

Week 1:

Understanding Small Groups & The Effective Small Group Leader

1. What Does it Mean to be a Small Group Church?
 2. The Purpose of Small Groups
 3. What Does a Healthy Small Group Look Like?
 4. What Does a Healthy Small Group Leader Look Like?
 5. The Typical Week of a Small Group Leader
- Appendix A: Questions of Character and Integrity

Introduction

Small Groups are the foundation of this church. It is important to understand the role that Small Groups play in fulfilling the Great Commission that Jesus gave his church. We can't effectively make disciples for Jesus without healthy Small Groups. And we can't have healthy Small Groups without called, effective Small Group leaders of good character who are devoted to the mission of Jesus. In this first session, we will look at the role of Small Groups and Small Group leaders in fulfilling Jesus' Great Commission through the local church. We will also examine what components make Small Groups healthy and effective.

1. What Does it Mean to be a Small Group Church?

Followers of Jesus are not called to simply be weekly church attendees. Disciples are called to learn the truths of the bible, live out the message of Jesus, and mature into people whose lives demonstrate the love of Jesus to those who do not yet know him. This church is set up to fulfill this mission through the Small Group structure. Small Groups provide a safe place for disciples to pursue Jesus and be connected in genuine, transparent relationships.

A Small Group church is distinct from the traditional church structure in many ways. Traditional churches come in different shapes and sizes but there are a few common types of churches that have different sets of values than the structure we value as a Small Group church. Here are some distinctions between traditional churches and a Small Group church.

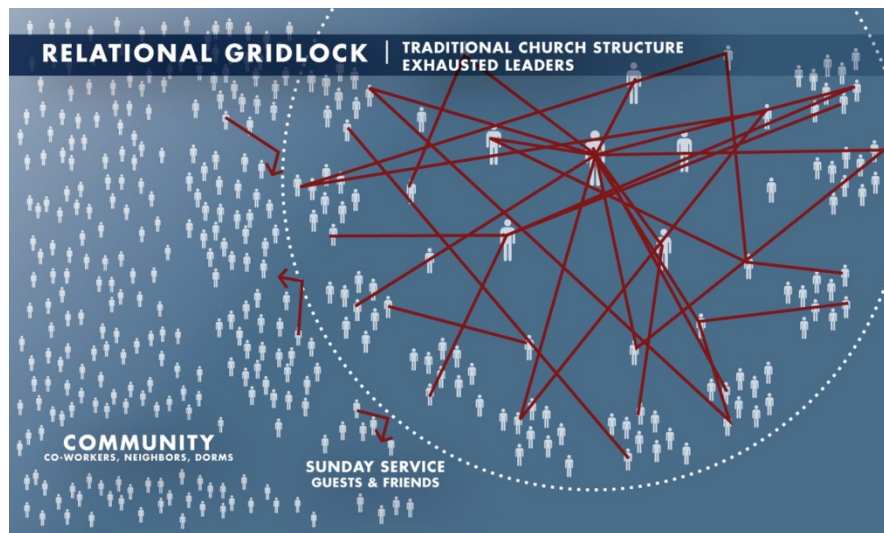
a. The Megachurch (See Figure 1)

1. Generally defined as having more than 2,000 weekly attendees, the megachurch is a church that is so large that relationships tend to be impersonal and interaction with others is low. There is a "shopping mall" feel where people are accustomed to walking past people with no interaction.
2. The emphasis is on great programs and high production value in the Sunday morning service.
3. Preaching tends to come from a single "superstar" pastor and often extends through campuses and live streaming.
4. Small Groups are numerous but are often hobby-driven or special interest based. These types of Small Groups are often temporary bible or book studies and closed to new guests. They aren't designed to foster deep relationships.

b. The Neighborhood Church (see Figure 1)

1. The neighborhood church can be under 100 to several hundred attendees. There is a high relational, close-knit feel due to small size but relationships tend to be inward focused, making it difficult for newcomers to break in.
2. The Sunday morning service is the foundation for ministry and relationship.
3. Preaching tends to cater to the needs of the members of the church with little or no intentionality about speaking to those who are not yet “in.”
4. Small Groups are optional or non-existent.

Figure 1 – The Traditional Church Structure

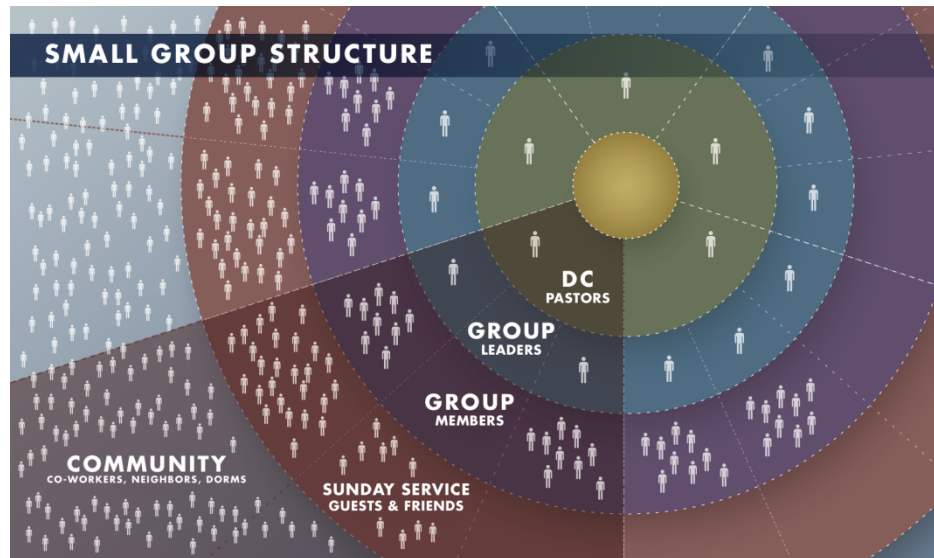


c. The Small Group Church (See Figure 2)

1. The Small Group church as we understand it doesn't continue to grow bigger and bigger. As Small Groups grow, leaders are identified and trained so the Small Group multiplies to make more groups. As more Small Groups come into existence, pastors are identified and trained to form Discipleship Communities. As Discipleship Communities grow and multiply, the church is prepared to multiply through church planting. The Small Group church reproduces itself through church planting, sending disciples to new cities rather than growing ever larger.
2. Small Groups *are* the church, not a ministry of the church. The Sunday morning service is a gathering of Small Groups, friends, and guests.
3. Preaching has specific personal application to a wide variety of people. In addition, there is a lot of one-on-one and interpersonal communication outside of the Sunday morning preaching.
4. There are many leaders, many serving, and no superstars.

5. Relational leadership ensures that the church is being loved, healed, cared for and trained to serve others.
6. Evangelism, ministry, and care-giving are relationship based and the responsibility of every maturing believer.
7. The Small Group structure provides a framework to reach many while maintaining real relationship.

Figure 2 – The Small Group Church Structure



2. The Purpose of Small Groups

The purpose of our Small Groups is to help us fulfill Jesus' mission to make disciples of all nations, to baptize them and teach them to live out his commandments (Matthew 28:16-20). We believe that Jesus has called our network of churches to:

a. Reach the un-churched

The church is to be a place where those who don't yet know Jesus can come and hear about him, and be saved and changed by him.

b. Reach students

We are called to reach students in university cities. The university students are the church, not a subset of the church.

c. Reach people from other ethnicities and nations in our communities

God's heart is for all the nations and the church must reflect the ethnic diversity in our communities.

The model for how we accomplish our purpose in Small Group is provided by the bible. The snapshot of the early church provided in **Acts 2:42-47** gives us a picture of disciples growing in the midst of a healthy, relational local church.

a. Bible Discussion (v. 42)

We teach people how to read, understand, and apply the bible to their lives.

b. Prayer and Caring (v. 42-45)

We pray, expecting that the Holy Spirit will show up and that our prayers will be answered. The needs of group members are met.

c. Relationships (v. 46)

We develop genuine love for others in the group as we spend time doing life together.

d. New Friends and New Groups (v. 47)

God saves our new friends and we multiply groups to make room for more.

3. What Does a Healthy Small Group Look Like?

Our Small Groups must be healthy if we are to be effective at fulfilling Jesus' mission of making and maturing disciples. Our goals are that every Small Group will:

a. Have healthy, maturing disciples

A healthy Small Group will be making disciples. Maturing disciples will begin to:

1. Grow in love for God (read the bible, pray, worship).
2. Grow in love for each other (transparency, honesty, caring).
3. Demonstrate Christian maturity (repentance, obedience, lifestyle changes, devotion).
4. Share Jesus with friends (invite to group, Sunday service).
5. Use their spiritual gifts to serve (in the church, others daily).

b. Be supported by a core of disciples

Maturing disciples will begin to form a reliable core of help and support for the leader.

c. Have a next leader identified

Future leaders will be identified from among the core. They will be trained with the help of an overseeing pastor.

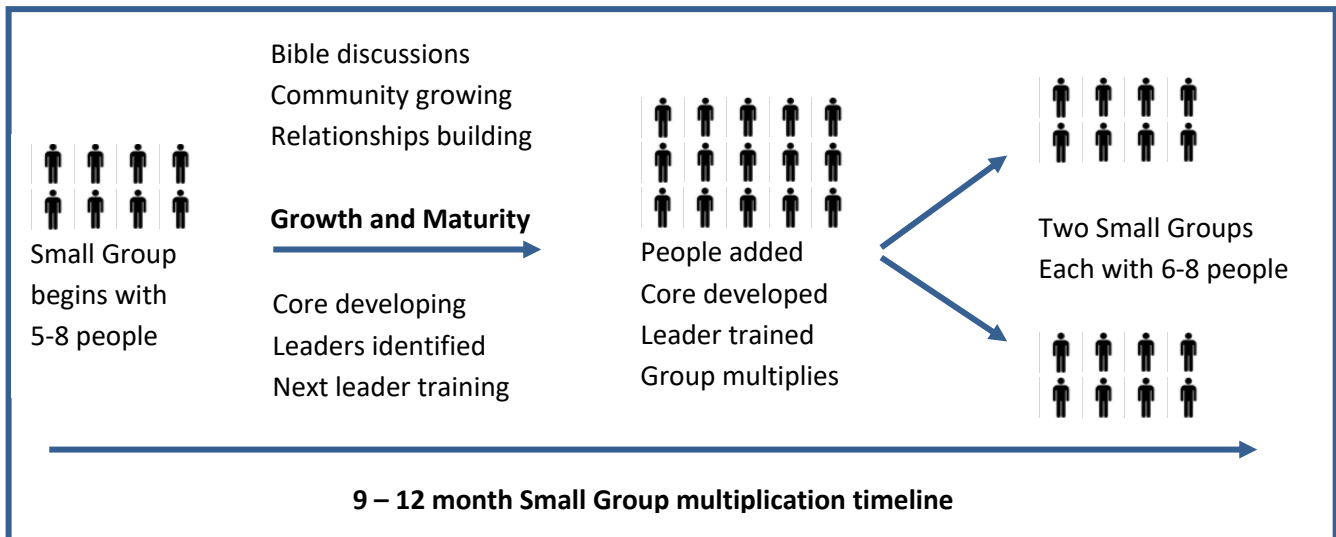
d. Be part of a larger vision

A healthy group understands that it is part of a larger vision, under the authority of and assisted by the Discipleship Community pastor.

e. Work towards group multiplication (See Figure 3)

The goal for each Small Group is growth in numbers, leading towards multiplication.

Figure 3 – Our Goals for Small Group Multiplication



It is very important to note that while ordinarily health leads to growth, there are times when things don't seem to be happening as much or as well as we'd like. The chart above represents an ideal but we recognize that there are often exceptions. Much is to be said for faithfulness when things don't seem to match the ideal. Sometimes God is building character in us by asking to take care of the small things, so that with an increased character he can entrust us with bigger things (See Luke 19:11-27).

4. What Does a Healthy Small Group Leader Look Like?

A healthy and effective Small Group can only be led by a healthy Small Group leader. Healthy Small Group leaders are people of good character who have been called to lead and have demonstrated commitment to Jesus' church.

a. The Healthy Small Group Leader has Good Character

We value character over gifting. For a group leader to be effective, they must love Jesus and live in obedience to his words. The biblical description of character requirements for deacons (including Small Group Leaders) is found in **1 Timothy 3:8-13**.

1. Lifestyle of consistent Christian character (v. 8)
 - i. Are you free from lifestyle habits not conducive to the Christian life?
 - ii. Are you pursuing a lifestyle of transparency and confession?
 - iii. Are you open to talking with your DC pastor when things need to be addressed?
2. Clear conscience regarding your faith (v. 9)
 - i. Do you believe the bible in unity with the church?
 - ii. Do you make time for personal worship, prayer, and bible reading?

3. Tested and blameless (v. 10)
 - i. Are you teachable, trustworthy, and willing to be accountable?
 - ii. Are you working through the Questions of Character and Integrity (Appendix 1)
4. Healthy family life if married (v. 11-12)
 - i. Is your personal/family life in order?
 - ii. Are you leading your wife and children appropriately?

b. The Healthy Small Group Leader is Called to Lead Small Group

Your leaders are careful to spend time in prayer and testing before considering any person for Small Group leadership. This is done in cooperation with your Discipleship Community pastor. Small Group leaders are not self-appointed but rather agree with the pastors that they are called by Jesus to serve in this capacity. Potential group leaders should prayerfully consider this calling. Sometimes leaders may be scared or uncertain, but willing to trust God and their leader's discernment (Deuteronomy 31:7-8, 1 Chronicles 28:20, 2 Timothy 1:6-7).

c. The Healthy Small Group Leader is Committed to Jesus' Church

Small Group leaders must demonstrate commitment to the local church they serve.

Leaders must:

1. Have personal ownership of the vision and values of the church.
 - i. Do you know and agree with the things Jesus called this church to do and be?
 - ii. Are you pursuing those things and encouraging your Small Group to as well?
2. Trust pastors and the church.
 - i. Do you believe that Jesus has called the leaders who serve you (Acts 20:28)?
 - ii. Do you trust the leaders Jesus has established in the church (Hebrews 13:17)?
 - iii. Do you refuse to engage in criticism or gossip (James 4:11, Ephesians 4:29)?
 - iv. Do you deal with conflict biblically (Matthew 18:15-20)?
3. Be an active part of the church.
 - i. Do you pray for this church regularly? (Colossians 4:2-4)
 - ii. Do you give your tithes and offerings consistently, cheerfully, and generously (2 Corinthians 9:6-15)?
 - iii. Do you make attendance at Sunday service, Team Meeting, Small Group, and Retreats/Conferences a priority (Acts 2:42, Hebrews 10:25)?

5. The Typical Week of a Small Group Leader

Leading a healthy and effective Small Group involves more than running an effective meeting. In addition to the time spent at Small Group, how should you be spending your time in order to be effective in making disciples for Jesus?

a. Be prayerful

You must be a person who prays! Set aside time daily to pray for each person in the group. This will make your interactions more effective. You will have more vision as you pray for the purpose, expansion, and direction of the group.

b. Prepare for bible discussions

Make time to pray and study the passage for bible discussion. Good preparation will allow you to follow the Spirit's direction more effectively. Last minute preparation leads to unhelpful, often directionless, discussions.

c. Plan meetings and small group events

Effective meetings must be planned in advance. Core group members can help with hosting, coordinating events, planning a snack rotation, checking in with childcare workers, etc. A good group leader doesn't do it alone.

d. Care for the people in your group

To be effective you must find a way to be in touch with group members during the week. Phone calls and texts go a long way in helping people stay connected. In addition to the small check-ins throughout the week, set aside one evening a week to spend time with group members (dinner, coffee, dessert, etc.) talking with them about their life and relationship with Jesus. Take time to pray for them and bring a next leader with you!

e. Spend time with people who are not yet Christians

Set aside time for friends who are not yet Christians. If you're not sharing Jesus with people, the members of your group will not do it either.

f. Raise up a new leader

You must plan for the multiplication of the group. Be listening to the Holy Spirit's direction and talking with your DC pastor about who your next leader may be. Talk with this person about the group, how it functions, why we do what we do, etc.

g. Stay connected with your Discipleship Community pastor

Being open and talking with your DC pastor, about your successes and your struggles, will help them to coach you effectively. Good communication between Small Group leaders and DC pastors is a vital link for pastors to really know how to best support you.

Conclusion

Healthy Small Groups led by healthy leaders are crucial in the church's ability to fulfill Jesus' mission. While an effective Small Group is much more than a good meeting, the Small Group meeting is the primary time when these purposes come together. We turn to leading the Small Group meeting in our next session.

Questions of Character and Integrity

These questions are intended to help you identify areas in which you still need healing and to help us know how to best support you in the process. It is not meant to disqualify you from serving as a leader. We just want to know that you are reasonably free from moral/lifestyle issues that would make it difficult for you to lead effectively. We frequently see potential leaders who are honest about an area of sin or temptation when answering these questions that get help and go on to lead a group with great effectiveness. Let the Holy Spirit do his work in you as you honestly search your heart.

- Tell me your story (past, struggles, salvation and hopes of what Jesus will do with your life).
- Describe good and bad prior church experiences.
- Describe a time when you had to be corrected by your leader.
- What is one area that you have had a hard time agreeing/trusting at this church?
- Describe your time in the bible, worship, and prayer.
- Do you give at least 10% of your gross income to God's work at this church? How long have you been consistent in this? Are you growing in generosity?
- In what areas are you currently serving at this church? Do you look for opportunities and enjoy serving others?
- Do you enjoy having people in your personal living space?
- Do you have at least one Christian friend in our church with whom you share your good news, struggles, and problems? If yes, whom?
- Do you have any sins for which you have not asked forgiveness?
- Do you need to forgive or ask forgiveness of anyone?
- Have you been with anyone of the opposite gender, or same gender, in any context that could be seen as compromising?
- How are you doing with sexual temptation?
- Do you feel like Jesus is asking you to serve as a leader?

Biblical Qualifications

⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 3:8-13)

- One of the first qualifications for a deacon is that they are to be dignified, “live in a way that is worthy of respect.” Are there any areas of your life that would cause people to lose respect for you? How is your work ethic? Currently what are some areas that you are struggling/growing in?
- Are there any areas where your words would dishonor Jesus (gossip, cussing, crude jokes)?
- How do you handle alcohol? Do you have any addictions?
- Have any of your financial dealings lacked integrity? How do you do with materialism?
- Is there anything that is weighing on your conscience that you need to talk about?
- If married, how is your wife doing in these areas?
- Marriage and family is first. How do you do leading your family? What is next for you as a family?