

LESSON ESSENTIALS

LEADING SMALL GROUPS

LESSON 1: DYNAMICS OF GROUP DISCUSSION

One of the blessings of being part of the Body of Christ is the ability to join with many other believers and to develop real and significant relationships. Certain churches are too large to facilitate knowing everyone in the congregation. Joining a small group is a wonderful way to get connected to other believers in a personal way and to learn and grow in the faith with them.

If the point of a small group is to facilitate relationships within a larger church group, then it is critical that the small group dynamics be such that people can actually build relationships. Without attention to the dynamics of group discussion, a small group could be so unhealthy that a new member could join and yet remain disconnected and unknown.

If you take the time to foster a Christ-centered environment, and build the group on a foundation of Biblical truths, you will find that your small group can develop a healthy and mutually beneficial community that is to be treasured.

Paul tells that church to “...complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:2-4)

The invitation to come together with other brothers and sisters in Christ is a great benefit to the Christian faith. What a relief that we are not called to live this new life alone! However, it is obvious that anytime you bring together many different people with many different personalities and many different life experiences, there can be many difficulties! Sadly, being a part of a small group is not always instantly an easy and enjoyable experience. However, if you, as the leader, take the time to foster a Christ-centered environment, and build the group on a foundation of Biblical truths, you will find that your small group can develop a healthy and mutually beneficial community that is to be treasured.

The Bible is full of guiding principles for how to treat the people in our lives. A word search of “one another” in your Bible will show many of the ways we ought to relate to our brothers and sisters in Christ. You may choose such a passage as the foundation or theme for your small group. On your first meeting together, and on a few occasions throughout the year, you may want to present, and agree to follow, a principle such as that found in Philippians 2:2-4. Paul tells that church to “...complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

Of course, another passage which would serve as an excellent guideline for your small group is the Golden Rule: “And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them” (Luke 6:31). No matter which principle or guideline you choose to adopt for your group, be sure to remind the members of it often and to pray through it together as a group in order to build that common ground among all the members. It will be a great help in ensuring that the group is functional and loving.

When a diverse group of people can agree to have that mentality towards each other, then the depth of relationship can be extraordinary, and very rewarding! Conversation can flow easily because everyone is listening intently and respectfully to each other; prayer requests can be given freely and transparently because everyone is honouring and trusting each other; and questions can be asked boldly because everyone is humbly learning together.

Practically speaking, what might a group like this look like? And, as the leader, how can you facilitate such an environment?

When it is your responsibility to start a good conversation and to ask leading questions, it is helpful for you to model good conversation, both speaking and listening, and to model good questioning and answering. For example, you may relate a personal anecdote that applies to your study and then ask others to share similarly, all the while listening intently to them without interrupting. You may also demonstrate how you examine the scriptures by saying, “This passage was confusing to me so I sought help in my understanding by reading a commentary and speaking to my pastor.” When the members of your group see that you, as the leader, are still learning and asking for help, they will feel the freedom to also be teachable in that way.

It can be a blessing to have talkative group members – they keep the conversation going and are more apt to ask and answer questions. However, if they are too talkative then the more quiet members of your group will tend to not speak up or to have their say. Sharing in a small group setting is still a form of public speaking which terrifies certain personality types. Encourage the more talkative members to share briefly and then to leave some quiet space for the less talkative members to join in. The members of your group will need to be gracious, understanding, and patient as they listen to each other and as they work with each other’s comfort levels.

In a small group setting, as with any gathering of believers, the common goal should be that all the members will increase in godliness and like mindedness. But what happens when you encounter disagreements? There will be times when you will have two or more very godly, sincere, Bible-believing people who disagree on a given topic. Assuming that the issue at hand is a ‘non-essential’ of the faith – that is to say, not a ‘salvation issue’, or something clearly laid out in scripture – then there ought to be grace given for the differing opinions and lots of room for ‘agreeing to disagree.’ As a leader, it is a good practice to hear both sides of the disagreement and to restate the commonalities without highlighting the differences.

All in all, living in community with other people can be wonderful! It can also be difficult. By fostering an environment of trust, kindness, preference for one another, and humility the group can thrive and

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truly be an enhancement to each member's life. It can be hard work, but the result is well worth the labour.

IN REVIEW

- It is a beneficial practice to decide upon a scripture that will be the guideline or foundational principle of your group, and then to refer back to that agreed-upon scripture regularly.
- Group Discussion is only really valuable as we learn to speak and to listen in a respectful way, remaining humble and preferring one another in our interactions.
- Our common goal should be that all members will increase in Godliness and like mindedness as we study God's Word and practice fellowship. Times of discussion should be focused to that end.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- Spend some time searching for passages that describe how we ought to treat one another. Which trait do you feel you or your small group need to work on to be a more loving group?

- What kind of 'talker' are you? Do you find it easy to talk in a group setting or is it difficult for you to do so? Pray and ask the Lord to help you to be more willing to sit and listen, or to get brave and speak up depending on your struggle.

- Pray for your small group now that the Lord would empower you to live with one another in an understanding way, and to give you a like mindedness that can only be the power of the Holy Spirit in you.

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