

The  
**BIG IDEAS**  
for  
**SMALL GROUPS**  
Book

*A Hand Guide for Anyone in a Small  
Group*

By **Steve Gladen**  
and  
**SMALL GROUP NETWORK**

*The Big Ideas for Small Groups Book*  
Copyright © 2023 by Steve Gladen and Small Group  
Network, a ministry of Saddleback Church.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form without the publisher's written permission.

ISBN: 979-8-370450-35-8

---

Scripture quotations noted CEV are from the CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION. Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations noted MSG are from THE MESSAGE. Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress, represented by Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted NKJV are taken from the Holy Bible, NEW KING JAMES VERSION®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations noted NIV are from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

## DEDICATION

*This book is for everyone who has a heart for  
people and a place to host them.*

# CONTENTS

<u>How to Use This Guide</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Section 1: Fellowship</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>Section 2: Discipleship</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>Section 3: Service</u>	<u>45</u>
<u>Section 4: Evangelism</u>	<u>68</u>
<u>Section 5: Worship</u>	<u>93</u>
<u>Section 6: The GROUP Method</u>	<u>108</u>
<u>Conversation Starters</u>	<u>115</u>

## How to Use This Guide

### **The Great Commission —**

#### **Matthew 28:19–20 (NIV)**

*“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations (Evangelism), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Fellowship), and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Discipleship).”*

### **The Great Commandment —**

#### **Matthew 22:37, 39 (NIV)**

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (Worship).” “Love your neighbor as yourself (Service).”*

Each section in this guide includes quick tips and articles. **Quick Tips** are exactly what they sound like—a short, usually easy idea to get the ball rolling on something. The longer articles in the **Big Ideas** sections go into more in-depth explanations of a particular idea or problem to be solved.

Each tip and article is categorized into one of five different sections: Fellowship, Discipleship, Service, Evangelism, and Worship. These are the five main verses in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. All believers have their strengths and weaknesses, and we all gravitate more toward one of the five purposes than others. The goal of this hand guide is to assist group leaders, hosts, and members by giving them suggestions to help balance out the five purposes.

In addition to the five main sections, there are extra helps and resources. In this edition of *The Big Ideas for Small Groups Book*, we also include some of the most popular icebreakers and conversation starter ideas. Most commonly, these are used in newer groups or groups that have just welcomed a new member or members, but even the most long-term groups can enjoy some fun conversation starters from time to time.

Lastly, we will also walk you through the GROUP Method for Bible study. The GROUP Method is a Bible reading and study method that is designed around the idea that the Bible

was written to groups of people, so let's read it that way! The GROUP Method is not a replacement for personal devotions, nor is it the only way to read or study the Bible. But many groups, families, and even small churches find it very useful and helpful for not only studying God's Word together but for applying it as a group.

For more great tips, ideas, and resources, or just to find some friendly people who love small groups, visit us at our site:

*SmallGroupNetwork.com.*

Because, after all—we're better together!

## Section 1: Fellowship

### Quick Tips

**Virtual Night Out:** Have a virtual meeting together as a group doing something fun together. Whether it's a game night, a cooking class, or watching a movie together, take time to enjoy one another's company.

**Church Online:** Stream your church's service online together. Both rewatching *and* having others there with you change the livestream experience and enable you to get something new out of it. Plus, discussing the sermon together enables significantly deeper engagement.

**Friendsgiving:** One great way to celebrate Thanksgiving is by throwing a Friendsgiving party! Gather your small group and hold a potluck to eat and spend time with one



another, being grateful for your community in Christ.

**Growing Together:** Gather some story questions that our group members have answered. We had two members share up top each night, and then we prayed over them. It took maybe 10 minutes per person. Having the questions helped even the playing field for those a little anxious to share. Currently, we are in a season of studying the *Rooted Workbook*, and each night two people share a 2 to 5 minutes of how they came to know Jesus. This has been powerful, and believe it or not, they actually do stick to 5 minutes. -Leslie Petty

**Full Belly Fellowship:** My group has the most consistent attendance when we serve dinner at every meeting. When we go through seasons of just serving snacks, it's ridiculous how spotty our attendance gets. Shallow but true. -Shelley Leith

**Gratitude in the Moment:** Appreciate those who are there each week at the session and focus on them, and I believe attendance will grow. -Lauren Southworth

**Map Quest:** Print out 4-10 different types of maps. Examples could be an old pirate-style treasure map, topographical map, written directions, satellite view, street map (with or without names), or even a hand-drawn map to the kitchen. Place all of the different kinds of maps in the center of the group and ask each member to share which map best represents where they are in their spiritual journey at the moment.

**Starting Easy:** If you haven't hosted a group before, you might be intimidated to try. Consider a short-term group. Use your church's sermons as discussion starting points. And don't forget to offer food!

**Couples Night Out:** Host a simple "night out" where couples (no children) can come out and meet other couples. To keep it simple, ask everyone to "BYO dessert" to share! While most of the time will be spent casually interacting with everyone, you can incorporate a simple connection activity, such as the "Getting to Know You" M&M game, where people have to answer specific questions about themselves. Follow it up with a brief devotional and a testimony from

someone in the group (make sure to ask them ahead of time so they aren't caught off guard).

**Ice Cream “Meet-Up”:** Who doesn't like ice cream? This is probably one of the easiest things you can do. You're simply providing an opportunity for people to come out and have some face-to-face interaction with others. Pick a date, pick a place, promote (you can choose to have a registration—or not!), and just show up! Be sure to be especially welcoming of everyone and make them feel valued and appreciated. The beauty of doing this at a local public place is also that it can double as an outreach opportunity too! It's a win-win all around. — Jackie Van Hook

**Card Chat:** Fold index cards in half so they stand up. On one face, write a fun, creative question (e.g., “Describe your favorite childhood pet,” “What was your wildest outfit as a child or teen?” or “What TV character are you most not like?”). Place these cards on the chairs or on a table in front of each seat. When people sit down, have them read their cards and, if the group isn't too big, share their answers with everyone. If the group is large, have members share their answers with

a person next to them. After they answer the first question, have members move two spots to the right and answer the question that is now in front of them.

**What's in the Box:** Think of a different icebreaker or conversation starter for each member of the group. Write each question on a separate piece of paper. Fold the papers in half and put them in a box. At your small group meeting, ask members to take one paper from the box and answer the question. For icebreaker ideas, check out Conversation Starters on p. ##.

**Guys/Girls Night:** Suggest that your group do a guys or girls night. Once a month, the guys go out to dinner, and the girls go out to dinner at different restaurants. If children are in the picture, guys and girls could go out on different nights, and whoever doesn't dine out will hang out with the kids.

## *Fellowship Big Ideas:*

### Ten Food Ideas for Your Next Small Group, by Andrew Camp

Here's a fun little fact: "Companion" literally means "one you share bread with." The word comes from the Latin *com* meaning "with," and *panis*, meaning "bread." Hopefully, small groups are made up of companions on the journey—people we share bread with as we journey closer to Jesus.

Most small groups aren't a small group unless there is food shared. Be honest. Which of us have not tried to entice our members with the food we serve?

While we all love to have a good snack or two, sometimes we are left scratching our heads, fresh out of ideas. Brownies? "I think we did those the previous three gatherings."

I recently asked other small group point people for their favorite snacks, and here are some ideas.

**Popcorn bar:** Pop up some popcorn and have a plethora of toppings/flavorings for people to choose from. As an icebreaker, you could ask, "What topping best exemplifies how you are doing/feeling today?" My only word of

caution: if popping in the microwave, be careful not to burn the popcorn so your house does not smell like burnt popcorn.

**Cheese and crackers:** Who does not love some really good cheese? Be adventurous and try some new cheeses. Or you could ask people to bring their favorite cheese. For me, nothing beats a good wheel of *Époisses*—earthy, slightly pungent, but so savory.

**S'mores:** Who doesn't love standing around a fire, roasting marshmallows? As the host, you provide the graham crackers and marshmallows and then ask others to provide their favorite accouterments, like different chocolates and Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. Plus, if you have younger kids, you get to train them on the proper roasting techniques; so that when they are old, they will not depart from it. (A loose interpretation of Proverbs 22:6.)

**Slice and bake cookies:** This is a quick dessert idea that includes the perk of the aroma of freshly baked cookies wafting through your house as guests enter.

**Crescent-wrapped little smokies:** For these *hors d'oeuvres*, you'll need a package of little

smokies and a tube or two of crescent roll dough. Cut each triangle of dough into thirds. Wrap each smokie in the crescent roll and bake as directed. Serve with a few dipping sauces.

**Guacamole competition:** Invite anyone and everyone to bring their best guacamole and have a competition to determine whose is best. No one will ever complain about too much guacamole. To make it a little more fun: depending on the makeup of your group, have the men compete against each other for guacamole top honors, with the women as judges. Or vice versa.

**Taco night:** Have a potluck centered around the ultimate handheld food—the taco.

During festive holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, here are a couple themed ideas:

**Holiday-themed potluck:** Whether it is turkey or a nice roast, have everyone bring a favorite holiday dish to share. Around the table, ask people to share their favorite holiday traditions.

**Cookie exchange:** A holiday season is not a holiday season without a good cookie exchange.

**Baked brie:** This is a favorite go-to small group snack. Get a wheel of brie cheese, a tube of crescent rolls, and your favorite jam. (I love strawberry rhubarb.) Unroll the crescent dough, being sure to push together any holes/tears. Put the brie on top of the dough. Spoon the jam on top liberally. Wrap the cheese and the jam, making sure there are no crevices for the jam to seep out. Bake at 350°F until browned. Serve with crackers. Fair warning: You might need two.



## Ten Questions Every Leader or Host Should Have On Hand, by Josh Hunt

Picture this. It is 90 minutes before your small group meeting. You just got in from mowing the lawn and are in bad need of a shower when you get this text:

*“So sorry I won’t be able to teach tonight. Can you lead group for me? Thanks!”*

If this ever happens, you will be glad you have this book on hand. The following questions can be used for any Bible passage—kind of like a pre-prepared meal. Simply read the Bible passage for that week’s study, and follow up with any or all of the questions. Obviously, some will apply better than others to any particular passage.

- 1. What do we learn about God?** A. W. Tozer famously said, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” If we have a big view of God, we have small problems. If we have a small view of God, we have big problems.
- 2. What do we learn about ourselves?** The Bible teaches that we are saints, servants, accepted, redeemed, beloved, chosen, predestined,

special, sons and daughters, saved, God's masterpiece, and a whole lot more. When we come to see ourselves as God sees us, we will come to do what God has called us to.

3. **What do we learn about . . . the topic?** What do we learn about the Devil? What do we learn about the Holy Spirit? What do we learn about Christian Discipleship? What do we learn about Heaven? This question can vary depending on the passage or text.
4. **What is the context?** Context is king. Many know the stories of the Bible, but they do not know the story of the Bible. Spend a few minutes exploring how this passage fits into the whole. Look at the chapter before and after.
5. **What is the big idea?** We teach so little because we try to teach so much. Good teaching has focus. What Haddon Robinson said of preaching is also true of small group Bible study, "Sermons seldom fail because they have too many ideas; more often they fail because they deal with too many unrelated ideas."
6. **What is the application?** James taught we are to be doers of the Word and not hearers only,

and so deceive ourselves. You don't deceive yourself by listening to heresy so much as you deceive yourself by listening to the truth and not doing anything about it. This is why, as teachers, we want to teach for application.

7. **What is the slogan?** Rick Warren said, "People don't remember sermons or speeches—they don't even remember paragraphs. What people remember are simple statements, slogans, and phrases." Try to reduce this week's teaching to a memorable slogan.
8. **What is the benefit if I do?** It is always in our best interest to live a Christian life. God is a good, good Father. It is always good for us to follow God. Highlight this by thinking clearly about the benefits of obedience.
9. **What will it cost me if I don't?** People are motivated by two things: pain and pleasure. Of the two, pain is a slightly greater motivator. Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminded us of the cost of discipleship. Non-discipleship also comes at a high cost.
10. **What is the next step?** How can I reduce it to a baby step? The first step is always the most difficult. The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. If you can get your

people to take one step in the right direction—no matter how small—others will follow.

### Six Summer Strategies to Invigorate Your Small Group

By the end of spring, it's not uncommon for small groups to want to change things up for the summer instead of starting a new Bible study. This comes from a commonly felt need to take a break and get refreshed before school, ministries, and so many other things restart in the fall.

However, if you only saw the summer as a chance to unplug, you'd be missing easy and effective opportunities to invigorate your group. Small groups don't have to break from being together in the summer and potentially break down their momentum of community building and spiritual growth. Rather, they can use this season to change gears with their regular meeting rhythms in order to find new ways to connect and grow together in Christ.

1. **Mix it up!** Instead of your usual, say, Tuesday, 6:30–8:00 P.M. time, decide to get together every other Friday for dinner and a movie together. If you meet weekly, try meeting twice a month. Or everyone could plan to

attend the same service and afterward do an outdoor activity together.

2. **Morph into a shared interest small group.**

Discover who shares the same interests in your small group and organize activities around them. Start out by asking:

- “What do you enjoy doing the most with your free time?”
- “If you could invite a few others to join you in an activity, what would it be?”
- “What special interest, topic, creative hobby, or sport do you enjoy doing?”

You don’t have to choose one! Create a “mixed shared interest small group” out of the ideas that came up. You might do a specific topical study one week and then a social or outdoor activity the next. Plan it all out, but don’t try to do too much; just enough to keep the relational connection and continue building upon the community that God has built thus far.

3. **Schedule it!** Before the onset of summer, ask small group members to bring their calendars to a meeting and plan around the dates people know they are going to be away. Before scheduling, appoint somebody to find out

what is happening in your surrounding communities during the summer, like farmers' markets, festivals, outdoor concerts, etc.

Besides community events, other examples of fun activities to put on the calendar include:

- Going out to a restaurant together and/or the movies.
- Grilling in a local park or the backyard of somebody other than your typical host.
- Going to a sports event together or doing an activity everyone can be involved in, such as bowling, water activity, volleyball, hiking, etc.
- Taking a day trip to the coast, mountains, or nearby state/national park.
- Watching July 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks together (invite neighbors to join you and introduce them to others in your small group).
- Having group members pray for one person in their lives they can invite to your small group by the end of the summer. (Take a meeting to pray for these people and for what group members hope to see happen in their personal lives by the end of the year.)

4. **Plan a servant evangelism project together.**

Check your church for opportunities to serve, or look through “Section 3: Ministry” and

“Section 4: Evangelism” later in this book for additional ideas.

5. **Volunteer to help your church with an event or project.**
6. **Encourage small group members to discover and develop their spiritual gifts.** Here’s a simple three-step process: 1) Read and discuss 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12:1-8; Ephesians 4:7-16; 1 Peter 4:10-11. 2) Have each one complete a spiritual gift assessment. 3) Affirm the outcomes for everyone and brainstorm how they could use them to build up your small group for the fall season.

Small group members who wouldn’t take on new responsibilities for the group during a study might be willing to do so during the different pace of the summer. Seize this season to “test drive” potential co-leaders by giving them bite-size responsibilities that will help you implement any of the strategies above. Also, seriously consider sub-grouping by gender when you change things up in any of these ways because it will help relationships grow deeper and develop new leaders for future small groups so that more people can

be impacted with the love and message of Jesus Christ!

### **Four Ideas to “Kickstart” Your Small Groups, by Tracey Ware**

I recently read an article from *Success Magazine* and was intrigued by a list they created on 1. “Kickstarting” the new year. Here are four from the list that challenged me and got me thinking about small group ministry.

1. **Write letters to three people in your life to let them know what they mean to you.** I was amazed that this was ranked second on the “kickstart” your year list in *Success Magazine*! In a world where we are constantly in touch with one another through text messages and other social media apps, a written letter still obviously has great power for good. I shouldn’t really be surprised because when I think about the times I have received a letter from someone expressing their appreciation of me, I know it has a profound and positive impact. So within your small group, who would you write to? Maybe a letter to a prospective small group leader outlining the gifts, qualities, and leadership you see in them? Maybe a letter to your senior pastor



encouraging him or her in their role. Maybe a letter to your church's administrative support team? I am sure you can add others to your list.

2. **Find a volunteer opportunity.** Many corporations and successful businesses make sure that their staff are involved in volunteer programs. They value the power of giving back, serving others, and making a difference in their local community.

Most small group ministries have serving in mission and ministry together as one of their core values. But do you have a specific plan for how you will encourage your groups this year to take on volunteer projects in the local community or overseas? Often, groups struggle to come up with ideas, so maybe someone in your team could compile a list of possible projects and give it out to groups at the beginning of the year.

3. **Practice the one-a-day principle.** Mark Sanborn writes, "You can't delight everybody all the time, but you can do something extraordinary for someone each day." Often, I find that "little" things can be extraordinary: making a colleague a cup of tea,

opening the door for someone, speaking an encouraging word to a stranger, complimenting your children, smiling at the barista, raking leaves for your neighbor, returning someone else's shopping trolley, or listening to a friend. This principle is an "attitudinal response," and if practiced, will become part of your DNA. Moreover, the impact of practicing this principle will create an amazing culture in any small group you are leading.

4. **Write a "not-to-do list."** This "kickstart" point really stood out to me. I love writing lists; it helps me feel organized, helps me remember what I need to do, and I can visually see what I have achieved. (Nothing more positive than seeing a list with lots of items crossed off!) But I have never written a "not-to-do list." The writer of the article reminds me that there is a difference between being busy and being productive and poses the challenge, "What are you wasting your time on?"

This is an interesting and powerful question to reflect on when it comes to small groups. What might your small group(s) be wasting time on? What if you encouraged each small

group to have an open and honest discussion around this question? Maybe it would be a great “kickstart” and help clarify what the group really wants to achieve this year!

## Section 2: Discipleship

### *Quick Tips*

**Impacted People Impact People:** Have group members talk about the person in their life who has had the greatest spiritual impact on them. Why was that person such an important influence? What was it about that person's character, words, or actions that sparked spiritual growth?

**Time for a Checkup:** At least once a year, spend an entire session or meeting giving members the opportunity to assess their own spiritual health. Encourage honesty and authenticity with each other. "Where are you strong, and where do you need to grow?" Allow some time for members to work on an individual health plan and to map out a strategy for their spiritual growth.

**Top Ten List:** Pass out a piece of paper to each person in the group. Have each person list the top ten qualities of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Ask people to share their answers with the group. Record the ideas on a piece of paper that everyone can read. Then see if you can reach a consensus on the top ten for the group.

**The Other Top Ten:** Again, pass out a piece of paper to everyone in the group. This time, ask each person to write out their top ten favorite things about Jesus. Then ask each person to share what they wrote and why they value those things so much.

**A Walk in the Park:** Plan a weekend group walk through a park or along a nature trail. Decide on a time and location. Encourage group members to take along a Bible (a mobile app works, too) and even a lawn chair or blanket. When everyone arrives, instruct each person to go off separately and be alone with the Lord for an hour. When everyone returns to the meeting place, ask for volunteers to talk about their experiences. What did they realize about the value of this time? What did they sense God was saying to them? How hard was

it to be quiet and focus on the Lord? How might this experience help you develop a regular quiet time?

**Silent Night:** Embrace the silence. When I, as the facilitator, ask a question, I am often looking for a quick reply from the group. However, some of the best times are when I give the group enough time to process the question and answer when they are ready. - John Hodnett

**Group Guide:** Set clear guidelines for the group, including things like not cross-talking, maintaining confidentiality, and limiting sharing to 3–5 minutes per question. Write out the guidelines, and read them together each week. Set a timer on your phone or other device when each person shares. When it rings, their turn is done. That way, expectations are clear, and enforcement is objective. You can even ask the long-winded person to be the timekeeper! -Kathy Clutz Oyama

**Mastering Meditation:** Have the group choose a particular passage of the Bible. Then encourage the group to spend at least 5, and if possible, all 7 days over the next week

meditating on that passage for 15 minutes a day. To meditate, carefully read the passage. If memorized, recite it mentally. Over the remaining time, “Dwell on that passage.” Think about that passage. Think about what stands out to you, and pray about questions you have about the passage. Carefully and intentionally listen to what God might be saying to you about the passage. If or when you start to get distracted, don’t count that time. Reset your clock back to the time you were distracted so you spend at least 15 minutes in meditation. For many people, 15 minutes will be a big challenge. Focusing on one topic without any mental distractions will not be easy. Some, however, may be able to achieve it easily. Encourage those to try and extend the time to 20 or 30 minutes. Then when you regather again, discuss the experience, what you got out of it, and what challenged you. Maybe you had a hard time carving out 15–20 quiet minutes a day (without falling asleep), or maybe you kept thinking about other things. But if you can continue in the practice for 40–60 days, share how you were changed and how your focus strengthened over that time!

**A Not-So-Cozy Fire:** Have your group sit in front of the fireplace. While everyone gazes on the flames, read 1 Peter 1:7 (CEV): *“Your faith will be like gold that has been tested in a fire. And these trials will prove that your faith is worth much more than gold that can be destroyed. They will show that you will be given praise and honor and glory when Jesus Christ returns.”*

Ask people in your group to share a time when they have been “through the fire.” In what ways did these difficult times produce spiritual growth?

**The FASTest Group in the West:** When Jesus taught about fasting in Matthew 6:16, he said, “When you fast . . .” not, “If you fast. . . .” Decide as a group to do a one-day fast. This would mean giving up all food for a 24-hour period. Pray during those times when you would normally be eating. Also, choose a few topics that all of you will pray about during the fast.

**Unconditional Surrender:** Read Joshua 24:1–27. Pass out a piece of paper to each person in the group. Then, just as the people of Israel made a covenant, have the group members



write out a personal covenant describing their commitment to God. (It might be helpful to have people be alone or separated by couples in different parts of the house.) After 15 or 20 minutes, call the group back together and ask for volunteers willing to share their covenant. Encourage each member or couple to sign the covenant they wrote, date it, and keep it in their Bible or somewhere they will regularly see it in their house to review from time to time.

### ***Big Ideas: Discipleship***

**The Oreo Method of Discipleship, by Kiersten Telzerow**

All throughout the book of Acts, we see the early church replicate itself. Disciples make disciples, and growing people grow people! I would even suggest that life change happens when we grow together and we catch glimpses of the work God is doing with this process of discipleship. Wouldn't you agree? Discipleship is all about a process, not a program, and I love that God chooses to use us to be a part of it!

Now, from here on out, you may never think of an Oreo in the same way again. So I want to give you a fair warning.

I like to think about discipleship like an Oreo. A true Oreo cookie has three parts. Two cookies and one filling. Whether you are a cookie lover or a filling lover, you play a vital role in discipleship. In fact, I'd argue that both cookie lovers and filling lovers are needed for this explanation.

One side of the cookie represents who is discipling **you**. Who is pouring into you? Who is challenging you?

The other side represents whom you are discipling or pouring into. In whom are you investing? To whom are you giving back? You are the icing. You are right, smack dab in the middle of both the receiving and pouring out.

Just as a true Oreo has all of these parts, so too does a disciple. Discipleship is both giving and receiving. Jesus tells us in Matthew 28:19–20, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*

*and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (NIV).*

Discipleship is a non-negotiable element of what it means to be a Christian, and you are probably discipling in ways you don't even know you are doing! The thing about discipleship is that it needs to be intentional but not complicated!

### **Challenge**

Spend some time thinking this week about the following:

- In whom am I investing?
- Who is challenging and pouring into me?
- Into whom do I need to pour?

I think one of the secrets to multiplying our groups is found in the Oreo method. Could it be that maybe we spend so much time focusing on whom we are discipling and not enough on who is discipling us? Or maybe it's the reverse. When we focus on discipling others and being disciplined, we fulfill the Great Commission.

So, the next time you are asked, “How do I multiply my group?” Grab an Oreo and walk them through the process.

## Fully Developed Disciples, by Andrew Mason

“You’re always doing curls for the girls.” When I was a high school football player, that is something we would say to a teammate in the weight room in jest. The comment was for a guy who was consistent with his arm curl weight-lifting routine but not so consistent with his lower body and leg exercises. The result would be impressive vein-popping biceps but little-to-no development in the calves and thighs. They would have huge arms and pencil-thin legs. Their bodies and muscles were disproportionate and uneven.

There can be a similar dynamic that occurs as disciples when it comes to our spiritual development with the Word of God.

Being whole-hearted learners of Scripture is the calling card of a healthy disciple. Jesus said in John 8:31 (NKJV), “*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.*” Again, he says in John 15:7–8 (NIV), “*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*”

The first discipleship communities of the early church were also branded with this attribute in Acts 2:42 (NKJV) as they met from house to house, “. . . they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” The apostles’ doctrine is now our modern-day New Testament.

When we see the Jerusalem church in Acts eating together from house to house (Acts 2:46), we must remember that among Jewish people, the standard topic of discussion at a meal was the Torah. Early Christians did more to grow in the Word of God than just listen to good preaching (although they did a lot of that too). Early Christians also did not have the benefit of the printing press and access to multiple print versions of Scripture at their fingertips. They spent more time discussing Scripture than we do reading Scripture, and they were bearing exponentially more fruit than we do (Acts 2:47).

How do we make sure we are fully developed through the Word of God? How do we avoid disproportionate results?

In *Courage and Calling* by Gordon T. Smith, there are four learning styles that are outlined:

1. Cognitive: Lectures and reading
2. Social: Small group discussions
3. Action: Doing the very thing that is being learned
4. Observational: Watching from a safe distance before actively engaging

In American church ministry, we are very effective at creating settings for cognitive learning and action learning. Through preaching and serving activities, we help people intentionally grow in the Word. We leave the social and observational learning up to chance, however, when we have little or no emphasis on gathering in circles for further empowerment. In small groups, believers are afforded the opportunity to discuss the Word of God and observe the quality of other believers' lives in close quarters.

Unfortunately, we have many Christians today who are disproportionately growing in the Word of God. They can read their Bible on their own, but they cannot talk about their faith to others. They can take notes and listen to a sermon, but they can't sit down and listen to a brother or sister in Christ share their own thoughts and discoveries.

This is why it's so important that a group host sees themselves as a facilitator, not a Sunday school teacher. There is a different dimension to growing in the Word of God when it comes to group study and discussion. Compared to weekend services, classes, and outreach, it's not an issue of "either/or." It's an exhortation towards "both/and." We need both great teaching, serving opportunities, and relational settings for biblical discussion in order to be well-rounded disciples of Christ in the Word of Truth.

Don't just have your ears tickled with great preaching or have your head full of more information through reading. Don't do the spiritual equivalent of "curls for the girls." Allow your heart to be cultivated, enlarged, and expressed through discussion of Scripture, and you'll be on your way to becoming a fully developed disciple of Christ.

**Building Authentic Relationships: Four Small Group Tips from 1 Thessalonians**, by Michael Grayston

Every disciple is called to make more disciples, and small groups are in the trenches of discipleship-making. Small groups are

fantastic places to learn, but more importantly, they are the best place to build authentic relationships and learn together. Creating an environment that elevates authentic relationships is a challenge, but a great example can be found in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonian church. Here are four small group tips from 1 Thessalonians:

### **1. Continual Prayer**

Paul told the Thessalonians that he continually thanked God and prayed for them (1 Thessalonians 1:2). For many, the time of prayer for a small group is the final box to check. It is the signal that it is time to go home. Prayer was prominent in Paul's letter; he noted prayer at different times for different reasons. Paul wanted his readers to know he cared for them, and above all else, prayer was the most important way to care for someone. Building authentic relationships requires intentional prayer for and with one another.

### **2. Making the Model**

Paul noted that the Thessalonians had become imitators of them and the Lord (1 Thessalonians 1:6). They became the model to the believers in the surrounding communities



as they shared the Lord's message (1 Thessalonians 1:7–8). As Paul, Silas, and Timothy discipled the Thessalonians, they did so with the intention that the Thessalonians would imitate them and disciple their neighbors. As leaders, we must recognize the same principle: We are not just making disciples; we are making disciples who will make disciples.

### **3. More than a Message**

As small group leaders, we can share a message that will help others grow in their relationship with Christ. The “message” or curriculum of the group is a great tool, but discipleship takes more than a great curriculum. Discipleship requires a relationship. Paul, Silas, and Timothy cared for the Thessalonians, and because they loved them so much, they were delighted to share not only the Gospel but their lives as well (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Building authentic relationships means taking the conversation outside of the study; talk about other hobbies or activities. Even better, check out some of those hobbies or activities together!

### **4. Encouraging, Comforting, and Urging**

Strive to create an authentic environment. Leaders can take note of the three terms that Paul used in his letter: “*encouraging, comforting and urging*” (1 Thessalonians 2:12, NIV). Authentic relationships require a willingness to share your life, and sharing your life means that leaders need to be present in both the good times and the rough times. Paul believed that a group of individuals should support and build one another up when they needed it the most. Paul provided encouragement and comfort as the Thessalonians were facing hardship, and he urged them to stand firm and live lives worthy of God (1 Thessalonians. 2:9-12).

### **A Small Group Leader's 30-Day Prayer Guide**

Leadership Pastor, Jim Egli, endeavored to discover what makes the difference between thriving and stagnant small groups. His research involving over 4,000 group leaders concluded that praying leaders have faster-growing groups. To that end, here is a tool that small group leaders can use repeatedly each month to help them build healthy group life and ultimately impact more people with Jesus' love and message.

1. Pray the Lord's Prayer. Matthew 6:9–13.
2. Pray that every person will become spiritually healthier as a result of participating in your discipleship experience. Ephesians 1:17.
3. Pray that every person in your group finds a really good friend in our church family. Ecclesiastes 4:9–12.
4. Pray that God gives you vision and direction for your group. Proverbs 29:18.
5. Pray that your group members will “love on” each other. John 13:34–35.
6. Pray that the fruit of the Holy Spirit will increasingly manifest itself in the lives of every person in your group. Galatians 5:22–23.
7. Pray that each one in your group will be led by the Spirit of God in their everyday lives. Romans 8:14.
8. Pray that every member of your group will have a meaningful time with God in prayer and Bible study every day. Isaiah 26:9.
9. Pray that you and each of your group members will be suited up in the full armor of God. Ephesians 6:10–17.
10. Pray that God would fill you and each person in your group with his Spirit. Ephesians 5:18.

11. Pray that each of your group members will grow in their delight and dependence on the Word of God in their daily lives. Psalm 1:2–3.
12. Pray for our church's local outreach efforts and ministry partnerships. Matthew 5:6; Luke 10:27.
13. Pray that God would help you know how to cultivate more of a hunger for God's Word in the hearts of your group members. John 21:16
14. Pray that each of your group members continually grows in their understanding of the Bible. 2 Peter 3:18.
15. Pray that each member is empowered to submit to God, resist the devil, and draw near to God. James 4:7–8.
16. Pray that every person in your group embraces the Bible for what it really is: the fully-inspired Word of God! 2 Timothy 3:16–17.
17. Pray that each of you would be spiritually alert and strengthened to stand firm against the Devil. 1 Peter 5:8–9.
18. Pray that every person would come to a deeper knowledge and stronger conviction about who they are in Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17.

19. Pray that each person discovers their unique set of God-given gifts and is inspired to use them to strengthen our church family. 1 Corinthians 12:7.
20. Pray that every person would be inspired to take one more step in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Colossians 2:6–7.
21. Pray that God will open the hearts of family and friends to hear the message of hope. Romans 10:17.
22. Pray that every person would be open to the move of the Holy Spirit in your midst. 1 Thessalonians 5:19.
23. Pray for God to move powerfully in your ministry. Acts 4:31–35.
24. Pray that each one feels like they fit and connect with others in your group. Hebrews 10:25.
25. Pray that God would equip you to help everyone in your group live out the Great Commandment and Great Commission on a daily basis. Ephesians 4:11–13; Matthew 22:37–40.
26. Pray that people would trust the Lord with their finances and tithe so they can receive

the blessings God wants to bring to their lives.  
Malachi 3:10.

27. Pray that each person grows in their confidence and ability to share their faith. 1 Peter 3:15.
  28. Pray for strength for each of your group members to turn away from sin and pursue godliness. 1 Timothy 6:11–12.
  29. Pray for our church's leadership and for an even greater kingdom impact in the days ahead! Acts 2:42–47.
  30. Pray that each person would be bold in inviting a friend to join you in your discipleship experience. 2 Timothy 4:5.
- Copy and give this prayer guide to your leaders, or create your own so that your groups can grow in strength and influence for the kingdom of God!

### **Seven Questions To Find Your Small Group's Purpose**, by Steve Curran

On a recent episode of the Small Group Network podcast, the fantastic Caroline Taketa interviewed the authors of *Leading Small Groups That Thrive: Five Shifts to Take Your Group to the Next Level*.

One of the comments the authors made that stuck with me was that the biggest factor contributing to the spiritual growth of small group members is their small group having a purpose focused outside the group. If the primary purpose of the small group is fellowship, community, or Bible study, the group might feel great, and the members really like each other. But to create an environment for spiritual growth, the small group needs a purpose outside of the group. I can see how this is true, but that naturally leads to the question: Well, how do I find a purpose for my small group? Because, to be honest, the group I lead does not have a clear purpose outside of fellowship and Bible study. There are lots of great resources out there on why small groups are important and why you need to be in one. In *Leading Small Groups with Purpose*, Steve Gladen does a great job of laying out the five purposes behind Saddleback's small groups: fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, and worship. Your church's purpose for small groups is a great place to start because your small group's purpose should not exist outside

of the purpose of your church. However, each small group must have their own individual purpose. Simon Sinek calls this “the nested why.” It will be specific to each individual group but still align with the purpose of your church.

We each need to answer the question: Why does MY small group exist? And is that the purpose Jesus and I want it to have?

### ***Seven Questions***

Here are seven questions to process with your small group to help discover your group’s purpose.

1. Why did you join/lead this group and not some other group?
2. When telling others about your small group or when your group gathers, what stories keep getting retold? What stories do you wish you could tell?
3. What are the things that when your small group talks about them, you forget about the time and find yourselves super focused and engaged?
4. How is your small group going to be a part of changing the world?



5. What is true about your small group today that would make you, who just joined or started leading this group, disappointed?
6. If you had to be with your small group all day, every day, where would you go, and what would you want to be doing?
7. If you knew you were going to die exactly one year from today, what stories would you want the other members of your small group to share with your spouse and kids or at your funeral?

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you as you process through these questions. And remember, the small groups that experience the most spiritual growth have a purpose focused outside the group.

My hope for each of you is that your small group will be so active, challenging, grace-filled, and involved that the members of your group will look back and point to their time with your group as a moment of spiritual growth and closeness to Jesus.

**Action Steps**

- Spend some time and process these questions with your personal small group.

- Share these questions with another small group leader and challenge them to process the questions with their group, then share your individual small group purposes with each other.

### **Five Keys to Overcoming Divisiveness with Your Small Group, by Andrew Camp**

In this ever-increasing, ever-divisive time, how do we, as small group point people, effectively shepherd our leaders to navigate these times? Is it still possible to have healthy, robust conversations in a small group?

Peter Englert recently wrote a great post for Small Group Network on navigating political discussion. Because this is such a huge issue right now, I wanted to add to the discussion. Plus, Derek Vreeland, discipleship pastor at Word of Life Church in St. Joseph, MO, and author of *By the Way: Getting Serious About Jesus*, recently provided some great training for my small group leaders on this issue. There were great thoughts that I wanted to share with you as a fellow small group point person.

**Respect Each Other (1 Peter 2:17):** This should go without saying, but every human (including presidential candidates and other government

officials) is created in the image of God and is therefore worthy of respect. This does not mean you have to agree with them, but hopefully, you can see where they are coming from. You can practice this by asking loving questions and not questions from a clenched fist or pointed finger attitude.

**Live from a Place of Humility (Philippians 2:1-11):** As Paul reminds us in Philippians 2, we are to value others above ourselves. Again, flowing from the fact that we are all created in God's image, fearfully and wonderfully made, we should have a natural curiosity toward each other. But also remember that you are finite. You do not have it all figured out. In your small group, consider how each of your lives has been enriched by each other, not because of what you agree on but because of how you each see things a little differently.

**Be Kind (1 Corinthians 13:4-7):** Kindness is more than just niceness "Christianized." While being nice is inherently focused on me, being kind forces me toward the other person. In being kind, I want the best for the other person. In being kind, I refuse to label and assume the worst in others. As a small group

leader, have people tell their stories. When we learn each other's stories, we are better able to understand and operate from a place of kindness.

**Listen (James 1:19):** David Augsburger has this great quote: "Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable." One of the most loving acts we can provide is simply to listen. But in heated topics, simply listening becomes increasingly difficult because as the other person is speaking, I am already formulating my defense and not actually hearing what that person is saying. In your small group, instead of simply responding right away, take 30 seconds of silence to respond.

**Love Your Enemies (Luke 6:35-36):** We all love our echo chambers. We all love to circle up with people who already think like us. This is easy love. But as Christians, we are called to more. Our love is to be modeled after Jesus's love, which included his enemies—people who ended up killing him.

None of these five are easy, and in my own strength, I fail miserably at these. But thanks be to God that he has given us his Holy Spirit

to empower each of us to live this life. We won't do it perfectly. We will mess up. So maybe we need to add a number 6: Be quick to forgive.

If, as a small group, you can practice and begin to embody these, your small group experience will not only be richer, but your witness to a lost, hurting, and deeply broken world will also be richer.

## Section 3: Service

### Quick Tips

**Dream a Little:** This great faith-building exercise will also give you a clue into people's passions and shapes for ministry. Simply discuss the following questions:

- If neither time nor money were an obstacle, what would you attempt for God?
- What can you do to start moving in that direction of ministry?

**Secret Service:** Matthew 6:1-4 (NIV) says, “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have

*received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

Ask each person to respond to Jesus’ teaching by accepting the challenge to anonymously meet a need in the coming week. Don’t be afraid to enlist the help of others in the group to carry out your acts of service. We can often accomplish bigger or more long-lasting things as a group than we can on our own.

**Good Neighbors:** Which group member has a neighbor with a need? Perhaps the yard could use work, some babysitting would be helpful, or the car could be washed and waxed. As a group, work together to meet that need, whatever it is, and be sure to take along some cookies or brownies when you put your love into action.

**Body Parts:** Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–26. How well does your group function as a body? What could you do to improve your teamwork? What role can and does the Holy Spirit play in the functioning of the body of Christ? Also, discuss which part of the body of

Christ different people in the group represent. For example, if one of you is a good listener, then they could be the ear of Christ! Then take it to the next level by asking what part of the body of Christ your group is. If your local church is the body, then what part does your group play in that body? Are you a hand that serves, a mouth that sings, or a foot that goes on mission trips?

**Go Farther Instead of Faster:** There is a saying that goes, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” If your group is already starting out with serving and ministry, then consider amplifying and growing that by connecting with another group or groups. You’ll be amazed at how your ministry impact can snowball exponentially. Oftentimes it is a case of multiplication rather than just addition when you add more groups!

**It’s a Date:** The biggest reason that many people don’t volunteer is because of the time commitment. It is true that many of us, especially parents, are constantly short on time and availability. But the biggest reason for that is a lack of time budgeting. So before a small group “time budgeting” meeting, ask



each couple or member of your small group to determine how much of their time they can commit to ministry over the next quarter, 6 months, or year (year actually works the best). When everyone arrives with that amount of time in their heads, put on a calendar the dates that you plan to spend that time on ministry. Members will also find that it is much easier to commit to a particular time if they know that someone else in their small group is also going to be serving with them then. This accountability is a huge incentive and very encouraging when you are feeling tight on time. Ask someone on your staff to send a list of volunteer or ministry opportunities over the next year. Typically, churches have a calendar of events up to a year or more in advance already, so it should be easy to put it on your calendar!

**Church to Church Ministry:** Choose another church in your town to pray for—and then pray! Intercede for the pastor(s), the ministries, and the members and friends of that church. Then have group members sign a card letting the pastor know that your group

spent some time praying for his church. What an encouragement that card will be!

**Adopt A Parent:** Support a single parent or extra busy family in your church or community. Offer to help with grocery shopping, changing the oil, helping with the yardwork, shoveling snow, or delivering meals. One of the biggest ways you can assist a family or parent like this is to offer a year of babysitting. Offer to babysit once a month on a regular day (i.e. the second Saturday of every month). Then take turns babysitting. This will often mean that any one person in the group only needs to babysit 3 or 4 times a year but will be a huge benefit to the parent. Don't forget to save time for a few "emergency" babysitting sessions for those situations when the parent needs help picking someone up from school, has a last-minute job interview, or something similar.

**Be Easy to Be Ministered To:** One of the best ways to prevent burnout among volunteers is to show how valuable and appreciated they are! Have your group organize a volunteer appreciation event for the people at your church who directly impact you through their

service, whether it is Sunday school volunteers who care for your kids, coffee station volunteers, or the people who help set up chairs for the service. Then once a quarter, write thank-you notes to the volunteers at your church who don't directly affect you but still make an impact in your community. You'll be amazed at how much it will mean to them to know that others in their church really do appreciate their gift of time!

### **Big Ideas: Ministry**

#### **Four Ways Groups Can Serve Together Through the Holidays, By Peter Clow**

*Galatians 5:13b–14 (NKJV) “Only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*

*Matthew 5:16 (NKJV) “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

It is clear in Scripture that we, as followers of Jesus Christ, have embedded within us the heart of Christ. The heart of Christ is to serve others and bring his love, truth, and forgiveness to all mankind. We have the

wonderful privilege and responsibility to follow Christ's example and display visibly to others around us God's goodness and love. One way we can do this is by serving others in our church and community.

Here are four ways we can serve together as a group during the holiday season.

### **1. Serve together at your CHURCH**

**events/services.** Most churches will have special services and events during the holiday season. These are perfect opportunities for groups to serve in your church together. I have found that it is such a blessing to serve together. It creates a bond, allows the group to get to know each other in a different setting, and facilitates discipleship opportunities. Serving together at a church event during the holidays will also help to introduce newer group members to other people in your church family.

Group members will have an opportunity to possibly discover their spiritual gifts or develop them in this capacity as well. This may look more virtual, like your group committing to join together as a group in making sure your online services or events are shared as

much as you can through social media or even praying for the special services. Find out what is going on this holiday season at your church and plug your group in somehow!

2. **Serve together in your COMMUNITY.** During the holidays, there are a plethora of opportunities to serve within your community. There are food banks, homeless shelters, Salvation Army bell ringers, Christmas caroling at nursing homes, sending care packages or letters to the military, or Toys for Tots, to name a few. Find an organization that your church is comfortable with and set a date for your group to serve. Angel Tree is also another organization you can partner with to show the love of Christ to children of incarcerated parents by purchasing a gift for them. This can lead to future ministry to the families. Check out what is happening in your community during this holiday season and see how your group can be a blessing!
3. **Adopt a FAMILY in need in your church or community.** If there is a family that you, someone in your group, or your pastor is aware of that is struggling financially or

maybe just a family that has been a blessing to your group or church, your group could “adopt” them for Christmas. Your group members would buy presents for the family, collect them together, and either present them to the family as gifts from your group or offer them anonymously or in your church’s name (which may be less intimidating for the family). This would work for someone in your church or for someone in your community with whom you just want to show the love of Christ. Identify a family that needs to see God’s blessings during this season and give them some presents!

- 4. Minister to the lonely and depressed.** There can be difficult seasons for many people. The holidays remind some people of the loved ones they have lost or the reality of their loneliness. Pray for lonely or grieving, send cards to them, and even mail gifts to brighten their season.

Also, the group could plan a party or get-together and include those who have lost a loved one or do not have family around. This can certainly apply to college students who may be stuck at college because they can not

travel home. There are many around us in our churches or in our communities who are lonely and sad during the holidays. Be sensitive and minister to these people as God leads your group!

A bonus way to serve as a group during the holiday season is to pitch in as a group to get your lead pastor or someone on your pastoral staff (leadership team) a special gift! Minister to your ministers!

These are just a few ideas to get your creative juices flowing and your heart yearning to serve others during the coming holiday season! Whatever you decide to do, do it with the motivation of showing others the love of Christ. You never know what fruit your act of compassion may yield in this life and in eternity!

### **Ten Ways to Ignite Fervent Prayer in Your Small Group**

Praying in a small group can be intimidating for those who haven't done it before. You'd be surprised how many people are not used to praying out loud with other people around them listening in. This is an essential spiritual practice for all believers to develop because agreement in prayer among two or more

believers sparks the outworking of God's will on earth as it is in heaven and strengthens the community of his Church (Matthew 18:18–20). As the small group leader, you can ignite a passion for prayer in your group by engaging in these practices:

1. **Be brief.** Brevity can reduce the anxiety level in group prayer because it allows time for others to pray and serves as a model for simplicity in prayer (Matthew 5:7-13). People who aren't used to praying aloud in a group will see short and simple as something they can do too.
2. **Be informal.** Don't have a big build-up. When it's time to pray, just begin. For example, "Okay, everyone, let's pray. Feel free to jump in if you'd like. Lord, we . . ." This makes prayer feel less intimidating and more natural.
3. **Be yourself.** Imagine God sitting across from you in your group and talking with him like you would a good friend; after all, he is in your midst and wants each one to share honestly from the heart. Have a conversational flow to what you share with the Lord, and avoid Christian clichés or complex theological jargon.



4. **Use Scripture.** Invite people to articulate their prayer with biblical passages. They can read something that is meaningful to them and then say, “I believe that about . . .” or “Let that be true for . . .” and reference their own prayer needs or one that was shared by another small group member.
5. **Go first.** If you’re going to ask people to share personal prayer requests, be the first to go and be unguarded and candid. This will prime the pump for others to share and set an example of vulnerability that will be contagious.
6. **Enlist others to lead.** There is usually at least one person in every small group who is more comfortable and proactive in prayer, or they’re good about summarizing multiple prayer needs. At the beginning of your next meeting, ask them how they’d feel about facilitating the prayer time. This can be an effective way of empowering somebody to serve as your co-leader.
7. **Don’t force it.** Not everyone will have a prayer need every week, so avoid calling on people or going in a certain order where somebody might feel like they have to share something. If

you're sensing somebody needs prayer, or you want to follow up on something they shared with you at another time, do it in private.

8. **Write down prayer requests.** You can ask somebody to capture prayer needs so that you can follow up on them at your next gathering. This cultivates a warm and caring environment that will help people feel safer about personally engaging in group prayer.
9. **Change it up.** Find ways to engage in your group prayer at different times during your meetings, and be creative in how you do it. Read Bible passages aloud, then pray immediately and incorporate keywords into your prayers. If you sense a personal need, pray for it right then. Prayer needs can be shared in different ways, like having people write theirs down on an index card at the beginning of your time together. Then each person takes one to pray over later. Diversify when and how you pray together so this critical aspect of biblical community doesn't become rote.
10. **Integration.** Revisit prayer needs outside of your regular meeting times or when you're socializing together so prayer isn't

compartmentalized in your small group life. Celebrate answers to prayer, and be spontaneous about lifting up needs that arise so that prayer is naturally woven throughout the community God is growing in your group! Prayer is a vital aspect of biblical community, and the early believers devoted themselves to it (Acts 2:42). What flowed from it changed countless lives for eternity and literally changed the world. The Lord can use YOU to ignite passionate prayer as you engage in these practices, and it will inspire greater participation among your group members. Prayer deepens our relationship with God and one another. As a result, we can confidently expect spiritual transformation because he is faithful.

### **Can You Really Measure Spiritual Growth?** by Steve Curran

The end of the year is a natural time to evaluate the success (or lack thereof) of the past year and to set goals for the next year. However, many group leaders struggle with exactly how to evaluate the ministry that has happened in the last year. How can you measure the effectiveness of small groups? How do you know if people have grown

spiritually? How do you know if small groups helped someone grow in love? How do you know if you are actually making disciples? It is impossible to look at someone and know if they have experienced spiritual growth. However, it is not impossible to measure spiritual growth. The key to effectively evaluating small groups is to measure growth over time.

The first step to measuring spiritual growth is to identify what actions or results indicate spiritual growth. For example, if you went to the doctor and she wanted to check the condition of your heart, she would check your blood pressure, listen to your heart, and maybe run a blood test or do an ECG.

The same principle is true when checking someone's spiritual heart. So what tests do you need to run to check the condition of a person's spiritual heart?

Here are some questions to ask to get a picture of someone's spiritual growth:

- **How often do you pray?** (Possible answers: multiple times a day; every day; a couple of times a week; once or twice a month; less than once a month, hardly ever).

- **How often do you read/study the Bible?**  
(Possible answers: multiple times a day, every day, a couple of times a week, once or twice a month, less than once a month, hardly ever).
- **How much do you give to the church or other charitable organizations?** (Possible answers: I regularly give more than 10% of my income; I regularly give 10% of my income; I regularly give less than 10% of my income; I give regularly but don't know how much; I don't give regularly).
- **How often do you serve others without expecting anything in return?** (Possible answers: multiple times a day, every day; a couple of times a week; once or twice a month; less than once a month; hardly ever).
- **How often do you get together with your small group?** (Possible answers: a couple of times a week; once a week, once or twice a month, less than once a month, hardly ever).
- **When was the last time you told someone outside your family about what Jesus is doing in your life?** (Possible answers: this past week, this past month, sometime in the last three months, sometime in the last year, I can't remember).

I am sure there are many other questions you can think of. The questions will give you a snapshot of someone's spiritual life. However, the key to measuring growth is to ask the same people the same questions over time. If someone's answer to the question "How often do you pray?" is less than once a month today, but in six months, their answer is now once or twice a month, that is an indicator of spiritual growth and an improvement in the condition of their heart.

As you evaluate your small groups from the previous year and plan for next year, I want to encourage you to do two things.

1. Spend some time figuring out what are the indicators of someone's spiritual heart.
2. Commit to asking questions about these indicators every six months for the next two years.

I am praying that this next year brings amazing spiritual growth for you and your small group.

**How to Navigate the Loss of a Loved One with Your Small Group, By Kiersten Telzerow**

I don't know who said it first, but there is a quote that says, "Silence speaks when words fail." At one point or another, we will

encounter a moment when we won't know the words to say. Maybe you've been there before. That's often what the loss of a loved one does. Initially, it leaves us speechless. So, how do we come alongside one another with support and love?

I recently lost my grandmother, and as a result, I became keenly aware of what my spiritual family did for me. I knew my biological family was there for me, but I wasn't able to physically be with them right away. So I prayed that my spiritual family would surround me in ways that my heart needed. When one is experiencing grief, it's like something locks up and freezes, and you aren't able to necessarily explain what you need. Unfortunately, grief is a part of life, and we can't ignore or escape it. You just have to be present and let God heal you in the ways he knows you need it.

In my grieving process, I learned three things that could potentially help other small group point people as they navigate grief themselves or as you help other people through their grief.

1. **Be present.** Learn to be present in ways that help the other person, even if it is sitting with them in silence. Just as the quote says, “Silence speaks when words fail.” Your presence is enough to let someone know, “You are loved, and I’m here for you.” You can also be present through phone calls, texts, dinners, or visits. I learned there is a healing power in being present and sitting with other people around a table without an agenda in mind.
2. **Be aware.** Several people asked if they could just drop off dinner, and as much as I declined, they kept asking. I realized they were aware of how much I love to cook for others, so it was an act of love for them to bring me food. They were aware enough of the details of my life that they knew how to best serve me. People who are grieving won’t ask you for specific things. Be aware of not just what they need but what would help them know they are loved.
3. **Provide support.** Your presence and your food are necessary, but support goes a long way as well. I had numerous people who encouraged me to take care of myself in whatever way I needed to. Sometimes the



person might need extended family time. Sometimes they might need to take a break from leading a small group, or maybe they need to get involved in a small group and not lead one. Sometimes flowers, cards, and gifts remind the person of the good memories of their loved one.

Being present, being aware, and providing support are three simple things we can do to further help encourage and grow the Body of Christ! Just because people don't ask for help in their grieving process doesn't mean it is unwanted. Let's serve each other well, so we can continue to be better together.

**Four Reasons Your Next Mission Trip Should Start as a Small Group**, by John Tyler Black

This one year, we hosted our traditional "Mission Trip Interest Meeting" for a trip to Israel, which was a little over a year from taking off. This meeting had a little twist to what had been our norm for a few years. This endeavor, spearheaded by a church volunteer, had an increased intentionality behind it.

Drew, our volunteer point person, and I talked through ways we could add more value to this trip. It was costing each participant a little more money than our normal trip, time away

from family and work, and the scope of the trip would demand a little more attention. We explored how we could best maximize the team's experience, and our answer was, "Let's make this a small group!" Fast forward a year. One week from now, we will take off for the Holy Land, and I want to share four reasons our next missions trip will start as a small group, and yours should too!

1. **Your group forms a bond before you leave.** Outside of learning and growing in acts of service to others, one of the greatest byproducts of many missions trips is the church's team growing in relationships with one another. This is typically observed a few days in, after the breaking-in period. If your group begins meeting the semester before for a specific study or orientation, each member grows in relation with one another and forms a great bond before the departure date. The trip then multiplies this relational value even more! **A group that serves together stays together!**
2. **You're able to better prepare for your trip's mission.** Learning each member's unique passions, gifts, and skill set is valuable for

planning how you can best serve those you are traveling to. If members meet prior to the departure, they can plan out tasks of service, trip projects, and/or how they'll share the gospel. We were even able to plan a few meetings around video conferences with the team on the ground, thousands of miles away! Weeks of meeting, praying, and planning together will increase your impact tenfold. **There is no greater natural enhancer of impact than being properly prepared for what God has called you to.**

- 3. The group is able to learn the language and culture and get a better sense of what to expect.** Drew was intentional and prayerful about his search for the best group study. In addition to biblical study, it focused on historical lessons of the region, customs, and cultural differences we would encounter. We also learned about the organization we'd be serving alongside and how they've served the people of Israel for over 30 years. This also made our trip more than a drop-in service project. We have and will continue to have, an ongoing relationship with the people we will serve and serve with. The weekly gathering

quickly opened our eyes to what we would encounter and how we can best be prepared to take it all in. **Many members expressed their gratitude for being so well-informed of what they'd see and experience.**

4. **The group adds a tremendous amount of value.** As point people, we wanted to make sure to maximize this experience for all involved. Drew believed that creating a study and orientation with Israel and our partner organization could create a yearlong experience, as opposed to one week, and he couldn't have been more correct. The curriculum, video chats, and already-formed relationships have already proven to be a great win for our coming missions efforts. **I am excited that our small group culture was able to add so much value to how our team will experience and serve Israel.**

We'd seen this model successfully executed in other churches and were excited to try it in our setting. If your church is looking to add another layer to your missional experience, I'd encourage you to marry Small Groups with your trip endeavors.

## Radical Hospitality, by Kiersten Telzerow

Cesar Chavez, who was a civil rights activist, once said, “If you really want to make a friend, go to someone’s house and eat with him . . . the people who give you their food give you their heart.”

Have you ever been to someone’s house where they treated you as if you were royalty for no other reason than they wanted to show you how much they cared? They probably have the gift of hospitality. Now, I get that not everyone has that gift, but we do have the gift of love. My family and I were recently invited to dinner by a friend. I thought what a nice gesture, and so we accepted the offer. But upon arriving- going out for dinner was an understatement. We were warmly welcomed by name. Seated at a table where several dishes of appetizers were brought out. Water and champagne were served without asking for it. A gourmet dinner and enough dessert to stuff us to the brim were served. The friend who invited us to dinner owned the restaurant and did everything in his power to make sure we were well taken care of.

I remember walking away from this experience thinking I thought I knew what hospitality was...but I was wrong. I wonder if that's how the people whom Jesus served, loved and cared for felt. They probably experienced a whole new level of radical hospitality.

As small group point people, I was recently challenged to create space in my life for radical hospitality- more than just casually hanging out and having people over. What does it look like to model this? How can this be a core value of our small groups? It doesn't even need to revolve around food (though that's a plus)! But in what areas are we challenging groups to take the definition of community to a whole new level? Are the people in our groups just rubbing shoulders with each other, or are they also washing their feet? I walked away from that dinner feeling like I didn't deserve to be treated that well. I was served beyond expectation, and true hospitality always adds value to and blesses other people.

If the value of hospitality is a core value of our leadership, many people will experience coming to the feet of Jesus.

When we are willing to invite, engage, and open up our everyday space- radical hospitality occurs in ways we may never expect.

- Invite often.
- Engage intentionally.
- Go the extra mile.

### **Small Groups On Mission, by Danny Bias**

One of the greatest seasons of joy and growth, both spiritually and numerically, I've experienced in ministry is when our small groups really embraced the idea of being small groups on mission. It took vision, direction, intentionality, and many tough conversations to take the idea of small groups on missions from a cool catchphrase to actual reality.

The toughest but most groundbreaking conversation we had to have was to help our coaches, leaders, and small group point people understand the difference between being socially aware versus being socially arrogant. When it comes to serving our communities, there is a fine line between being socially

aware and being socially arrogant. We do this when we think we know how best to help the homeless or when we decide to impose our views on the poor, the addicted, the minorities, the undeveloped nations, etc. We do this when we refuse to give money because “they’ll just buy drugs” or when we refuse to help others because they aren’t helping themselves.

Because God helps those who help themselves, right? That’s not anywhere in Scripture. I’m still trying to convince my mom of this, ha!

No, not only is this unbiblical, it’s the complete opposite of Jesus’ teachings. Understand, you don’t have to help everyone, but you can help one person, or as Pastor Andy Stanley says, “Do for one what you wish you could do for all.”

I love this quote from the book *Interrupted: When Jesus Wrecks Your Comfortable Christianity*:

“We don’t get to opt out of living on mission because we might not be appreciated. We’re not allowed to neglect the oppressed because we have reservations about their discernment.



We cannot deny love because it might be despised or misunderstood. We can't withhold social relief because we're not convinced it will be perfectly managed. We can't project our advantaged perspective onto struggling people and expect results available only to the privileged. Must we be wise? Absolutely. But doing nothing is a blatant sin of omission. Turning a blind eye on the bottom on the ground of unworthiness is the antithesis to Jesus' entire mission. How dare we? Most of us know nothing—nothing of the struggles of the poor. We erroneously think ourselves superior, and it is a wonder God would use us at all to minister to his beloved.”

The biggest mind and heart shift that we can help our leaders make and then empower them to help the people in their groups to make is to stop seeing the act of serving our communities as charity work and the people in those communities as projects.

In Matthew 20:24, we see Jesus have compassion on two blind beggars while the religious types around him, in their social arrogance, yell at them to be quiet.

What did Jesus do? He healed them.

Why? Because they couldn't help themselves. We have the awesome opportunity as leaders to help lead our people through these tough but revealing types of conversations in regard to serving our communities.

However, the hardest part in all this is asking ourselves the tough but revealing question: Am I being and leading my people to be socially aware, or am I being and leading my people to be socially arrogant?

It's the answering of this question that will direct us to the steps we need to take to make the idea of small groups on mission a reality in our churches and the communities we serve.

## Section 4: Evangelism

### *Quick Tips*

**Seven for Seven:** Encourage your members to write down a list of seven names of potential seekers or people that God has placed on your heart to share the gospel with. Have each member pray for every seeker they have on their list over the next seven days. Ask God to open their minds and soften their hearts to hear and receive his truth and be saved.

**Feeling Stumped:** It's really okay to say "I don't know" to people you are witnessing or talking to in your small group. If you don't know the answer to a question, tell the one asking, "Good question! I'll try to find the answer for you." If no one in your group knows the answer, ask for a volunteer to research the answer. If no one offers, do the research

yourself and get back to the group and/or seeker the following week.

**Saving a Spot:** An empty chair can communicate an important message to members during your small group meetings. If you are an open group, keep a spot available as a reminder to always be on the lookout for the next “one.” That chair can remind people that God has someone new for the group. Who is that person? Have your group actively recruit new people who need love, God, and fellowship. Pray consistently for that next “one.” And just as Jesus did, don’t forget to rejoice and throw a party when that “one” joins the flock!

**BBQ and Friends:** Invite some seeker friends to enjoy a barbecue with your group. Encourage each group member to invite at least one friend or couple. Keep the time together light and fun. Make sure to be sensitive to them as you plan your evening. This would probably not be the time, for instance, for thirty minutes of prayer. Your guests will hopefully notice your camaraderie and friendship and perhaps be curious about your group. If they seem interested, invite

them to check out the group at the next meeting.

**Group Garage Sale:** To help simplify your life and to raise money either for a missions project or a need in your group, church, or community, organize a garage sale. Advertise what your purpose is. For example, “Garage Sale to Benefit Habitat for Humanity.”

**Adopt a Missionary:** As a group, connect with a missionary. Consider supporting their ministry, arrange a time to video chat with them, and get to know them. If possible, make it semi-regular in order to support them emotionally (if they are interested and have the time). Make sure to include them in your prayer time each week and follow up on their prayer requests to stay in the loop. And possibly, the most fun option of all—ask them to share recipes from the area that they are serving and try to make them as a group! If you support more than one missionary, make sure to make the cooking night a regular thing.

**Pit Stop:** If it’s not practical for you to volunteer to change tires at the Indy 500, try instead to meet the needs of a missionary

family who is home for a pit stop. Consider helping them recharge by providing wheels (loaning them a car); refreshment (inviting them to dinner or taking them meals); and encouragement (ask them to visit your group, have them talk about their ministry, and pray for them). Give them a “brake”– as in a break from the kids. And be sure to refuel them by meeting a specific physical or financial need.

**Small Group Oasis:** North American churches benefit from being in countries that are both “sending” and “receiving.” Churches here are regularly sending out missionaries to share the gospel throughout the entire world. But you don’t have to be a missionary to make a global impact! Because we are also “receiving” countries, people from around the world are also coming here. Consider looking around your community for an exchange student, refugee, or recent immigrant to welcome in and befriend. If you can go the extra mile, contact a local college to find out if there is an international student who needs a host home. Offer as a group to host a “Welcome to Our Community” social for international students in the fall. If it goes well, you might consider

having another open house at Christmas and other breaks. Most international students don't return home for the holidays. The same is true with refugees and immigrants. Typically, the only reason someone would leave family, friends, and the only life they've known to go someplace completely foreign is because they absolutely felt forced to. So, when arriving in a new country where immigration is often politicized, they feel perpetually on the outside looking in. This is the perfect opportunity to show the love of Christ to someone who may have never heard of the gospel before and to befriend someone who most needs it.

**Origin Stories:** At one meeting, have everyone tell how they got connected to the church or plugged into the small group and who was instrumental in those decisions. Use these shared stories to remind people once again of the power of invitation.

**Birthday Bash:** When your small group gives birth to a new small group, celebrate that momentous occasion with a "sending-out" party for the new host. A party needs food and

fun, but this party also needs prayer. Then, sometime down the road, have a reunion with the second-generation small groups.

**Online Maps:** Because of phones and the internet, most of our relationships don't have as much to do with geography as affinity. So make a "map" of your relationships. On a piece of paper, draw a square for "your house." This is you and your immediate family. Next, draw out houses representing the people that you spend the most time with. Often this is coworkers or fellow students. Then gradually work your way out to map your whole "neighborhood" of relationships. Now commit to going through and praying for those in your neighborhood who don't know the Lord. Many Christians often live in a "gated community" that is built up of like-minded believers. This can give a sense of ideological security but often can keep people out as much as not. So look for ways to "develop your neighborhood" by going out of your way to build new relationships with seekers. As a group, commit to praying for each other's neighborhoods and how you can grow your communities to expand the kingdom of God!



## **Big Ideas: Evangelism**

### **Three Proven Models Of Small Group Outreach,** by Josh Hunt

An ideal small group is a micro-church—a church in miniature. As such, it fulfills the five purposes of the church:

- Worship
- Evangelism
- Discipleship
- Service
- Fellowship

I asked recently on the Small Group Network Facebook page what was the weakest link for most small groups. The overwhelming answer was evangelism.

So, I did a little research and found three small group models of evangelism you might consider for your small group. The following are excerpts written by experts representing each of the three models. If one of these models resonates with you, I'd invite you to research them further.

#### **Servant Evangelism**

*Definition:* Servant evangelism is sharing the love and message of Jesus Christ through simple acts of service and kindness. Servant evangelism is a biblical, fun, simple, and

intentional way to make sharing Jesus a lifestyle!

*Description:* An individual or group begins doing intentional acts of kindness in their community with the aim of evangelism.

Projects could include serving people by giving out free bottles of water on a hot day, passing out free granola bars to people on their way to work, or delivering gifts to local firemen or policemen. In addition to being served, each person is also given a card inviting them to church. On each card is information about the church, including service times, phone number, location, and any other information the church wishes to share.

Servant evangelism is a wonderful expression of the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. It is great for people who are first learning how to share their faith as well as for the most seasoned Christian!

### **Hospitality / Matthew Party**

This is a very important part of this study—having a Matthew party. As a group, begin planning a party, like the one Matthew held, to which you invite neighbors and friends who

may not yet know Christ. Your goal will be to make him known to them by letting them into your life. This means meeting people, getting to know them, allowing them to get to know you, and being ready to share your stories with them. Set a date, place, and theme for your party during this meeting, and ask someone to volunteer to bring invitations to your group meeting next week or have everyone supply their own if this works out better for your group. Party theme ideas include sports (football, Super Bowl), fiesta, luau, western, music, holiday, getting-to-know-you, game night, block party, barbecue, mystery party, decade party ('50s, '60s, '70s), food party (banana split, cookie exchange, pizza, picnic) or season party (winter, spring, summer, fall). Be creative and have fun with this.

### **Oikos Evangelism**

When I served as a pastor, a group from our church took a trip to Seoul, Korea, to visit the largest church in the world, Yoido Full Gospel Church. They had literally thousands of small groups in their church. One of the principles

that we learned during our time there was the “*oikos* principle.”

What is an *oikos*? Acts 10:2 speaks of Cornelius and all of his family or *oikos*. *Oikos* is the Greek word for household or house of people. Your *oikos* is that group of people with whom you relate on a regular basis. All believers should apply the *oikos* principle to their lives as a way of infiltrating their spheres of influence with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One time when Paul and Silas were in prison in the midst of an earthquake, the jailer became receptive to the gospel. He invited his household to listen to Paul’s message, and they were all saved. This group of people was his *oikos*. The *oikos* principle is a strategy of using our existing relationships to evangelize and to make disciples. This includes:

- Family and relatives: Your Uncle Jack, Aunt Sadie, and Cousin Ted are all part of your *oikos*, even if they live far away. If you maintain regular contact with them, they are part of your *oikos*.
- Those who have common interests with you: Those who play tennis with you are part of your *oikos*. Anyone you share a common

interest with, such as an interest in computers, sewing, playing basketball, or playing the guitar—these people are a part of your *oikos*.

- Those who live in the same geographical location as you: Your neighbors are a part of your *oikos*.
- Those who have a common vocation: Those with whom you work—your fellow employees—are a part of your *oikos*. If you are a construction worker, your *oikos* includes other construction workers. If you are a doctor, other professional people that you relate with would be included in your *oikos*.
- Others with whom you have regular contact: These people may include your dentist, family doctor, mechanic, hairdresser, salespeople, school officials, and the like.

Those people in your *oikos* group will be much more receptive to the gospel in God's timing because they trust you—you have built a relationship with them.

Amy, a young woman in Indiana, started talking to Jim, a fellow engineer at work, about the Lord. He would share struggles he was having with his family, opening the door for

her to share Jesus with him. Here's her story describing how her *oikos* relationship grew to include her small group as they worked together to reach this family.

One day, I could tell something was really troubling Jim. He told me that his father, Jim Sr., was dying and how difficult it was on the entire family. In fact, his father had been asking about God lately. He was afraid to die. Immediately, I began to pray, "Oh, Father, give me wisdom on what to do!" Our small group's desire was to reach out to our *oikos*—the people we relate to on a daily basis—and I realized this was a wide-open door for our group to pray. From my computer, I emailed everyone in my group, asking them to start praying that the Lord would give me wisdom on how to reach this man and his family.

My small group was extremely supportive. Within one hour, I received two emails from members who were praying for me. One of my small-group members, Julie, also knew Jim personally because she used to work with us. So I called her to see if she would go with me to pray for Jim's father. She was excited at the

opportunity to share Jesus with someone who desperately needed hope.

At work the next day, I asked Jim if we could pray with his father. He was very open to the idea. He called his parents, and they, too, were thrilled to hear we were coming. Of course, I jumped back on my computer and emailed my small group to start praying again!

That night, Julie and I drove to Jim Sr.'s house. When we arrived, Jim Sr., his wife, Sandy, and their granddaughter, Nicole, were there. They were so hospitable as we talked for a while, getting to know them.

When we asked them what they would like us to pray for, Jim Sr. said he was afraid to die—he was afraid of the unknown. Julie began to talk about the assurance we can have through Jesus Christ. Then I shared the concepts of salvation and eternal life with him. After discussing some more, we had the privilege of leading Jim Sr. to receive Jesus as his personal Savior. What a blessing this was for us!

At work the next day, Jim thanked me for praying with his parents. I told him it was our pleasure, meanwhile thinking to myself, You're next! I mentioned that our group offered to

bring over dinner for his family or help them with other daily chores. He was amazed that people who didn't even know him would offer to help his family.

My group made dinner, and I took it to their house. The next day at work, Jim Jr. couldn't stop thanking me for the dinner. I told him it was my small group that made the dinner, and we all had been praying for them. Later that day, he asked me for directions so he could bring his family to our group!

Everyone in my small group is praying for this family. Though I am the one with the closest working relationship with this family, we all play a role—especially one of prayer. This is what small-group life is all about! Working together to reach the lost!

Sometimes Christians discover they have only other believers in their *oikos*. When this is the case, steps need to be taken to develop new circles of relationships. Some believers join soccer teams, neighborhood organizations, and other community groups to increase their *oikos*.

On a simplified and less organized level, group members can use the power of a shared meal



or meeting for coffee to embrace the stranger. The entire small group need not be involved—possibly only a couple or a member from the group.

### **Seven Ways to Encourage Evangelism in Your Group, by Peter Clow**

All of us who desire a Biblically balanced small group see the need to ensure that our groups are not just inwardly focused but also have an outward reach to those who are not yet believers in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:46, 47). Some use the term outreach, missional, or evangelism. Whatever you call it, it is imperative that people in our small groups, no matter the type of small group, see the importance of sharing their faith with those around them. So how can we, as small group leaders, encourage our members to be evangelistic in their personal world and community?

1. First and foremost, we as **group leaders must model evangelism** in our own lives. Our example of fulfilling the great commission (Matthew 28:16–20) is the best motivator and inspiration for others to do the same. Share testimonies frequently about how you were

able to share your faith with somebody or invited someone out to your church or group. Of course, to share current testimonies, we need to be fulfilling the great commission in our daily lives! Look for opportunities to show others and share with others the love, grace, and forgiveness of Jesus.

2. Secondly, evangelism will come naturally, or should I say supernaturally, as the **group member is being developed and disciplined** through the Word, curriculum, and interaction with the other small group members. When someone is truly growing in God's Word and in their community of believers, their heart will desire others to experience the same hope, peace, and joy that they are experiencing. The curriculum is important to fuel this passion to share one's faith. As Steve Gladen said, "What your small groups study is one of the most important choices to ensure that your small groups accomplish your church's end purpose—to grow mature disciples." Mature disciples of Christ see the need and obey the command to spread the good news of the gospel.

3. Ask for **testimonies or praises** from the group so they can testify how they shared their faith with someone that week. Making evangelistic testimonies part of your group time will help stress the importance of outreach in a person's life and in your group's life. There may not be a testimony every time your group meets, but the hope is it will become more frequent. Giving someone an opportunity to share how they witnessed to their neighbor or co-worker not only positively supports the one testifying but also is a blessing and motivation to the rest of the group. Celebrate it, rejoice with the person and the group because of it, and pray for the unbeliever or unchurched.
4. As a group, **pray regularly for those who are unbelievers** to come to faith in Christ (Romans 10:1). In one group I was involved with, we went around the room and asked if there was someone in each group member's life that they would like to see come to Christ. There ended up being two unbelievers that really stuck out that we would pray for and ask regularly about, and even looked for opportunities to invite those people out to a

small group or a church event. Let your group members see the importance of prayer for the unbelieving person.

5. At the end of your small group meetings, you, as the leader, or someone with the gift of evangelism, could **encourage and remind the group to pray for and look for opportunities** in the coming week to share their faith with others. Let your small group studies each week always end with an eye towards the great commission. The curriculum is not just meant for us to consume as small group members but also to transform us so we can shine the Light of Christ more and more (Matthew 5:16).

In addition to encouraging outreach during group time, there are also certain things you can do as a group.

6. **Plan a fun group event** that allows group members to invite their unsaved friends and family. This will give them an opportunity to meet other believers and see that we are “somewhat” normal. It could be as simple as a cookout or board game night or whatever else would allow guests to come and feel comfortable spending time together with the

group. This is low-pressure and more about getting to know one another. This can be the beginning of the unbeliever's journey to know Christ personally.

7. Plan a **group outreach event**. Do something together as a group that advances the gospel of Jesus Christ. Go downtown and pass out invitations to your church, church event, or small group. Show the love of Christ through an outreach event that ministers to the needs of your community. Serve together at a soup kitchen or at an event at your church that reaches out to unbelievers or the unchurched. Fulfill the great commission together as a group.

These are just seven ideas to encourage evangelism in your group. There are boundless ways and other creative ideas that your group can brainstorm and pray about based on your group's dynamic and spiritual gifts. Personal evangelism and group evangelism can both yield fruit to God's glory.

### **A Three-Step Plan for Mobilizing Your Small Group Outreach**

If you want your small group to be healthy, contribute to God's mission in the world, and

inspire your group members to grow closer to Jesus and help others to do the same, then voice the need to reach others with the gospel! Get your small group to think about others more and about sharing their faith. If you don't take the lead in cultivating an outward orientation to your group life, then it is unlikely somebody else in the group will. Let people know at the beginning of your small group that evangelism is an important part of group life that will ensure everyone's experience in the group is healthy and life-changing. Explain how the community of your small group can be instrumental in helping each one fulfill their calling to be an evangelist and bring biblical truths to life (Acts 2:42-47; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 2 Timothy 4:5). Don't just give permission for your group members to invite friends . . . tell them you want them to invite their friends. This three-step plan will help you be a catalyst for small group outreach so that your group can fulfill God's evangelistic purpose for its gatherings.

1. **Don't wait.** Start right when your small group starts. Much of a group's operative DNA is created toward the front end of its life

together, so it's a mistake to wait. Building a bond happens best by reaching out, not huddling up. A small group that chooses to be intentionally evangelistic will experience the life-giving community and impact God intends for it. Evangelism is self-perpetuating, even addictive. Once group members get a taste of it, they tend to want more of it.

2. **Pray beyond your small group.** Oftentimes, small group prayer consists of praying for the needs of group members and their families. This is important. You, as the small group leader, can also leverage your group's prayer time as an opportunity to direct people's hearts outward by praying for the unreached, your neighborhood, and the larger community. Prayer for God's future family goes a long way in cultivating a compassionate love for the lost. Additionally, when you've had opportunities to share the gospel with others, tell your small group about them. Don't be shy—be open and honest about your experience. This will encourage others to look for ways to let Jesus' light shine through them.
3. **Share your heart.** Tell your small group how much lost people matter to God and share

your heart for reaching them (Luke 15). Don't just give them permission to invite friends to your group; tell them how much you want them to include others. It's never too early or too late to share a vision for small group outreach, set goals together, and applaud people exuberantly when they take even the tiniest of steps to share the love of Christ with people who have yet to know him.

Once you sense your small group is ready to show God's love practically to others, encourage them to step out in some of these ways so they can become even more effective as Christ's ambassador in the world:

1. **Make new friends at church and invite them to your small group.** Strike up conversations with people you haven't met yet at weekend services and events. Find out about them and look for natural connections (community, kids, school, etc.). Let them know you'd love for them to check out your small group!
2. **Take the lead with inviting, and share about the attempts you've made.** You're not being prideful. This encourages people in your group to take steps toward inviting their friends. They don't have to fear being rejected



(Matthew 10:40; John 12:47–50). Tell your group members that all they're doing is sharing an opportunity for a friend to join them in doing something if their schedule allows, which helps the person being invited to not feel awkward if they can't participate for any reason.

3. **Affirm people in their efforts.** Whether or not a guest decides to come and stay with your small group, encourage the person who did the inviting to help their friend connect with your church's community life in a different way. Follow-up helps bring closure so the person who did the inviting isn't left 'hanging,' and it shows the person invited they are sincerely cared for.
4. **Learn about the neighborhood/community where you meet.** Research the immediate area of your host's home and get a general idea as to who lives there based on demographics (age, gender, ethnicity), interests (shared affinities that big clusters of people hold), and lifestyle (such as married or single, community-oriented or separate camps, active or quiet, etc.) Reserve a meeting to talk about your discoveries and insights. Talk

about ways your group members can build relationships with neighbors and allow your surrounding community to literally see your small group in action through “servant evangelism.”

5. **Adopt a people group or sponsor a child.** At some point, your group might become interested in adopting a child through Compassion or an entire unreached people group. Your group can pray for them, offer financial support, or partner with indigenous Christians and actually go to them. Concentrate on praying for this people group or child. Write to them and build a relationship.

Your small group is a powerful catalyst for personal evangelism. You’ll see your group members share their faith in ways they would not have otherwise done without the encouraging voices of those who are part of your ever-growing community of friends. So don’t wait; pray beyond your small group and share your heart! As a result, the faith of your group members will be built up so they can step outside their comfort zones and share their faith in ways that will allow more people

to hear the Gospel and believe in Jesus Christ (Romans 10:14–15).

### **A Lifestyle of Small Group Evangelism, by Sean Buono**

While we may be able to pursue evangelism on our own and within our individual sphere of influence, small groups can also be an effective vehicle to engage those who may not have yet heard the life-transforming good news of Jesus Christ.

#### **We Were Once Evangelized To**

Oftentimes, it helps us to remember that we, too, were tremendously blessed to receive the word of God through someone else's evangelistic efforts. While we certainly hear of miraculous testimonies of God- encounters within a nonbeliever's life (like when Jesus visits the person in their dreams), it's safe to say that most of us were evangelized by one or more individuals within the body of Christ, directly or indirectly. I know an individual who has experienced both types of evangelism. While Christians were directly engaging him for a season and sharing the gospel with him, he actually ended up receiving the Lord inside of his apartment when no one else was

present. He later found out from one of his new Christian friends that there was a small group prayer meeting taking place at the same hour that he encountered the Lord and that at this prayer meeting, there was an entire room of people praying specifically for him! Indeed, The Great Commission that Jesus extended to us was not optional, and we are each called to participate (Matthew 28:19-20).

### **Evangelism Involves Action**

Have you ever ended a conversation with the phrase, “I’ll be keeping you in my prayers,” with a friend or an individual you just met? While it is certainly a kind gesture, is it the most effective thing we can do in the moment? Is Jesus invited to be a part of the conversation, or are strongholds broken down to allow for spiritual growth? What if, instead, you were to offer to pray for the individual right there on the spot or on the phone? It may seem intimidating; however, most individuals are quick to accept the offer. Evangelism is an action we do, and not just a feeling we feel. Evangelism involves identifying a need and responding to it in a manner that is practical, sacrificial, and

strikingly representative of Jesus Christ. It is genuinely caring for the individual in a way that not only helps them catch a glimpse of how God sees them but also how he loves them unconditionally.

### **Evangelism is an Ongoing Lifestyle**

While evangelism is at times viewed as an occasional event, it is anything but. When Jesus commanded us to go and make disciples of all nations, it was a God-sized goal that could only be done with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. And if such a goal requires the assistance of the Holy Spirit, then we know that The Great Commission cannot be achieved solely through a handful of scheduled “evangelism days.” Instead, it is through an ongoing relationship that constantly communicates with and responds to the still, small voice of God. So what can we do within our small groups to help each person adopt a lifestyle of evangelism? Perhaps facilitating a conversation with the group may be an effective starting point, where you ask each member of the group to share their story of how they were invited to church. After allowing each member to

respond, ask each member how they felt when they were invited. By weaving conversations like these into group meetings, it may be able to help group members begin to understand more of what it means to be actively engaged in a lifestyle of evangelism.

### **Four Habits of Highly Evangelistic Groups, by Josh Hunt**

Our enemy, the devil, wants us to think that evangelism is difficult and that we will offend people by telling them about Christ. But the bottom line is this: if your small group is helping the lost become found by praying, sharing their testimonies, and inviting unbelievers to a meal or a social activity, then they are fulfilling the purpose of evangelism. It's really that simple.

Here are four ideas to help your group do better in evangelism.

- 1. Pray for the lost by name.** This does two things. In addition to the awesome power of prayer to move the lost, it also has the effect of reminding us of the priority of evangelism. You might do this every week in your group. When you close in prayer, you might say something like . . . “This week, we want to

remember our lost friends as we pray. What else can we pray about?"

- 2. Share witnessing encounters.** Another way to keep evangelism front and center is to allow a moment to share opportunities that your group has had to share their faith. Ask your group on a regular basis, "Who has had an opportunity to have a spiritual conversation this week?" Share your own encounters. Lead by example. The research indicates that we are having fewer and fewer of these conversations:

To put it simply, Americans today are less involved in spiritual conversations than we were twenty-five years ago. A "spiritual conversation" is defined as any conversation about spiritual or faith matters (including doubts) with anyone. This would include talking about Jesus with a non-Christian friend but would also include talking about the sermon you just heard with your spouse.

These spiritual conversations could have been in person but also could have occurred on the phone, via text, or even on social media. In this way, the researchers used a fairly broad definition for spiritual conversations.

Yet even with a broad definition for spiritual conversations, as you can see in Figure 1.2, most of us (74% of us) have fewer than ten spiritual conversations a year. We are what the researchers characterize as “reluctant conversationalists.”

3. **Do a study on evangelism.** I recommend you do this once a year. Here are a few suggestions:
  - *Questioning Evangelism*, by Randy Newman
  - *Evangelism in a Skeptical World: How to Make the Unbelievable News about Jesus More Believable*, by Sam Chan
  - *BLESS: 5 Everyday Ways to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World*, by Dave Ferguson
  - *Stay Salt: The World Has Changed: Our Message Must Not*, by Rebecca Manley PippertOne teacher used to say, “We can teach our way out of any problem.” By doing a study once a year, you will teach your people the necessary skills in evangelism.
4. **Invite every member and every prospect to every fellowship every month.** If you can get them to the party, they are far more likely to attend a group and come to faith in Christ. For a biblical example, look at Matthew in



Matthew 9.9–13 or Google “Matthew party.” I recently listened to Sam Chan’s book on evangelism. He explains why this is so effective:

“Hospitality is another means of evangelism, and if we carefully read the New Testament letters, we find that hospitality is quite prominent among the topics discussed and practiced by the early church. While the gifts of teaching and preaching proclaim the words of the gospel, hospitality demonstrates that the gospel is real, authentic, believable, attractive, and livable. Another way to say this is that hospitality breaks down plausibility structures. The gospel might be true, but to most non-Christians, it sounds unbelievable. The gospel will remain unbelievable as long as our non-Christian friends don’t have many Christian friends because we tend to adopt the plausibility structures of those we know and trust. By sharing our homes with both our non-Christian and Christian friends, our non-Christian friends will get to eat with (and know) more and more Christian friends, and maybe even adopt their Christian friends’ plausibility structures.”

## Section 5: Worship

### *Quick Tips*

**Modern-Day Psalmist:** Many of the Psalms are actually acrostics. For example, Psalm 119 goes through the Hebrew alphabet. As a group, try praising God by naming his attributes in alphabetical order. The first person, for instance, will praise God because he is A–All–powerful; the second person—because he is B–Beautiful; the third person—because he is C–Compassionate, etc.

**Dear Prayer Diary:** It's harder to forget God's abundant blessings, and it's easier to avoid the sense that he is distant when we keep a prayer journal. After all, that sense that God is far away usually comes because, like the Israelites, we forget all that God has done in our lives and in the life of our group. But writing down our prayer requests and later

noting when and how God answered our prayers helps us remember God's faithfulness. Of course, we know that he never leaves or forsakes us, but we are forgetful creatures!

**Sacred Spaces:** To sanctify simply means "to set apart as or declare holy." So "sanctify" your group's prayer time by dedicating a certain location, playlist, candle lighting, or something similar. These may seem like meaningless rituals, and in and of themselves, they are. But these small and regular acts can help the people in your group shift gears and quiet their hearts to better focus on the Lord.

**Invite Collaborators:** Create a public playlist on your group's preferred music streaming service. Encourage each member to add a worship song or two. Ask the members to either sing along or enjoy a quiet time of worship as they follow along with the words. Never be afraid to include singing in your group time! Plus, now that all have a shared playlist, you can worship together even when apart throughout the week.

**Take Me to the Water:** Encourage the group to attend a new believer's baptism service. It is one of life's most joyous worship

opportunities. If someone in your group has not yet been baptized, encourage them to do so and celebrate it afterward as a group. It will be one of the biggest days in the life of your group!

**Play the Hits:** Ask a different member to share a favorite Psalm each week. Ask them to share what it is about that Psalm that they connected with. Spend some quiet minutes reflecting on that Psalm. Don't forget to reflect on how men and women of the faith, throughout all of history, have worshiped God through this very Psalm and the connection that you share with the Church around the world because of God's word.

**Worship the Easy Way:** Have your group sit together during a church service. This shared worship experience can help build unity in the group as well as offer accountability when it comes to church attendance. And it is probably the easiest way to incorporate worship into your small group since no one has to lead worship, and you're all there anyway!

**Secret Saints:** Find out what your pastor or person in charge of small groups likes to eat:

What snacks, junk food, or treats are personal favorites? (Don't forget to also note what their families like). Ask each person in your group to pick up one of these treats or a gift certificate and bring it to the next meeting. Plan surprise deliveries of the goodies so that the recipient gets an anonymous gift each day for a week or so from a caring small group that is praying for church leaders.

**Spreadsheet Worship:** Have someone create a shared spreadsheet. Collectively list truths about God and his wonderful character traits. Spend time in prayer praising God for who he is. Then assign a daily praise person. One person can praise through the list on Mondays, another on Tuesdays, etc. Make it an ongoing thing. So every Monday, that person spends time in prayer and praise. Throughout the week if someone in the group has an encounter with God or is impacted by a particular character trait, they can add it to the list and share that story the next time the group meets together.

**What's Your Jam?:** Music has always been deeply personal, even during David's time. Psalm 150 mentions a variety of instruments

that we can use to worship God. After all, there is more than one right way to worship him. Ask for a volunteer to read Psalm 150 aloud. Then talk about what style of music most helps people in your group connect to God. Celebrate your diversity!

**Everybody Now!:** Ask for someone in the group to read Psalm 96 aloud. Then ask someone else in the group to read it again, Finally have the whole group read it together as a prayer to God.

Have your group show up extra early to church one weekend. Then have each member walk through the rows of chairs or pews and pray for the service and the people who will be attending that day. Make sure to dedicate the service and worship to God and to pray that each soul there that day is able to hear the Holy Spirit clearly.

**Come Home:** James 5:19 (MSG) says: “*My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God’s truth, don’t write them off. Go after them. Get them back.*” After reading, have each member share the names of friends and family members who have wandered from the faith. Ask God to show you any step he might

want you to take to help them return to Christ.

**Experts in the Field:** Challenge your small group at the beginning of the year or the beginning of a semester, etc., to pick a book of the Bible or lengthy passage to memorize. Make sure it is a stretch for everyone but not an impossible amount. Save time each week to test each other to see how you are coming along. Even entire books of the Bible are not too lengthy to have multiple people recite during a meeting. For example, the entire book of Philippians only takes about 20 minutes if you go slowly. You'll be amazed at how much you get out of the Bible just by chipping away at it every day. By the end of the time period, your entire small group will be "experts" in that passage or book!

### ***Big Ideas: Worship***

#### **Ten Ways To Unleash Creative Small Group Worship**

Although everyone would agree worship is an essential part of our spiritual life, many leaders wrestle with how to incorporate it into their group time without it feeling forced or awkward. One of the ways you can "break the

ice” is to help your small group members expand their understanding of what worship can look like beyond the church service. For example, being still before God and listening for his voice, reflecting on Psalms, thanksgiving, giving something up for a fast or Lent, and remembering Jesus’ sacrifice for us, etc.

In other words, don’t try to replicate weekend worship services in your group. Rather, discover ways the people you circle up with can worship together that fit your group’s unique dynamic and personality. Gradually introduce new forms of worship by offering a few suggestions from the list below and getting a sense as to which one your small group resonates with the most.

1. Invite your small group members to think of something that feels ordinary in their daily lives but for which they are grateful, e.g., a roof over their head, more than one meal a day, etc. Then have each person express their thanks for that thing within the group. After everyone shares, let your small group know you just had a time of worship by humbling



yourselves before God and giving thanks (Psalm 69:30).

2. Ask your small group to reflect on the names of God found in Scripture and share the ones that stand out as the most significant for them. Simply google “list of names of God in the Bible” if you’d like to give them a list to jump-start their thinking.
3. Play worship music and ponder the lyrics. Choose a song or two that is especially meaningful to you. As you play it, have your group simply listen intently to the lyrics and reflect upon God’s goodness. Afterward, invite them to share a word or thought that struck them while listening or something that was inspirational. Be the first to share and watch how the Lord uses this to help people express worshipful thanksgiving.
4. Read a Gospel account of Jesus’ death and resurrection and invite your small group to reflect on God’s love for each of them and the world (John 3:16–17). Expand on this time by celebrating communion together (1 Corinthians 11:23–26).

5. Read through Psalms 23, 63, or 64 and then invite people to share what was personally significant to them.
6. Attend your church's weekend service or a special event where you can worship the Lord together.
7. Talk about how serving "the least of these" is itself worship and touches God's heart (Matthew 25:37-40). Plan together to participate in a local outreach.
8. Identify something in your current study that you are being encouraged to contend for and stand together against the enemy, renounce sin, proclaim God's promises, etc. (Ephesians 6:10-18; Colossians 2:13-15; 1 Peter 5:8-9; Hebrews 12:1-3; 2 Corinthians 1:20-22)
9. Invite your small group members to bring a picture to your next meeting that's important to them, and be prepared to share how it reflects God's faithfulness in their lives, what they're believing God for, etc. Pray together afterward.
10. Read biblical references about different kinds of worship, such as clapping, raising hands, bowing down, etc. (e.g., 2 Samuel 6:5, 14-15; Psalm 149, 150).

Purposefully expose your small group to various flavors of worship and talk about what you all think this says about God's heart for worship.

Worship is a vital aspect of biblical community, and the Holy Spirit will help you lead your group to God's throne of grace (Acts 2:47, Hebrews 4:14–16). As the small group leader, be spontaneous and vulnerable in praising God because this will empower others to do the same when they're ready.

The Lord will honor your effort in exploring new ways of incorporating it into your small group meetings. As you do, your times together as a group will feel increasingly worshipful, and your members' devotional lives will be enriched as they express their love for God and others in creative ways (John 4:24).

**Leading Worship for Small Groups**, by Rick Muchow

Over the years, I have led worship for many small groups. I love it! Almost every small group I have led worship for has been grateful for the music—as if they had a deep hunger to worship together in their intimate setting.

One thing I have found in common with vibrant small groups is that they worship together. These groups find a way to sit together during most weekend worship services, attend worship nights, talk about worship, include worship in their group time, and more. Sadly, however, many groups have yet to discover or incorporate this missing jewel.

The two most significant barriers to having meaningful worship in the small group are musical leadership and the misconception that worship is synonymous with music. Biblical worship is, of course, more than music and is not synonymous with it (see Romans 12). The essence of worship is faith, not the soundtrack!

Biblical worship is faith expressed! There are many ways to worship God without music. However, one of the most common, most beautiful, most effective ways to express faith corporately involves music.

“Music is one of the most magnificent and delightful presents God has given us.” Martin Luther

Here are some practical tips for leading worship with music in small group gatherings.

- 1. Calm fears.** If public speaking is the number one fear of most adults, then public singing was overlooked in the survey! Most people like to sing but prefer to vocalize privately or in a setting where their individual voices will not be noticed. Getting people to sing in a small group can be a challenge. An affable worship leader encourages participation by intentionally gaining the group's trust. Being friendly, relaxed, and likable will help calm fears about the "singing" part of the worship time. Worship leaders should avoid making direct eye contact with the group members while singing words directed to God. Staring generally makes people nervous, but staring while singing can be particularly weird. Picture singing the words "I love you, Lord" while staring directly at someone just five feet away from you. Direct eye contact is important when you are speaking to the group but will feel awkward to others while singing in a small setting.

**Simple rule:** Be caring without staring.

2. **Choose friendly:** Use songs that are accessible to the group—familiar, well-liked, and in singable keys. Singing gets better with confidence. Confidence grows with familiarity. Avoid using songs that are unfamiliar, hard to learn, and difficult to sing. Another way to be friendly is to put the song in the right key. Most groups stop singing when the key is too high. This is because many people have to sing louder when they sing higher. Some can't reach the high notes, and most people become self-conscious if they hear their voices above the rest and will stop singing.  
**Simple rule:** Use familiar songs and friendly keys.
3. **Control volume:** People follow voices! Be careful not to drown out the voices with your guitar or other accompaniment. There's a difference between louder and more energy.  
**Simple rule:** Sing brighter and strum lighter. Your guitar can be louder than you realize.
4. **Contextualize songs:** Participation will increase when the group relates to the song. The worship leader can share interesting facts about the song: what the song means to them

personally, its scriptural reference, or how it relates to the group study.

**Simple rule:** Plan your speaking and be brief.

5. **Connect group:** The goal of group singing is connection—connection with God and each other.

Music is a language that speaks directly to the soul. The worship leader's job is to make the introduction and then stay out of the way.

**Simple rule:** Focus on connecting, not performing.

6. **Come prepared:** Know your music and sing from the overflow. The Bible says, "If we are leaders, we should do our best" (Romans 12:8, CEV). The worship leader should know their music and words well enough so their leading style is easy for the group to follow. Effective worship leaders are more than just skilled troubadours. The worship leader must have an authentic relationship with the Father, faithfully living a life of worship.

**Simple rule:** Leading worship with music requires Spiritual and Musical preparation.

7. **Continue praying:** Think of singing to God as a form of prayer. Don't just play your songs.

Pray them. People respond to sincere prayers, especially in an intimate group setting. Be aware of those you are leading while staying focused on the conversation with God while singing. Approach worship time as more of a prayer time than “special music” or a mini-concert.

**Simple rule:** Pray and play.

**Four Creative Ways to Pray with Your Small Group This Spring**, by Jackie Van Hook

Prayer is a vital part of every small group gathering. It is also a part that can sometimes become routine, especially if your group prays the same way every time. Here are four creative ways you can pray together this spring:

1. **Go for a prayer walk in your neighborhood(s):**  
In addition to praying for those right in your neighborhood, you’ll reap some other benefits, such as getting exercise, fresh air, and beautiful scenery. A prayer walk offers a nice change of scenery from the usual room where your group usually gathers and prays and is a great opportunity to pray for specific people (your neighbors) to come to know Christ.



During your prayer walks, you can pray for specific opportunities to see and meet a need in their lives; for open doors and open hearts! A prayer walk can also be used to spread some encouragement (such as crafting stones with Scriptures on them or simple words such as peace, love, joy, hope, and faith, and leaving them by mailboxes as you walk and pray). Prayer walks can also turn into an outreach opportunity by sharing with people you pass by that you are praying for them, asking if there is anything specific you can pray for them. You could also extend invitations to join you at church or your small group one night.

- 2. Community prayer:** Challenge your small group members to find out what is happening within their local communities. What trials are people facing? What are the needs of the people around you? Ask that each group member come to your group with at least one prayer/need. Compile a group list of these prayers and needs. That list will be the focus of your group's prayer time. Ask for the Spirit's help in identifying how God might want to use your group to love, encourage, and meet the

needs of those around you. Create a follow-up plan as the Spirit leads.

3. **Bonfire prayers:** Why not gather your group together this spring, taking advantage of the warmer weather and the beauty of the stars at night? Have a bonfire and gather your group around the warmth and light. Pass around small scraps of paper and pens. Ask each group member to write down ONE THING that is weighing heavily on their hearts. It could be a person they are worried about, a circumstance, a struggle, or a heartache. God likes it when we pray specifically! Invite each group member to share their ONE thing with their group, then toss what they wrote down into the bonfire, saying, “I surrender this to you, Lord.” Then, invite the rest of your group to pray specifically for that person (in regard to that one thing they surrendered). Continue until everyone in the group has “surrendered” their one thing into the fire and has been prayed for by the group. Wrap up your prayer time by singing “I Surrender” (or any other song of your choice) together around the fire.
4. **Praise-only prayers:** This spring, come up with a creative way to collect praises and

answered prayers each week. At the end of spring, just before summer break – have a “praise-only” prayer time where your group will gather to celebrate and praise God for all the wonderful things He has done! Below are some creative ways to collect praises and answered prayers:

- Keep a praise jar with strips of paper. Or, for a spring theme, use fake flowers and attach labels around the stems with praise/answered prayers.
- Set up a praise table runner. If we are honest, most of our groups involve food—so get a white table runner, and invite each member to write their praises on the runner each week (use fabric pens). Then, at the end of spring, celebrate together around the table with all the answered prayers and praises visible right in front of you!
- Create a praise poster using a large white roll of paper and/or poster paper. Be creative. Use words, verses, pictures, or stickers to record your praises and answered prayers. This could be a keepsake. Collect the items, and put them into a frame for the group leaders to keep as a reminder of God’s goodness and faithfulness.

- Start a praise photo album. This is another easy way to collect praise and answered prayers each week and to reflect on all of them! Purchase a small photo album to use. Each week, give each person a blank index card and ask them to record their praises and insert them into the photo album. Be specific, and include dates, etc. When the photo album has been filled, spend time passing the photo album around, thanking God for each card of praise. This is another keepsake to hold on to! Prayer is such an important part of your small group time. There are many ways a group can pray together, and changing it up will keep prayer from becoming stale. Prayer can also lead to additional opportunities such as ministry, evangelism, and worship. Have fun giving these a try and watch and see how God revitalizes your group's prayer time!

## Section 6: The GROUP Method

The Bible was written to groups of people. Why don't we read it that way?

The GROUP Method is a Bible study method designed to be read together, as a family, a small group, a church, or any gathering of believers who want to grow closer to God together.

The Psalms were meant to be sung together, the epistles were letters to churches, and the Pentateuch was meant to define a new people group. Of course, the Bible is written for personal growth, application, and a relationship with God. But it was also written so that WE can grow, change, and deepen OUR relationship with God.

The GROUP Method is simply a Bible study tool that is meant to make group Bible study easier. It is not the only way or even the best

way to study the Bible. It is a way that can be helpful for cultures that tend to think more in individualistic terms rather than group identities.

## ***How to Do the GROUP Method***

**Gather:** Get together with your small group, family, friends, Bible study, or church.

**Read:** Read the passage or book of the Bible aloud together. Longer passages work better, especially at the beginning of a study, to give you an overall perspective. For example, when studying an epistle, it is recommended that you read aloud the entire book during the first session. Many people are surprised to find out that it doesn't actually take that long, often 20 minutes or less.

**Observe:** This is the personal part of the study. Write down the big idea, the application, your questions, and what stands out to you. What did you notice? What was confusing? What was convicting? Write these all down because you will share them with the group next. Make a special effort to write down any personal application that you got from the passage. Ask yourself the question:

What should I be doing now that I've read this?

**Understand:** Here's where the real work comes in. Share your observations with the group. Notice what each member said, discuss, and apply the passage to your group, not just individually. Ask the question: What should our group be doing now that we've read this? Most of the Bible was written to groups. Whether it was to the nation of Israel, to congregations singing Psalms, or to churches with the epistles, the Bible revealed and instructed families, churches, and nations just as it did with individuals. Group application will be much easier if your group already knows its purpose and is already involved in some kind of ministry. But group application can also help your group determine its purposes. What is your group especially gifted in? What areas is your group weaker in? You'll be surprised as you go around your circle and share observations of the areas that everyone noticed, areas where everyone got something different, areas that everyone skimmed over, and areas where everyone was confused! Lean into that

discussion and use whatever resources you have available to answer questions or pursue a better understanding of the areas that you don't get.

**Prayer:** Pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit at the beginning and end of each study. And pray for each other as well as praying for your group as a whole.

### *Going Deeper*

1. Begin and end with prayer. Write down prayer requests and unite in prayer even apart.
2. If you are studying a book of the Bible or a longer passage, begin the first session by reading the entire book/passage aloud to understand the whole context as much as possible. We often dissect the Bible by looking at verses and shorter passages and cut out the primary reason for that passage.
3. After the first session, the following sessions should break up the passage using natural breaks, usually by chapters or paragraphs. For example, if you are studying the Book of Philippians, read the entire book during the first session. Then devote the next session to study Philippians 1. Then study Philippians 2 in the following session, and so on.



4. As you go through each chapter or paragraph, don't forget to refer back to the big ideas that you noticed in the first session for the book as a whole. Or, maybe you will even revise your opinions and understanding of the big idea after studying it further.
5. In making your observations, write down what stands out as well as what, if anything, seems unclear. Be intentional about looking for personal and corporate (group) principles and applications.
6. When others are sharing, write down what stands out to you! Be especially attentive to the Holy Spirit. One of the most frequent ways that God speaks to us is through others in holy community.
7. Notice the parts of the passage that stood out to everyone. Notice the parts that everyone skimmed over. Find common questions or shared applications. Write them down.
8. In case you haven't noticed, writing is a common theme running through. Get a group notebook or journal. Typically, we are less likely to write down our own ideas, assuming we will remember them later. But we are more likely to write down something that someone

else said. When studying the Bible as a group, you will need a journal or notebook to record others' thoughts and insights. It is also incredibly helpful to re-read through your notebook as you progress through a book of the Bible.

### **Example of Applying the GROUP Method**

First, (G) gather your group together. A small group may decide that they are interested in doing a study on the book of Ephesians. Make sure to begin each session with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to give you clarity and conviction as you read the Bible. In the first session, someone, often the host, will (R) read the entire book of Ephesians. Most books in the New Testament can easily be read in one sitting in 30 minutes or less. It usually works better to have just one person read the whole book rather than taking turns since people tend to pay more attention to when their turn is than what is being read. But it can be left up to your group.

As the host is reading the passage, make your (O) observations. What is this about? Often, we have read individual verses and famous passages but missed what the entire book is

about. In many cases, reading it through in one sitting makes it obvious as the authors often state to whom they are writing and why, along with the rest of the book's supporting ideas.

Additionally, write down the things that stand out to you. Ideas that are repeated often, unusual wording, the concepts that seem emphasized, something that was personally convicting. Don't forget to write down your questions as well. This will help to engage the group during the discussion portion.

Lastly, listen for anything that might either be personally applicable or potentially something that might be helpful to share with someone else in the group. For example, if I've been struggling with something at work, my wife may hear something that she feels like might be comforting to me or give me a better perspective on the situation.

Next comes the (U) understanding part. This is where the group talks through the passage and shares their observations. What was the main idea? What was the book actually about? What questions did everyone have? What areas did everyone skim over? What

applications (if any) did each person get? Now put all of that together! Lastly, how can this book potentially apply to us as a group? How should our group change our corporate actions? Should we be serving in some capacity at our church? How does this affect our group worship time? Write all of this down, because next week you'll need it. The following week and each subsequent week, be sure to break the book or large passage down into more manageable sizes. Often this is a chapter. For example, if you are studying Ephesians, there are six chapters. So there will be six more weeks. Read each chapter and look at how and where it fits into the big picture of the book. Repeat the observation and understanding portions. Continue to begin and end each week in (P) prayer. Also, continue to look for ways to apply the passage to yourself individually and to your group as a whole

## Conversation Starters

Icebreakers are often one of the most polarizing tools in the tool chest of a small groups point person. Introverts can't live with them, and extroverts can't live without them. But they don't have to be so polarizing. There is a great game called The Hygge Game. In reality, it isn't exactly much of a "game." There are no winners, losers, points, scores, or even an ending. It is just a deck of cards, and each card has three questions on it. The questions are meant to initiate conversation, in particular the type of conversations that evoke "hygge," a Danish word meaning: "a quality of coziness and comfortable conviviality that engenders a feeling of contentment or well-being (regarded as a defining characteristic of Danish culture)." Coziness is something that even introverts

can get behind. In an effort to bring new visitors or members into conversation and community within a group, here are some conversation starters for all types of groups, even yours!

- What is your favorite thing about being at home?
- What is your go-to comfort food or drink?
- Do you have any cozy rituals or traditions that you enjoy?
- What is your favorite thing to do on a rainy day?
- Do you have a favorite spot where you love to relax?
- What is your favorite way to unwind after a long day?
- Do you have any special items or decorations that make you feel cozy?
- Do you have any favorite memories from spending time with loved ones at home?
- What are your favorite activities to do with friends or family when you're all together?
- Do you have any favorite books or movies that you like to watch or read when you're feeling cozy?

- Do you have any favorite board games or card games?
- What is your favorite thing to listen to when you're feeling cozy at home?
- Do you have any favorite quotes or sayings that help you feel relaxed and at peace?
- What are your favorite ways to decorate your home for the different seasons?
- Do you have any favorite traditions or activities that you like to do during the holiday season?
- Do you have any favorite memories from past holiday seasons spent at home?
- What are your favorite ways to celebrate special occasions or milestones with loved ones?
- What is the most meaningful gift you've ever received?
- If you won the lottery, would you tell anyone?
- How do you find a balance between being social and needing solitude? What book changed your life?
- What movie do you wish they'd make a sequel to?
- Can you think of a time when you were really in the right place at the right time?





## Special Thanks

Thank you for opening up your heart and your home to fellow believers! Thank you for loving and caring for a few other souls that God has brought into your life. Thank you for being open to accountability, fellowship, love, and growth. The Small Group Network exists to serve you and your home because we believe that what you are doing is biblical, important, and valuable. Thank you!

If you would like to find more tools and resources, please visit our website at: [SmallGroupNetwork.com](http://SmallGroupNetwork.com). We would love to share them with you.

And we would love to hear from you! We would love to hear your great small group ideas, tips, and suggestions. We would also love to hear your stories of transformation, friendship, heartache, and miracles. Please share your stories with us at the following email: [info@smallgroupnetwork.com](mailto:info@smallgroupnetwork.com).

Lastly, we think you might also like Lumivoz. It is a podcast network with great shows for believers, including many small group Bible studies and curricula from top publishers like Lifeway, Study Gateway, and more. And the

best part is that they are all free to listen to with your small group or on your own. Just search “Lumivoz” on your favorite podcast app!

# List of Contributors

Danny Bias

*Chief Exam Proctor, State of California*

John Tyler Black

*Executive Pastor, Ministries at Stevens Creek Church*

Sean Buono

*Senior Business Analyst, Pontoon Solutions*

Andrew Camp

*Adult Ministry Pastor, Christ's Church of Flagstaff*

Peter Clow

*Associate Pastor, Emmanuel Church of Hooksett*

Kathy Clutz Oyama

*Instructor, Musashi University*

Steve Curran

*Founder, Director, CEO of Khaki Consulting, LLC*

Michael Grayston

*Adjunct Professor, Liberty University*

Josh Hunt

*Pastor, Salem Baptist Church*

Shelley Leith

*Director of Church Relations, Zondervan*

Andrew Mason

*Lead Pastor, International Church of Las Vegas*

*Rick Muchow (1957-2021)*

*Former Worship Pastor, Saddleback Church*

*Leslie Petty*

*Connections Pastor, Stateline Church*

*Lauren Southworth*

*Westlink Campus of Pathway Church*

*Kiersten Telzerow*

*Small Group Pastor, National Community  
Church*

*Jackie Van Hook*

*Associate Director of Adult Discipleship, The  
Chapel*

*Tracey Ware*

*Community Engagement, Bethel Funerals*

Founded by Saddleback Church’s small groups pastor, Steve Gladen, the Small Group Network (SGN) is an international community that “exists to connect personally with and resource strategically small group point people to impact globally to build healthy biblical communities in their local church.” SGN currently serves tens of thousands of small group point people in over 100 different countries.

*Everyone needs a few good ideas in their back pocket . . .*

Written by Pastor Steve Gladen from Saddleback Church, along with contributions from the Small Group Network, this handy guide includes tips and ideas for every small group scenario.

It is organized into five main categories:

***Fellowship: Creating true community***

***Discipleship: Cultivating spirituality and growth***

***Service: Caring for each other***

***Evangelism: Communicating Christ to the world***

***Worship: Celebrating our Lord***

The Small Group Network is made up of thousands of small groups pastors, directors, volunteers, and point people from around the world—many of whom shared their favorite

tips and suggestions from their experience in small groups ministry.

**Make your small group day the best day of the week!**