

# **Covenant Harvest Church**



## **Small Group Leaders Manual**

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## Preface

*Acts 2:46-47 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, (47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

God is a Divine Family. The Trinity was a family/community before man was ever created. When He created man in His own image, that image contained the design for family relationships. *Ephesians 3:14-15 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, (15) from whom every (KJV the whole) family in heaven and on earth derives its name (identity).*

The creation mandate seen in Genesis 1:26-28 (be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth), was about God joining His family together and they would pursue his mission in the earth. This idea of family on a mission is at the heart of God's design for church. When we look at Jesus preparing His disciples for their mission in the earth in the dialogue at the last supper (John 13-17) we see a similar pattern. The majority, 75%, of the last supper instruction was centered on relating with God and those He joins you to **in a way of life**. This was the foundation of the other 19% of instruction that was about His departure and our mission in light of it. It was about **God building His family for mission**.

The Bible begins with His family walking in God's mission together, and ends with His family in the culmination of that mission at the great family event, the marriage supper of the Lamb. *Revelation 19:7-8 Let us celebrate, let us rejoice, let us give him the glory! **The Marriage of the Lamb has come; his Wife has made herself ready.** (8) She was given a bridal gown of bright and shining linen. The linen is the righteousness of the saints.*

Family is at the beginning, the end, and is woven throughout His plan. We desire to cultivate these family relationships on mission through our home groups. We call our small groups both home groups and community groups because not all of them will meet in houses. Some may meet in other locations. These small groups offer support, leadership development, spiritual growth, and serving opportunities, all designed to help us accomplish God's mission in the earth.

The purpose of small groups is to connect and grow authentic relationships with God, each other, and our neighbors as we engage in His mission. It is about building family on a mission. They are a main way for the church body to become like family. In small groups, people talk through life issues, eat together, pray together, laugh together, and serve others together. In short, it is where we live life together in family as we engage His mission.

In order to truly be connected to the House of God, not just a building or Sunday morning meeting, it is important to participate in both Sunday gatherings as well as small groups. Small groups are designed to facilitate relationships among God's family. Both types of gatherings (Sunday mornings and small groups) meet different needs in the spiritual health of the Church as well as individually. This is why every member needs to be part of both.

**Even Jesus needed to walk with a small group in order to engage in the mission of God. If He did then so do we!**

## Caring for God's Sheep is at the Heart of Small Groups

*Psalms 23:1-3 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. (2) He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. (3) He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.*

### I. Shepherding in Biblical Times

Eighty percent of Jesus' listeners made their living off the land. Many were shepherds living on the mesa with their sheep. No flock every grazed without a shepherd and no shepherd was every off duty. When the sheep wandered, the shepherd found them. When they fell, he picked them up and carried them. When they were wounded, he healed them. Sheep aren't smart; they tend to stray into running creeks for water, then their wool grows heavy and they drown. They need a shepherd to lead them to "still waters" (Ps 23:2). They have no natural defenses – no claws or horns. They need a shepherd with a rod and staff to protect them. They have no sense of direction. They need someone wise enough to lead them "in paths that are right." So do we.

### II. Apostle Peter and Shepherding

*John 21:14-17 "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He \*said to him, "Tend My lambs." (16) He \*said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He \*said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." (17) He \*said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus \*said to him, "Tend My sheep.*

Jesus told Peter a truth that is still true today. If he loved Jesus he would shepherd/care for His people. This should always be the case. A real love for Jesus should result in caring for/shepherding God's people. Caring for God's people is at the heart of God's will for us. Jesus is the Great Shepherd and at the center of His call for us is shepherding. The same Peter who heard Jesus' words about caring for His sheep and lambs instructs the church and its leaders to shepherd/care for His flock.

*1 Peter 5:1-4 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, (2) **shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; (3) nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.***

The tending and caring for of God's sheep is of the utmost importance in God's eyes. Sheep in Biblical times were important to Israel's economy and they are important to God's spiritual economy today. Taking care of God's sheep is at the heart of all true ministry. We have so misunderstood ministry in the American Church. True ministry is about taking care of and tending God's flock. All ministries should have a touch of shepherding and tending sheep in them.

### III. Shepherding is part of the Great Commission

The gospels record four perspectives of the great commission. The two most common are Mark's and Luke's accounts.

*Mark 16:15-16 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation  
Luke 24:47 and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*

Historically, in evangelical and charismatic circles, the aspects of Mark's and Luke's perspectives have been the main emphasis (preaching). There are two other perspectives that have another emphasis.

*Matthew 28:18-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you;*

*John 21:15-17 Jesus \*said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He \*said to him, "Tend My lambs." (16) He \*said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He \*said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He \*said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." (17) He \*said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus \*said to him, "Tend My sheep.*

Matthew's and John's renditions of the Great Commission have elements to them that are impossible to accomplish at a preaching event. They entail aspects that require walking together relationally that is a way of life not just a meeting. Making disciples, teaching to observe all He commanded, and shepherding sheep and lambs call for an element of pastoring that is essential.

#### **IV. Ezekiel's Prophecy, the Early Church, and Shepherding**

The prophet Ezekiel received a prophetic picture of the shepherding aspect of the great commission being carried out. On the day of Pentecost, we saw the beginning fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy, and it will continue until the Lord returns.

*Ezekiel 36:37-38 "Thus says the Lord GOD, "This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock. (38) "Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the LORD.""*

Ezekiel sees how God is going to fill the ruined cities (which can represent cities and towns that have been ruined by darkness that the enemy has sowed into them over the years) with flocks of His people. You can already see that He is prophetically speaking of local churches where there is pastoral care for sheep. This is why everywhere the gospel went in the first century, churches (local flocks of sheep) were planted where the continued process of the Great Commission was fulfilled.

With the completion of Christ's work and the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, we see the beginning of this process. Peter ends his message with many words about being saved from this perverse generation. *Acts 2:40 And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!"*

It doesn't tell us what the many other words were but we can get a good idea of what was said by how the people responded after they heard them.

*Acts 2:41-46 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. (42) They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.. (44) And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common;..(46) Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,*

They immediately began to live an ongoing way of life as a flock of spiritual sheep in Jerusalem. They began to live and express what local church life is really all about, living out a common life together in Jesus Christ that goes beyond a weekly meeting. House to house as well as in the temple they lived out their common life together in Jesus.

Within this daily way of life in the House of God there was care, shepherding, and discipleship. We must realize, however, that simply starting a church or being involved in a church doesn't mean that good shepherding takes place. Shepherding isn't just a byproduct of being a church. Shepherding takes intentional effort. This is why Peter exhorts elders to shepherd.

*1 Peter 5:1-5 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, (2) shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;*

One of the main functions of shepherding is to help bring healing to people's souls that have been destroyed by the effects of sin. David understood the pastoral process because he took 400 people who were in debt, distress, and discontent and formed them into mighty warriors. *1Sa 22:2 Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him.*

## **V. Small Groups and Shepherding**

One of the patterns God set forth as He lead the children of Israel out of bondage towards His promised land under Moses' leadership was that dividing people up in smaller manageable groups was important to their care and health Exodus 18. We also see a similar pattern in the early church in Acts 2 in which they met in larger groups in the temple but also smaller groups, from house to house. *Acts 2:46-47 Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house.* This is one of the main reasons we do small groups at CHC.

The story of God's people in the Bible begins in the Garden of Eden with His family on His mission together and culminates in the book of Revelation with His family gathering at the marriage supper of the Lamb, Revelation 19:6-7. God's people began with family and will end with family and family should mark everything we do. Home Groups is one of the main ways we build this sense of family among God's people.

Small Group interaction helps us facilitate care for God's people as we become aware of one another's needs and opportunities to serve each other. As we spend time with God and one another people reach out to God and rise up to serve one another and the community in mission.

Whether it is prayer, encouragement, spending time with someone, helping around their house, or serving the community, we get involved in each other's lives and the Ephesians 4:16 process begins to work. *Ephesians 4:16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

Every leader and member of Small Groups needs to feel the responsibility to tend and shepherd the sheep. We need to be thinking all the time about how we can encourage the sheep and keep them healthy. How can I encourage them; how can I get food (God's word and thoughts) in them; how can I give them a drink of water (refreshing of the Spirit); how can I heal any diseases or malnourishment that have come upon them; how can I get them to walk with the flock for protection etc?

Touching and caring for God's flock is job one for us. We need to be motivated and motivate others to care for God's sheep. As small group leaders and responsible people we need to get actively involved in shepherding and tending sheep. Simply getting with people and speaking words of encouragement can have a profound impact on the spiritual health of sheep. We must be about this important aspect of God's business. Also we need to examine our hearts and make sure we are willing to be involved in tending lambs not just older sheep. If you or I don't have a heart for the children and a willingness to help with children's work we need to repent! It is not about feeling some sort of special call or emotions towards children. It is about obeying Jesus who said, "tend my lambs."

## **General Instruction regarding Small Group meetings**

### **I. Biblical precedent for ministry in the home**

#### **A. Much of Jesus activity centered around the home.**

Mark 1:29-35 After Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James, and John He entered Simon's home and ministered there. People came to the home. See also Mt 8:14, Lk 4:38

Matthew 9:9-12 After calling Matthew, Jesus went into his house for a meal with tax-gatherers and sinners. Notice the intimacy of the home with a meal.

Matthew 10:1-15 Jesus sending out the disciples with authority instructs them to enter people's houses. He speaks of getting personal with people entering their space. In Luke 9:4 He sends out the 70 instructing them to enter houses. In Luke 10:1-7 they were not to move from house to house.

Matthew 13:1-52 After teaching parables to the multitudes, Jesus took His disciples into a house to further explain the parables in a more intimate bible study. We see the same thing in Mark 7:17-23, 9:28, 10:10

Matthew 17:24-27 Jesus takes Peter into the home setting to explain the concept of paying taxes. Again we see intimate instruction in the home setting.

Matthew 26:1-13 Jesus is in the home of Simon the leper with His disciples when a lady anointed Him with costly perfume as He was reclining at the table. See also Mk 14:3

Mark 2:1-11 Jesus was in His home teaching a large crowd when the paralytic was let through the roof because of the large crowd.

Mark 7:24-30 Jesus goes into a house to be with disciples when He encountered the Syrophenician woman who insisted that Jesus help her. She said even the dogs under the table feed on the crumbs.

Mark 9:33-50 Jesus takes His disciples into a home and begins to teach them about His death.

Luke 7:36-39 Jesus is in Pharisees home reclining at the table when the immoral woman anointed and washed His feet with her tears and hair.

Luke 8:41-56 Jesus enters Jairus house and ministers healing his daughter.

Luke 10:38 Jesus in Mary and Martha's house. Mary is the one that enters into close fellowship with the Lord which sheds some light on priorities in home meetings.

Luke 14:1-24 Jesus in one of the leaders of the Pharisees home healing the man with dropsy. He goes on to teach the parable of the dinner guest.

#### **B. Much of the activity of the early church centered around the home.**

Acts 2:2 The disciples were gathered in a house when they were filled with the Spirit.



Acts 2:46 The early church met daily from house to house and in the temple. There were initially 3000 people. It would have been hard to get all of them into one meeting place. There were probable many home gatherings in that city

Acts 5:42 After Peter and the apostles were released from jail they went to the temple and from house to house teaching and preaching about Jesus.

Acts 8:3 Saul as he was persecuting the church went from house to house to drag believers off. Some of these were probably having meetings at the time of their arrest.

Acts 9:11-19 God instructs Ananias to go find Paul in the house of Judas where he was praying.

Acts 10:1-8 Peter was staying at the house of Simon the tanner when He instructs Cornelius the centurion to dispatch men to Peter that he would come to them. Peter went to Caesarea into his house where the Gentiles heard the good news and were filled with the Spirit.

Acts 16:40 Paul enters the house of Syria where a group of the brethren were gathering and he and Silas encouraged them.

Acts 18:1-10 Paul went to Corinth and stayed with Priscilla and Aquila in their home. He left there and went to the house of Titius Justus whose house was next to the synagogue. He stayed in Corinth a year and six months.

Acts 20:20 Paul in his farewell to the Ephesian elders reminds them of how he use to meet with them publicly and from house to house teaching them. He was at Ephesus three years.

Acts 21:8 When Paul passed through Caesarea he entered the house of Philip the evangelist and stayed with them. Hospitality

Acts 21:30 While in Rome Paul was in rented quarters welcoming all who came to him preaching and teaching them. Hospitality

Romans 16:5 Paul instructs Romans to greet Prisca and Aquila and the church that meets in their house.

Col 4:15 Paul refers to the church that is in the house of Nympha.

Philemon 2 Paul refers to Apphia and Archippus and the church that meets in their house.

2 John 10 False teachers are no to be received into their houses (this could have reference to gatherings in their houses).

### **C. House meetings in history.**

1. History indicates that Christians didn't build church buildings until about A.D. 200, although there are recent archeological discoveries that there were designated structure in caves near Rome as early as the 60-80s

2. If you would have ask “where is the church?” in any city of the ancient world where Christianity had penetrated in the first century, you would have been directed to a group of worshipping people basically gathering in a home or other available facilities. The church is people.

3. In the early days of the great Wesleyan Revival in England two hundred years ago, John Wesley discovered the importance of the small group for his day. He instituted small cell groups, class meetings, for the conservation and development of converts. In response to a criticism of this method he wrote...”Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to ‘bear one another’s burdens’ and naturally to care for each other.’ As intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other.” If you trace the history of revivals, you will find that many had their beginnings in what we call cottage prayer meetings, or cell groups.

## **II. Purposes of Small Group meetings**

Quotes: John Havlik “The church is never a place; but always a people, never a fold but always a flock; never a sacred building but always a believing assembly. The church is you who pray, not where you pray. A structure of brick or marble can no more be a church than your clothes of serge or satin can be you. There is in this world nothing sacred but man, no sanctuary of man but the soul.”

Howard Snyder “In many western cities, the last thing the church needs is more buildings! What it often does need, however, is to rediscover true Christian community and fellowship.

### **A. Some of the truths God has been restoring that has application to Small Group meetings.**

- 1. The replacing of religion with relationships. Relational theology*
- 2. The restoring “spirit and truth worship” that is real and relational*
- 3. The experiencing of real fellowship –Koinonia – a way of life lived in relational connections*
- 4. The restoring of normal “every-believer-a-minister” functioning*
- 5. The restoration of the Kingdom of God (rule of Christ) in all aspects of believers lives, family, church etc.*
- 6. The restoring of the Biblical idea of discipleship and making disciples of the Lord*
- 7. To be a family of God’s people engaging in His mission to the earth*

### **B. Purposes of Small Group meetings.**

*Mark 12:28-31 “What commandment is the foremost of all?” (29) Jesus answered,... (30) AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’ (31) “The second is this, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”*

#### **1. To encourage and help every person develop a relationship with God.**

#### **2. To encourage and help in developing community relationships with His people.**

They help facilitate community, common life together in Christ and by the Spirit. There is a great importance of relationships in the Kingdom with God and one another. Church is not a meeting but a way of life. It is people living out their relationships in Christ together on a daily basis.

**3. Provide an environment for socializing and helping facilitate building relationships.**

Home meetings are only a facilitator. Just because you attend them is no guarantee that you will go on and enter the relational life. We must avoid seeing them institutionally to the point that they are just another meeting we attend rather than a life we enter into. If we approach them correctly they will be a catalyst to build and enter into community.

**4. They help build a sense of family.**

Through meeting together and fellowshiping with the group, a sense of family is developed. Through various group activities, service projects, outings, common struggles together, family memories are experienced which instill a sense of family.

**5. They help provide a setting where God's word is worked out in our lives.**

Often the main word to the body (mostly through Sunday morning messages) is amplified in the more intimate setting of small groups. As we evaluate the word in light of our common everyday experience and how it is applied in those experiences the word gets worked into our lives. As we listen to other's experiences of God's word working in their life we gain greater perspective of how it is worked into our own life.

**6. They help create a relaxed natural atmosphere that helps foster every member.**

**participating (every joint supplies Eph 4:16).** They participate through encouragement and the exercise of spiritual gifts.

**7. They help develop people in worship, prayer, Spiritual gifting, teaching, and leadership on a more intimate less intimidating format.**

**8. They help facilitate pastoral care of the sheep.**

They are points of contact to see how people are doing so we can see how to care for them.

**9. They are helpful for participating in God's mission and working in the harvest.**

Jesus set forth a pattern while on earth that He associated with a small group as He engaged in God's mission. He instructed His disciples to do the same in the last supper dialogue, John 13-17. If Jesus needed a small group to engage in God's mission then we do to. Home groups can provide a less threatening atmosphere, whether we go to them in serving or they come around us, to engage unchurched people so they get a taste of Kingdom life.

**10. They can be helpful in administrating service in the church and serving one another**

**C. Six important reasons for every member to participate in Small Groups.**

**1. They are the laboratory for practicing unselfish, caring love (God's love) in a real way.**

In Home Group connections you learn to care about others and share in their experiences, both good and bad. *1 Corinthians 12:26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.* As we connect in a regular way we have the opportunity to consider God and others and lay our lives down in real love as Jesus commanded. *1 John 3:16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*

*Philippians 2:3-5 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; (4) do not merely look out for your own*

*personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (5) Have this attitude(mind) in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,*

**2. Small Groups give us “workouts” that help us grow/mature.** Most people know that exercise is good for their health, but doing it on a consistent basis is another matter. Just like a muscle never grows without exercise we will never mature spiritually without real spiritual exercise. Active participation in Home Group is like working out.

The NT uses the phrase “one another” over 50 times. This is the spiritual exercise that calls us out of selfishness and helps us grow. We’re commanded to love each other, pray for each other, encourage each other, admonish each other, greet each other, serve each other, teach each other, accept each other, honor each other, bear each other’s burdens, forgive each other, submit to each other, be devoted to each other, and many other such things.

We never grow in isolation. The only thing that tends to happen in isolation is self deception. We can fool ourselves into thinking we are more mature than we really are when we have no one else to consider than ourselves. Real maturity shows up in relationships.

**3. Small Groups help prove and confirm our identity as part of God’s people/family.** We have an amazing potential in our humanity to be “legends in our own mind.” We can think certain things about ourselves which there is little proof of in reality. Jesus said that we will truly be known as His disciples if, and only if, we love one another. *John 13:34-35 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (35) "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* The active process of walking in love helps confirm we are His disciples. No one of us is Christ body on our own. As we walk together we participate in a real way as a part of Christ body and member of His family.

**4. Small Groups are the best way to participate in God’s mission to the world.** Jesus first demonstrated this pattern as He walked on this earth in fulfilling His mission. He did so with a small group. If Jesus had a small group He walked together with then we probably should as well. When He sent the disciples He did so two by two. His taught and prepared them for their mission during the last supper dialogue, John 13-17. 32% of its verses were about how to walk together in God’s mission.

The church is His body on earth. Just like your human body parts require connection to others to walk on this earth, we need to be joined to other members of His body to fulfill His mission on earth.

**5. Small Groups connections help keep us from backsliding.** Any of us is capable of deception and sin. There is as pattern in the Bible that our interaction with others helps keep us on track. *Hebrews 3:12-13 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. (13) But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

Even David’s interaction with Nathan helped turn him away from his backslide. The idea of “mind your own business” is never a Kingdom ethic when it comes to helping others. When someone begins to stray away from the truth it is our business to try to get them back. *James*

*5:19 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*

Along with this there is also the Biblical pattern of Godly leadership that helps us in the process of staying on track with God. God gives all of us leaders to help “shepherd” us. They watch out for our spiritual welfare and exercise the Biblical exhortations to guard, protect, defend, teach, and care for our spiritual lives. *Hebrews 13:17 Yield to those leading you, and be submissive, for they watch for your souls, as those who must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.* (Acts 20:28–29; 1 Peter 5:1–4).

**6. Small Groups help provide a place for you to serve and develop your gifts.** The Biblical pattern for church is that “every joint supplies.” *Ephesians 4:16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.* People draw strength from your perspective and experiences of life. You have unique gifts and abilities that play an important role in God’s family. Participating in Home Groups helps give a place for you to serve with your gifts and talents to build up His body. *1 Corinthians 12:7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good....1Co 14:12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.*

### **III. Mentalities that need to be avoided in Small Group ministry**

**A. It is not an independent group.** We must avoid any mentality that drifts toward autonomy from the rest of the church.

*1. There is a corporate flow and direction for local churches.*

The corporate flow and direction is set through the pastor and leadership. We see the direction through corporate teaching, messages, and the general prophetic flow. The home groups are the place where the corporate prophetic flow gets kneaded (worked) into the peoples lives.

*2. The two extremes of direction for home groups.*

Each group independent and autonomous does their own thing, or each group in a cookie cutter mold doing the same thing. One side is total flexibility the other is no flexibility.

**B. Avoid trying to make it into a miniature Sunday morning meeting.**

The main aims are to facilitate community and build upon the corporate direction of the church which is part of community. Flexibility and Spontaneity should be the rule.

**C. Try to keep it from being viewed as a Bible Study (thinking there has to be a lesson every week) or a Prayer Meeting (although we should pray, try to avoid set types of prayer and follow the Spirit)**

### **IV. Benefits of Small Groups – communicated by veteran participants**

1. Close contact with smaller groups enabling you to develop friendships and a sense of family.
2. Easier to bear one another’s burdens in prayer because you have gotten to know the person you are praying for, enabling you to really intercede for them.

3. Gives you a chance to have close contact and fellowship with other Christians during the week.
4. People know you well which gives one a sense of accountability. You feel a responsibility for the group.
5. Easier to share your feelings and hard times you are going through in a more relaxed setting.
6. Helps you feel more a part of the larger group by being a part of the smaller group.
7. Easier to move in gifts of the Spirit because you don't feel intimidated by a large crowd. You aren't as self conscious with people you know well.
8. More personal attention given in personal prayer.
9. Easier to have more input into teaching which enables you to get a better return on teaching and also get a chance to learn from others perspective. This is done by input and asking questions.
10. Have a lot of family fun.
11. Learn from other's lives as you watch and interact with them (such things as raising a family, handling conflicts adversity etc.).
12. Tends to foster more fellowship with others during the week.
13. Creates a relaxed time during the week, centered around the things of God.
14. Help you be reminded that you can be informal and real in the presence of God.
15. Provides more opportunity (you become more aware) to serve others.
16. Stimulates us by introducing new ideas that you can take home and study.
17. Helps get out information to people.

## **V. Things to do in Small Group meetings**

### **A. Spontaneity and flexibility should be the rule.**

### **B. Things that can be done.** Not an exhaustive list. Creativity should be the key.

1. Discussion of topic, or current prophetic theme at a deeper level
2. Fellowship
3. Meals and special meals, themes etc.
4. Worship and praise
5. Special outings - Bowling, camping, volleyball, ball games etc.
6. Teaching
7. Ministry to others. - Prayer, encouragement, etc.
8. Being missional in the world - Engaging in service projects in our community in which we "go and be" salt and light.
9. Outreach picnics, block parties, volleyball games etc.
10. Bible Study
11. Gathering together. Sometimes it appears nothing beneficial happens or the meeting was a flop, but just the fact that we gathered together is of benefit.

## **VI. Helpful hints for leaders and assistants**

### **A. Leadership is a key ingredient for fruitful groups.**

### **B. Don't be afraid to lead.**

There is a fine line between lying back, hoping something will happen and gently directing the flow of the Spirit. Beware of leader-orientated meetings, where the leader feels he must always keep things going. We want to avoid both extremes.

A leader who is afraid to take authority will find himself frustrated and things will get out of hand at times. A leader who dominates the meeting will destroy the spontaneity of others.

**C. Learn to know the flow of the Spirit.**

Leaders walk the line between making the flow and watching for it to yield to it.

We need to seek God for direction and attempt to hear from Him. Sometimes you will know the direction strongly and other times you might not be that strong. We need to be confident in God even if we aren't sure what to do believing that He will have His way. Avoid getting uptight when you don't know the flow going into the meeting.

Don't be afraid to say "we are off on a tangent" and bring the meeting back into the flow. Try to avoid letting people turn the meeting into an airing of immature personal opinions about controversial subjects.

**D. Leaders must be people of prayer and the word.**

With the added responsibility of leadership we need to be feeding on the word and spiritually sensitive through prayer.

**E. Always keep in mind the shepherding and caring for the sheep.**

## Four Legs of a balanced Small Group Chair

There are some things that are important for all small group leaders to remember that will not only help them hear direction from God but also evaluate what happens in their group in a better light. Much of it has to do with vision and purpose. What are the things that should happen with any small group?

Here are four key elements that are important for the life, health, and direction of the body of Christ. Every gathering should have some combination of these elements in them. It is much like the legs of a chair. If we try to sit on one leg it will be very unstable and unbalanced. If we have two, three, or four legs down it is much more secure to set on. Here are the four key elements that should be present in some form in our small groups.

### 1. Real relational connection with God and each other (Relational/Family life).

The church is not to be institutional, but organic and relational. Jesus said that the two most important issues that sum up all of the commandments of God is relating with God and each other.

*Mark 12:28-33 One of the scribes came and..., asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" (29) Jesus answered,... (30) AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' (31) "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*

*Joh 17:21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

We must desire real relational connections with God and each other expressed in our gatherings if we are to be organic and not institutional. These relational connections can come through worship, prayer, moving in Spiritual gifts (as we hear from God), or having real fellowship with each other sharing honestly about our lives. In doing so we help one another gain God's perspective from His word for our life and circumstances.

We must have a blend of this relational life in our gatherings. It isn't just about prayer, worship, or fellowship. It is a blend. Our gatherings should have aspects of each of these elements in them.

### 2. Teaching and reaffirming God's design for our lives through His word (truth).

God's word is our objective basis of faith and practice. It is the path way God wants us to follow. This is how we are to live in order to follow and be pleasing to Him.

The church is the "pillar and support of truth" in the earth. *1 Timothy 3:15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.*

We want to apply God's truth in every area of life. In our gatherings we want to make sure we attempt bring God's perspective (His word) into every area. This is done through bible reading, teaching, discussions, as well as reminding people about God's perspective in various areas of our



life. Zechariah prophesied about God's intention for His people to build their lives on His word. Paul quotes from this passage in the book of Ephesians as He writes of this design for the church.

*Zechariah 8:2-3 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I am exceedingly jealous for Zion, yes, with great wrath I am jealous for her.' (3) "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.'...16 'These are the things which you should do: **speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates.***

*Eph 4:15 but **speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,*

### **3. Body Ministry/Every joint supply.**

*Ephesians 4:16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together **by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part**, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

*Col 2:19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom **the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.***

The design of Christ body is like our human body. Every part is designed to be active and contributing to the over life of the body. We must resist any spectator form of Christianity or church. I have seen small groups become more like a "teaching/bible study/give a lesson" gathering in which people come to listen as a spectator.

We want body ministry! Even if a leader brings a revelation from the word, as people engage with it, asking questions or bringing their perspective, it helps everyone learn and gain insight. Good leaders draw out people's perspectives in order to gain a fuller insight into His word. *Pro 20:5 A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, **But a man of understanding draws it out.***

Body ministry helps us gain a fuller revelation of Jesus as the Holy Spirit moves in our midst. This has the tendency to bring edification beyond what any one or few people can give.

*1Co 14:26 What is the outcome then, brethren? **When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.***

### **4. Engaging in Mission/Serving (being missional).**

Part of our joining as a body is so that we are sent into the world to make impact. This is tied to our becoming salt and light. There is also an aspect of our growth and development in it. As we are serving and on mission we tend to grow ourselves as we serve others.

*Joh 20:21 So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; **as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.**"*

Jesus sent the disciples out **two by two** to serve in His mission. This helped them grow and develop. He didn't wait until they were perfect before He sent them. The mission helped them develop. .

*Luke 10:1-35 Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. (2) And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest... (5) "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' (6) "If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you... (9) and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'... (17) The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."...(20) "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven*

**We are joined together for mission to this world.** This aspect of our groups may entail service projects for others in the congregation but also serving our community on mission. This is where the body moves out of a building and into the world so people can taste and see God among His people. We need to look for opportunities to take the church to the world by demonstrating the life of God through serving.

As we plan and later evaluate our gatherings, if there is some combination of these elements in them, we can be sure that we will hit the mark and they will be fruitful.

## Leading Effective Discussions

### I. The need to understand your goals

The basic goals of small group ministry in our church centers around four things. They are relating with God, from which we relate with each other, seeing God's word applied in our lives for the purpose of maturity, as well as facilitating our mission in the earth. Our discussions and group interaction should be center around these things. Our discussions and group interaction should be aimed at:

#### **A. Facilitating people connecting with God and His Spirit through, worship, prayer, meditation, and opening up their awareness of Him in their midst**

Without a real connection with God's presence there will just be a going through intellectual or religious motions void of the life of God. This doesn't mean that we need to have a full blown "Charismatic" meeting in which people shake, cry, or are slain in the Spirit. It also doesn't mean we have to have the same format each week (singing songs, set types of prayer time etc). We simply need to help encourage people to connect with God in a real way whether it is through prayer, singing songs, or meditation.

#### **B. Understanding God's word yourself - You can't apply it if you don't understand it.**

#### **C. Helping people apply God's word to their lives, with the purpose of being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29).**

#### **D. Deepening relationships.** Vulnerability and honesty are essential elements of this dimension of small groups.

#### **E. Obedience to God through His word.**

With these goals and aims in mind how do we utilize discussions and questions that will enable us to lead effective meetings?

### II. Begin with Prayer (seeking God)

**A. Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance.** What are the issues that are most important right now for people in your group? In this way you are preparing for people, not a meeting. This will help you keep your focus on the task. The purpose of our small groups is not simply good meetings. It is for the people to encounter God and His truth, and by the Holy Spirit's work and grace, have it illuminated to them in their life situations. Ask God for guidance to serve people, to help them in their current circumstances.

**B. Resist the pressure to "produce a good meeting" or preserve your reputation.** Your preparation should be for the purpose of pleasing God and serving God's people. God's glory is your ultimate purpose.

**C. If you are overly concerned about how you will do or how the meeting will go, your focus is on yourself rather than pleasing God.** Repent and receive the grace necessary to prepare for the specific people God has given you.

**D. Don't direct your prayers or your preparation toward the problem people.** Seek to build. Correct when necessary, but primarily allow God's truth to break down wrong thinking, theology, or practice.

### **III. Atmosphere for Comfortable Discussions**

**A. Atmosphere where people can be real.** Create an environment where people are free to ask questions. Leaders need to be accepting and unshockable. We are leaders to help people grow. They can't grow if they can't be real. For God grants grace to the humble. And humility and reality are inseparable.

**B. Atmosphere of respect.** Active listening: Listening attentively to others. Look at them, nod your head, and pay attention. We must show respect to our small group members, not simply await the opportunity to ask the next question. Remember that a discussion involves people. Our respect and love demonstrated to the group will cultivate trust

**C. An effective leader will draw questions from the responses of his group.** Do they not understand an issue being discussed? Are they seeing it for the first time? Are they sensing conviction? How you respond to their responses will either facilitate the Spirit's work or hinder it. This is a very important aspect of leadership.

**D. Atmosphere that is not distracting.** Make sure the room has:

1. Adequate light, comfortable seating.
2. The phone turned off.
3. Distance from noisy children or other distractions.
4. Is orderly, neat, and reasonably clean.

**IV. Applying God's Word:** The word of God must be the basis of our entire ministry.

**A. We must have a sound basis of understanding the word using simple rules of interpretation.**

Scripture tends to interpret itself. No portion of scripture should be interpreted in such a way that it conflicts with what the Scripture clearly teaches elsewhere.

Focus on the grammatical construction and historical context of the writing. What was the setting and the context for the Scripture being written?

The Bible should be interpreted in its natural reading according to the normal rules of grammar, speech, syntax, and context. Avoid fishing for hidden underlying ideas or meaning.

**B. We must avoid subjectivism,** "whatever you like is true for you, whatever I like is true for me."

While there is a subjective element in the truth, the Bible is also objective truth. We should seek to understand what the word says in its context before we go about the equally necessary task of applying it to ourselves.

**C. We should Exegete:** Explain what the scripture says, From the Greek "Ex", to guide out of.

Not Eisogete: Read into the text. It implies something that is not there.

**D. Distinguish between meaning and application.** A Scripture may have one meaning but many applications. We need to use sound principles to determine the meaning and from that place determine the application to us.

## **V. The Key to Effective Discussions is Good Questions**

**A. Editing, arranging, and orchestrating existing questions** (if you are following some sort of Bible study questions from some material).

**B. Creating your own questions for a topic or portion of Scripture, study, or an article.**

**C. Learning to create questions and discussion spontaneously.**

## **VI. Developing Questions or points of discussions**

**A. When we are considering a portion of Scripture or another book we need to start with the question, "What is the author's purpose in writing?"**

As you are considering the author's purpose you need to determine if it is relevant to your people in the first place. You want to choose wisely the sections of scripture, books, and articles you study as a group. Base your decisions on the issues and topics you believe will help them grow in God's purpose for their lives. Do they need help in their marriages, raising children etc? Be led by the Spirit and chose scriptures and articles that coincide with what the Spirit may be saying.

**B. You must consider how much material you have to cover and how much time you have to cover it.** A discussion allows for less material to be covered than a teaching. If it is a long chapter or article you must prioritize. What are the critical points you want to get through? Build your questions around these points.

**C. Don't get distracted by chasing theological rabbits.** Questions that tend to lead in that direction may be interesting but they will not allow you to go anywhere specific, or build anything into the people.

1. If you are going through a book don't take months and months to get through. You will lose peoples interest.
2. Hit the main points of a book or chapter. Do not try to cover it comprehensively.
3. This is the hardest part and most difficult parts of leadership.

## **VII. Three levels of questioning**

Each level increases reflection and vulnerability from the group.

**A. Observation: These are questions of fact. (What is the author saying?)**

In these types of questions you asking folks what the author is saying. They encourage people to put the author's points into their own language. You can tell if they have understood the material.

**B. Interpretation:** These are answers that require the participant to answer the question, "What do you think of the author's point here?"

These types of questions can also bring in observation questions. "Have you ever seen this type of thing happen?" By asking them about their own experience, they are forced to begin to interpret the points through their own personal experiences.

**C. Application leading to obedience:** Here you get into the nitty gritty of what small groups are about. It is the place here we put into practice Jesus' words, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:17)

Here are some application questions: "Why are we reading this material? Why is this point important to us? What do we do with these questions so that we can grow in godliness and see God glorified?"

**Whatever the topic, keep in mind our end goal: to apply God's word to our lives.** It all has the same purpose, which is to help us be more and more conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:28-29) to the glory of God.

We have stated it with the author's purpose, interpreted it through our own experience and then lastly asked, "What can we do in response, to cooperate with God's purpose in conforming us into the image of Christ?"

**Here are some sample application questions.**

- What do the truths taught in this passage mean to me here and now (Jas 1:22-25)
- How does knowing this truth about God make a difference in your life?
- How can we apply this truth?
- What are the implications to you and me?
- Is there a command in this passage that we are required to obey?
- Is there an example to follow?

## **VIII. Good Questions Don't Guarantee Good Discussions**

**A. Own the questions.** You must be enthusiastic about the material if you are going to lead people into an enthusiastic response.

**B. Lead the discussion somewhere.** When asking questions you want to allow people to share. However, you as a leader should always lead and steer the discussion, avoiding tangents. You do this by following up on responses, particularly the ones that lead to the issues you see as most important:

1. Clarification: "could you restate what you said?"
2. Re-direction: If someone is going off on a tangent, bring it back, "Thanks for your thoughts on that, but I wonder if anyone else...(restate your question)."
3. Extension: "Could you expound on that? What do you think about what Paul said? Has anyone else ever felt conviction in this area? What did you do? How did you respond?"

## **IX. Leading a Group into Vulnerability**

**A. Recognize that the group will grow in vulnerability as they get to know one another and are led into the value of fellowship.** Because of sin, most folks are comfortable with less than biblical fellowship. We must lead them into it.

**B. Questions that promote encouragement and getting to know one another often prepare a group for dealing with issues of indwelling sin.** When folks are opening up their lives they like to know they are in the presence of faithful friends.

**C. It often helps if the leader is the first one to answer questions demanding vulnerability.** Make sure you use discretion in this, you could lay things on people they can't handle (a man confessing lust towards another woman in the group other than his wife).

**D. When vulnerability has been expressed, it is helpful to communicate an appropriate response to help navigate into the deeper fellowship as a group.** You can:

1. Ask others to share as well. This can be done by simply thanking the person for their vulnerability and asking others if they have experienced similar things, or asking others if they wish to respond to the same question?
2. Express support and love for those who are opening up their lives. Commit to pray for the person and/or talk to them later.
3. Look for opportunities to minister. Pray for individual people, lead the group into prayer in response to what God is showing them.

## **X. Be Sensitive to the Holy Spirit**

**A. You should try to have a sense of what areas the Holy Spirit wants to lead the group into for that evening.** As you go along you can sense the Spiritual atmosphere that may require a response. The Spirit may lead you to:

**B. Expect the Holy Spirit to help you lead the discussion.** You need to prepare effectively but also remember He loves God's people even more than you do. It is His job to touch and change hearts.

**C. Be looking for His direction, and don't be afraid to follow His path.**

## Keeping Small Groups on track for discipleship and maturity

### I. Making Disciples

We must remember that an important aspect of the great commission that we are all built on has to do with making disciples who are learning to obey all Jesus commanded.

*Matthew 28:19-20 "Go therefore **and make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

When it comes to relationships and the church we must also keep in mind that an important feature and goal is growth/maturity.

*Ephesians 4:15-16 but speaking the truth in love, **we are to grow up in all aspects** into Him who is the head, even Christ, (16) from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, **causes the growth of the body** for the building up of itself in love..*

*Heb 6:1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, **let us press on to maturity**, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,*

There are many reasons people have for involvement in church and small groups but a main Biblical reason is to grow in our faith by the word of God. When we join together in small groups there must be an aspect of discipleship and God's word with the goal of growth in them or we will be function in less than God's design.

Community is belonging together as we follow Jesus. It is being joined as part of the Body of Christ for the biblical purposes that Jesus charged us with keeping. Our home groups must be centered on that purpose. We must make sure they are providing an opportunity to grow in discipleship.

### II. Various things that will help you say on course for discipleship/maturity in Small Group Meetings

#### A. Don't let your small groups become fellowship-only groups.

When we say fellowship often it only means social interaction rather than Biblical fellowship that usually contains discipleship aspects to it. Many people see home groups as simply a place to have friends or where they can count on people like a family. Everyone sees these as benefits.

While fellowship and social interaction are important for discipleship, not all social interaction leads to discipleship. I heard someone say that "when we eat and fellowship together, the only growth we experience is in our waist."

#### B. Don't let small groups become a "serving needs" only group.

While there are legitimate needs people have and the church is to be rich in good works we must be careful that people's "perceived needs" become the direction of the groups. Jesus was never simply led by needs even though He was tremendous at meeting needs. He was directed by the voice of the Father and what He saw the Father doing. This caused Him to even be late with Lazarus and Martha (the lady good about doing "good things") let Jesus know about it *Joh 11:21 NASB Martha then said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.*



We are not called to be led by needs but be led by God's Spirit and as we are we will be rich in good works.

**C. Also be careful about using the slaves to build the pyramids.**

Knowing that helping, caring for, and loving one another is a design for the church, that reality can subtly be used for selfish ends. With this knowledge it is easy for people to assume when they are planning to do certain projects that the Home Group is a labor force they can count on. They end up figuring the home group into their project. Instead of a discipleship group that helps people it can become a workgroup that sometimes is involved in discipleship.

We must be careful with this especially if you are a leader. James says that teachers are judged by a stricter standard. *Jas 3:1 Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.* We must be careful in situations where a leader uses his leadership influence to get help for himself. It is always better for others to suggest helping the leader rather than the leader directing people to help him. This is what the Pharaohs did in building the pyramids. They ended up with a great monument to themselves but a lot of unknown slaves died in the process.

**D. Be careful not to overemphasize the interest and passion of the leader therefore becoming imbalanced.**

Using the model of the five fold ministry, each gift expresses a desire God has all the time. He is always evangelistic, pastoral, teaching, prophetic, and apostolic. Many times if we aren't careful we will only emphasize our particular strength. One way to help keep from this is to utilize the strengths and interest of others in your group. Get them involved in leading a discussion or teaching.

**E. Make sure your small group meetings are not autonomous from the corporate flow of the Spirit.**

One of the surest ways to see our Sunday morning corporate flow become Gnostic is to fail to follow up with the things God says to us corporately in our gatherings. Gnosticism was an early heresy facing the church that was very dualistic. Spiritual things didn't have little bearing on or were disconnected from real everyday life.

If we don't take the time to connect with the things God emphasizes among us in our corporate celebrations (prophetic stirrings, teachings etc) then our Sunday mornings will become a Gnostic meeting that doesn't connect to real everyday life. Remember that one of the slogans God gave us is that we are "More Than Just a Meeting." The surest way to seeing Sunday mornings become "just a meeting" is to treat what happens there as totally unrelated to the rest of our lives.

Paul speaks of this "working the word into people" process that all of us are called to participate in. *2Ti 4:2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*

We want to take the word (both prophetic veins and preaching messages) and knead it into the lives of people. Make sure you take good notes on Sundays and be aware of prophetic exhortations so you can follow up on them in your group.

I know some of you do other things like book studies, but please be sure you are not heading autonomous directions disconnected from the corporate flow. The Bible says a lot about **reminding people** of things and that is what we should be doing in our small groups.

*2Pe 1:12 Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you.*

**F. Small groups should have a regular diet that contains God's word.**

We need to regularly have something to chew on. Whether it is Bible study type things, reviews of the word in sermons, Bible study devotionals such as SOAP etc. there should be some content of the word on a consistent basis. (We have excellent studies available if you need them). The word of God is critical to growth. We are shaped and strengthened by God's word.

Relationships and even the prophetic things can touch the emotional realm that can be helpful for growth but God's word is the rock solid thing we are to build on. If you need any help knowing what or how to get into the word let me know and I can help.

**G. Don't be afraid to have a little structure to your group.**

If you just shoot from the hip every week, asking people how they are doing etc it can quickly move into nothingness. I remember as a young leader an older leader telling us that we must remember to "meet to purpose." That is the job of leaders. While we want spontaneity sometimes that can be an excuse for a lack of leadership, preparation, and direction. Every group may have certain rhythms and we should not be afraid of that as long as we leave openness for Spiritual spontaneity. Also be mindful that many people have children that have to get to bed are rise early. Sometimes is can be very spiritual to get to bed early and get sleep. Even Jesus needed sleep on this earth.

**H. Make them interesting.**

While we all have different spheres of gifting we can all learn to be more effective. Look fore ways to apply the word they are learning to real life situation. Become more proficient in leading discussions (we have training material for this if you don't have any). Check and see what other groups are doing that is effective. They may be doing things are using some material that you can use.

**I. As a leader you must be in the word and grow if you are going to be able to provide good food for growth to others.**

An always "winging it" leaders is often one who simply is not growing in understanding God's word themselves. If we are going to lead we must be students first.

## Helping people in different types of Situations and States

### I. God's house is a home for the weak and lonely

#### A. Spiritual sparrows and swallows.

*Pro 26:2 Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, So a curse without cause does not alight.*

*Psa 84:1-12. How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts! (2) My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. (3) The bird (sparrow) also has found a house, And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God. (4) How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You. Selah. (5) How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, In whose heart are the highways to Zion!...(10) For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness. (11) For the LORD God is a sun and shield.*

In Biblical times a sparrow speaks of that which is of little worth and the swallow speaks of restlessness. Both types of birds were considered of little value. There are people in the world and the church that are "spiritual sparrows and swallows." How we try to help shepherd/care for them is important to their finding the life God has for them.

The spiritual sparrow has little worth. They have no real sense of dignity or destiny. The spiritual swallow speaks of people who have no rest or protection. *Psa 102:7 I watch, and am as a sparrow alone on the house top.* The Hebrew word for *sparrow* simply means "a very small bird." The sparrow, the kind in the Word of God, is a lonely bird. You never see the sparrow in groups; you see him alone. Both the sparrow and swallow need to find dignity, destiny, rest, protection, and a home, the House of God.

*Psa 68:5-6 A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation. (6) God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land.*

Sparrows were considered a cheap sacrifice that poor people could afford. Think if you were a sparrow. You would understand that your life was not worth very much. When Jesus came on the scene it meant a new hope for spiritual sparrows and swallows. He brought a whole different revelation of God in contrast to the religion of that day. The religious leaders (Scribes, Pharisees, etc.) emitted an attitude that reinforced the fact that certain people weren't very valuable to God. They were quick to point out God's standards and people's inability to keep them. At the same time they were very poor at bending down to help people. *Luke 11:46 He said, "Yes, and I can be even more explicit. You're hopeless, you religion scholars! You load people down with rules and regulations, nearly breaking their backs, but never lift even a finger to help.*

#### B. God's House reflects the attitude of Jesus.

Jesus, in contrast to the religion of His day, offered a perspective in which spiritual sparrows and swallows were valuable to God. God saw their lives and was mindful of their situations. *Mat 10:29-31 "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. (30) "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.*

This made a great impact on spiritual sparrows and swallows. The care of God came through Jesus' life. It brought a sense of care and dignity to the lives of people who had none. This enabled Him to say challenging difficult things to people, but somehow, because of His care, they new He was for them and they were valuable.

When the house of God has a proper heart for sparrows and swallows we will see examples of people finding strength and stability in their life. It is what many people in the church at Corinth found. *1Co 1:26-27 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, **not many mighty, not many noble;** (27) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and **God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,***

### **C. Helping people in different situations and states.**

God's instruction shows us different ways of approaching people according to their situation and state. We see this variety of approaches in the instruction for caring for people in 1 Thessalonians 5:11-15. There are three specific scenarios listed.

*1 Thessalonians 5:11-15 Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. ... (14) We urge you, brethren, **admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.** (15) See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.*

**1. Admonish the unruly:** The Greek word of "admonish (noutheteo)" means "to warn, caution, to urge to duty, or to remind of obligation." The word for the "unruly (Ataktos)" means "the disorderly, out of rank, or deviation from the prescribed order." The word ataktos often was used in a military sense. When used in a military sense it had the idea of a soldier who was out of line, a soldier who was out of rank, a soldier who was guilty of disorderly conduct, who was insubordinate, non-submissive, disobeying orders, or not following through on his duty. He was out of step. It eventually came to mean anybody who doesn't do his duty, or anybody who doesn't follow through on his responsibility. Moffit translates it "loafers". Some have suggested it as the quitters, idle, lazy, indolent, or apathetic. But it doesn't have to mean just that. It can mean someone who doesn't do his duty, not only out of apathy, but someone who doesn't do his duty out of a rebellion.

In a current sense, it refers to the wayward. They're out of line. They're out of step. Everybody else is going in one direction, they're not. Everybody else understands spiritual duty, and is willing to do it. People will do whatever God has gifted them to do. They tend to be behind the leadership of the church, supporting the direction they are going. They are on board, on the team, participating, and involved. These are the kind of people that make the church move and grow.

The unruly reject all that. They're out of step. It may be that they're not doing their duty because they don't care; it may be that they're not doing their duty because they're angry, rebellious, or contentious. They're just not supportive. They're not a part of what's going on. Sometimes they hang on the fringe for a while and finally they are so bitter that they just leave and go somewhere else. They tend to be the complaining bench warmers.

How are we to deal with the unruly? Paul says to admonish them. There's no formula, there's no program, and there's no system. Individual sheep go to these sheep that are hanging on the fringes and not doing their duty and warn them. They come alongside and as A.T. Robertson said,

“noutheteo means to put sense into.” Sheep come alongside and put some sense into their heads. One writer says, “It is the idea of coming to someone who is following a path that ultimately ends in serious consequences and instructing them about the inevitability of those consequences.”

It doesn't have the idea of distant judgmentalism. It doesn't have the idea of criticism from a vantage point of superiority. It simply has the sense of coming along closely and intimately in order to show someone the consequences of their conduct and attitude. It is born out of a heart that doesn't want them to continue in that direction and experience those consequences.

**2. Encourage the fainthearted:** The Greek word for “encourage (paramutheomia)” means “to calm, console, encourage, or inspire with courage.” The Greek word for “fainthearted (oligopsuchos)” means “feeble-minded, lacking courage, or to be timid or full of fear.” The idea is to be “small souled.” The small souled person tends to fear the unknown. They worry about everything. As William Hardy said, “They see the manure pile in every meadow.” They lack courage and love what seems safe. They only want to walk in a path that somebody has paved. They want a risk-free life with absolute security. They're usually melancholy. They are afraid of opposition, usually sad and/or worried all the time. They often are depressed, in despair, and discouraged. They can't seem to rise above their problems

To encourage means to come close to their side and speak to them. Out of a relationship with them we comfort, strengthen, and reassure them. It carries the idea that someone stronger has personal, intimate fellowship with them that provides encouragement to go forward.

**3. Help the weak:** The Greek word for “help (antechomia)” means “to hold, to support, and to be alongside (like an ankle splint).” The Greek word for “weak” means “feeble, liable to yield, break, or collapse.” A weak person is very susceptible to temptation and sin. It's almost a hyper sensitivity to sin. Because of this they are also very susceptible to the condemnation of the enemy.

Paul uses this word, and it most often refers to people who are very susceptible to sin. These are the weak people that you seem to barely pick up out of the hole of sin and get them dusted off and they're back in it again. These are the people that find it so terribly difficult to do God's will. They keep falling into the same sins over and over and you can seem to work so very hard and there they go again. The spiritual sparrows and swallows usually fall into the category of the weak. .

The Greek word for “help” means “to hold firmly to, to hold tightly to, to cling to, to support, or to hold them up.” It carries the same idea of “bearing one another's burdens.” We come alongside and walk with them providing an external support that they don't have on the inside. This is an important way in which we help spiritual sparrows and swallows find rest and dignity in the house of God. It is sheep taking care of and supporting weaker sheep.

**4. With all patience:** Patience is always the important issue in dealing with sparrows and swallows. Patience has to do with not giving up. Patience is the foundational mentality in dealing with all God's people. The word carries with it the idea that we are patient with people who will try our patience. It is being patient with people who will tend to frustrate us. It is being patient with people who will disappoint us. It is being patient with people who will sometimes break our heart.

**D. Biblical instruction on patience.**

The Bible says a lot about the importance of being patient with His people. There is a gentle patience that we exercise toward God's people (especially sparrows and swallows) out of which God's strength and stability comes.

Ephesians 4:1-3 NASB walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, **2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,** 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'

Ephesians 4:23-32 NASB and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,...(32) **Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**

Philippians 4:4-5 NASB Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! (5) **Let your gentle spirit be known to all men.** The Lord is near.

Colossians 3:12-13 NASB (12) So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, **put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;** (13) **bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.**

Titus 3:2-4 NASB **to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.** (3) For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

2 Timothy 2:24-26 NASB The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be **kind to all,** able to teach, **patient** when wronged, **25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition,** if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

2 Timothy 4:2 NASB preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, **with great patience and instruction.**

2 Timothy 3:10-11 NASB Now you **followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance,** me!

1Pe 3:4 but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of **a gentle and quiet spirit.**

Jam 3:17 **But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits,** unwavering, without hypocrisy.

1 Thessalonians 5:13-15 NASB Live in peace with one another. 14 We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, **be patient with everyone.**

James 5:19-20 MSG 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** 20 and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God.

2 Peter 1:5-7 NASB Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, (6) and in your knowledge, self-control, **and in your self-control, perseverance,** and in your perseverance, godliness, (7) **and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.**

*Jud 1:22 And have mercy on some, who are doubting;*

Patience is essential to sparrows and swallows finding strength. You may ask, "How patient do we need to be?" The answer is, more patient than you've been. We are to be as patient as God has been with us. Some may mistakenly think patience means non-involvement. That is not the case. Patience is not passive. Here are some contrasts between patience and passivity:

Patience is something you exercise; passivity is failing to exercise  
Patience is expectation; passivity is procrastination  
Patience is powerful; passivity is purposeless  
Patience is vigilant; passivity is slothful  
Patience is hopeful; passivity is hopeless  
Patience is faithful; passivity is faithless  
Patience is aware; passivity is clueless  
Patience is obedient; passivity is rebellious  
Patience is a virtue; passivity is sinful

A great example of the difference between patience and passivity is going to a busy doctor's office. You go and sit in a busy waiting room in which there are sick children screaming and crying. We exercise patience to endure the waiting room because we have symptoms that need addressed. Passivity sees the same scenario and would decide to ignore the symptoms because of the hassle involved in dealing with them. In dealing with sparrows and swallows patience causes people to "ignore the hassles" and wade out into their lives to help bring the stability, dignity, and the hope of God to their lives.

## **II. Good Shepherding and Consistent Reminding**

The Holy Spirit spoke a word in my heart one time while I was leading a study time with a group of students. *It is not what you say to them that they will remember, but it is what you continually say to them that they will remember."*

As I started meditating on this thought I began to think on relevant issues from the Word. For example, Bible scholars believe that the Sermon on the Mount was not just a one-time teaching but was a compilation on of Jesus' teachings that He taught over and over. It wasn't just what He said on one occasion, but it was what He continued to say. Throughout the Bible it says a lot about remembering. Paul and Peter both write in the Epistles about reminding. The word "remind" means *to cause one to remember, bring to remembrance, recall to mind: to another, to put one in remembrance, admonish, of something to be reminded, to remember.* Consider the following Scriptures.

*Romans 15:15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God.*

*1 Cor 4:17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.*

*2 Timothy 1:6 For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*

*2 Timothy 2:14 Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers.*

*Titus 3:1 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed,*

*2 Peter 1:12 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed.*

Any involved in caring for God's people understand that they must patiently impart over and over the same important truths. Sheep can tend for forget. Vision is caught and maintained as we call it to mind with people over and over. Why do we need to constantly remind? All the enemies of our soul (flesh, devil, and the world's system) war against the Spirit inside of us and press us to forget the truths of God. In pressure and difficulty there is also a tendency to forget God's truth. This is why the Bible speaks of keeping the Word of God within and before us.

*Jude 1:3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*

The letter of Jude was written as a cyclical letter to the churches connected to the church in Jerusalem approximately 35 years after the day of Pentecost. Jude, who was the leader of the Jerusalem church, wanted to write to the other churches about certain things but then realized by the Spirit that he needed to remind them to contend for the faith that they had received. They had let things slip and needed to be reminded.

There is a danger in Christian leadership always trying to have some "new revelation" to bring forth all the time. Unfortunately, leaders who follow this path can do this because of a subconscious desire to keep people interested and impressed. It can easily slip into tickling ears.

*2 Timothy 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.*

Good shepherds remember that sheep tend to get what you continue to say more than what you say one time. Consistent reminding is more about calling people to do the Word, not just hear the word. Doing the Word is where the blessing is, not just hearing. Leaders and care-givers should never grow weary of reminding.