

# LESSON ESSENTIALS

## LEADING SMALL GROUPS

### LESSON 4: FOSTERING HEALTHY SMALL GROUP RELATIONSHIPS

When the Bible says that Christians will be known by their love for one another (John 13:35) there is a hopeful implication that any group of Christians will be obviously loving towards each other. While this truly is often the case, there are times when certain personality combinations in a small group do not result in an easy, healthy set of relationships. Should that group disband? Or is there a way to foster healthy relationships despite initial discomfort?

Part of developing healthy small group relationships depends on understanding the purpose of small groups, and working as a team to accomplish that purpose. Broadly speaking, another key part of these relationships is a steadfast gaze on Christ and His will while denying self-interest. Easier said than done? Perhaps: but so worthwhile!

There certainly are many personal blessings that come from being a part of a small group, primarily the inter-personal relationships. These can be developed and enhanced in many ways, and considering the many functions of a small group is a good place to start.

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Having a clear understanding of some of the core purposes of a small group will assist the members in setting realistic expectations of what they might receive from their involvement in the small group. There certainly are many personal blessings that come from being a part of a small group, primarily the inter-personal relationships. These can be developed and enhanced in many ways, and considering the many functions of a small group is a good place to start.

One function of a small group is to strengthen the group's individuals in their gifts and abilities, and to increase their knowledge of the Word. A small group has the unique position of building an environment where the members can discover each other's gifts and then strengthen them in those gifts. Opportunities to serve, to lead, to pray, to minister to one another all exist in the small group setting and can be used to bring out the best in each individual. As the members see each other grow and mature in the Lord, there is a deepening of the shared relationship. It is a joy to see brothers and sisters in Christ grow in godliness, and to see the Lord glorify Himself through the lives of the group's members.

However, Christianity is not an individual sport. We must remember that another function of a small group is to then use those individual gifts together for the help and betterment of the group, and their outreach. Each member must remember that they are part of the broader body of Christ. Both 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 use the imagery of a body with many parts to describe how the Church ought to work. This applies to a small group too, which is just a smaller body! Where one group member is weak in a skill, there will surely be another member who is strong in that skill. Coming together as a group with all its complementary gifts and abilities multiplies the effectiveness of any individual member. There is great joy in taking on a project as a team and seeing the Lord bear good fruit from your combined efforts. Serving together, with all the weaknesses and strengths represented in your group, is a great joy and great way to foster healthy relationships.

Of utmost importance and function, however, is that each member looks to Christ and seeks His will above their own. In so doing, the group becomes more about 'others' and less about 'self'. The group's members ought to be about 'others' in that they look inward enough to bear one another's burdens within the group. If one member is suffering or is in need in anyway, the group can demonstrate their love for that member by meeting those needs and supporting the member in the time of difficulty. Just as a

biological family will feel compelled to carry one another's burdens and to provide for their needs, so should a healthy small group love their members in tangible ways.

And yet, another function of a small group that contributes to healthy relationships is that they look outward enough to love their neighbours as Christ commanded. We may each, individually, be responsible to fulfill the Great Commission, but we can be extremely effective at it as a group. If one member of the group knows of a need in the neighbourhood the whole group can work together to meet that need and to show the love of Christ to that person, even if they are a stranger to the majority of the group. What a testimony that is! The neighbour will be stunned that a group of strangers would show compassion on them, which gives your group an open door to speak the Gospel to that person. Serving like that together as a group significantly strengthens the bond between the members of small group. A shared and common goal is a unifying element which cannot be underestimated.

Practically speaking, there are many simple, weekly tasks you can initiate in your small group that will enhance the growing relationships amongst your members. Encourage your members to visit individuals in the group outside of your regular meetings. Make sure you are praying for one another and staying in touch during the week. Have meals together, and plan meetings that are purely social in nature so that you can laugh together and build good memories. Above all, pray that the Lord would give you hearts of compassion and love for the members in your group. Differing personalities do not mean that deep, healthy relationship will be impossible to foster. No: the Lord is greater than that. He can bring unity and a family bond to any group of believers: pray for it expectantly, and work towards it humbly!

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## IN REVIEW

- Small groups function well by both developing individuals' gifts for their personal service of the Lord, but also by developing the groups' gifts as they serve together as one body.
- Small groups need to be inward focused to lovingly meet the needs of the groups' members like a family, but also outward focused to lovingly reach the lost for Christ.
- By investing in simple relational gestures, the relationships in your small group can be enhanced and fostered into a healthy and beneficial experience, regardless of personality differences.

