



Greater Sydney SDA Conference

Soul Shaping Small Groups

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IVP Connect, 2010

Jesus started with a small group.

- Learn together
- Travel together
- Eat together
- Argue Together
- Suffer Together

- Small groups is where people speak, listen, apply, correct, assimilate and have the chance to truly absorb and be affected by learning.

- The small group movement is the greatest social revolution of our day. ... I can think of few gifts that would have a bigger or better impact on the church than to create more life-giving, life-changing small groups. John Ortberg

- History has carried us into a world that is large and impersonal... Today, people are searching for a more relational and intimate world.

- Making sure small groups are well led and effectively experienced is a Mt Everest-sized challenge.

Experiencing God's Presence in Small Groups

- Many times small group is an extra burden in a busy schedule. It becomes another chore, duty or obligation. For many, small group is draining and inconsequential for spiritual growth.

- If small groups are 'add-ons,' just one more thing to do/be involved in, there will be scant, sporadic involvement, and you will find yourself restarting groups every year.

- Small groups need to be more than a casual gathering with question-answer curriculum.
- Reveal Study: Involvement in church activities has absolutely no direct correlation to spiritual growth. At the same time the study showed that a relational closeness to Jesus (not the church¹) was what really changed behaviour toward loving God and others. Small groups became far less important to people's spiritual growth as they matured in Christ.
- "Something is missing in all our tactics and procedures. Or Someone!"
- There is a hunger for deeper connection.
- Can we create community that nurtures and provided spiritual growth to more mature Christians and those in search of authentic spiritual connection with God?

Create Space For Jesus:

- Re-cast the small group as a place to connect with God in community over being simply content driven. Small group is a place for experiential prayers that are not so readily possible in large groups. Put the pencils down and ask people to listen to God. Take time for prayer requests and then pray for each other.
- "I am not suggesting that small groups become experiential factories that try to manipulate the Holy Spirit to do something outside of God's timing. However small groups need guidance on how to create space for God to move in and among these communities.

Build a Prayer Community That Experience Life Together:

- This book would not have been written when we lived in a communal environment. Today we need to learn to be in community.
- "The spiritual journey is a journey we are meant to make with others. The experience of God cries out within us to be shared, and doing so with wise trusted companions is an important part of the way in which we learn to attend to the movement of the Spirit in daily life." Juliet Benner
- Serving Together
- Celebrating Life Events Together
- Discerning God's Will Together

- Cultivate authentic sharing and humble surrender to God in a context of prayer, not just what is happening in life.
- Grow people in listening skills – to each other and to God.

Befriending Scripture:

- There is nothing wrong with an intellectual approach and discussion however be aware there are other ways to use Scripture which are often more valuable in the small group setting.
- There is a difference between knowing a frog by dissection and knowing a frog by experiencing it in its natural habitat, jumping from lily pad to lily pad. Both are good ways of knowing, but the latter often touches the heart more profoundly.
- Scripture can be seen as either a textbook to be conquered or a love letter to be cherished.
- Perhaps choose a very small portion of scripture to meditate on over a period of time. Identify and closely work with a biblical character or theme.

Experience God in The Midst of The Ordinary:

- Make sure there is lots of room for applications and discussion of how the scripture we are meditating on impacts everyday life.

Getting Started

- In most cases, don't ask the congregation to volunteer for small groups and assign them to leaders
- In our context authoritarian small group systems usually do not work.
- Fast implementation, on a church wide scale, usually leads to a weak overall structure i.e. coaching, resourcing and values.

Understand change dynamics in your context. Know that the entire congregation will not be on board at the beginning. Pace the rate of change. Successful transition usually takes 3-5 years.

Allow the system to grow through multiplication rather than trying to implement a church wide system in entirety

- Teach, model and promote values of community over consumerism.
- Identify, resource and train leaders
Care for your leaders on an on-going basis
Be intentional about raising up new leaders and creating an environment of on-going care
- Have leaders invite people into groups, perhaps at the start with a time limit or for a particular purpose.
- Have systems in place for attenders to join a group and have a group/s that can take new people easily.
- Have new people join a group quickly
- Maintain the desired DNA in each group (evaluation tools, mentorship) Ensure there are regular coaching and vision casting opportunities.

Don't

Recruit leaders and neglect to train them

Train a bunch of leaders in a class room setting divorced from the environment of a small group.

Recognise and use all levels of training

- On-the-job training for small group experience
- Personal mentoring for character and skill development
- Classroom style instruction for conceptual ideas
- Leadership community meetings for mutual support and visioning
- Retreats for in-depth training
- Have children experience small group life early.
- Raise up new leaders. Few leaders will miraculously appear without intentional recruitment and training.

Continuing care for leaders is critical to the on-going life of small groups

We need to be careful in that we don't become so prescriptive about how a group should work that people become servants to the Small Group structure rather than served by it. The structure needs to facilitate leadership development, resource availability, adequate supervision and training around the values of our Small Group ministry. The exact nature of the group, meeting time, frequency etc is something that will vary form group to group.