

Doing Life Together

Building Relational Groups

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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

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; then ask the Essential Inductive Questions:

- What does it say?
- What does it mean?
- What is God telling me?
- How can I be changed so I can learn and grow?
- What is in the way from these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of me listening to God?
- How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
- 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.
 - Discuss the assigned study, passage or devotional reading.
 - What temptations/sins are you dealing with? What are you going to do to resolve them?
 - Is there anything-issues, concerns, ideas you need to share or to confess to?
 - How is your relationship with God? What do you need to do to improve it?
 - 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?
 - What is a longing in your heart, an issue or a person?
 - 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.

Questions

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.

- Based on what you have learned this week, what will you do differently now?
- What lessons did you learn?
- What mistakes will you now avoid?
- How can you learn obedience and trust in our Lord?
- What is something good you have done or learned this week with which you can continue?
- 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!
- What Character is missing from or weak in your life that needs to be implemented or refreshed?
- What is a bad character you have? What are you going to do to replace it with a good one?
- How will you exercise the love and care from the Fruit of the Spirit to those around you this coming week?
- What do you need to do to better equip you this week?
- What are your eating and exercise habits? Remember, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit!
- Are you confident in whom you are in Christ? How will this affect your actions this next week?
- 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

- Do you have any questions?
- Do you have an issue or habit with which you need help?
- What resources do you need to help you get over temptations?
- What resources in time, talent, and treasures do you have that can benefit someone in this group, church, and/or community?
- How can this group help with support, strength, skills, call, and encouragement for you this week?
- 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?

- Did you connect with someone this last week?
- How so?
- How did it go?
- Do you need a call this week to remind you of something or to encourage you?
- What can we do to enrich our meetings?
- How do you need encouragement?

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.

- When and how can you encourage someone this week?

- Who would you like to meet with this coming week?
- Is there someone you would like to invite to this group?

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.

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

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