

Equipping the Local Congregation Small Groups



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(With the help of many wiser and smarter people)

1. Disclaimers and Acknowledgements

Disclaimers:

- I don't have this all figured out.
- Don't be too dogmatic – e.g. "Everyone must be part of a cell-group..."

Acknowledgements:

- The Holy Spirit and the saints in small groups that have moulded me.
- Malan Nel, Scripture Union, Youth For Christ, The Navigators, Bill Donahue, Bill Hybels and Patrick Morley who have taught, modelled and demonstrated the vital importance of small groups.

2. The Absolute Basics

2.1. What?

A gathering of believers (often in homes.)
Sharing, praying, learning together.

"They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people."
Acts 2:46b-47"

2.2. Why?

- ✓ God is a community and so should we be. (John 17:20-23)
- ✓ Christ has made us one. (Eph.2:11-17)
- ✓ We grow together. (Eph.4:11-16)

So, we do community (*koinonia*)

1. To learn about God
2. To learn to love
3. To study Scripture
4. To pray.
5. To become more human
6. To encourage one another: "As iron sharpens iron, one man sharpens another." Proverbs 27:17
7. To experience God's working in each other's lives. "Jesus with skin on."

8. Can be very effective as an entry point into the church.

9. NOT as some technique to grow the church or replace the need for pastoral care. (These are wonderful spin-offs but not the primary purpose)

2.3. How? The Baseball Diamond (Serendipity)

Coming to understand identity - i.e. We are already in *koinonia*. We don't have to make *koinonia* - we must discover it.

We start with our theological *koinonia* (batter's plate) and run through the bases to get to a *koinonia* community.

BASE 1. History giving.

discovering one another.
historical journey.

spiritual journey.

What are your spiritual roots?

Do this with great sensitivity and openness.

BASE 2. Affirmation

Affirming: hang in there. You can do it.

Acceptance: The group is not exclusive. You're OK.

Assurance: Positive experience of the gospel. Encouraging and uplifting

- give the freedom to fail.

Accountability: how did it go?

BASE 3. Goal setting

Leadership must constantly evaluate, plan, and set goals constantly.

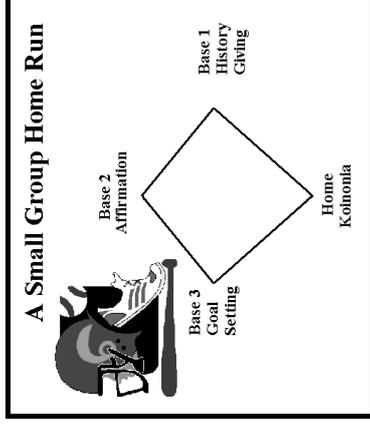
A three legged stool: Worship. *Koinonia*. Task.

HomeBase. Strong Relational Groups

- Sharing & caring.
- Self reliant spiritually functioning people. (Callahan)
- Creating people who grow spiritually in openness, discernment, creative pro-activity (Malan Nel)

2.4. Some Key Principles

1. Focus on Jesus
2. Be regular
3. Participate
4. Love – don't like!
5. Respect privacy – squash gossip.
6. Grow up
7. Major on the fruit of the Spirit



3. Discussion Time (15 mins)

1. Can you think of a "Jesus with skin on" story in your church experiences?
2. Can a board meeting be a fellowship group? Should it??
How do the goals and principles above translate in the Associations?
3. How many of you learned to pray out loud in a small group?
Discuss the potential for Spiritual Formation in Small Groups.
4. Is there a uniform approach to being a group? (One size fits all)
What are the limitations you would consider for a group size?
5. If you consider what is at stake in a small group, what is the potential damage in a "group gone wrong"?

4. Training Leaders...

4.1. Finding Leaders.

- Look for those who have hospitality and followers
- Look for those who are teachable and available
- Sometimes hosts and leaders are not the same
- People who can facilitate and create safe space.
(Lay preachers can be terrible small group leaders!)

4.2. Key Issues to deal with / Skills to Impart.

Purpose: Create Strong Relational Groups where:

- There is sharing and caring
- Mid-week faith lift
- Solid explicitly Christian relationships are formed
- Wrestle with issues
- Shelter in the Storm
- Equipped to become self-reliant, spiritually functioning humans
- Growth in openness, discernment, and creative pro-activity.

Leading Skills:

- Open Sharing and Affirming
- Facilitating
- Timekeeping
- Balance in programme
- Build trust relationships

4.3. Keep Meeting with them. (e.g. Once per Term)

- Encourage, Appreciate and Inspire them
- Synchronise with each other and the vision of the church
- Get advice on tricky situations
- Celebrate victories and share sorrows
- Share resources and ideas
- Identify new people to invite to groups
- Plot and scheme the starting of new groups together.

The next two pages can be used as handouts at Training Sessions...

INTRODUCING FELLOWSHIP & GROUPS

Key Texts: Hebrews 10:19-25 and 1 John 1:5-7 & 2:9-11

Fellowship is:

- 1: The horizontal beam of the cross
- 2: Vital part of our faith
- 3: Witness to the world,
- 4: A place where we may help and be helped

What is Christian fellowship? There are many answers to this question, some may be long and complicated, others short and simple. In Hebrews we are encouraged "not to give up the habit of meeting together".

Simply put then, fellowship is the gathering together of believers where the love of God is shared and experienced.

Although fellowship is not always the purpose for the gathering of a group of believers, it should always be the result! It could be that a group exists for Bible Study, or for prayer, or to do something practical like the musicians, the session, the W.F. or the board of management. There is always a danger that when we do get together to do something practical, we end up being task- centered instead of people-centered. But Christ came for people, not causes...

Fellowship is not limited to individual groups but to our Sunday services as well. The standard comment about the early church was: "See how they love each other!" I wonder if this is true of our congregation? Or are visitors saying "What an unloving Church!" or "I can't seem to get into any of the cliques." or "I just can't get to know anyone!"

Fellowship is not just the minister's job, nor is it just the task of the elders, but the vital work of every member!

How can you help in fellowship?

- Take a risk and stretch yourself!
- Introduce yourself to strangers and get to know them.
- Take the time to phone someone on their birthday.
- Invite people around for supper, or tea.
- Get involved in a group which interests you or where your can serve.

Remember that you could either be another ice-cube making the church a cold place or take the risk and be a candle shining into the darkness of loneliness and isolation

Here are some passages that talk about fellowship. Look 'em up and see!
 Acts 2:42-47; Joh.13:34-35, Joh.15:12-17, Prov.27:17, Rom.1:12, 12:5, 1Cor.12, Gal.3:28, Eph.4:3&11-16, Mat.18:19, Ecc.4:10, 1Pet.3:8, Joh.17:23B.

LEADING BIBLE STUDIES AND FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

(Leader's Training Handout)

Principles

- Purpose: Discipleship. You are Christ's ambassador.
- The Human Factor: Every group is different.
- Pitching: Where is your group at? Scratch where it itches.
- Caring: A unique privilege.
- Reaching out: Becoming the contact point.

How to lead a Bible Study:

PREP:

1. Pray
2. Find passage
3. Understand the background (Context)
4. Colour/mark/write!!!!
5. Find paragraphs
6. Watch for clue/key words
7. Find the main point in each paragraph
8. Summarise
9. Personalise before you Prophesy
10. Don't Intellectualise - Internalise
11. Read **from** the Passage not **into** the Passage
12. Levels of Question
 - ice-breaking and content
 - meaning
 - application

LEADING:

1. Pray
2. Geography of Group
3. Listen
4. Shut the talkers up
5. Get the quiet people talking
6. Use your levels of question wisely
7. Handle distractions/herrings
8. It really helps if people can see the passage they are studying
9. Asking people to *summarise* a very powerful tool!
10. Be honest - if you don't know then you don't know

Ideas and Pitfalls for Fellowship Groups

Ideas

- Lunch time get together
- Short term, low key Theme Bible Study
- Weekly discussions on a chapter from a book
- Start with tea
- Prayer requests (personal)

Pitfalls

- Carry on too long
- Too spiritual (threatening)
- Lack of relevance
- One person dominates!
- Lack of trust
- Too Therapeutic (Shared ignorance)
- Environment too stiff

5. Pitfalls

- 5.1. Eyes off Jesus
- 5.2. Loss of Task / Koinonia / Worship Balance
- 5.3. Gossip and "Politics"
- 5.4. Attempt to offer therapy / problem centred
- 5.5. Receiving instead of giving / Critical Spirit
- 5.6. The Leader
- 5.7. Closed to newcomers/change.
- 5.8. Logistical: Kids / Distance / Safety
- 5.9. Others?

6. Discussion Time (15 Minutes)

1. If you think of folk who have failed as Small Group Leaders, what were the reasons for their failure?
2. What are the key needs for your small group leaders?
3. Do your groups take breaks over school holidays etc.? Why / Why not?
4. Do your groups synchronise the teaching program (eg. Discuss Sunday's sermon or all use the same book)? Why?

7. An introduction to Polarity Management.

(From "Walking the Small Group Tightrope" by Donahue and Robinson) !
 Why is it that some groups that shouldn't gel and work do and others that should be perfect crash and burn? They discovered a book called *Polarity Management* by Barry Johnson. It gave them a very helpful tool for analysis of success and failures.

The gist of Polarity Management is that there are many tasks in life that require creative tensions or tightropes between opposite poles that have to be walked and managed. e.g.

- Parents need to give their children protection and freedom
- Discipleship vs evangelism and maintenance and mission.

These are areas where we have what the author calls **unsolvable problems**. Parents cannot only set their children free, they have to protect them which may mean curfews and chores. These opposites have to be managed. If the tension is too slack the rope cannot be walked on. Too tight and the rope snaps.

Leading small groups is no paint-by-numbers. There are basic skills to master.

- Give people a sense of **belonging**
- Help them wrestle with **Scripture**
- Lead a good **discussion**
- Create a **loving** environment
- Listen to people's **needs**.

But these basic skills are not sufficient because the challenges that sometimes crop up in a group have to do with equilibrium that has been lost. A small group leader needs to face six challenges (or unsolvable problems) that have their own creative tension in them:

<i>Challenge to Meet</i>	<i>Tightrope</i>	<i>Purpose to achieve</i>
Learning	Truth-Life	Spiritual Transformation
Development	Care-Discipleship	Intentional Shepherding
Relational	Friendship-Accountability	Authentic Relationships
Reconciliation	Kindness-Confrontation	Healthy Conflict
Impact	Task-People	Serving Together
Connection	Openness-Intimacy	Inclusive Community

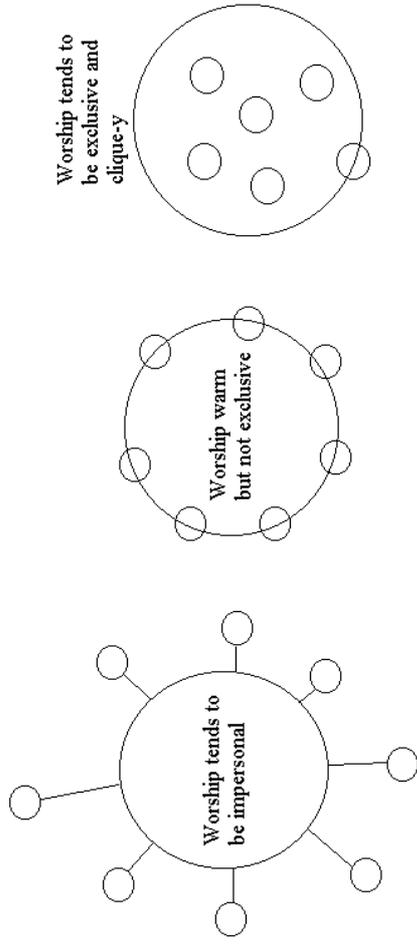
Two final observations:

- The ends of the continuums in all six challenges are good things. Truth is good, life is good. Managing these tensions is not playing something bad off against something good. That is why these tightropes are so tough!
- We never solve these polarities (that would mean we do one good thing, but never do the other!) We always have this balancing acts!

8. Small Groups and the Wider Congregation.

False dichotomy

- Church with small groups vs Church of small groups.



"Goal: Groups that flow out of but enhance our worship and koinonia." (Malan Nel)

8.1. Ministers! Take note!

When it comes to the conduct of Sunday Worship, those who lead services should take note of what Malan Nel, in an article "the Worship Service and Koinonia", has to say:

1. Small groups do not constitute Koinonia.
2. The total Worship Service takes place in an atmosphere of Koinonia.
3. The Worship Service should be prepared with Koinonia in mind.
4. The Worship Service should be conducted with Koinonia in mind.
5. The handling of the service should be geared toward the fellowship of the whole congregation. (The experience is enriching, upbuilding, and fulfilling.)

9. The Big Idea Concept

Dave Ferguson, Jon Ferguson and Eric Bramlett

We are in the middle of an era of information overload! Once, more information was a good thing - but now we are being bombarded with more information than we can ever process.

And we are doing the same thing in the church - we are bombarding people with more information than they can process. From the moment people pull into the parking lot till they finally drive home they get hit with a multitude of little ideas: a different little idea in the program, singing, announcements, teaching, etc.

We believe the solution is not more, but less. We teach one BIG IDEA every week to our adults, students and children in our larger group worship services (at all locations) and in our small groups. Why? Because we want them to not just know it, but live it out. Our goal is transformation, not information!

Every week we try to communicate just one big idea.

"So what did you learn today?"

Synchronise all your communications on a Sunday.

- Parking lot sign.
- Bulletin
- Greeting Call to Worship
- Sermon & Sunday School
- Announcements

Narrow the focus of all the messages going out in all the small groups within a church, weekend services and devotionals in serving teams otherwise else they all will get lost.

Lots of competing little ideas results in a church with more information and less clarity. Big Idea gives focus clarity and action, but little ideas results in confusion and less action

"More information = Less Clarity"

"More information = Less Action"

(Cancelling effect when you layer multiple ideas on top of each other.)

What central idea do you want them to know and what central thing do you want them to do. (30 second test - What do you want people to know and do!)

Benefits of the Big Idea:

- ✓ Takes the focus off getting more spiritual information and focuses on transformation and how to mobilise people to accomplish the mission of Jesus
- ✓ Missional velocity: clear direction and speedy obedience.
- ✓ Mass x Velocity = momentum. When individuals in group have the same

missional velocity.

- ✓ Speed only exhausts people. (They shut down.)
- ✓ Brings both vertical and horizontal alignment in all groups in the church.
- ✓ Groups left to themselves will drift toward misalignment - follow the passion of the group-leader. (We are not a federation of sub-ministries - not working at cross-purposes.) (Bill once taught about *heaven* in the sermon and his daughter had a lesson on *hell* in Sunday School!)
- ✓ Collaboration on content creates a disposition toward unity of strategy.
- ✓ Small groups benefit by the increased the likelihood of life application and transformation.
- ✓ Diminishes the fear of people leading small groups. Very pro about developing curriculum ourselves. (High risk decentralised pastoral care.)

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Needs a brainstorming / planning session once a year.
2. The big idea must serve us, we do not serve the big idea.
3. How to keep track on the success of the big idea: Celebrating - connecting - contributing
4. The big idea could be done periodically throughout the year (5 week series etc).
 - B - Basic Big Idea Church
 - I - Integrated Big Idea Church
 - G - Global Big Idea Church

10. One more Discussion... (15 Minutes)

1. Think about one of the groups in your congregation and run it through the six polarities of Donahue and Robinson. How does it look? Remember a score in the middle is good!
2. Is the Big Idea do-able in your congregation? Why / Why not?

11. The Resources Challenge

Finding good materials for your groups to use is difficult. Material is often expensive or theologically unsuitable and there's a lot of material on the internet, but much of that is dubious...

11.1. What materials have you used?

- Serendipity Bible

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11.2. Some other ideas

- Work from Sunday Sermon (for a season...)
- Produce and Share your own resources
- Use Andrew Murray's "An exciting new life"

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11.3. Some On-line resources

- www.upcsa-cdp.org.za
- www.emmanuel.org.za go to resources and daily devs.

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12. Some Loose Ideas...

12.1. How to attract people

- Food
- Encourage them to shop around
- Personal Invitation
- Advert
- Open House night

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12.2. Pitfalls

- Distance
- Rotating / Fixed
- Age of kids
- Definite start and finish

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The Big Idea 2009: Community #1 How it started.

1. Intro

Welcome to this Bible Study which forms part of the "Big Idea Series." The principle behind the "Big Idea" is that we channel a lot of energy into dealing with a basic concept and hopefully get it into our heads, hearts and lives.

Our overall theme is "Community." In the first week we look at how the first church looked.

2. Bible Study – The Early Church

We're going to use the SOAP method of study:

- **S**cripture
- **O**bserve
- **A**pply
- **P**ray

2.1. Scripture

Background:
It's the day of Pentecost which was a traditional feast (firstfruits) in Jewish Culture. There would have been thousands of Pilgrims in Jerusalem for the Feast. The Holy Spirit is poured out in power and the disciples miraculously speak in all the languages of the people there. Peter preaches and 3000 people are converted! This is an instant-church and this community serves as a template for what church should look like.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves

to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship,

to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

2.2. Observation

1. What do you think it would have been like to become a church overnight like this? What would you think some of the challenges would be?

2. Of all the things that the early church did together, which two are emphasised the most?
3. What were the locations of their activities?
4. Why do you think the believers moved into community "selling their goods and having everything in common?" How do we understand this in the light of the fact that none of the other churches in the book of Acts do this?
5. Here is a list of the key "ingredients" of the first church experience. Identify them in the passage above and then look up the cross-references and discuss each of the concepts.
 1. To learn together. (1Cor.4:17)
 2. To share and fellowship together. (Heb.10:25)
 3. To pray together. (Acts.4:23,24,31)
 4. To share in needs together. (Phil.4:14-15; Gal.6:2 & 5)
 5. To worship God together – to be in awe of Him. (Ps.47:1)
 6. To meet in homes. (Rom.16:3-5 Col.4:15 Acts 20:20)
 7. To enjoy the favour of all the people. (Mt.5:13-16)
 8. To give to God's work. (Malachi 3:7-12)

2.3. Application

1. Luke tells us that the Early Church were "devoted" to these key facets of a growing church. This devotion is revealed in the three areas given below. Discuss these in the group and try to isolate the principles and how to apply them in today's society.
 1. Frequency:
 2. Sacrifice:
 3. Attitude:
2. What was the pre-cursor to "wonders and miraculous signs"?
3. What's the difference between the "home" and the "temple"?
4. How can we do more about praying together?
5. What are some of the obstacles to the "ingredients" (see 2.2.5 above) of community and how could these be overcome?

2.4. Prayer

Take some time to pray that our levels of Community in our congregation increase quality and quantity.