

Small Group Leadership: Skills for Changing Lives

Class Notes, August 2011

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Introduction: Why's and What's of Small Groups

1. Why are Small Groups a Good Idea? (Have Class suggest answers)

a. Advantages:

- More interactive than classroom sessions, more participation = better learning
- Accountability
- A place to discuss and apply sermons
- A place to read and discuss the Bible intimately
- An environment to discover spiritual gifts
- Less requirements for facility space
- More intimacy
- Closer locations means more opportunities to interact outside of group as well
- We can model behavior better in groups and judge behavior better in groups
- We can talk about more specific life application in groups by assembling groups in similar life stages
- We can get to know each other more intimately in a group setting
- We pray better for people we know better
- Because small groups can truly exist as churches that multiply rapidly
- (The simpler the church model, the faster it reproduces)
- Better Care of People within the church (pastors can't do everything for everyone)
- Reorientation to close fellowship with a community (something we've lost because of things like isolation in individual homes and cars, breakdown of family, prosperity lessening our dependence upon one another, etc.)
- *Because they utilize our culture and our human needs to help grow us in Christ better than other programs/tools the church has used in the past.*
 - Discussion fits better than instruction in a culture where everyone has access to the answers via books, the internet, etc. We need help processing the information, not obtaining it.

b. Disadvantages/Bad Reasons:

- a. "They are Biblical" (We will explore this reason next session)
 - b. To make Christian friends to hang out with ALL the time (isolationism)
 - c. Sharing gossip is easier in groups
 - d. People get hurt relationally in a way that makes you run from the church
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Leadership Skills:

What are skills?—and Why are we focused on them?

Why + How + Practice = Skill

Skills indicate that you are competent in an area. Not only do you know how to do it, you know why it is important, and you have done it enough to be proficient.

No one sends a fourteen-year-old to drive the carpool after giving them a basic rundown of the driving rules. Knowledge alone is not sufficient. This knowledge must be learned, tested, and then refined by practice. These are the goals of this practice. Consider it the “driving school” for small group leadership.

Not Everything about a Skill is Biblical:

The Bible concerns itself with the ultimate truths of the world, but it does not seek to hold ALL truth. For example, you can't figure out heart surgery from the Bible, or the rules of avoiding infection by germs or bacterial. Skills are often the product of principles of human nature or culture. Some of what this class will cover is opinion and conjecture. That means you can feel free to change or adjust these things based on your experience. My goal is to make sure you know “why” every time I tell you “how” so that if there's another way to get the end result, you can use it.

Biblical Foundations of Small Groups¹

Small Groups are modeled in the Bible, but they are never commanded/required.

"There is no passage in the Bible that says, 'You must have a small group for people to grow in their faith.' Instead, what is in the Bible is an understanding, from beginning to end, that people need an authentic, intimate community in which to grow."²

The Scripture constantly underscores the centrality of relationships.

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work; If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up. ~ Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. ~ Proverbs 27:17

"We should not think of our fellowship with other Christians as a spiritual luxury, and optional addition to the exercises of private devotions. Fellowship is one of the great words of the New Testament: it denotes something that is vital to a Christian's spiritual health, and central to the Church's true life...The church will flourish and Christians will be strong only when there is fellowship." ~ J.I. Packer³

"It is both foolish and wicked to suppose that we will make much progress in sanctification if we isolate ourselves from the visible church. Indeed, it is commonplace to hear people declare that they don't need to unite with a church to be a Christian. They claim that their devotion is personal and private, not institutional or corporate. This is not the testimony of the great saints of history, it is the confession of fools." ~ R.C. Sproul⁴

"In our self-sufficiency we tend to ignore fellowship—only to discover our need for it when we hit a crisis. Then we scramble to build relationships just when we have the least time for them, and when people—for good reason given our history—have concluded we have no interest in fellowship."⁵

A farmer who had a quarrelsome family called his sons and told them to lay a bunch of sticks before him. Then, after laying the sticks parallel to one another and binding them, he challenged his sons, one after one, to pick up the bundle and break it. They all tried, but in vain. Then, untying the bundle, he gave them the sticks to break one by one. This they did with the greatest ease. Then said the father, "Thus, my sons, as long as you remain united, you are a match for anything, but differ and separate, and you are undone."
- Aesop

1. **Marriage** is instituted by God because it is a good thing. Man needs the partnership between himself or woman, because "it is not good for man to be alone".

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." ~ Genesis 2:18

Who can find a wife of noble character? For her value is far more than rubies. The heart of her husband has confidence in her, and he has no lack of gain. She brings him good and not evil all the days of her life. ~ Proverbs 31

2. **The household is made a central unit for passing along faith**, and the father is made a leader over his household—holding a responsibility before God to raise His children as his primary small group. (Numbers 27:8–11; Numbers 30:1-15)

“Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children...You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates...” ~ Deuteronomy 4:9, 11:18-20

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. ~ Ephesians 6:1-4

The exhortation throughout most of proverbs is from father to son.

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. ~ Proverbs 2:1-5

But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. ~ Joshua 24:15

Qualifications for Church Leaders: *He must manage his own household well and keep his children in control without losing his dignity. But if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for the church of God? ~ 1 Timothy 3:4-5*

...Christ is the head of every man, and a husband the head of his wife, and the head of Christ is God. (NIV) ~ 1 Corinthians 11:3:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife...wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ~ Ephesians 5:22-24 (NIV)

"...God, by creating Adam first (Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 11:8) and also by creating woman for man (Gen. 2:18,20,22; 1 Cor. 11:9), has set the gender-based role and responsibility of males in the most basic unit of society (the family) to be that of leader, provider and self-sacrificial protector (also cf. Eph. 5:25; 1 Peter 3:7), and likewise has set the gender-based role and responsibility of females to be that of help and nurture (Gen. 2:18) and life-giving (Gen. 3:20) under male leadership and protection (cf. 1 Peter 3:7)..." 8
The Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood (1997)

I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot, Or your brides when they commit adultery, For the men themselves go apart with harlots, And offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes; So the people without understanding are ruined. ~ Hosea 4:14

3. **The nation of Israel was organized into small groups by Moses** so they could be better cared for.

Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace."

So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said. Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. They judged the people at all times; the difficult dispute they would bring to Moses, but every minor dispute they themselves would judge. ~ Exodus 18:17-26

4. **Jesus trained His disciples in a group of twelve**, with an even greater focus on three men.

And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons. ~ Matthew 3:13-15 (also Luke 6:13)

5. **The church began as a large assembly that was characterized by a very caring close community of people meeting in homes as well as larger assemblies.**

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. ~ Acts 2:41-47

6. **God deals with us corporately as well as individually**

God spares Israel because of Moses (Exodus 32-33)

So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. Then Abraham drew near and said, "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" And the Lord said, "If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." ~ Genesis 18:22-26

By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. ~ Hebrews 11:7

Some people came bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. When they were not able to bring him in because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Jesus. Then, after tearing it out, they lowered the stretcher the paralytic was lying on.⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ~ Mark 2:3-4

Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.

~ James 5:14-15

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. ~ 1 Peter 4:8

7. **Accountability**

David and Nathan's interaction serves as a positive example of fellowship, Solomon's example afterward serves as the anti-example.⁶

2 Samuel 12:1-2, 1 Kings 9-11

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective...My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins. ~ James 5:16,19-20

8. **The "One Anothers" of the New Testament** serve as a powerful topical list of our responsibilities to each other:

- Be at peace with each other (Mk 9:50)
- Love one another (Jn 13:34)
- Be joined to one another (Ro 12:5)
- Be devoted to one another (Ro 12:10)
- Honor one another (Ro 12:10)
- Rejoice with one another (Ro 12:15)
- Weep with one another (Ro 12:15)
- Live in harmony with one another (Ro 12:16)
- Accept one another (Ro 15:7)
- Counsel one another (Ro 15:14)
- Greet one another (Ro 16:16)
- Agree with each other (1 Co 1:10)
- Wait for one another (1 Cor 11:33)
- Care for one another (1 Cor 12:25)
- Serve one another (Gal 5:13)
- Carry one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)
- Be kind to one another (Eph 4:32)

- Forgive one another (Eph 4:32)
- Submit to one another (Eph 5:21)
- Bear with one another (Col 3:13)
- Teach, admonish each other (Col 3:16)
- Encourage one another (1 Th 5:11)
- Build up one another (1 Th 5:11)
- Spur one another on (Heb 10:24)
- Offer hospitality to one another (1 Pe 4:9)
- Minister gifts to one another (1 Pe 4:10)
- Be humble toward one another (1 Pe 5:5)
- Confess your sins to one another (Jas 5:16)
- Pray for one another (Jas 5:16)
- Fellowship with one another (1 Jn 1:7)

Life Change Happens BETTER in Community – Community Fosters Strong Relationships

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.
~ Proverbs 13:20

Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. ~ Hebrews 10:23-24

Brothers if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently.
~ Galatians 6:1

“Pivotal Relationships” appear to be a common denominator in the lives of those who come to faith and who are growing spiritually.

Five Things God Uses to Ignite our Faith: (North Point Community Church)

1. Pivotal Circumstances
2. Providential Relationships
3. Spiritual Disciplines
4. Practical Bible Teaching
5. Serving God

1. Small Groups are the form of the typical church: In ancient and modern times

While the example of the early church is never commanded or mandated as the model we must follow, its effectiveness in both the present and ancient times should be an indication to us that the small community of believers is an effective component of discipleship.

- a. The majority of churches today are small enough to meet in homes
- b. The early church mainly met in homes for the first 300 years of its existence, because it was under the threat of persecution and did not build buildings. This is true for the persecuted church today. It meets in homes and does not build buildings for assembly. Example: China’s church is mostly composed of house churches.
- c. Small churches are a very effective model for reaching large, lost populations because they don’t require lots of money, dedicated staff, or administrative skills (they are very easy to reproduce) so missions agencies focus on planting house churches almost exclusively in many areas of the world.

2. Priesthood of all believers—the Spirit’s powerful presence and gifting of each member of the church allows us to lead each other and grow into truth without the explicit leadership of a spiritual guru or a “especially-gifted” person.

Older women too must be teachers of good things. Especially they must teach young women their duties as wives and mothers. ~ Titus 2:3

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good... The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 1 Corinthians 12:7, 21-26

3. **Training Leaders requires small groups** of people who share teaching and life together, just like Jesus and the disciples AND that is the main purpose of the church! Discipleship is really the focus – Small Groups is one type of "packaging" that works REALLY well for creating disciples. (water bottle analogy) Therefore, when we "do" small groups, we need to be asking the questions...
 - a. What does a disciple look like?
 - i) Disciplined Spirituality
 - ii) Leadership of others
 - iii) Understanding the Essential Doctrines that make Christianity, Christianity
 - iv) Serving with their Gifts
 - v) Sharing their Faith
 - b. How do we make disciples?
 - i) Teach and Encourage the Disciplines
 - ii) Educate them on the Bible and on Faith
 - iii) Give them the opportunity to serve
 - iv) Challenge them to be responsible
 - v) Model Evangelism, Prepare them to do it, and give them opportunities to practice

There is no passage in the Bible that says, "You must have a small group for people to grow in their faith." Instead, what is in the Bible is an understanding, from beginning to end, that people need an authentic, intimate community in which to grow.⁷

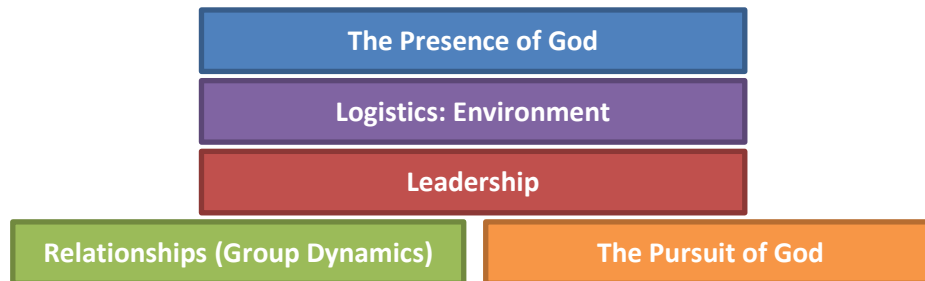
Fellowship and/or Community:⁸

Fellowship as defined in the New Testament, is sharing the experience of God Himself—between God, me and others. Only Christians can experience this fellowship, because we have a relationship with God through Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

You + Me = Relationship

You + Me + God = Fellowship

My Small Group Model



The Foundation of Community: Relationships

“Some, upon hearing this, might be tempted to ‘get off the bus’ that takes them to fellowship. Relationships, even between believers, come packaged with problems. To pursue relationships is to open ourselves to hurt, misunderstanding, and inconvenience, for our relationships are inevitably influenced by our sin...Yet the Spirit of God often chooses to employ other people as a means of communicating His truth to our ears and heart. Who are we to argue with Him?”⁹

The foundation of relationships is shared knowledge. This shared knowledge encompasses the past, the present, and the future. Knowledge of the past and future can be gained by sharing information. Knowledge of the present can be gained by experience as well as shared information—therefore fellowship involves both shared information and shared experiences.

Willow Creek Association’s Goals for Community

- i) A place to KNOW and BE KNOWN
- ii) A place to SERVE and BE SERVED
- iii) A place to LOVE and BE LOVED
- iv) A place to CELEBRATE and MOURN TOGETHER

There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. ~ 1 Corinthians 12:24-26

(I would add: A place to GROW and BE GROWN as a disciple)

Building Relationships

1. Activities (Shared Experiences are essential to relational growth)
 - a. Examples:
 - i) An Adventure: A road trip with friends
 - ii) A Competition: Paintball
 - iii) Casual Recreation: A Day at the Park, a baseball Game, etc.
 - b. Suggested Activities (Discussion)
2. Icebreakers (Knowing About Someone is the starting place for a relationship)

“While getting people to talk about themselves is not the most difficult task in the world, getting them to share meaningful things from their past can be difficult.”¹⁰

- a. Key Information for the Group:
 - i) Occupation(s)
 - ii) Hobbies/Recreational Interests
 - iii) Where they have Lived
- b. Types of Questions: (See the List on the Big Book of Small Groups, pgs 92-93)
 - i) Informational
 - ii) Dreams and Desires
(Example: What is your dream car? And Why?)
 - iii) Priority
(Example: You’ve won your choice of two options: An all-expense-paid trip to the destination of your choice for two weeks, or a week with the President of the U.S. Which one would you choose? Why?)
(Example: Which household chore would you like to never have to do again?)
- c. Move from general to specific questions. Like asking questions about the study, make the first ones easy to answer, and gradually go deeper over time.
- d. Move from general to spiritually-relevant questions over time. Fun facts are always welcome in group discussion, but don’t miss the opportunity to share truly intimate thoughts, especially when they set up the study material for the meeting: (Example: What do you feel God is calling you to do in life?)
- e. Resource Suggestion: The Complete Book of Questions – Gary Poole
- f. Areas of Sensitivity:
 - i) Option to Pass: It is important as questions become more personal that the leader communicate to the group that members can skip questions they do not wish to answer. You don’t want anyone feeling forced or manipulated into sharing things they are not ready to share. Example: the question, “Who have you dated in the past?” can be very easy or very hard, depending on who is answering the question.¹¹
 - ii) Equal Time: Try to allow equal time and give everyone the opportunity to respond to icebreakers. If you decide not to go around the circle systematically, then make sure you keep record of who has and has not responded.¹²

3. Sharing Life Stories

A very relevant group strategy for increased intimacy is to set aside study material and take time to have members of the group members tell their personal story, particularly as it relates to how God has worked in their life. This must be approached carefully and only after an evaluation of the group's intimacy and trust leads you to believe that the members will be respectful of the person sharing and keep that person's story confidential outside of the group. These sharing events are often times of high emotion, as members choose to relate their deepest regrets and gratitude for God's work in their lives.

- a. A good introductory material: Max Lucado's first chapter in He Still Moves Stones
- b. A good emphasis: This exercise serves to connect to the meaning of Baptism, a public proclamation of what God has done in your life
- c. Importance of Intimacy in Any Relationship relies upon knowing a person's past (Example: marriage)
- d. Importance of Creating a Confidential, Intimate Environment

Logistics for a Successful Group

"The Holy Spirit can work in the most difficult of conditions. That doesn't mean, however, that we should test God. For example, most groups would study better in a well-lit room without phones ringing and dogs jumping on people. The small group leader can help make sure that the place, time, room condition, refreshments and other sundry arrangements have been made and that the group is comfortable as it learns and grows."¹³

1. Types of Groups¹⁴

- a. Life-based Groups – groups that **focus on relational interaction** and growth based on the changing needs of its members. Curriculum is sometimes a core part of the groups, but can often be an addition to the groups normal activity of meeting and discussing their current walk with Christ.
- b. Content-oriented groups – groups that form based on mutual interests to **study a specific topic**. Their focus is on the content being studied. Other interactions and fellowship activities are optional and secondary to the group's main focus.
- c. Task-oriented groups – groups that form for **a specific repeated task**: purposes of accountability, substance abuse, evangelism, missions, etc. Their focus is on equipping members for the task and monitoring the group's achievements toward specific goals. They function more like teams than traditional small groups.
- d. Orientation Groups – **short term groups** that form with the specified purpose of introducing members to the church or a specific aspect of the church's life. These groups have a defined, short life span, but can agree to transition into a longer-term relationship too.

2. Methods for Forming of Groups¹⁵

- a. Church Assignment

Advantages:

- It can be helpful to have someone fully aware of ALL the important factors of groups pairing people together, like location, age, similar interests/lifestyle, etc.

Disadvantages:

- Groups feel forced at first, and commitment must be developed over time.

b. Member's Choice

Example Methods:

- i) Host a night for people to form groups. Have everyone spend an hour interacting based only on nametags and faces. When the hour is complete, introduce the group leaders, and have people spend an hour discussing joining a group based on their interactions during the night.
- ii) Post contact info, group purposes, group stage of life, meeting times, and locations. Have the church members join the groups that fit their desired criteria and availability.

Disadvantages:

- People often choose the people who are the most similar to them. This can be good or bad, but you must consider the different dynamics.
- People may choose without considering all the important criteria. (Example: They might choose a great group, but then realize it is too far away.)

Advantages:

- Creates an attitude of commitment right from the start.
- Assures that they are relatively comfortable with the aspects of the group that prompted their choice.

c. Random Assignment

Works well when you are separating an existing large group into smaller ones for small discussions.

3. Location of Meetings:

a. Frequency of Location Changes

If your group's location rotates or changes frequently, make sure that you send out the locations well in advance, and remind members the week of the meeting. Changing locations can be a source of frustration for members who are not detail-oriented.

b. Commute Time to Meetings

How do restaurants choose to expand: Location, Location, Location. The same is true for small groups. In each church, the members have a maximum commute time they are willing to make to their group. Because you can't factor in everyone's specific driving factors: traffic, stop lights, speed limits, driving habits, etc.; you need to help groups to pair up based on living as closely as possible.

c. An Environment Conducive to Group Intimacy¹⁶

People interact differently in different environments, and a person's living room is a VERY different environment than a restaurant, a church classroom, etc. Lighting, Room Size and available seating are also factors. I suggest having folding chairs for use in these situations.

- Home communicates family & friends = "I genuinely like you"
- Church communicates church = "Jesus said I should like you, so I'm trying"

A Key Question: Is Child Care sufficiently separate from Adults? Children represent one of the greatest focus and intimacy killers for any group. Sincere conversation, in-depth discussion, honest confession will not take place when the threat of interruption or the sounds of distraction of kids playing in the adjacent room can be heard.

4. Frequency of Meetings

- a. Bad: Once a month: difficult to bond, study material gets forgotten for 3 weeks
- b. Better: Every Other week: easier to bond, study material only forgotten for 1 week
- c. Best: 3 weeks on, 1 week off (week off can occasionally be a 100% fun activity)
- d. Too Much: Every week: people want to have that night free sometimes, without feeling like they are letting you down. EVERY week can make members feel trapped in an endless cycle with little relief. They have to “skip” or let down the group to get a week off.

5. Length of Meetings (Optimal Suggested time is 1 ½ -2 hours)

Keep in mind that many group members are annoyed by lax start times and groups that constantly go beyond their end times. Keep to a strict start and end time. You're group members will adjust to your promptness. You do not need to adjust to their lazy behavior.

6. Proper Size: (2-16 people)

- a. “As group size increases, the complexity of interpersonal relationships expands geometrically.”¹⁷
“When groups grow past twelve members, they tend to become less intimate and more confusing.”¹⁸
12 members = 66 relationships
15 members = 105 relationships
This is difficult for the members, but especially for the leader, who needs to maintain one-on-one rapport with each member.
- b. Couples vs. Singles makes a difference: couples means forming closer to half the relationships
- c. The larger the group, the easier it is for specific members to hide. The quiet can remain silent with less awkwardness and the less-committed members can find excuses for coming or not doing homework without relational accountability.
- d. The larger the group, the stronger the leader required to lead it.
- e. Discussions take longer, and groups are harder to please because there is a greater number of opinions.

7. Childcare:

Children represent one of the greatest focus and intimacy killers for any group. Sincere conversation, in-depth discussion, honest confession will not take place when the threat of interruption or the sounds of distraction of kids playing in the adjacent room can be heard.

Child Care arrangement suggestions:

- a. Coordinate Small Groups with children's programs at church
- b. Trade off child care with another group or an individual that is a part of another group.
- c. Hire babysitters to care for the children at a different location so that the children cannot interrupt the meeting.
- d. Some churches reimburse groups for the cost of a babysitter during group time.

Group Dynamics:¹⁹

1. Group Focus: A Group Should Not Be All Things.

Key Question: How does the small group function within the overall church strategy?

- a. Restoration & Accountability (Example: Celebrate Recovery)
- b. Fellowship & Accountability (Example: Watermark Community Church Groups)
- c. Learning/Instruction/Knowledge (Example: Bible Fellowship Classes at Prestonwood)
- d. Shared Spiritual Growth/Application & Empathy (Example: North Point Community Church)
- e. Service (Example: Missions Teams, Ministry Teams)
- f. Prayer
- g. Leadership (Example: Deacons Meetings)
- h. Outreach & Assimilation/Evangelism

2. Group Diversity:

Relatable people bond quicker and closer, but diversity challenges people to grow beyond themselves and their limited perspective/interests. The key is balance. What is the proper level of commonality for a healthy group?

a. Same Gender (male or female)

It's often a great idea to split a couple's group into girls and guys sessions for 2-4 weeks. This creates a heightened sense of commonality, allows for closer bonding, and facilitates more open discussion.

b. Same Stage of Life

- i) Single individuals
- ii) Engaged Couples
- iii) Married without kids (joke: can and will talk about sex)
- iv) Married with kids
- v) "Empty Nesters" (married and kids are out of house)

c. Same Career or Career Stage

d. Same Age

e. Same Interests

Similar interests greatly enhances small talk and fun, fellowship oriented activities outside of group.

f. *Same Spiritual Growth Needs/Areas*

Surveying a group's members is critically important. Knowing where the gaps in a person's knowledge of God are at can greatly increase the effectiveness of the group's interaction and curriculum choices. If there is an area that I wish the church did a better job, this would be it! Why don't we strive to know where our members are at on their spiritual journey???

Example: Watermark Community Church requires its members to complete surveys every year on key areas of growth to monitor their progress and suggest areas of study. Failure to complete the survey is failure to remain a member of the church.

3. Open or Closed Groups?

Should you add members to your group at any time? Ultimately, it depends on the purpose of the group...

- a. As a general rule, I strongly suggest groups are generally closed, and only open at specific times to add members and multiply. Intimacy requires an environment of mutual commitment to respect, confidentiality, knowledge of one another, etc. These things are almost impossible to build and maintain when new group members are constantly present.
- b. Open groups are often found in environments like evangelism groups, and teams dedicated to projects or programs, etc. These environments do not require or focus upon intimate interactions.

4. Interacting with the Four Personalities/Temperaments

Identifying and adapting to the characteristics of the four personalities in your group will add huge gains to your ability to manage discussions and conflict in healthy ways.

a. The Basics of the Four Different Personality Types:

i) **Sanguine:**

Highly Sociable, likes to be the center of attention. Long-winded and often mixes humor or dramatic storytelling in with everything. Not sensitive to time (will be late to group a lot) or to keeping things serious. Most often very positive. Fast mood swings. Commitments are not kept easily—needs to be reminded.

ii) **Melancholy:**

A deep thinker—will always be interested in the details, and will tell most stories with ALL the details, regardless of whether they are important to the overall point. Sensitive to time and highly committed. Can be depressed and not easily moved to change his/her attitude quickly. Overly analytical of the motives of others—can think everyone has a hidden agenda. Often has a pessimistic outlook on life.

iii) **Choleric:**

Driven, task-oriented individual. On time (as long as he/she feels the group is important) and always in a hurry. Needs to see progress in the group. Will say insensitive things, and is prone to outbursts of anger. Competitive. Keeps the group discussion on track.

iv) **Phlegmatic:**

A peacekeeper. Laid-back unless you hit a subject they are particularly passionate about. Quiet and not in a hurry to speak. Does not interrupt others or jump ahead of others to speak their mind. Very sensitive to others feelings. Not competitive.

b. Key areas to monitor the personalities in during group time:

- i) Commitments
- ii) Talkative vs. Quiet
- iii) Analytical vs. Topical
- iv) Comfortable with Conflict vs. Uncomfortable

c. Problem Personalities: (Taken from How to Lead a Small Group)²⁰

- i) Social Sidney – just at group to be the entertainment, to feed a need to be the life of the party. This activity starts off as fun and helps the group relax, but prolonged

emphasis on this aspect of the meeting keeps the group from serious discussion and growth.

- ii) Academic Ann – an intellectual giant who wants to spend all the time on the study material. Socializing is sinful to her. She always has the right answer, and she shares it right away in response to a question—making everyone else hesitate to answer and feel foolish if their answers are not up to par with hers.
- iii) Holy Harry – He’s quick to spout off the correct answer when called upon to do so, but rarely shows that the content of the study has touched his heart. He’s just attending to check the box on his holiness “to do” list, and appease his guilty conscience.
- iv) Counselee Cynthia – is skilled at turning every small group meeting into a counseling session with their emotionally-charged, world-ending problems and prayer requests. Needs the extreme sympathy of the group to get through each week on her own.
- v) Philosopher Phil – Asks hard questions and prefers to debate theoretical issues
- vi) Counselor Carol – Feels free to cram the “solution” to problems down the throat of anyone brave enough to admit they have problems.
- vii) Preacher Patrick – dominates the discussion and assumes leadership.
- viii) Forced Frank – attends group because of his spouse or some personal obligation, but spends his time sitting quietly watching his wristwatch count down the remaining time.
- ix) Cynical Charles – always has a depressing thought or story to share on the subject at hand to bring the group down to his perspective of life: it’s the pits.
- x) Gossiping Jill – Always has tidbits of information to share about what’s happening “behind the scenes” with people in the church. Other members are always cautious to share information around her.

5. Managing the Discussion²¹

- a. How to prepare questions
 - i) Start easy, get harder
 - ii) Start impersonal, non-threatening questions, then move to more personal questions.
 - iii) Don’t ask two questions in one. One question at a time.
 - iv) Keep your questions short and simple.
 - v) Progression of questions:
 - from questions about facts,
 - to questions about what the author is trying to communicate,
 - to questions about how to apply this to life situations
- b. Don’t content yourself with one answer.

Follow up with questions like, “What led you to that conclusion?” or “What do the rest of you think?”
- c. Appropriate levels of silence: give the group members time to think!
- d. Limiting the talkers and drawing out the quiet ones
 - i) The Importance of Affirmation
 - ii) The Importance of limiting the leader’s role too
 - Don’t become THE answer person
 - Refuse to always give the last word
 - Refrain from teaching rather than discussing something

- e. Limiting distractions & rabbit trails
 - i) Sources of Distraction:²²
 - Children
 - Televisions
 - Noise (people walking upstairs, flushing toilets, etc.)
 - Phone Calls
 - Restroom Breaks
 - ii) Strategy for Rabbit Trails: Summarize the points of the current discussion and move on
 - f. Eliminating Disrespect

You must let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is beneficial for the building up of the one in need, that it may give grace to those who hear.

~ Eph 4:29

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle , but also to those who are unreasonable...In the same way , you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

~ 1 Peter 2:18, 3:1-2
 - g. The Importance of Active Listening

It is important that you affirm people as they share in the group. As the leader, it is often appropriate to sum up the group's discussion or restate a person's thoughts with the words, "What I hear you saying is..."
 - h. Establishing Confidentiality
 - i. Avoiding Gossip
6. Evaluating and Responding to the Level of Intimacy in the Group
- How much trust can each member give to the group, and what past experiencing are contributing to their hesitancy?
7. Managing Distractions
- a. Food
 - b. Movement
 - c. Televisions
 - d. Phones
 - e. Children (childcare)
8. The Elements in the Flow of a Group Meeting
- a. Welcome (everyone needs to know you are glad to see them)
 - b. Small Talk, Food, Chatter
 - c. Logistics (details about future meetings, decisions that need to be made, announcements)
 - d. Focus on God's Role in the Meeting (prayer, possibly worship)
 - e. Focus on Lesson
 - f. Focus on Group Needs
 - g. End time of Focus (allow people to return to small talk)
 - h. End time of meeting (give people the freedom to leave)

Experiencing the Presence of God as a Group:

For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst. ~ Matthew 18:20

"The first Christians were most conscious of the guidance of the Holy Spirit when they met for common worship and common deliberation. No one who has experienced this unifying process can remain in doubt about the power of the Holy Spirit. So remarkable can the agreement of the Christian fellowship be that at a famous church meeting at Jerusalem [Acts 15:28] a momentous decision was recorded in these words: "it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.""

~ G. B. Caird, *The Truth of the Gospel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 107.

Group Prayer

"One the greatest gifts you can give anyone is your loving prayer on their behalf."²³

"Listening to a new believer pray is like a breath of fresh air. Hearing a mature believer converse with the master becomes a rich experience"²⁴

1. Modeling Prayer for Others

One thing the church does not often do is teach people to pray. That doesn't make the list of sermon topics in most churches. Prayer in a group setting is a primary way to teach people how to pray. Every time you pray, seek to model prayer for the rest of the group. Be sensitive to the elements of your prayer: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, requests, and phrases like "in Jesus name" and "by the Holy Spirit". People will pick up your habits and pass them along.

2. Limiting requests

- a. Define the Proper Circle of Concern – Immediate Personal Needs, Close Family and Friends
- b. Avoiding Gossip

3. Avoiding awkward moments:

- a. Choosing Pray-ers: Don't force people to pray or ask them to pray if you're not sure how they'll respond. This is one of the greatest areas of insecurity in many believers' lives. Ask them one-on-one before the moment comes to pray.
- b. Don't pray for some and not all requests. You leave the group wondering: "Was my request not important enough?" "Did he forget or ignore me and my request?" If you pray for some specifically, pray for all specifically—or just pray generally for all.²⁵

4. Recording and Following up on requests

Prayer for others can and should be a daily discipline, but make it convenient for your group members. It's not always appropriate or effective to ask each person to remember the group's requests. One person can easily write them down and then send them out to the rest later. An email with the group's requests in it is a powerful thing to remind and motivate people to pray. Just make sure the email gets sent quickly after the group—not 3 days later.

5. Interesting Prayer Dynamics: The Seven People You Meet in a Prayer Circle²⁶

- a. The Opener: They set the tone for the rest of the pray-ers.
- b. The Almost-er: Constantly on the verge of praying, but always preempted by someone else. You can hear their preparatory breath just before someone else jumps in.
- c. The Rambler (enough said)
- d. The Cave-In: Prays because everyone else is doing it, and he doesn't want to appear unspiritual.
- e. The Gunslinger: When there are only two people left to pray—this one wins the showdown.
- f. The Shot Blocker: The one who counters an earlier, unspiritual request with a more theologically-sensitive one.
- g. The Closer
- h. (The Encore-ist: You only thought you were done praying.)

(For further commentary on Quirky Prayer Habits, and funny do's and Don'ts, see the book, Stuff Christian's Life by Jonathan Acuff)

Communion

Major Passages: Mark 14, Matthew 26, Luke 22, 1 Corinthians 10-11 (John 6)

1. The Meaning of Communion
 - a. The Establishment of the New Covenant and the birth of the Church
 - b. The Sacrificial Death of Christ as reflective of the Old Testament Sacrifices
 - c. The Future Return of Christ and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb
2. The Setting of Communion
 - a. The Passover Meal (Exodus 12) – whether or not Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Lord's supper on the day of Passover or the day before, there can be little doubt that Jesus intended the establishment of the Lord's supper to reflect the significance of Passover. Therefore all the aspects of Passover should be reflected in our celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is a celebratory, redemptive, and unifying event.
 - b. At a meal, not a ceremony – There is significance to the fact that this is the Lord's supper and the Passover meal and the breaking of bread. The proper setting of this celebration is truly a meal—one in which you express fellowship with others, not just focus on Christ's redemptive work. It's likely that this is a major reason that Jesus chose to make the bread significant and not the lamb. Meat was not a common element of a regular meal—thus it would have been difficult and expensive to celebrate the Lord's supper if meat was a key element.
 - c. In close fellowship – Jesus chose to celebrate the Lord's supper with his closest companions – the twelve disciples. He could have celebrated it in a much larger group, if he had wanted. We too should consider the company in which we celebrate this sacrament. The small group is a much more accurate setting based on the examples of Scripture.
3. Studies that shed light on the meaning of Communion
 - a. The significance of the bread
 - b. The significance of meals before God (Exodus 24 and Isaiah 25.6)
 - c. The significance of the Old Testament burnt, peace, and sin offerings
 - d. The significance of the Passover meal

- e. Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross
 - f. The depth of forgiveness that we have in Christ
-

Pursuing God as a Group:

Teaching Techniques

1. Length of Studies

You can cover a subject in any amount of time—Genesis can take 3 weeks, 3 hours, or 3 months...but keep in mind that variety maintains a person's interest. If you study a subject so long that a group loses their motivation to do their homework, then the group suffers. Also, if you study a subject so long that a person is overwhelmed with all the application they are trying to make in their own lives, they will likely begin avoiding adding more application as the study continues.

- a. Be brief - 6 weeks is good, 8 weeks is maximum (compare to a 4 hour movie)
- b. Encourage further study outside of the group by suggesting additional resources—remember, the church's discipleship/leadership classes and the seminary are the specialists in comprehensive coverage of a subject, not the small group or the Sunday morning sermon.

2. The Investment = the Return (each person gets out equivalent to what they put in)

- a. Reading is Expected: At least the Bible, but hopefully much, much more
- b. Assign and expect homework
- c. Don't make it too easy
- d. Don't make it too hard

3. Types of Studies

- a. Life Application Topics
- b. Books of the Bible
- c. Figures & Events of the Bible
- d. Topics from the Bible
- e. Themes in the Bible

4. Bible Study Tips & Guidelines

Bible Study is an extremely sensitive subject, because the Bible is an extremely complex book and if a person is not careful, they can easily read their own meaning into its pages, rather than the meaning that the original writer and the Holy Spirit intended to communicate.

I highly recommend reading chapter 8 in The Big Book on Small Groups on this subject.²⁷

- a. Be EXTRA familiar with the text before you lead the group through a book.
- b. Avoid studying small sections of the Bible in isolation. The section should always be discussed in light of the overall message of the book.
- c. Educate and prepare yourself by reading the thoughts of experts (commentaries are a MUST for book studies, Bible Dictionaries like the one produced by Holman are key for defining terms, cities, etc.)

- d. Stay away from or limit discussion on controversial topics. Schedule in-depth discussions on this for private or small meetings...otherwise someone will leave the study upset and with unresolved questions.
5. Use Creative Ideas to Increase Learning and Retention
 - a. Homework Assignments
 - b. Personal Stories
 - c. Video Illustrations
6. Recommended Studies and Resources
 - i) What Topics are Essential to Create Disciples?
Discipleship is about advancing in three key areas: Intimacy with God, Community with Christians, and Influence with Non-Christians. Ask yourself with each study, which areas does this study advance us in?
 - ii) Topics to Consider Studying
 - i) How to Study the Bible
 - ii) An Overview of the Bible's Contents and Major Themes
 - iii) Dating/Marriage
 - iv) Sharing Your Faith
 - v) Spiritual Disciplines (Crucial Habits in the Christian Life)
 - Quiet Time/Bible Study
 - Prayer
 - Silence and Solitude
 - Service
 - Worship²⁸
 - Accountability
 - Celebration
 - Confession
 - vi) Financial Management
 - vii) Apologetics (Controversial Topics)
 - viii) The Purpose of the Church

Group Leadership

"Competence goes beyond words. It's the leader's ability to say it, plan it, and do it in such a way that others know that you know how—and know that they want to follow you." ~ John C. Maxwell

"You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can't get them across, your ideas won't get you anywhere." - Lee Iacocca

"Leaders must be close enough to relate to others, but far enough ahead to motivate them." - John Maxwell

"A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go, but ought to be." - Rosalynn Carter

"Understand that the small group will, over time, learn to perceive individuals as you perceive them."²⁹

Leadership and Teamwork Skills are universal, pick them up wherever you can find them: business, coaching, church, etc.

1. Why do Small Groups require trained leaders?

- a. Not everyone is gifted to lead. Leaders must either be identified or trained to fill the role.
 - i) Jesus trained His disciples, but He simply identified and commissioned Paul. Both were well prepared for ministry by their training and the power of the Holy Spirit. "Come with me and I will *make* you fishers of men." ~ Matthew 4:19
- b. Poor leadership can do more damage than good...even when they are trying out of good intentions.
- c. Leadership is a gift, and like all gifts, it must be developed and regulated by a sincere attitude. Good skills require refinement by practice and knowledge. Then they must be exercised with heart.

2. What traits identify a potential leader?³⁰

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. Deacons likewise... 1 Timothy 3

- a. Strong character
 - The Law of Solid Ground: Trust Is the Foundation of Leadership ~ John Maxwell
 - i) Weak character cannot be easily reformed...when the parent has failed to help establish good character, the job of re-parenting is extremely hard. It's better to select for character and build skills, than to select for skills and build character. (Chick Fil A)
 - ii) Look for traits like honesty, reliability, and a good reputation with their spouse and friends. If a person is not worthy of your trust and has not earned the trust of those closest to them, then they cannot create an environment of trust for the group.
- b. Good relational & communication skills
 - If the leader cannot compel others to follow him, than he is not a leader. The church cannot simply command the members, "follow him"--that "him" must possess enough magnetism for the members to stay the course he sets. Leadership can be taught and modeled, but it also requires the leader to have some natural ability in this area of magnetism from the start.
- c. Reliance on God and growth in their walk with God through the exercise of spiritual disciplines. If a person does not model the attitude and habits of a Christ-follower, they cannot provide the basic model for the members of their group to follow.
- d. A natural inclination or passion to help disciple others

If passion is not driving the person, they will have a hard time continuing their responsibilities when the job gets tough...and somewhere along the way the job of the small group leader always meets a challenge.

e. The Skills to Teach Scripture

A major task of the group leader is to study the Bible with others. Either the leader needs to be trained to do this, or in training and well-resourced so that he does this correctly. The last thing you want is a group mislead in their understanding of the Bible.

3. What are the benefits of Small Group Leadership?

- a. Leadership makes people more effective in all areas of their lives: family leadership, team leadership at work or in sports, family gatherings, counseling, etc.
- b. Teaching always makes the lessons you pass on sink much deeper in your life than lessons you learn as a student.
- c. You are never more like Christ than when you serve.
- d. Watching other people grow in their faith is exciting!
- e. Doing the work of the kingdom means working alongside God's Spirit!
- f. Doing the work of the kingdom pleases the Lord and merits praise and heavenly rewards from Him.

4. What are the Disadvantages of Small Group Leadership?

- a. People are unpredictable, therefore results are unpredictable. Some groups will fail, no matter how good the leader is. Discouragement is not a matter of if, but when. Leaders must be willing to try their best, and sometimes fail.
- b. Relational pain REALLY hurts.
- c. The dynamics of a group are constantly in flux. Leaders must remain agile and flexible...the same technique does not work every week, month, season, or group.

5. Who is the Leader?

- i. The church ordains the group, so we must serve under its authority.
- ii. The Holy Spirit is the one who is truly working within the group, we are His Co-leader.
 -) Guiding (John 16:13)
 - i) Teaching (John 14:26)
 - ii) Convicting (John 16:8)
 - iii) Interceding (Romans 8:26)
 - iv) Enabling Service (1 Corinthians 12:11)
 - v) Creating Unity (Ephesians 4:3)

6. Engaging the Members in the Group Growth Process

Every leader must not only determine the direction and goals of the group, but they must call for the group to accept and abide by those things. This requires the ability to call for commitment from the group members, and a willingness to repeatedly communicate these things throughout the groups life.

- 1. Vision-casting (regularly - 6 months)
- 2. Establishing Commitment to Standards of Behavior and Contribution

7. Leadership Traits and Practices:

- a. Genuine Love for EVERY Person

"The basis for unity in the church is love, not tolerance"

My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor...If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin... ~ James 2:1-9

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.~ 1 Peter 1:22

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. ~ 1 Peter 4:8

b. Bring out the best by expecting/assuming the best

You may be deceived if you trust too much, but you will live in torment if you do not trust enough. ~Frank Crane

"I have yet to find a man, however exalted his station, who did not do better work and put forth greater effort under a spirit of approval than under a spirit of criticism."
- Charles Schwab

c. One-on-one rapport

Make it a goal that at least once every 3-4 months, you see each member of the group individually over coffee, or a golf game, or dinner, giving attention to their specific lives and concerns. Credibility earned by caring shown on a personal level will greatly enhance your leadership influence within the group.

Relationships are like banks. Each interaction with someone either deposits or withdrawals from your account with them. Time slowly debits the account as well. If your account becomes low or overdrawn, relational interactions become more course and difficult. The best strategy is to keep a high account—and allow it to smooth interactions and create a high level of loyalty—especially since you're mistakes as a leader and as a human being will withdrawal from that account on occasion.

d. Confidentiality

Trust is built upon a belief that people will not betray personal information or attack their character or behavior—especially when they are not present.

The Gossip Rule: Only speak about a member of the group when that member is present.

The Confidentiality Rule: What is spoken of in the group, remains in the group.

e. Flexibility in Leadership through the Group's Life Stages³¹

The Law of Timing: When to Lead Is as Important as What to Do and Where to Go ~
John Maxwell

i) Stage 1: Exploration aka “the Honeymoon Phase”: Unity at the Expense of Diversity

Everyone wants the group to succeed at first, so they will do their best to ensure everything operates smoothly at first.

Many groups content themselves with relationships that exist only on the surface level, the leader must encourage the group to go deeper into each other’s lives as they study together.

ii) Stage 2: Conflict: Diversity at the Expense of Unity

Conflict appears as people get tired of avoiding or dismissing the behavior of others in the group. Behaviors may need to be encouraged, modeled, or refined so the group can carry discussion without offense. Members will have to choose to work things out or reject others, or pretend to accept them.

Leaders must establish the fact that everyone is different, but that differences do not equal distrust. Everyone’s trustworthy nature and commitment to the group should be affirmed. Differences must be accounted for in communication.

iii) Stage 3: Enjoying Community: Unity Alongside Diversity

People begin to respect the dynamics of the group and know their fellow members. Barriers fall and openness and vulnerability appear. Leaders must ensure that the group upholds confidentiality as things that can truly be used against members are being shared at this time. Since the group has come to know its members, the opportunity for deeper studies and more focus on the material is present in this stage.

iv) Stage 4: Breaking up with Closure: Affirming Unity, Increasing Diversity, Celebrating a Season of Life

All breakups are hard to ensure, the deeper the group has bonded, the harder it will be for it to change.

At this stage, the group should be given time to celebrate their relationships, as well as reminded and recommitted to the church’s goal of growing and allowing others to experience the power of community.

f. Problems and Confrontations³²

“Each of us is unique, not only in our personalities but also in our life experiences. On the positive side, this means that each church body possesses a wealth of experience and knowledge that if tapped, could provide wisdom, guidance, and vision...Yet alongside the wonderful potential there exists a great possibility for division. People...have to expend energy just to understand each other. We interpret what is said and done from our own mindset, becoming easily offended and divided...if groups are to bridge this issues that naturally divide persons, they must provide an opportunity for us to communicate in a positive manner.”³³

Disagreement is inevitable because we are different from one another.

Conflict is inevitable because we are sinful people.

- i. The #1 Rule of Problem-solving – intimacy goes a long way in solving problems.

- ii. The #2 Rule of Problem-solving – do not ignore the problem and hope it will go away! Avoidance is the main reason relationships go sour...people pile their problems into the corner until the pile falls down and crushes the relationship.
 “Trying to avoid the godly resolution of conflicts just builds a dam between ourselves and others, allowing a reservoir of misunderstandings, bitterness, unforgiveness, and/or resentment to form. The dam eventually bursts...in the meantime, as we keep shoring up the walls of the dam in a futile attempt to prevent them from bursting, our character becomes increasingly defined by our sinful attitudes.”³⁴
 - iii. One-on-One or member-to-member meetings are important.
 - iv. for resolving conflict.
If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church...
- Pray for the Holy Spirit’s help and an understanding of His work in the other person’s life. Remember that God is always at work in His children’s lives. Your job is to come alongside the Holy Spirit, not be the Holy Spirit.
- Affirm your genuine affection for the person
- Acknowledge the problem and the member(s) frustrations as valid
- Clarify the ROOT issue of the problem. Explain what you have perceived, and allow the other person to respond to these perceptions. Give them a chance to communicate their side without interruption.
- Explore options for resolving the problem
- Ask forgiveness for ways in which you have contributed to the problem
- Agree on a solution and implement it
- v. Other Tips for Problem-Solving:
 - Deal with one problem at a time
 - Refuse to use threats, social pressure, or plays on authority—let the church take more extreme measures when you are unable to bring things to a resolution.
 - Emphasize unity of the church, the group’s covenant, and honest, open communication.
 - Keep this rule in mind: It’s almost never the fault of one person. Both parties usually have some actions to blame.
- g. Scheduling: Balancing Flexibility with Consistency and a Clear Plan
 - i) Give everyone at least 2 weeks of the plan *in writing*
 - ii) Give people enough time to get the study materials before starting
- h. Preparation
 - Prepare the Long-Term Schedule
 - Prepare for the Lesson: Review Material and Create Discussion Questions 1 week ahead of time. Make sure everyone has time to think through the material and any questions you wish to ask. More thought = better discussion.

- Prepare for the Meeting: Agenda, Icebreakers, Etc.
- Discuss the Flow of the Meeting with Coleaders or your Spouse
- Pray for the Group's Needs, the Groups Discussion, and the Spirit's Guidance of You

i) My personal rule is 1 hour of preparation doubles the quality of the group meeting.

"It's ok to fly by the seat of your own pants—just don't expect others to ride along with you..." ~ Patrick Fowler (me)

ii) When I led my last couples group, part of the day every Sunday was set aside preparing for the upcoming group session. The day tended to be the least busy of any day, so it allowed me to place my full attention on the events of the upcoming meeting. Usually I had already covered the material and had time to think about it, and I could now plan the flow of the discussion.

iii) Attention in the Little Things makes a BIG difference

- Pens & Paper
- Bibles
- Snacks and Drinks

i. Praying for your group

One huge responsibility the group leader assumes in his role is the role of a prayer warrior. The group leader must model fervent prayer for his group and care enough to be talking and listening to God on their behalf on a weekly, if not daily basis.

⁹This is my prayer for you: that your love will grow more and more; that you will have knowledge and understanding with your love; ¹⁰that you will see the difference between good and bad and will choose the good; that you will be pure and without wrong for the coming of Christ; ¹¹that you will do many good things with the help of Christ to bring glory and praise to God. ~ Philippians 1:9-11

j. Counseling Group Members³⁵

As a leader, people will come to you for advice or even for counseling. Be sensitive to their need and vulnerability, assure them that you will help them get the support they need, but don't make yourself the focus of that help: always put the church in the main role of helping them.

- Preserve Confidentiality, but don't promise unconditional secrecy.
- Probe for a deeper problem than what they initially present to you.
- Stick with your gender...or counsel with another person of the same gender present.
- Foster responsibility—don't just tell them what to do, help them to draw the right conclusions themselves and agree to take action.
- Pray with them.

8. Leadership Development³⁶

Leadership is most valuable when it raises up others to lead—when it works itself out of a job. Empowering others is essential to advancing the church and kingdom.

9. Facing Discouragement

Leadership is A Responsibility before God

Let not many of you become teachers , my brethren , knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. ~ James 3:1

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

~ 1 Peter 5:1-4

10. Leading through Group Transitions:

Every healthy group will both lose and add members. The goal is to add members in a way that everyone appreciates and say goodbye to exiting members in a way that communicates closure to the relationships and respect toward everyone.

a. Growing a Group

Groups have “life stages” where the dynamics of its interaction and the responsibilities of the leaders change.³⁷

- New Groups require a lot of direction, and must be prompted to share their lives.
- Maturing groups will desire more shared decision making and will share more readily and openly.
- Groups that are ending will require direction again, as members become more emotional, either clinging to the group when it is ready to breakup, or distancing themselves from the group in an attempt to shield themselves from the loss.

b. Multiplying/Splitting a Group³⁸

Handle with Care! “Birthing new groups can be traumatic.”³⁹

Communities should naturally expand as people build new relationships. Groups should split by adding new members as appointed times, and growing to the point where the numbers are too great for the group to continue to meet together as one large gathering. Appointed times for adding members ensures that new members are expected by everyone in the group, and changes in the level of intimacy are anticipated. Growing the membership into a large group allows participants to feel the tension of a group that is too large, and helps them to own the idea of splitting, rather than having the plan to split up forced upon them.

It may be appropriate at times to even place empty chairs in the group as reminders and encouragements to pray and seek others to join the group.

Often it is best to leave the more established group in the hands of the apprentice. The leader should be the one to charge ahead to build a new community.

Evangelism can be a motivating factor in group splits. Some groups send a portion of their old membership out to create a “seeker Bible study” in the community.

c. Breaking Up or Ending

i) Reasons Groups Breakup:⁴⁰

- The group achieves its goal
- Stated length of time expires

- Too many people join for the group to meet together: multiplication is forced
- The appointed time comes to grow and/or multiply
- Conflict that cannot be reconciled
- Members can no longer meet due to changes in life
- The group has no leadership
- Members drop out or give up

Recommended Reading and Resources:

Small Group Specific Materials:

How to Lead Small Groups - Neal McBride

The Big Book on Small Groups - Jeffery Arnold

Why Small Groups - C.J. Maheney

(*Please note, I do not agree with his argument for male-only leadership)

Soul Shaping Small Groups - Kim V. Engelmann

Seeking God Together - Alice Fryling

Small Group Leader's Handbook

Icebreaker Ideas:

The Complete Book of Questions - Garry Poole

On Leadership in General:

Seven Habits of Highly Effective People - Stephen Covey

Improving Your Serve - Chuck Swindoll

The 21 Laws of Leadership ~ John Maxwell

The 21 Qualities of a Leader ~ John Maxwell

Winning with People ~ John Maxwell

On Teamwork:

Personality Plus - Florence Littauer

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team - Patrick Lencioni

On Bible Study:

By the Book - Howard Hendricks

Websites:

<http://Training.rightnow.org>

<http://groupcurriculum.org>

www.Lifechurch.tv (Lifegroups)

Recommended Small Group Study Materials:

Books:

The Life You've Always Wanted - John Ortberg
Your God is Too Safe - Mark Buchanan
Heaven - Randy Alcorn (study selected sections)
Money, Possessions, and Eternity - Randy Alcorn
(study pre-selected sections or use the smaller book, the Law of Rewards)
Personality Plus - Florence Littauer
Fall in Love, Stay in Love - William Harvey
The Purpose Driven Life -

DVD's:

Just Walk Across the Room - Bill Hybels
Five Things God Uses to Grow Your Faith – North Point Community Church
Where You Live Matters: Developing a Vision for Your City (<http://www.qideas.org/studies/>)
The Spirituality of Science: How Science Strengthens Faith in God (<http://www.qideas.org/studies/>)

For a good study to start with, look through the starter study in The Big Book on Small Groups, pgs 236-248.

Resources Referenced in Class Notes:

Acuff, Jonathan. *Stuff Christians Like*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.
Arnold, Jeffrey. *The Big Book on Small Groups*. Revised. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
Mahaney, C. J., and Greg Somerville, eds. *Why Small Groups?* Gaithersburg, MD: Sovereign Grace Ministries, 1996.
McBride, Neal. *How to Lead Small Groups*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1990.

¹ Ibid., 85-88.

² Ibid., 86.

³ Mahaney and Somerville, *Why Small Groups?*, 3.

⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵ Ibid., 26.

⁶ Ibid., 6-8.

⁷ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 86.

⁸ Ibid., 89-95; Mahaney and Somerville, *Why Small Groups?*, 11-13, 17-30.

⁹ Mahaney and Somerville, *Why Small Groups?*, 21.

¹⁰ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 90.

¹¹ Ibid., 91.

¹² Ibid., 95.

¹³ Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, Revised. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 231.

¹⁴ Neal McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1990), 64.

¹⁵ Ibid., 72-73.

¹⁶ McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups*, 71; Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 70-71.

¹⁷ Ibid., 72.

¹⁸ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 215.

¹⁹ McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups*, 53-55.

²⁰ McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups*, 108; Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 131-135.

²¹ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 54, 72.

²² Ibid., 55.

²³ Ibid., 97.

²⁴ Ibid., 184.

²⁵ Jonathan Acuff, *Stuff Christians Like* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 57.

²⁶ Ibid., 53-56.

²⁷ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 141-159.

²⁸ Arnold dedicates an entire chapter to this subject. Ibid., 160-179.

²⁹ Ibid., 96.

³⁰ Ibid., 47-50; C. J. Mahaney and Greg Somerville, eds., *Why Small Groups?* (Gaithersburg, MD: Sovereign Grace Ministries, 1996), 48-60.

³¹ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 125-129.

³² Mahaney and Somerville, *Why Small Groups?*, 61-77.

³³ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 89.

³⁴ Mahaney and Somerville, *Why Small Groups?*, 65.

³⁵ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 112-115.

³⁶ Ibid., 100-101.

³⁷ McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups*, 38-39; Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 73.

³⁸ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 69-71; Mahaney and Somerville, *Why Small Groups?*, 77-90.

³⁹ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 213.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 130.