

# 5 Ways Small Groups Empower Women

Providing opportunities to serve, developing leaders, and more  
Julia Mateer

My journey with leading small groups began nearly 22 years ago as a college student. Through small groups, I've had a front-row seat to women entering into a relationship with Jesus, being set free from all types of addictions, developing deep friendships, and seeing their marriages restored. These stories fuel me to continue serving in small-group ministry. However, the *greatest* joy for me is when a woman finds her voice and begins leading a group.

Small groups are powerful not only because life change happens in the context of relationships but also because they provide ministry and leadership opportunities to women. Here are five ways small-group ministry empowers women:

## 1. Small Groups Provide Healthy Community.

Small groups allow women to experience healthy, authentic community—maybe even for the first time. Sitting in my living room was a group of 30 women gathered for the first week of a study on Lisa Bevere's book *Lioness Arising*. Some women sat pensively in their chairs waiting for the group to officially begin. Others buzzed about the room introducing themselves and connecting. Every week, the group gathered to read and study the book, but something deeper happened—something more meaningful. Women's lives were changed. During the 12-week small group, friendships were birthed and women became more fully devoted followers of Christ. Some experienced positive interactions with other women for the first time.

Here is a beautiful testimony from Gloria, a small-group leader that has found fulfillment in leading groups:

Personally, I have changed completely because of small groups. I did not feel comfortable with women. Since my childhood I've had issues with women, but through small groups I have found that we are the greatest influence to encourage each other. I kept reading Scripture that talked about fellowship being important and how we lean on each other for support and confess our sins to each other so that we may be healed. Now I live those Scriptures through small groups with wonderful, godly women who love the Lord as I do, and we can relate to the ups and downs of life together. I believe that Christ saves us, but small groups grow us in the love of Christ.

## 2. Small Groups Provide Opportunities for Women to Serve.

Small groups empower women to serve others whether or not they're the leader of the group. The church I serve has several thousand members. The pastoral staff cannot effectively shepherd such a large congregation. So small groups are the place people are cared for. This provides lots of opportunities for women to use their gifts to serve one another. For example, if a woman has a baby, her small-group members coordinate meals for her family. Or perhaps a woman's family member passes away. Her small group rallies around her for prayer, encouragement, and support.

Sarah, a successful CPA with two children, was driving home from the office when she got a call. Julie, another woman in her small group, had been in a car accident and rushed to the hospital. Immediately, Sarah kicked into high gear! She went straight home, got her children settled, and started lining up meals for Julie. Once her husband was home from work and could watch the children, Sarah went to the hospital to visit and pray with Julie. Sarah didn't have to be the leader of her group to lean into her gifts and help Julie in her time of need. Small groups provide lots of opportunities to serve.

### **3. Small Groups Allow Women to Grow in Their Leadership Skills.**

Small groups empower women to lead in the local church, providing opportunities for women to minister in meaningful ways. Small-group leaders have the opportunity to stretch their leadership muscles and connect people, learn to really listen to group members, and encourage the people they lead. They get to create life-giving atmospheres within their group where group members feel loved, safe, and encouraged. They get to identify other leaders and call forth their potential. Often, these opportunities aren't available to women in other places within the church, which leads me to my next point.

### **4. Small Groups Provide Unique Opportunities to Women.**

Small-group ministry opens doors for women to lead in ways that other ministries don't. For example, my best friend, Liz, loves to volunteer in the nursery. There is no other place she would rather serve than holding babies so young moms can attend service knowing their babies are safe. However, I'm not wired that way. While I love children, I'd much rather be leading. Liz is a behind-the-scenes person, and I'm an out-front person, and we need both to make up the different parts of the body of Christ.

But small groups provide leadership and ministry opportunities for women wired like me, women who get energized by gathering people together and helping them take the next step in their relationship with Christ. For women wired to lead, this is a welcome opportunity not afforded in many other ministries in the church.

### **5. Small Groups Provide Opportunities for Women to "Move Up."**

The small-group structure affords women opportunities to fulfill their God-given potential in many ways. There are several leadership roles within small-group ministry that women can fill: small-group leaders, coaches, and directors. Often, this becomes a clear leadership ladder that leaders can climb as they demonstrate their leadership ability. The different levels of leadership provide different opportunities and challenges. Each level of leadership pours into the next so that everyone involved is cared for and developed.

Life change happens in and through relationships, and small groups are a perfect format to create the types of life-giving environments where women can grow in their relationship with others and with God. Small groups are a wonderful vehicle for us to lead women to becoming more fully devoted followers of Christ.

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