
How to Start and Lead Small Groups!

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How to Start and lead Small Groups in your Church with His power and purpose!

1. Why should I be in a Small Group?

In Acts the Bible tells us we need to be in relationships for our personal and spiritual growth. As Paul and the early Christians taught and received teaching “*from house to house*,” we too must respond in our walk with Christ in each others homes (Acts 5:42; 20:20)! Even in the shadow of the Temple they did this, even in the shadow of your Church you can do this too. Why did they do this? Because they needed to be connected to one another in their fragmented and persecuted world, we desperately need to be connected too! They needed a way and place to do as Christ modeled and taught them, the multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches so that God’s Kingdom will be built and glorified.

Are you thinking this is great but not for me? Perhaps you are like me, struggling a very busy full plate in life. A plate that is overfilled with mounds of things that you need to do and are responsible for in your life. Perhaps, they are overflowing your dish. We all struggle with the demands of our career and all of the frustrations and stress placed on us, such as goals, deadlines work flow and the office high jinx. Then there are our family obligations, taking the kids to school, picking them up here and there, dealing with all of their demands and obligations too. Then maybe you are already volunteering for something in the church or community. Maybe you are juggling work and school and family, to the point there is not a free minute in our week. Then you are asked, “hey, why don’t you join our small group?” What??? I do not have the time! I can not possibly commit to anything else. I am overloaded and overwhelmed! Well, to be honest, then you are the person who needs to be in a small group the most!

Why? Because, it is God’s plan for you to be in quality relationships to Him and then to others within the confines of a loving community, which is also the definition of “Church.” Because, we all need a place to belong and work through the issues of life. Because, we need to be loved and give our love. As a Christian our primary thrust is to know and grow in Christ. Where our goal is to be a surrendered and poured out offering to Christ’s glory (John 14-15; Gal. 2:20-21; Phil. 3:10). How can this be accomplished when all aspects of our life are riddled with stress? By learning spiritual disciplines and receiving the discipleship, relationships and encouragement that small groups offer. We need a place to grow and we as humans in relationship to Christ grow best in community with people who love and care for you!

Here are some more reasons to ponder

1. Small groups are the perfect place to understand and practice authentic relationships to feel apart of God's family.
2. Small groups are the perfect place to practice our call to be discipled and make disciples
3. Small groups are the perfect place for Spiritual growth to make His truth come to life in our lives (Matt. 28:18-20).
4. Small groups are the perfect place to understand the Bible and heartfelt prayer and put it into action.
5. Small groups are the perfect place to unwind, release your stress and reprioritize your life.
6. Small groups are the perfect place to have our needs met and dealt with and fulfill those burdens in others is in a stable community. In this way we can handle stress, crisis, changes and the pressures of life better.
7. Small groups are the perfect place to be in study of His Word and to be in prayer, we do this individually but we are also to do it in community.
8. Small groups are the perfect place to welcome your friends into the church and introduce them to Christ.
9. Small groups are the perfect place to develop our skills, leadership and ministry so we can be better servants of our Lord.
10. Small groups are the perfect place to understand how to share Christ with loved ones and coworkers.
11. Small groups are the perfect place to deepen your understanding and practice of worship.
12. Small groups are the perfect place to put into practice the teaching you are receiving from your church, radio, web and your personal devotions. Remember the phrase "*one another*" is used over 50 times in the New Testament to describe our relationship to other believers. So, small groups are the perfect place to be with one another!

I am excited to be apart of a small group on my church for over 15 years now and that small groups are a part of the vision of my church. And the main reason I have stayed with my "home" church even as a pastor in other churches is the relationships I have developed and experienced through the Bible studies and

small groups! We will not get much out of church if we just come to the services as good as they are, we have to get involved and small groups are the perfect place to do this! Your church needs you, and I believe you may need them too. So if you would like to host a group, lead a group or just attend a group: Please take the initiative and get yourself plugged in! If leading or hosting scares you remember this: At Into Thy Word we have excellent training and resources for you. In fact no experience is needed, because we have curriculum that teaches itself, all you have to do is show up.

2. Getting to Know You: All About Small Groups

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Prov. 27:17)

Warning! The Spirit General has determined that Small Groups are detrimental to your complacency (self-satisfied versus Christ-satisfied)!

Proverbs 25:12; 27:17; Colossians 3:12-17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-16

The Small Group is the prime platform for establishing and instilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission that Jesus gave us in Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 12:29-31. The Small Group is also the vehicle with which to develop and experience authentic relationships and growing discipleship. This builds a Church of authentic community, poured out to His precepts and being in relational intimacy and fullness in Him. This is what we are called to emulate from our Lord. Because people will be learning and growing, they will move from personal agendas and pride to growth and service to our Lord. This produces a supportive environment that has love and care, hospitality, and the Spirit impacting the people. This will then foster the engagement of the community and world for the Gospel.

However, heed this warning! People will fight you; it will take work and effort, and at times you may think of giving up, but do not! He is with you and He will empower you, but you have to work for it, too!

If you do not want to work and put forth the effort, if you just want a nice club, a place where the people can easily be manipulated and controlled, if you want a place to rule and to spur on your personal power and yoke, do not have Small Groups in your church! Because, a Small Group is where the Lord is at work, and you do not want Christ getting His Way in the way of your personal agenda and pride! Satire aside; for Small Groups to work, you must be willing and able to let Christ truly work in you personally and your church collectively! This will conquer complacency and move us from being self-satisfied to being Christ-satisfied. Then, allowing Him to further conquer our fears and pride will enable us to move onward to spiritual maturity. A Small Groups is the best vehicle to do this along with our personal Bible reading, devotions, and prayer

time. Small Groups will take what we have learned in our quiet time, then add to it, hone it, sharpen it, pressure cook it, and then release it into service and community.

Think about this point: How do we live the Christian life? How do we apply His precepts? In First Corinthians 11:1, Paul tells us to *follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ*. We are called to be people who learn of His Word and impart that knowledge to others (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:4-14). But, most of us live in a culture that fosters isolation, personal pride, loneliness, individualistic mindsets, hedonism, suspicion, distrust, and the fear of being vulnerable. Thus, we have to put forth an effort to live the Christian life! In over 20 years of pastoral ministry, I have found no better way to take what we learn from the church and Word and work it out in our hearts and minds and make an application with it than in Small Groups! Small Groups are essential and necessary in building supportive and meaningful relationships and Bible learning, and they must be a part of every church who seeks to know our Lord and make Him known. This helps create a church of real purpose—God’s purpose—that is, one of dependence on God and the independence of one another. Without Small Groups, we will fall far short of learning and applying His precepts into our lives and community. We will have a church that is fragmented, disconnected, isolated, and meaningless!

So, why are there not more churches doing this? Is it just because it is a lot of work and there may be resentments and hesitations? Actually, because Small Groups can be scary, people will start to grow; and, those who are not growing, especially some pastors and church leaders, will become fearful and fight against them. These are the people who will give the most resistance! Personal agendas will be challenged and the godly life will transpire along with His purposes running the Church. This is what we are called to: however, our sinful nature gets in the way of His Way! Christ usually does not force Himself, so we continue in our pride when we could have had abundantly more in Him! Small Groups can also be dangerous as they denote alteration in the typical way people “do” their church, and may go against some traditions and mindsets that do not embrace change or conviction. The enemy to Small Groups is our complacency. Complacency is like pride; it hates being impacted by the Spirit and detests the application of Christian living. Small Groups will kick the complacency out; make sure you want it out. You and your church cannot grow spiritually until you want to, and you put the effort into it (Acts. 2:46-47)! Small Groups are the way to grow your church in Him!

What is a Small Group?

The definition of a Small Group can vary, too, as many Small Groups are out there. A Small Group characteristically is a group of committed people who come together on a regular basis for a specific function—that of the growth and discovery of God’s precepts from His Word. The basic idea is a group of people,

from three to 12 in number, who come together for connection in their faith building and fellowship. This can also include accountability, recovery, evangelistic, discipleship, and various other learning and personal need groups. The effective Small Group will always have an open Bible, have committed prayer, and the attitude of care for the people who are there! Small Groups can be the “rubber that meets the road” of the ministry of your church and community!

We all need to have encouragement, connection, advice, and support from a community of Believers who are growing in Him. It should be a place to reflect on our life and situation, build community, encourage accountability, study the Bible and learn to apply it, pray for others, and reach out to the world around us. Thus *learning to do life together*, receive care, discipleship, and learning, and learn about the ways of God through the Bible and prayer will build us up as individuals and as a church. Faith must inspire us before we can do outreach effectively (Matt. 4:18-19)! Small Groups are geared to provide all church members a rewarding benefit from their experiences in the church, and that benefit is their growth and maturity in Him that translates into character and to outreach as His witness!

How they benefit the Church

Do you have a church that is so big it is not meeting the needs of its members? Perhaps your church has magnificent worship and impacting teaching; that is why you came, but you feel disconnected. Perhaps you feel your church is too small and see no opportunities there but you feel you are cared for there. Maybe your church is too small because it is stagnating and that is why it is not growing. Is your church just right but something is missing? Then, the answer is Small Groups. Small Groups answer the question, *how do I grow in Christ and grow my church?* We grow by growing in Him! Small Groups become the hub of learning, care, outreach, discipleship, and lead in nurturing, encouraging, and spiritual formation.

The Church needs to emphasize Small Groups as an essential primary ministry. Why? Because, Small Groups help fill you with His awe and wonder (Acts 2:42-47). Jesus Himself was in a Small Group of twelve. The Church got its start in Acts from Small Groups. This is how our Lord chose to model ministry personally and to launch His Church. The early church *devoted themselves* to Jesus' teaching and to one another. It was the Small Group where the Spirit impacted people and empowered them for ministry. It was the Small Groups where community and function were formed, even before the persecution came. The Lord blessed them and used them; we have no excuse not to. The Church, your church, must have Small Groups at its core; not a few here and there, but all encompassing for all stages of life and ministry, from youth to the elderly. If you want to grow your church in spiritual maturity (which is far more important than growing numerically, but usually creates numerical growth, too), Small Groups are the way to go if you want to grow your church membership and worship; you

have to have spiritual maturity and a place to invite the people in, and, as Acts tells us, *He added to their number!*

The people in your church live in a disconnected and stress filled world. Relationships are few and fragile and His Word is rarely applied. Without Small Groups, you cannot effectively grow your church or effectively or efficiently care for your people. Your church will not have depth, maturity, or much community impact without the caring, prayers, and support of its people. A pastor and/or staff cannot effectively meet the needs of all of the people. A pastor must train and equip others; this is what lay ministry is all about. Ministry and relationships form and accumulate best in Small Groups. When people are hurting, need direction, or can help others, it comes from the Small Group. Ministry and impacting the neighborhood comes from the Small Group. Your church will grow and be used by God through the Small Group. Small Groups are not to replace the church's worship and teaching; rather, they are the participants and conventioneers of the church. Consider a church a convention of Small Groups united for prayer, worship, instruction, the proclamation of His Word, and synergistic ministry. Your church is called to make Small Groups!

The Hurdles

The biggest reason why people do not join Small Groups is because they are fearful. Being vulnerable to people who may intentionally or unintentionally betray you is very scary. For some, it is scary to meet new people, go to a stranger's house, or take the time to make such a commitment. In addition, to share your life and woes with a stranger or to be afraid that you may not know the answers and look stupid in front of others is threatening. But, we have to get over our fears and embrace the community. We do not need to know the answers, but we are to be willing to discover them. When we share with others, we commune and grow tighter and together, building community and effectual relationships. Yes, people will hurt you, and you will hurt others. But, we still need one another; we need forgiveness, to be willing to forgive others, and to be open and vulnerable. This is a *must* to growing in faith. The main hurdle is YOU, and your willingness to more deeply pursue your faith and your relationships. We need one another to grow further in the faith!

To be successful in a Small Group, the participants need to know that we are created *from* community *for* community by a triune God. As Christians, we are called to know one another. Just look up "one another" in a concordance and see all of the passages listed. We are made for community; we need community. But, that does not mean it will just magically function. We all have to put in the effort and take the risks. Once you are willing to take the risks, then the time, commitment, and effort to press on will become easier as you see the benefits outweighing your fears. A good program of introducing Small Groups by easing people in them with testimonies and demonstration in a safe environment will help alleviate these fears.

Types of Small Groups

Whether you call them home fellowship groups, home groups, Alpha Groups, Beta Groups, community groups, encounter groups, Lighthouses, Life Groups, Kinship groups, share groups, growth groups, His groups, home Bible studies or discipleship groups, they all are places to come together for learning, worship, prayer, encouragement, accountability, celebration, personal support, fellowship, and community building. There is no set formula, schedule, or singular purpose. A Small Group is a place to learn and grow and to equip and be equipped to glorify our Lord. It is a place to learn and build relationships. It is a place to know, understand, experience, and to share love and joy. It is a place to learn and develop character. It is a place to prepare and help prepare others for His service. However, it is my opinion that a Small Group without a Bible is just a club with no distinction or purpose and no real way to grow. A Small Group can use other books, articles, and curriculum, or just talk about your day; but, at some point, the Bible must be opened and His Word must be engaged. His redemptive plan must impact you! The bottom line is that a Small Group is a place to know Christ and one another (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4).

Small Groups have no set time, place, or duration. They can meet for periods of a few weeks to being permanent fellowships. I have seen groups last just a few sessions and they dissolve while others have been meeting for over thirty years regularly and consistently. They can meet weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly, although the more consistent you are, the more you will get out of it. Small Groups best meet in people's homes that are comfortable and inviting; this helps people's learning and attitude, and gives the opportunity to invite people who would not normally come to a church.

Small Groups have no set number of participants, although the optimal number is dependent on the personalities and goals of the participants. The numbers I have found to be best over the years is from four to 10, seven being the prime. For Jesus, it was 12 (Mark 3:13-14). A Small Group can range from three to twelve to hundreds of people. The big groups of over 20 to 2000, to be real Small Groups, meet corporately for worship and instruction, and then section themselves off into groups of five to 10 for deeper learning, prayer, and application. Small Groups timing can be any day or time when the participants are available. You can meet for an hour, an hour and a half, two hours, every week, every other week, or once a month. You can meet at church, an office, the library (get permission), at a coffee house, or restaurant. But, it is always best to meet at a home. You can just have fellowship and a topic study, or also incorporate worship, Bible study, and outreach.

Who is supposed to be in the Small Groups? Pastors? Church leaders? Deacons? Elders? Only the spiritually mature? Only for new Christians? The answer is *everyone who claims Jesus as Lord* should and must be in a Small

Group or Bible study, and *people who do not know the Lord* should be in a Small Group, for that is the best way to continue and grow in the faith. It is a means to reach your full potential, growth, maturity, share the faith, and be better used by our Lord!

Some of the Main types of Small Groups (Ecclesiastes. 4:9; 4:12):

Bible Study Groups: *Doing the Bible together.* This would be Bible-centered Small Groups where learning the Word and instructive discipleship is the core. The benefit is being able to grow beyond personal learning by asking questions to learn, hear from others, participate in the text, see God's Word being worked out in the lives of others, interaction to take your knowledge into a deeper level, deepen your love for the Lord and one another, intensify your worship, handle life better, share your insights with others, and be challenged to grow and apply your faith to life. These groups can go through a book of the Bible, explore topical subjects, do inductive study, discuss the sermon, or even read a Christian book, as long as the Bible is the foundation.

Accountability Groups: *Keeping one another in line to His precepts and call.* The main focus of accountability-centered Small Groups is to provide a place to build relationships and be honed by one another. The benefit is being able to interact with others and keep one another on track, to sharpen yourself, and to internalize what you have learned into daily life so God can use you to sharpen others. These groups work best as gender specific, such as women's or men's groups. Also, mentoring groups fall in this category of older people discipling the younger.

Life Groups: *Doing life together.* Share, learn, care, and prayer! The primary function is relational—*how do I deal with life? How do I learn and grow by learning His Word and allowing others to help me encounter Christ and one another?* The benefit is being able to share your life, learn from the experiences and encounters with God others have had, and to feel a part of God's family. This model is excellent for new Christians starting off. It is also excellent for mature Christians desiring to grow further and be further challenged! This type of group works best as a mentoring model for two to five people. Six is too many; when you hit six, then start a new one. This type of group can meet as a large group for worship and a short Bible study then partition off into constant smaller groups of two to four. The consistency of who is in each group to build communality and openness is very important.

I first saw this model over twenty years ago and have since seen it in various forms and acronyms for the name, such as: Living In Faith Experiences and Learning Biblical Truth, Intercession, Fellowship, Extending LIFE To Others. The key is to be with one another whether that be just prayer, silence (in times of dire stress and loss), or listening. Have an open Bible, a regular, consistent meeting time and place, or just get together sporadically when needed; it is about

sharing and caring! When I was on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ in the early eighties I helped start the “Lighthouse Movement” based on this model.

Recovery Groups: *Healing and Learning together.* These are semi-therapy groups for people overcoming addictions, life stress, loss, divorce recovery, or learning basic relationship skills. The benefit is being able to deal with life, stress, better being able to overcome extreme hardships such as the death of a loved one, and help in living a more stable life. Premarital and marriage building skills also fall into this category. It is essential that these groups are staffed with educated and trained clinicians or supervised by one!

Ministry Groups: *Doing the service of our Lord together:* These groups are a place to serve and use spiritual gifts. These groups usually have a specific agenda. It could be a ministry in the church or community such as the women’s morning break, mothers support, prayer ministry, parenting skills, or direct ministry such as choir, Deacons, Elders, building and grounds, or.... The benefit is being able to develop the skills to serve the Lord and apply your faith into the church and community in a more meaningful and effective way. The primary purpose is preparation for the ministry. This is a football huddle, coming together to share, care, and prepare for the ministry by coming to know the Lord and one another more.

Evangelistic Groups: *Sharing the Lord together.* The main function is to invite new Christians and non-Christians. These are Small Groups designed to introduce Christ in a loving and caring way. The benefit is being able to apply the Great Commandment and the Great Commission to the people around you in a personal and powerful way. There are two primary models, the “Alpha Groups” and the “Lighthouses.” (see links below.)

Small Groups are the best way to apply the “one anothers” in Scripture, and there are over 50 of them—look them up in a concordance! There are many other types of Small Groups too, but most will fall under one of the above categories. It is paramount and fundamental that all groups must also have the atmosphere of care, be non-judgmental, and be a safe place to reflect on life situations. It is the duty of all participants to give and receive care and learn about the ways of God through the Bible and prayer. Any of these main types can and should combine Accountability and Bible study models with the focus on being interactive and introspective. It is also essential that confidences be kept. What is shared in a Small Group stays in the Small Group unless you have the permission of the person to share information. (If they are a danger to themselves or someone else, you need to involve a professional counselor and/or the authorities).

If there is little Bible time in a Small Group, the person needs to be in another Bible study group or another primary means for their discipleship. All of these types should incorporate a mentoring model, seeking answers to the

question *how do I deal with life and bring my encounters with God, myself, and others into a more healthy Biblical approach and become a person who learns and grows?* We must allow God's influence and outcome upon us. This means that The Spirit seeks us out and then we grow in Him, to allow His empowerment to affect us so we are effected by Him in our lives for the benefit of our spiritual growth, His Church, and His glory! Each Small Group model—if it is Christian based model—is about pursuing a more meaningful relationship with God while developing key friendships with others in the church. It is learning and growing in community. Remember, we all need to have encouragement, advice, and support from a community of Believers who are growing in Him.

The Key Principles

They devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching and to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42).

A Small Group is analogous to a network, an association of relationships joined together in harmony within the bonds of the Fruits of the Spirit, commitment, and a common purpose. The purpose is to know and grow in Christ and make Him known to others in the group, church, community, and world. We are to show our gratitude to Christ by our service to share Him, encourage others with hope and His love through us, help the downcast, and build one another up while proclaiming God's Kingdom. Within these key precepts, each group will have its own group dynamic (personality) and different skills, call, and opportunities. Thus, we can honor their uniqueness and what the Holy Spirit is doing in them, while at the same time, realizing there are key precepts that each group needs to function in its best for our Lord's glory. There is no specific formula or plan for how a church can do Small Groups, as each church and each group is unique. Nonetheless, by understanding these precepts, we can be better able to exhibit wisdom and discernment in knowing what we are to do; thus, the groups can be guided as a shepherd guides his sheep, yet remain uniquely different in Him and used by Him. Thus, the leader and the atmosphere of the group dynamic should have the desire to:

- **Love the Lord!** *Sharing Life's Adventure of knowing Him.* The primary purpose is to encounter Jesus in a personal way. Some will not, and that is OK; we call that evangelism, but the leaders must have this precept down (Mark 12:29-31)!
- **Growing!** *Growing with Jesus* by discovering His precepts and the magnificent person you are in Christ. The group's dynamic should desire to learn and grow in the Lord. Not all will have this all of the time, as we all have our ups and downs in our spiritual pilgrimage, but the overall reason is to know Him (Phil. 3:1-14)!

- **Bible Study!** *Studying the Word.* The Bible is the cradle to God's Word, what He has to say to us. The Bible must be the principle content. The Bible is to provide us with the insights and applications for Christian living. Other topics, such as recovery issues and book studies, may be used as long as the Bible is there, open and used (2 Tim. 3:14-17)!
- **Prayer!** *Prayer* is our means to communicate with God by telling Him our needs and hearing from Him concerning His plan and care. All that we do in a Small Group must point to God as Creator, Savior, and as Lord (Phil. 4:4-7).
- **Relationships!** *Filled with Fellowship.* For celebrating the good times and forming life-long impacting friendships, fellowship is the building of our bonds with one another. We do this by sharing, openly and honestly, and being vulnerable while keeping confidences. People need to know they are in a safe environment so they can share and connect—to care so all can share. This builds trust and community and enables people to be who they are without the need to pretend while they learn who they are in Christ (Col. 2:2-4).
- **Comfort and Counsel!** *Support in the bad times.* We are called to help others through their crises and hurts by listening, and, if appropriate, giving wise council. In the trials of life, we need a place to rest and to heal, and to be encouraged, prayed over, and supported. The result is the healing, learning, and getting back to the game the Lord has called us to play (Rom. 12:1-2; 10).
- **Accountability!** *We are called to hold one another responsible in Christ* within the parameters of care, and to keep confidences (Heb. 10:24-25).
- **Celebration!** *Encouraging and honoring* others because we are in a supportive Christian community that really is, as the name implies, "like Christ" (2 Cor. 2:14-15; 8:23-24).

When these precepts are at work, then the hurting, the lonely, the curious, and the person who is passionate can come and feel comfortable in sharing, to be challenged in love, and to be encouraged to grow in our Lord! In a good Small Group, we can apply God's Word to our lives so we can become what God desires us to be! Then, once the Small Groups are functioning properly, they can be used as outreach and ministry platforms. The people who come to know Christ can now make Christ known!

- **Sharing Out!** *Divide and conquer.* Each person in the group should be encouraged to invite friends and acquaintances (but not forced to). The Small Groups need to be open to growth. When they do grow—by inviting new people into them, especially non-Christians—they can split and form two groups, and so forth. The key for success is the training and equipping of the leaders. Leaders should be mentoring their replacements so when the group splits there will be a leader waiting. The leader will teach both by example and

by instruction so everyone's potential is sought, challenged, prepared, and reached. Small Group ministry is a team with coaches, and assistant coaches who grow to become coaches (Acts 20:20).

- **Outreach!** *Reaching the lost and ministering in His church.* When the Small Groups are growing, they are inviting non-Christians, and can become one of the best avenues to reach people for the Kingdom. Also, the ministry of the church can come from Small Groups, too. Visitation, crisis response, prayer ministry, or virtually any ministry in the church can be operated by Small Group people. Each Small Group can pick a specific ministry and stick to it, or do what is needed when it is needed. This would be in addition to its primary function. The call is to reach people for the Lord and then care for those people and the others in the community and the world (1 Pet. 3:15).

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:46-47 NIV).

I believe that these key precepts are needed to create this network to be effective and effectual. Not all these precepts will be in everyone or every group, which is OK, but there should at least be an endeavor and desire to learn and grow. Sometimes, someone just needs a place to vent and to express their hurt from the trials of life they have gone through. Sometimes, people do not know the Lord and are curious as to what this Christianity is all about. Sometimes, people are stagnant in their faith, and need to discover how to break their barriers. Sometimes, a person has a passion to learn. Whatever the motivation and reason, a good Small Group will welcome them.

Small Groups are the way to grow your church in Him! Your church is called to build and grow Small Groups!

3. How to Start and Lead Small Groups

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them (Matt. 18:20)

Small Groups are the way to grow your church in Him! Your church is called to make Small Groups!

So what can you do? Start to think small! For God to do something big in your life and in your church, you need to start thinking small—Small Groups! Small Groups are important and essential. They are the primary and best means to learn and grow in our walk with Christ. All Christians who are serious about their faith should be in a Small Group. In the section, “Why we should be in a

Small Group,” we discussed its importance and impact. Now that we understand that Small Groups are essential for the formation of our Christian faith, we must realize their importance and how they help give us the ability to transfer our learning into real, practical influence to others around us. It is as *iron sharpens iron*; this means we help one another to hone our faith and develop our character. We can listen to all the sermons, read all the best books, buy great CDs, and go to seminars—even seminary; but, unless we challenge one another in the Word and faith, we will only have a shallow understanding of and impact on the Christian life. Community breeds maturity and growth compared to individualism which tends to breed pride and isolation. Do not get me wrong; we need to be in church under good teaching, we need to do our devotions individually, and be in personal prayer and study. But, to get the most out of our Christian learning so to impact our Christian living, we have to work it out with others who are working it out; and that place is in Small Groups (Phil. 2:12-13).

What Does My Church Need to Do?

Even though there is no set formula, there are a few “tried and true” ways Small Groups can develop that will be more consistent and purpose-filled so they can be more impacting and rewarding for all those involved. Our primary spiritual growth comes from our personal devotional times. Our involvement in Small Groups helps us further our growth and be the “iron that sharpens” one another as each one in the group helps another grow in Him and apply our faith into the world! Make a commitment to develop a Small Group ministry. All the tools you need are in this article, and the rest of the resources can be found in our Small Group channel and in the various links provided. You can also go to organizations such as Serendipity and Neighborhood Bible Study (links at the end) for good resources. You can see our article on how to start programs. In addition:

- Use our article (in the Leadership Curriculum and our website on the channel Church Leadership) to develop your philosophy of Small Group ministry—keep it short and simple.

Have a clear ministry vision of Small Groups and communicate this to the leaders and congregation. This will explain what it is, what it means, its values and purpose, and its benefits. Then develop a structure and plan for it.

- Put in lots of prayer!
- Who will be the leaders?
- Who will train the leaders?
- What materials will you need?
- How will they be organized?
- When and where will the meeting take place?
- What curriculum will be used?
- What resources will be needed?

- How will the leaders of the church communicate with the Small Group leaders?
- How will accountability be structured?
- How will you deal with problems?
- How will you evaluate it?

Then, seek how people will be encouraged and equipped, listen to input, and then make the adjustments. Then, go to the congregation with your passion and plan, and just do it!

Marketing Small Groups to a Church That Thinks They Are Scary

The people in your church, whether you have two Small Groups, have never had them, or half of the people are in them, need to be challenged and inspired to be in Small Groups. You have to tell them why they need to be in one, that it is fun and easy, and help alleviate their fears. The pastor must share the passion, personally be in one, and give his testimony. Then, further help enable your church membership to get in one by modeling Small Groups through demonstration, skits, testimonies, and literature. Have a table in your church lobby staffed with Small Group leaders to sign people up and answer questions. Then, once the people are coming, continue the testimonies, share success stories, and honor the people with celebration and encouragement.

The congregation also needs to know how pastoral care and counseling will be provided (know the limits of the Small Group; they can provide listening and encouragement but not resolve serious issues or do therapy unless the leader is licensed and trained!) Small Groups can unravel deep hurts and issues that have not been dealt with prior, so people need a place to go to be helped.

Create Clear Leadership Responsibilities!

Have a plan to recruit and develop leaders. Make sure the leaders are growing in their walk, have a plan to deal with problems such as crisis, conflict, and abusive people, have regular meetings for prayer, evaluation, encouragement, and mentoring and apprentice development.

A Model to Equip Leaders

The church is called to find the most capable people possible and protect the flock from potential harm. Never put just anyone in any position; it is better to have empty positions than the wrong people in them! The essential key is for you to find people whose heart is after God's heart (1 Cor. 11:1)! It is always best to find people who have done it before, but this is not necessary, as long as you train effectively. The biggest reason why churches fail at a Small Group ministry is they fail to train the leaders; the result is the occurrence of all kinds of problems (Rom. 12; Phil. 3:10-14, 4:8-9, 13; Col. 1:28-29; 4:7ff)!

As church leaders come together to pray for wisdom on group dynamics and direction:

- Create your own Small Group training booklet; use this article, the section on why to be in Small Groups, and how to resolve conflict. You will then have your own manual. Make any needed changes and put your church name on it. (Please keep our copyright info on it, too.)
- Realize that since the dawn of the Church, finding leaders and workers has been a tough task. Our call is to do it even when the results might seem like failure (Matt. 9:37-38).
- Look for a person who is grounded in the Word, has a good temperament, an aptitude and desire to lead, and the willingness to be supervised. If he or she does not like supervision, consider that a red flag warning!

A good facilitator needs to strive for obedience to the principles of God's Word and practice the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, fellowship, worship, and stewardship. He must have good relationships with spouse, children, friends, church members, neighbors, co-workers. If he does not, find out why; you do not want toxic people in leadership. Sometimes people are shy and that is OK. In addition, these characteristics are very important: have an attitude of prayer, a sense of humour, listening skills, a willingness to learn and follow, one who influences people for Christ and is sensitive to others, an organizer, one who is responsible, who possesses an attitude of servant leadership, and one who is willing to explore his spiritual gifts and use them (Matt. 20:26; John 3:30).

- The leader or facilitator will provide the atmosphere of a safe place to ask questions, and be encouraging, loving, caring, and vulnerable.
- The leader or facilitator will come prepared, keep people on the subject, and realize one cannot lead others where one has not been before!
- The leader/facilitator's main purpose is to get the conversation going.
- The leader or facilitator will introduce the subject or text of the Bible and give any background information. (This can be delegated.)
- The leader or facilitator will then engage the group in dialogue to keep the interaction going without dominating the conversations.
- The leader or facilitator will ask questions and help people respond to the passage or subject for a better understanding of the Bible.
- The leader or facilitator will seek to challenge the people to think on a deeper level to discover the precept, learn what it means, how to be a changed person because of it, and then how to apply it to life. He will demonstrate excitement, when people are growing, by giving affirmation.
- The leader or facilitator will inspire by example that we are people in the process of a spiritual journey and growth; no one has arrived yet. He will share life stories, help others discover and apply God's Word, discuss the precepts, encourage—but not force—everyone to participate by asking “what do you

think; anyone else?” realizing that there are many times when there can be more than one good answer or perspective to any good question, and be open to the leading of the Spirit.

- The leader or facilitator needs to be willing to drop the subject of the week to address a current stress or crises with a member.
- The leader or facilitator will honestly express the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) so everyone can better experience authentic care from one another!
- The leader or facilitator will keep confidences and insist others do the same.
- The leader or facilitator will not be afraid to discuss significant issues about real life.
- The leader or facilitator will laugh and have fun, and plan social outings and get-togethers outside of the Small Group!
- The leader or facilitator keeps his people in prayer during the week!

Keep in mind that not everyone will get along with everyone; personalities will conflict, hot buttons will be pushed, and passions exposed. This is OK; it is about being human. Polite disagreement and tension can enable a group to understand each person's position and learn from them! The leader or facilitator will be aware of this and help motivate people toward the big picture of love and care without putting that person down.

The key characteristics to look for in a leader are listening, a willingness to facilitate discussion and summarize input, to allow others to contribute, and then practice care, share, be an encourager, clarify issues, give praise, keep people on the subject (unless there is a “teachable moment”—don't allow people to monopolize the group), and handle wrong answers and heretical ideas graciously while pointing out truth (if you do not know the answer do not make up one, research it and get back to them the following week). It is OK to have periods of reflection and silence, as long as you realize that everyone has a right to be heard and to contribute!

We have to be aware that we are led and embowered by Jesus and can do nothing apart from Him (John 15:5). Facilitating takes work and time and not everyone will be able to do it every time. However, a growth in this direction is essential to growing a healthy, interactive group. Remember, any good Small Group that is “Christian” will have the Bible at its core! And, also spend time in prayer for each member and concerns of the church and world.

Types of leaders

Depending how you feel called to structure your Small Groups you can assign leadership functions to one or more people for each group and even rotate leadership in those groups.

Discussion Starter: This person is the primary leader for the Small Group. He can provide the teaching, be in charge of the curriculum, and/or for starting and

facilitating the discussion, making sure everyone has a chance to contribute and no one person dominates the group. This role can rotate from week to week, but someone needs to take responsibility of choosing the leaders, curriculum, make sure it flows, and that the right set of course and questioning are being used.

Host: This person provides the logistics, hospitality, a place for the study (preferably in a home), keeps it fairly neat and welcoming, and facilitates the refreshments. Also, he or she keeps a list of the members, takes attendance to make sure absent people are followed up in the week to see how they are doing, provides good driving directions, gets the curriculum out to people a few days ahead of time if needed, and gives an email or call to remind people periodically. This position can also be rotated as long as consistency and the location are known to all.

Prayer: This person is in charge of the prayer to start the group, and facilitate the prayer at the end. This is an important job; each person should have the opportunity to share prayer requests. Keep your pastor, church, community, government and other concerns in prayer, too. It is best to write down each person's request and keep a record of it for seeing answers and growth and to follow up when necessary. Many resources are in our prayer channel under Discipleship.

Other roles can include a **Socials Coordinator** as each group should do something fun every other month, like a dinner out, a movie, a trip, a yearly retreat, or? There can be a **Care Coordinator** to follow up on people in times of stress or absence, a **Worship Leader** to provide a few minutes of worship, a **Child Care Coordinator** (I have found that if three or four Small Groups that meet at the same day and time pool their resources to hire a sitter, this provides an excellent way to have cost-effective child care in a central location). The point is, not everything should be done by one person!

These people do not need to have theological knowledge or experience; they are the pump primers to get things moving and ask the questions. This works best when you use curriculum that already has the teaching and questions in it, such as any of our *Into Thy Word* studies. You can have groups where people take turns to lead; this has also worked well, especially for professionals and moms who are busy. A good leader is a listener and will help everyone get involved in the discussion. Not all will talk; but there needs to be an atmosphere for dialogue without reproach from others. A good leader will not allow one person, especially him or her, to dominate the discussion unless it is a leader-based Bible study. Even so, community and discussion must be practiced and encouraged.

Basic Small Group Structure

There is no best way to structure your Small Groups, but there are proven precepts that help structure each group for efficiency, learning, and care in the time allowed.

This is a one hour to a one and a half hour model. For a two hour model, add five minutes of time to the teaching, and most of the extra time to discussion and prayer!

- **Warm up:** Serve refreshments, fellowship, perhaps have worship (5+ minutes).
- **Prayer:** Open with prayer, then, have a fun opening question. (The Serendipity Bible is a great resource for this, as well as any discussion starters from Youth Specialties; they work great for adults too.) (5 minutes).
- **The Study:** Curriculum, inductive or...read the passage, then give any relevant teaching that will help stimulate learning and discussion (10 to 20 minutes).
- **Discussion & Questions:** Encourage discussion; make sure everyone has the opportunity to participate, and seek to end with an application (25+ minutes).
- **Close in significant Prayer:** Spend some time asking how everyone's week has been, then spend time fervently praying for one another, the issues from the above categories, and specifics that have come up (15+ minutes)!

Small Groups are usually one and a half hours to two hours; it depends on time constraints and availability of the people. Do not forget to leave room for fellowship. Perhaps your time is 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., thus you actually start at 7:10 and end promptly at 8:30. This leaves room for people to get to know one another, share life, and fellowship. Make sure you respect people's time.

Then, you need to structure and organize the Small Groups in your church for area coverage, days of the week, and types offered to benefit each member. Also, a leadership structure needs to be in place. For example, for every seven to 10 Small Groups, you need a coach/trainer and a pastor or coordinator in charge of them all. In larger churches, you can group the Small Groups into groups according to where they live under regional coordinators/leaders whose primary responsibility is to train and be a help for the groups in their area. You can have three areas, four to six or more for major metropolitan areas. Make a flow chart, but make sure your chart and structure is flexible and based on prayer, not in feelings and/or personal agendas. It is also best to have regular meetings for group leaders at least every other month for prayer, training, encouragement, and feedback.

Small Group Training

What does the essential training entail? Basically, it is what is in this article: “What is a Small Group,” “How They Benefit the Church,” “The Hurdles,” and “Types of Small Groups.” Also focus on The Key Principles and how to resolve conflict (in the Leadership Curriculum and our website on the channel Church Leadership). Typical training can also include:

- Ministry vision, philosophy, and leadership structure.
- Various curriculum offerings, training in how to use them, and their Bible content.
- Prayer ideas.
- Group dynamics.
- Interpersonal relationship skills.
- How to care better.
- How to gain new members.
- How to facilitate more effectively.
- How to resolve conflict.

The Small Groups need to be under the influence of the church and its set parameters, but not over-controlled. Some liberty and freedom needs to exist to allow room to grow and explore other options that the church leadership did not consider.

For more insights see: **Training your Leaders and Congregation** (in the Leadership Curriculum and our website on the channel Church Leadership)

How Do I Recruit Leaders?

So, how do I recruit leaders? One of the best ways to recruit and train Small Group leaders is a “mentor approach.” This means to have a primary lead person for each group alongside a secondary lead person. As the group grows, it can be divided into two, and the secondary lead person would become a primary lead person for the new group. Then, a new secondary lead person would be recruited for each group, and so forth.

For additional insights, see our Article on **How to Recruit Volunteers!** (in the Leadership Curriculum and our website on the channel Church Leadership)

Once you recruit the leader, partner them off for a few weeks in another Small Group so they can “get the feel” and give them the training booklet. This provides the model and experiences the leaders will need to have to reproduce the group. Then, meet with them to answer any questions; get their feedback and go over the basics so they have the vision and purpose down. Then, you can supervise, solving problems where and when they occur, reinforce, encourage, and put together more training as you go and grow. Have seminars once or twice a year with all leaders and potential leaders for further training, such as, *how to resolve conflict, and how to interact with the different personality types.* (Serendipity has

good resources for this.) You cannot just give them a book, no matter how good it is; personalized instruction and encouragement is essential. If you have a small church and limited resources, partner with other churches and do one together.

- It is absolutely essential that you be willing and able to weed out people who should not be leading groups. Have them do a personality inventory such as Myers Briggs (links below), and a Spiritual Gifts inventory (in the Spiritual Gifts Curriculum and our website on the channel Church Leadership). Get to know the people who are responsible to care for the flock. You want the flock properly cared for and not fleeced!
- A true leader, one who is in Christ, will have the characteristics of Servant Leadership, an essential trait.
- What should you watch out for? People with wrong or ulterior motives for being in leadership, being over-zealous to lead, spiritually immature and/or a lack of willingness to grow, distrust or dislike for authority, or a personality that seems unstable.
- Is experience required for the leader? No, as long as the attitude and willingness to learn and grow are there, he can learn as he goes. Make sure he gets extra support, mentoring, and prayer (John 1:12).
- Having a method of handling conflict resolution is paramount, and will solve most future problems and issues. Firstly, identify the conflict and the responses from each side and listen carefully to them with encouragement and understanding. Secondly, explore a Biblical model of conflict resolution. Thirdly, integrate Biblical knowledge in a step-by-step fashion. And, fourthly, help teach the parties *conflict resolution* to prevent a repeat of such instances in the future. I sometimes bring other staff or other people in if required. I try to eliminate any misunderstandings and have the attitude for a win/win solution.
- Having a conflict-free environment will enhance recruitment greatly, because nobody wants to work in an atmosphere of strife! Alongside this, it is essential to have a Biblical Vision and Mission Statement, so everyone will be on the *same page* of what we do and why we do it.
- Have a public reporting of your progress and growth in the church newsletter!

4. How to Form New Small Groups

Catching and producing a 20/20 vision for your church!

You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. Acts 20:20

People are naturally attracted to a program that works and is logical and informative so they can understand it. Thus, you need to create a handout or brochure with your vision and key precepts and how they can get connected in them.

How do I recruit people? Have each group always be open to new people if possible. Some groups want to be closed; that is OK for them, but for most, having a small group of no more than 8 to 10 participants makes enough room for two more then you can split them up in two. Thus, the small group itself is the primary recruitment vehicle and evangelism platform.

The key is to “divide and conquer,” so to speak. Each person in the group should be encouraged to invite (but not force) friends and acquaintances. The small groups need to be open to grow; when they grow by inviting new people in to them, especially non-Christians, they can split and form two groups and so forth. The key for success is the training and equipping of the leaders. Leaders should be mentoring their replacements so when the group splits, you will have a leader-in-waiting and so forth. The leader will teach by example and by instruction so everyone’s potential is sought, challenged, prepared, and reached. Small group ministry is a team with coaches and assistant coaches who grow to become coaches (Acts 20:20).

The second way to do this is have an open introductory session. This is from Serendipity in the ‘70’s and works incredibly well today. Provide plenty of publicity with flyers and testimonies in church services and newsletters, then invite all interested people to a “Get To Know Small Groups” event. Do this preferably right after the church service. Make it a short seminar on small groups. Take only one hour of their time and provide refreshments, a light lunch and “smiley” welcoming hosts. In this session, have an opening prayer, a 10 minute message on why they should be in a small group (see section why you should be in a small group), then break them off into tables of 10 according to the area in which they live. Then, have them rehearse a small group right there. Here is an idea: As people gather, give them name tags and on them put a code or color for the area in which they live. Then, ask everyone to go to the corners of the room with their code or color. Next, section them off according to the day of the week that is best for them to meet, and divide those into groups of 10. You can have tables already decorated, such as a Monday table, a Wednesday table and so forth. Why divide into groups of 10? Because. Usually, 1/3 of them will bail out.

Have leaders there already prepared if possible. If not, have each group elect a leader and use “user friendly” curriculum. Then, for 25 minutes, have them “do” a small group. Your first session can be about relationship building, a short Bible study, the first four questions in “The Character of Love” study, an

inductive study on Romans 12:1-3, or a Bible study on community. (see our small group channel for more ideas.) The people will get to know one another, thus neutralizing any fears. Then, encourage them, and send them off to do a small group for six weeks. Provide curriculum, this article, and your small group handbook or another resource on small groups for them. During the first two weeks, have training for the new leaders. After that, in my experience, most will continue.

You need to have a plan for maintaining the existing small groups so they can be better equipped. If not, the new ones get all of the attention and the older ones can lose their momentum. In addition, you need a plan for how to multiply the groups. You could just tell existing small groups to divide. But, you will disrupt a good group and generate hurt feelings as after a significant amount of community has already been developed, hesitance and resentments will develop. To head this off, make it clear that it is encouraged, but not mandatory, that the groups divide up after reaching a certain number of people. If they know ahead of time that when a group hits the magic number, say 10 or 12, they are to divide, this eases the stress. Just telling them to divide creates undue anxiety and antagonism. If a group wants to stay as they are then let them do so, never force a program, programs are just a tool of ministry not the ministry in of itself!

- Have a plan for choosing small group leaders. This process should not just be an arbitrary “get whomever you can get;” these people will be the principle caregivers of your church and must be selected wisely!
- Have a plan for the options and kinds of groups and resources that will be available.

Decide on Bible books, typical studies, recovery, and so forth. Make sure you have the resources for them in your church; do not expect people to hunt for them themselves. Some will do this and like it, but the vast majority need a set of clear options available for them now. Then, provide the training on how to use them.

- It is very important to offer continual seminars and group training. If your church is too small for this, other organizations, perhaps other churches, can do this for you. Perhaps you can go to theirs, but these resources must be offered.

Many new groups do not form in churches because they do not have the leaders. Volunteer recruitment is paramount to effective ministry. Volunteers are best found by personal invitation (see our curriculum How to Recruit Volunteers in the Leadership Curriculum and our website on the channel Church Leadership). It is best to first meet with an interested individual and listen to him, go to a neutral location, or use the church office and get to know each other. Never fill a leadership position with “whomever;” otherwise, you will fail the people in your care! The second thing to do is show him your vision and the plan of action as well as responsibilities and expectations of small group facilitators.

Third, if the person has not been involved in a small group, have them sit in on several sessions and observe. Then, spend the time to train them either individually, or in a group. If your church has more than 250 members, schedule regular training sessions for all small group leaders as well as introductory sessions of training for new small group volunteers and individual follow-up by trained staff members.

Having staff whose lives are centered upon the Lord Jesus Christ is essential in any effective ministry, along with love for the people to whom you are ministering. This creates the atmosphere for attracting good leaders. Concentrate on the training and community building with current staff, along with the recruitment of additional leaders. Focus on building the current leaders to do the bulk of the “contact” work with friends and acquaintances. The “focus is discipleship, and the heartbeat is evangelism,” motto applies to recruitment, too. This flows from the primary emphases in leadership, which are building relationships with people, and establishing a vision and shared philosophy that instills leadership in the people who are in charge. We need to provide the lead and follow-through with training, love, and resources. I have found it essential, in every position I have held, to develop a leadership team where I am responsible for their training and equipping, because I cannot do the work alone.

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:20

Remember: Small groups are the way to grow your church in Him!

5. Small Group Curriculum Model

“Doing Life Together”

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments (Col. 2:2-4).

Small groups are designed to meet the deepest relational and learning needs of the congregation. Small groups can help provide the framework for people to be challenged to worship God with joy, passion, and conviction by learning who they are in Christ so they can develop the trusting faith in Jesus as Savior and LORD. We will be better able to build Christ-centered friendships, and then be equipping others to impact the world—all for our Lord’s Glory. Thus, we will be able to pursue our *walk* in Him that builds our *intimacy* with Him, so we are *living* in Him, according to His Word. Our love will be infused with Kingdom

principles and not self-desires and aspirations that will only lead to a life of despair. Rather, we will have a life that is triumphant and joyful, fulfilling and exciting, and rewarding in that we become the blessed to be a blessing to those around us.

This particular model is for a relational group, designed to build effective authentic relationships. Learn about them and from God's Word and apply His precepts to daily life. This type of group only needs this article, a Bible and selected verses for the study. A good one-volume commentary, a study Bible, and a Bible Dictionary can also be of help.

This model is best described as a mentoring model and works for all ages. It is great for people and places where resources, such as study guides, are either too costly or unavailable, as all you need is the list of questions and a Bible! In fact, I believe this approach is better than a study guide because it gets our eyes off what one person has to say (the author) and get us more into the Word and serious caring matters in your life from those whom you know care for you! For this to be optimal, this approach must contain basic, introspective questions that search out one's self and become the signposts for our behaviors and our actions and reactions in life. Then, this is combined with what the Bible has to say to us, and we then turn to prayer to cement our time in our Lord. Thus, we share, care, learn, and pray. When this approach negates the Word and becomes only a discussion group, it is no longer optimal. Without the boundaries and empowerment of God's Word, even with good leadership and discussions, you have just a pooling of personal insights. As good as this may be at times, it will only lead to a pooling of ignorance! God's Word still must be core here. The Bible Study Small Groups is centered only on the study of the Word with a small amount of time for personal sharing and prayer. This relational group model brings God's Word more into our daily lives so that each person learns from his/her experiences along with the Word, sharing, and prayer!

The Key Principles and Structure

Keep in mind the Key Principles for Small Groups in the section "All About Small Groups!" The qualities and goals for this type of group include, Be willing to be a learner of life and the Word. A person who learns, who is usable, and who is not afraid to fail, glorifies the Lord! Be a person who prays and is able to encourage others. Do not feel you have to get through all of the questions in each section (except for the one on prayer), because some groups can spend all the time on one question while another will quickly go through all of them

1. **Prayer:** Spend five minutes to open the session in prayer; invite Christ into your meeting as if He is there—because He is there (Rev. 3:20)!

2. **Read a short Bible Passage.** Use a concordance and look up the “one another” passages; there are over 50 of them. Or, go through Romans 12 with one or two verses at a time, or John 14 and 15, or, 1 John or James in the same way; use the passages from our Character series. Then ask the Essential *Inductive Questions* (for more inductive questions see Curriculum # 2 How to Study the Bible Inductive Bible Study at www.intothyword.org):
 - a. What does it say?
 - b. What does it mean?
 - c. What is God telling me?
 - d. How can I be changed so I can learn and grow?
 - e. What is in the way from these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of me listening to God?
 - f. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
 - g. What can I model and teach? What does God want me to share with someone?
3. **Reflect:** Listen to one another. Ask how the past week has been. The key is to be open, approachable, vulnerable, and honest, and keep all things confidential so this is a safe place to be in and to share in! This group is not about looking good; it is about learning to be good! It is about that we all fail at times and need rebooting!
4. **Questions** (Pick a few of these relational questions below and rotate the rest for each week. Remember, Do not feel you have to do all of them or every section (except prayer,) as some groups can spend all the time on one question while another will quickly go through all of them):
 - a. What has your week been like?
 - Situations that you are dealing with?
 - Good news?
 - Bad news such as setbacks, failures, harm done to me, or what I have done to another?
 - b. What is God doing in your life now?
 - How is He working?
 - What is preventing Him from working in you?
 - How is your Bible reading and study going?
 - How is Satan trying to work in your life?
 - c. Accountability questions, choose one or two for each week.
 - d. Discuss the assigned study, passage or devotional reading.

- e. What temptations/sins are you dealing with? What are you going to do to resolve them?
 - f. Is there anything—issues, concerns, ideas you need to share or to confess to?
 - g. How is your relationship with God? What do you need to do to improve it?
 - h. How is your relationship with your spouse, friends, co-workers, and church members? What do you need to do to improve it?
 - Did you spend adequate time with family?
 - How is communication? How can you improve it?
 - What is negative in your family? What are you going to do to resolve it?
 - What is positive? What are you going to do to honor and reward it?
 - How are you maintaining your friends?
 - Were you hurt by them this week? How so? What can you learn? How can you bring healing?
 - What can you do to improve your relationships, first with immediate family, extended family, friends, coworkers, neighbors and then others around you?
 - i. What is a longing in your heart, an issue or a person?
 - j. What is your dream? If you could do anything, what would you do? What is holding you back? Is it in God's permissive will (not violating His precepts)? What do you need to do to make it so?
5. **Refocus** on God's principles. This is the time to listen to God and His Way. The key to spiritual growth is the desire to grow, the ability and willingness to step up, consistency; eagerness for His Word is essential! If you have not done so yet, open a Bible passage and ask some Inductive questions of yourself; keep it short and focus on "how can this passage change me?" Be willing to learn and obey. Overwhelmed? Then take it by baby steps, a little at a time, learning and putting into practice until you are ready for the next lesson. You can start off using our Character series along with the Scriptures and a question or two from each one.

Questions:

- a. Take an issue from the above, use a concordance or your Scripture knowledge, and look up a passage to seek an answer from God's Word. A "Bible Promise Book" works great too; choose one promise for each meeting. You can also use the Scriptures from our Character series (in the Character curriculum).

- b. Based on what you have learned this week, what will you do differently now?
 - 1. What lessons did you learn?
 - 2. What mistakes will you now avoid?
 - 3. How can you learn obedience and trust in our Lord?

 - h. What is something good you have done or learned this week with which you can continue?

 - i. What Biblical application have you learned? How can this application or insight change you? How are you going to apply it? Benchmark a plan to implement it!

 - j. What Character is missing from or weak in your life that needs to be implemented or refreshed?

 - k. What is a bad character you have? What are you going to do to replace it with a good one?

 - l. How will you exercise the love and care from the Fruit of the Spirit to those around you this coming week?

 - m. What do you need to do to better equip you this week?

 - n. What are your eating and exercise habits? Remember, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit!

 - o. Are you confident in whom you are in Christ? How will this affect your actions this next week?

 - p. Do you realize how much Christ loves you? How will this affect you this next week, and affect your relationships?
6. **Resources**, how the group can help, what the resources are that are needed to help in this situation? Remember, listening is essential; do not just jump in and try to fix a problem. Allow a gentle dialog and process to take place so the person is ministered to, not just “fixed.”

Questions

- a. Do you have any questions?

- b. Do you have an issue or habit with which you need help?

- c. What resources do you need to help you get over temptations?
 - d. What resources in time, talent, and treasures do you have that can benefit someone in this group, church, and/or community?
 - e. How can this group help with support, strength, skills, call, and encouragement for you this week?
 - f. What suggestions or ways to help with a particular need do you have?
7. **Return.** When will we meet again? How can the groups help one another during the day? How can we improve and grow in prayer, accountability, and accessibility?
- a. Did you connect with someone this last week?
 - a. How so?
 - b. How did it go?
 - b. Do you need a call this week to remind you of something or to encourage you?
 - c. What can we do to enrich our meetings?
 - d. How do you need encouragement?
 - e. This is a good place to assign a passage, a study such as our character series, or a devotional reading for the following week. Agree upon it and keep it short and simple.
 - f. When and how can you encourage someone this week?
 - g. Who would you like to meet with this coming week?
 - h. Is there someone you would like to invite to this group?
 - i. Keep the groups under five; when you get six, split it into two and grow it from there. If you break it down into small sub groups for the questions and prayer, you can always meet in a large group for worship and study. Also, keeping the people in the groups consistent and enfolding new people when the groups split helps in the community and sharing.
 - j. When will we meet again?

8. **Prayer**, spend time fervently praying for each other and the issues from the above categories along with specifics that have come up!

These groups are to foster support for one another so we can live a life based on Christ and His precepts and values, and so we can demonstrate His character. This is essential for learning how to engage others in community, accountability, taking responsibility, and providing opportunities for witness and service. We learn to be the people of God so we can do the work of God!

This approach can be scary for those who tend not to like to share their feelings and have an aversion to learn from one's mistakes and the input of others. But, this approach is one of the best ways to disciple, to mentor others, and be mentored, as life is about our growth in Him. We will be better able to put character into action and build our spiritual formation. To grow, we need to be vulnerable and allow ourselves to see under the hood of our will and desires, how we deal with life so we can learn from God's Word and the experiences of others, to be more "wholistic" (all encompassing, bringing our spiritual life into our daily life) and mature in our approach to self, others, and Christ.

Being in a caring Christian community is essential to spiritual growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Small groups are essential for the Christian who desires to grow beyond himself and unto the Lord. This is done in the crucible (a furnace, to process melted metal, a colloquialism of the Puritans to mean a refractory life that is surrendered to God by confluence of life combined with the study of the Word producing patience and spiritual maturity) of community. We all need to be in nurturing Christian communities that help us to not only grow in maturity and our faith formation, but also help to encourage us so we can integrate faith into our daily lives. If your church is not doing Small Groups, you must ask *why* and *what is in the way?* Perhaps pride?

Small Groups are to be the life-changing framework to allow discipleship and authentic relationships and Christian fullness in your church (Matthew 5: 14-16; John 4:34-38; 6:43-45)!

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Romans 12:2-3

(Gleaned from resources from "Son Life," "Campus Crusade for Christ," "Frontiers Missionary Dr. John Hervey" and the "Into Thy Word Inductive Method")

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6. Becoming a Lighthouse of Prayer

"The most effective evangelism tool ever developed!" Billy Graham

Matthew 9:36; Luke 15:7, 11-24; Acts 12:5; James 5:16-17; 1 Peter 3:15

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:1-4).

Many years ago I was on staff with Campus Crusade for Christ and we started this program on how to better reach our neighbors with prayer. Later on it was infolded into "Mission America," our Ministry Partner and the Association that *Into Thy Word* is a part of. So, it is natural we have for you a "How to Develop a Lighthouse! "

What is a Light House? Throughout recorded history, from the ancient Atlantians and Egyptians to the Mesopotamians and the Greeks, a Lighthouse was, and still is a beacon of light to warn ships at sea of danger such as rocks, and to provide rescue for ships in distress.

What Is A Lighthouse of Prayer? A Lighthouse of Prayer (LHP) is a beacon of light to the wonders of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the Light and you are the lighthouse! This is one of the most non-threatening, totally convenient, simple, yet profound methods of reaching the lost with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Based on Luke 10, a Lighthouse of Prayer does not talk to their neighbors about God; rather they simply spend as little as five minutes a day in prayer for their neighbors. This for the past several years has been the focus of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Mission America as well as Campus Crusade for Christ.

The Focus is to Prayer , Share, and Care for your Neighbors!

A Lighthouse is a gathering of two or more people, in Jesus' name, uniting together to **pray** for, **care** for, and lovingly **share** Jesus Christ with their neighbors and others in their sphere of influence. Lighthouses of Prayer are places where Believers pray for their neighbors. Houses of Prayer may be in homes, places of business, work sites, college dorms, apartments, prison cells—any place where Believers can gather to pray for unbelievers.

Becoming a Lighthouse is a simple process. We begin by making the commitment to pray for, care for, and share Christ with people in our neighborhoods or sphere of influence. If the notion of sharing your faith of Christ scares you, do not worry because the Lighthouse strategy is a simple way for all of us to share—sometimes without even speaking a word or overtly sharing your faith! Pray with compassion and conviction! But, of course, to really be more influential, we should also open our mouths to what is in our hearts.

The Lighthouse Strategy begins by identifying your neighbors, those you will pray for and eventually share Christ with. The best way to begin is to do a "prayer-walk" your neighborhood. Prayer walking is easy. At least once a week (preferably once a day) go on a walk through your neighborhood, praying for each home as you walk by. Many people pray five blessings upon five homes (a strategy developed by Houses of Prayer). Prayer walking is most successful when you go with another person such as spouse, family, or another Christian in your neighborhood. Prayer for blessings is praying for God's best upon your neighbor's health, family, work, emotions, social life, and spiritual life.

After doing a few prayer walks, begin letting your neighbors know in casual conversation that you are praying for them, and ask them if there is something specific they would like you to pray for. Most people will be glad to give you one or two items. Pray for those items during your prayer walk, share them with your small group or prayer group at church (keep confidences); then, a few days later, ask each person what is happening. Continue prayer walking regularly as you care for and share with your neighbors. Prayer walking in your neighborhood in this fashion begins opening the doors of opportunity. As those doors open, you can show love to your neighbors by offering to do practical things for them that they will appreciate. Begin building bridges. Serve them and meet their needs. Do random acts of kindness—mow a lawn, buy food, baby-sit, look out for a job for a person out of work, send their kid to camp, etc.

The next stage is cultivating common activities like starting block parties, cookouts, sports, and other events. This goes a long way toward building relationships and showing each neighbor you are the kind of Christian that genuinely cares for them. As you express care for your neighbors, you are actually preparing them to receive an important gift that will introduce them to a love far greater.

Then from this you can start to develop small groups. Use the Alpha Course ([link below](#)), or our Small Group Curriculum Model. And now you have started evangelistic Small Groups!

You can also register as a Lighthouse ([link below](#)) to help you in committing to reach the people in your sphere of influence for Christ through this three-fold strategy of **praying** for, **caring** for, and **sharing** with your neighbors.

There are further resources that will help you get started in praying for, caring for, and sharing Christ with those around you. This includes video training, tracts, and encouragement.

The Bible urges that prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone. And "everyone" includes our neighbors, whom God wants "to be saved and to come to a knowledge of truth." (1 Timothy 2:1-8) If you are a Believer, if you have neighbors, if you love the Lord and care about those neighbors, and if you have five minutes a day to pray for them, you can start a House of Prayer!

How do we start ?

Start by praying for the "Fives"

- Five neighbors or persons or households who live or work near you, for
- Five minutes a day, for
- Five days a week, for
- Five weeks, with
- Five blessings.

Use the acronym **BLESS** to remind yourself of five important areas to cover when praying for others:

- **Body**—physical needs, health, energy
- **Labor**—work, income, job satisfaction
- **Emotional**—inner life, joy, peace
- **Social**—family relationships, friends
- **Spiritual**—repentance, faith, holiness.

This is a start. At the end of five weeks you decide whether or not to continue. It does not have to be every day in order to make a powerful difference. As you go, you may start to increase your time.

How Do I Pray for My Neighbors? **Be friendly!** Lighthouse provides a five-week devotional guide designed to help you pray for your friends and neighbors, and a booklet that shows how a House of Prayer can powerfully change your life and your neighborhood. They also have "Door-hangers" and prayer greeting cards—tools to help you connect with those you are praying for, and "Power House," a monthly newsletter full of stories, articles, and ideas about prayer that will help and encourage you.

How can I begin?

Start by saying **yes** to God's call! Then document what you will be doing

Persons I will pray for: write your name below to commit to pray for your neighbors:

Persons I will pray with:

My five-week commitment begins ____ and ends the week of ____

What I have learned as I have prayed: _____

Why should I start a Lighthouse?

- The gift you give each person is the Good News about Jesus Christ. There are many ways that you can introduce Jesus to your neighbors. *Lighthouse* is an excellent and easy way to commence!
- Because your neighbors are fragmented, disconnected, isolated, or lost! They need to see God illustrated in the lives of others—of your life!
- If you have no problem openly sharing your faith, use your times of caring to begin probing about the spiritual condition and beliefs of your neighbors. Materials like the “Four Spiritual Laws” from Campus Crusade will help you present the Gospel clearly. See our *Evangelism Channel* for more great resources!
- If you are not sure how to share your faith, then gift giving is the strategy you should use. Giving a copy of the “JESUS” film to neighbors usually results in nearly half of all homes having someone receive Christ. Giving JESUS CDs or “The Passion of the Christ” during holidays can have even greater impact! After you have given your gift, check back with them within a few days and

ask them what they thought of the video. You may discover that many of your friends prayed to receive Christ at the end of the CD, but they do not know what to do next. That is your opportunity to lead them in an investigative or evangelistic Bible study for new Believers, or get them involved in your church.

- Ready to Build! Every day new Lighthouses are being established. You can be a part of the growing number of people whom God is using to see their neighbors come to know Christ. They are centers of blessing in which Believers ask the Father for blessings on those who live or work near them.

Can we depend on you to leave His light on from your prayers and example? Let us make our homes "Power House" Lighthouses (Matthew 5: 14-16; John 4:35; 6:44)!

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7. Accountability Questions

Key passages: Proverbs 25:12; 27:17; Ecclesiastes 4:8-12; Romans 14: 13-23; 2 Corinthians 12:19-13:6; Galatians 6: 1-6; Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 4:9-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; James 5:15-16; Hebrews 3:13

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." -- James 5:15-16

Accountability allows us to be answerable to one another, with the focus on improving our key relationships with people such as our spouse, close friends, colleagues, coworkers, a boss, small group members, or a pastor. Accountability will also enhance our integrity, maturity, character relationships in general, and our growth in Christ. Accountability is sharing, in confidence, our heartfelt Christian sojourn in an atmosphere of trust so we can give an answer for what we do, see where we need help, understand our struggles and where we are weak, and be encouraged to stay on track, seek prayer, care, and support when we fail, and model guideposts for one another to keep us going.

Below are some key Accountability questions you can ask yourself and/or have a mentor ask you. These are designed for small groups and mentoring for those from high school youth to seasoned adults. They are for men's groups, women's groups, and so forth. Because of the number of questions, all you need to do is choose three or four questions for each week. If there is a particular struggle area, add that one, too. Also, incorporate one of the key passages above and spend significant time in prayer:

1. Did you spend significant time with God through His Word, prayer, quiet time, devotions, and other spiritual disciplines? How much; how constant? Is He your driving force?
2. What blocks your growth in Christ? What blocks growth, in your other relationships, from becoming more mature and effectual?
3. How has your time with God been? Did you pray for others? Are you satisfied with the time you spent with our Lord this week? How so? What can you do to improve it? Did you pray for the others in this group?
4. Have you faithfully served the Lord, His people, and the lost?
5. Did you go and participate in church activities and worship this week? How so? Why not?
6. Did you set spiritual goals this week? What were they? Did you achieve your spiritual goals?
7. Have you made your family a priority? What noteworthy activity or deed did you do for your spouse and/or family?
8. How have you struggled with sin? What are the sins that have weighed down your walk with God this week?
9. What did you do to enhance your relationship with your spouse/friends? What can you do to make that relationship better?
10. In what ways has God blessed you this week? How have you shared your blessings?
11. What disappointments did you face? Did they consume your thoughts? What did you do about it? What can you learn?
12. Have you filled the mandates of your call, work and school, practicing excellence, and being the best 100% as you can be for His glory?
13. Have you committed any sexual sin? Did you look at someone lustfully? Have you been alone in a compromising situation? Have you been flirtatious? Have you struggled with pornography or “romance novels?” Have you exposed yourself to any sexually oriented material? Did you put yourself in a situation with a member of the opposite sex that could appear to be compromising, even though it may not have been?

14. Have you shared your faith? In what ways? How can you improve? Have you had an opportunity to share with a non-Christian?
15. How well are you handling your finances right now? Have your financial dealings been questionable?
16. Have you been trustworthy? Have you lied? Stolen? Cheated? Been Dishonest or Manipulative? Have you elevated yourself over another for your own personal agenda? What about your language and attitude?
17. Have you allowed the media and its distortions in TV, music and movies to unduly influence you? What about peer pressure?
18. Have you been prideful? Have you been guilty of Gossip or Anger? Slandered? Shown Indifference? Been Greedy? Not Controlled your tongue? This hinders people from knowing and trusting Christ the most!
19. Have you demonstrated a servant's heart? How so? What have you done for someone else this week?
20. Did you struggle with a disappointment this week? How did you handle it?
21. Have you respected and treated your classmates, co-workers and peers graciously by showing them compassion and the love of God in your words and deeds? What can you do to enhance your relationships here?
22. How is your level of character, according to the comparison of Gal. 5:22-23 versus Gal. 5:19-21?
23. How did you practice *joy* this week? Have you had a thankful attitude toward God? Have you struggled with anger toward God? How so? What can you do about it?
24. Have you taken care of the temple of the Holy Spirit with rest, sleep, exercise, healthy eating, etc? What about addictions, gluttony, or substance abuse?
25. Has your thoughts been kept pure?
26. Are you giving to the Lord's work with your time, talent, and treasures? What about financially?
27. What do you need to do to improve your relationships with God and with others?
28. What do you see as your number one need or struggle for this next week?

29. Have you compromised your integrity in any way, or lied about the above questions?

30. How can this group help you?

Take it slow and easy. Don't try, or even expect, to immediately delve into the deepest, darkest corners of your life. Begin by having your close friends hold you accountable for things like praying regularly and integrity issues. As you see the benefit and results of this, you will also be building up trust, which is necessary for accountability in more personal and private areas.

If you need further help in this area, seek a qualified and trusted pastor or Christian counselor. Also, seek someone to whom you can be accountable. Do not just trust yourself; have a small group or mentor ask you these questions on a regular basis!

"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long" (Psalm 32:3).

If you fall away from these questions, or refuse to have someone hold you to them, then Satan will have a foothold in your life. These questions are not just for the pastor or church leader; they are for all Christians who want to live a life of integrity and significance. The failure to have accountability will produce sin. At that point, it is not a question of *if* you may fall, but, rather, *when* you will engage in sin and destroy everything in your life. The relationships and ministry God has given you as well as your family and those around you, for generations to come, will be destroyed. Yes, there can be restitution and restoration, but the cost can never be completely repaid. Just look at King David; his sin had dire consequences with which we still live.

"The highest proof of true friendship is the intimacy that holds nothing back and admits the friend to share our inmost secrets." -- Andrew Murray

The Christian life offers glaring, empirical proof that "all of us make many mistakes," (James 3:2) and we are grateful for the forgiveness offered to us through Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1).

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Helpful Links and Further Resources:

<http://alphacourse.org>

<http://www.lighthousemovement.org>

<http://www.ccci.org/>

<http://www.lighthousereport.com/>

<http://www.namb.net/evangelism/prayer/lighthouses/>

<http://www.hopeministries.org/>

<http://www.harvestevan.org>

<http://www.lighthouseofprayer.org/>

<http://www.jesusday.org/>

Resources on the web

For recovery:

<http://www.raphacare.com/>

<http://www.newlife.com/>

For materials and ideas:

<http://www.lighthousemovement.org/>

<http://smallgroups.com/>

<http://www.serendipityhouse.com/>

<http://www.neighborhoodbiblestudy.org>

Make sure you check out the rest of our small group articles and resources!

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Remember these resources are free for you! Most ministries only sell their materials, we feel we are doing what God has called us too, by going ahead and offering the best materials possible for free and seek support for doing so. There

is no obligation but please consider supporting our ministry if you are able to do so. As these materials have cost us a tremendous amount of time effort and financial resources that have taken us years to develop for you!

Feel free to pass this around to any pastor who is overseas or on the mission field who may need it! We also have several other “Pastors Training Packs” available in various languages on: “How to Study and Teach the Bible,” “How to Lead and Manage the Church” and many more. As a missions and discipleship organization it is our call to train pastors and provide resources to Christians and Church leaders all over the world. They may printout any information we have posted, reproduce it, make the needed cultural changes and translate it. All we ask of you is to keep us in prayer, keep the name of our ministry and any copyright information on the resources, and tell other pastors what we have to offer. If anyone does translate any of our material, please let us know and give us a copy so we can make them available to others in their language and culture!



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“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.” Nub. 6:24-26