



CRUCIAL ELEMENTS OF A SMALL GROUP

GROUPS THAT CHANGE LIVES

Though groups may include a variety of members, personalities, and people, from a wide range of backgrounds, there are some elements which characterize every effective Christian small group. A prospering small group will have each of these elements: Christ-centered focus, community, each person richly experiencing Christ, progressive life-change and outward impact.



QUALITY BIBLICAL CONTENT

This might come as a surprise, but small group Bible studies study the Bible. Central to the Christian faith is the belief that God has revealed Himself to us in His Word. But the ultimate goal of studying the Bible together is to point the group to Christ, not to view Bible knowledge as an end in itself, but to see the Bible as a map that leads us to Christ.

Your group needs to experience Christ, not just learn more about the Bible, as valuable as that is. In no way do we want to move away from the Bible – it is the Word of God – but as you study the Scripture you want to help your group to see the person to whom the Scriptures point, that is Jesus. This is not to look to find Jesus in every text but to look to discover how the text relates and points to Christ and his redemptive work.

COMMUNITY

Community is the sense within the group that members are a team, bonded together as friends and committed to each other's well-being and growth. This doesn't happen all at once, but healthy, growing groups have an increasing sense of community. Over time, individuals rejoice together, and share in sorrow together. These groups move from being "Tom's group" to "our group," as members begin to take ownership of the group. The leader can help facilitate this, but community is not primarily a leadership issue. Rather, it's a oneness that becomes apparent when individuals come to value others in the group. Chapter 6 will give you insight into understanding community and some ideas on how to nurture this in your group.

EACH PERSON RICHLY EXPERIENCING CHRIST

As a leader your role is to stimulate group members to encounter and experience Christ for themselves. One of the most intimidating things that a small group leader faces is thinking that they have to have all the answers – the "map" memorized. Leaders don't need to have all the answers, but they do need to be experiencing Christ for themselves and know how to point others to Him. This comes from knowing people's greatest needs, having an understanding of how real change happens and being skilled at asking good questions that engage the heart.

You want each person in your group to taste, see, and personally encounter Christ as you come to the Scriptures.

PROGRESSIVE LIFE-CHANGE



Successful small groups are about life-change. On the road trip of life, we all hit potholes, dead ends, construction zones, and pileups – sometimes twenty cars or more. As a result of the wear-and-tear brought on by life's challenges, each week the members of your group show up in less than showroom condition, sometimes in need of some serious bodywork. Their condition may be obvious, or not so obvious.

As a leader (in need of your own bodywork, of course) you want to allow the Scriptures to expose our brokenness and then follow the passage as it points toward a solution and ultimately to a person, Jesus Christ. This is how life-change happens. If a group stops short of being a catalyst for life-change, it has fallen short of all God intends for the group.

OUTWARD IMPACT

One thing that's often neglected in small groups is communicating an increasing sense of God's purpose for the world and how we fit in the picture. Content is not the only ingredient needed for our growth. Knowing how God can use us in His plan is a critical ingredient. Catching His heart for people around the world is motivating.

His love moves us to action. We're not here merely for theory, debate or platitudes. We exist to glorify God and be used by Him. Sometimes when we share our faith there's an overwhelming sense that "God can use me!" How do you build vision in your group? Here are some suggestions: Highlight sections from a visionary book or magazine like:

- Master Plan of Evangelism
- Tell It Often Tell It Well
- Disciple Are Made Not Born
- Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secrets
- In the Gap
- Spiritual Leadership
- Discipleship Journal articles
- Becoming a Contagious Christian
- Use the Operation World prayer book and a map to show what God's doing around the world.

Or you can discuss a passage related to one of these topics:

- Evangelism
- Faith
- Prayer
- Worship

- Discipleship
- Compassion for the Lost
- Spiritual Battle

TRAINING

Another element for your small group is training. Share practical, helpful, specific things about how to live and minister to others. How do you have a Quiet Time? How do you study the Bible? Can you share Christ comfortably with a friend? How do you answer someone's questions about Christianity? Can you share your testimony in three minutes? If someone did trust Christ with you how would you help him or her grow? Help your students develop the skills they need to effectively address situations like these:

- Using the Four Spiritual Laws.
- Communicating the role of the Holy Spirit.
- Following up new believers.
- Sharing personal testimonies.
- Using evangelistic tools and apologetics
- Planning and running retreats and conferences.
- Recruiting for projects.
- Motivating others from the Word.
- Leading a small group.
- Explaining how to know God's will for your life.

PRAYER

Prayer is an expression of our dependence upon God. You'll help people see their need to depend upon Him. Most small groups have time set aside for prayer, but often it's a quick sharing of requests for the week. Creativity is the element most needed in prayer. Sometimes you need to ask, "How has God answered prayer this week? What are you trusting Him for?" when students in your group see God's answers to prayer they get pumped. When you pray together a powerful bond in the group forms.

It's also important to pray for other people, issues and events outside your small group. Here are some other things to consider for prayer:

- Application of the vision time.
- Application of the Bible study topic.
- Worship (songs, Psalms, etc.).
- Up-coming events.
- Personal ministry development.
- Laborers for the harvest.
- Ministry leaders.