

CHRISTIAN ESSENTIALS

DISCOVERING SMALL GROUPS

by David Stiles

PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE



Discovering Small Groups

by David Stiles

Participant Guide

About the Author

David Stiles works as a writer and consultant for churches and other organizations. He is the author of He is the author of several resources including “*Skills for New Leaders: A Turbo Group Training Program*”, “*Discovering the Gift of Leadership*” and other training materials used by churches to train new small group leaders.

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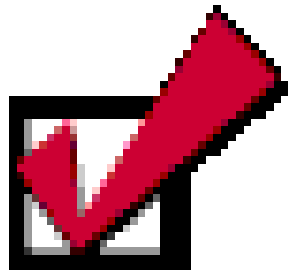
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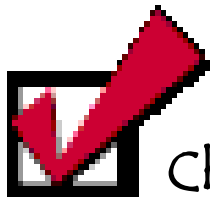
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Introduction

In this chapter you will:

- Learn key features about "Discovering Small Groups"
- Get to know others



Chapter 1: Introduction

Welcome...

Welcome to "Discovering Small Groups". During this training, you will learn helpful tools for getting started in a Christian small group, including:

- ✓ how small groups can help you grow in your faith
- ✓ a Biblical basis for small groups
- ✓ four essential areas of focus for an effective small group
- ✓ your personal preferences regarding small groups
- ✓ planning tips for future small group meetings

Our Tools...

Throughout our training we will use a variety of methods to learn about small groups, including:

- ✓ Biblical insights on community and relationships
- ✓ Group discussion questions
- ✓ Personal reflection questions

Our Perspective...

Throughout the training course, you will hear much about small groups. One of things we'll keep in mind, however, is that small groups are not perfect, nor are they the only ministry that a church should have. Small groups serve an important role, however, in helping people experience the love and mercy of Christ with others.

Opening Prayer...

Almighty God, humbly we come before You, knowing that You have called us to love others and love You. Open our hearts to You and your plans as we seek to discover how we can benefit from small groups and how small groups can benefit our families, our church and our community. Amen.

Questions for Discussion

1. Introduce yourself to others. From the list below, describe what you might be doing if you weren't attending today's training:

- Working
- Shopping
- Playing/watching sports
- Attending a church function
- Caring for children
- Other: _____

2. What previous experiences have you had with small groups?

3. What three things you would like to gain from this training? Why?



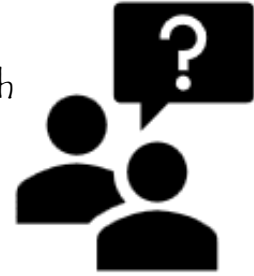
Why Small Groups?

In this chapter you will:

- Learn about Christian community in the ministry of Jesus and the Early Church

Chapter 2: Why Small Groups?

Effective Christ-centered small groups exist to accomplish several important objectives. We'll examine each area in greater detail, but first let's look at the Biblical basis for small groups.



The Jesus Model

One of the *first* things that Jesus did at the start of his ministry was to _____ . We learn in Scripture, that early in Jesus' ministry he went alone to pray, then called his small group together:

"When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, who he also designated apostles." (Luke 6:13)

The Jesus Model, continued

Jesus spent time with his small group, eating with them, teaching them about Himself and answering their questions. Just a few passages from the book of Matthew help us see this close relationship that Jesus had with his small group of disciples. In Matthew, we learn that Jesus:

- ✓ _____ his disciples (Matt. 5:1-2)
- ✓ Traveled with them (Matt. 8:23)
- ✓ _____ to minister to others (Matt. 10)
- ✓ Called them his "brothers" (Matt. 12:48-50)
- ✓ Answered their questions and explained parables (Matt. 13:36, Matt. 18:1 and Matt. 19:10)
- ✓ Called his disciples to _____ (Matt. 15:32)
- ✓ Asked questions of his disciples (Matt. 16:13)
- ✓ Explained his mission to his disciples (Matt. 16:21)
- ✓ Spent time with three of the twelve (Matt. 17:1)
- ✓ Celebrated a Passover meal with his disciples (Matt. 26:18)

The Early Church

We learn in Scripture that after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians continued to _____ . In the Acts of the Apostles, for example, we learn that early Christians:

“...devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-47)

“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.” (Acts 4:32-35)

New Testament Writers

Other New Testament writers also encouraged Christians to meet together. The writer of Hebrews adds:

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)

New Testament Writers, continued

The apostle Paul echoed this encouragement for Christians to meet together and care for others:

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love, honor one another among yourselves.” (Romans 12:10)

“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” (Ephesians 4:2)

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.” (1 Corinthians 1:10)

A Definition:

From what we've learned so far, an initial definition of a small group might be:

“A small group is...
a caring community
of Christians seeking to
grow together in their faith.”

Questions for Discussion

1. Review the definition from the previous page. What benefits might members of a small group find as they grow with others in their faith?
2. What things would you add or change to the definition?
3. What attributes would describe a caring Christian community that you would want to join?
4. What obstacles might a group run into as they become a caring Christian community?
5. What steps could group members take to overcome these obstacles?

Personal Reflection

1. List the attributes that would describe a caring Christian community that you would want to join.

2. Why are these attributes important to you?

Notes

Assessing Your Small Group Preferences



In this chapter you will:

- Answer questions about your ideal small group
- Learn key features of a Christian small group

Chapter 3: Assessing Your Small Group Preferences



Small groups reflect the values and interests of their leaders and group participants. The assessment that follows will help you analyze your preferences for small groups. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers.

Instructions:

Spend a moment thinking about your *ideal* small group. On the following pages you will be asked to complete eight sentences. Each has four endings.

Rank the endings for each sentence according to how well you think each one fits you. Rank a “4” for the sentence that describes your ideal group, down to a “1” for the sentence that seems least like your ideal group.

Place your score for each response on the line that follows each question.

Remember:

- 4 = most like your ideal group
- 3 = second most like your ideal group
- 2 = third most like your ideal group
- 1 = least like your ideal group

Use each number only once as you complete each sentence.

Small Group Preferences

Remember:

- 4 = most like your ideal group
- 3 = second most like your ideal group
- 2 = third most like your ideal group
- 1 = least like your ideal group

Use each number only once as you complete each sentence.

	Response
1. In a small group I like to:	
a. study and discuss issues.	
b. experience God's presence.	
c. build strong relationships.	
d. help reach my community.	

	Response
2. Groups are best when I:	
a. learn more about the Bible and Christian principles.	
b. experience intimacy with God.	
c. rely on the support of others.	
d. help non-Christians.	

Small Group Preferences, continued

	Response
3. I want groups to help people:	
a. learn more about the Bible and practical skills for living.	
b. feel intimate with God.	
c. be vulnerable with others.	
d. care for people outside the group.	

	Response
4. Groups motivate me to:	
a. find Biblical solutions to life's problems.	
b. feel God's presence.	
c. build stronger relationships.	
d. love non-Christians.	

	Response
5. Between meetings, I would hope group members would:	
a. put into practice the lessons discussed in the group.	
b. continue to experience closeness with God.	
c. be in contact with other group members.	
d. witness to non-Christians.	

Small Group Preferences, continued

	Response
6. During times of difficulty, I think groups should:	
a. search for Biblical solutions.	
b. find ways to grow closer to God.	
c. rally around each other.	
d. gain perspective by reaching out to non-Christians.	

	Response
7. The best thing about a Christian small group is its ability to help group members:	
a. learn Biblical principles.	
b. feel closer to God.	
c. grow in relationships.	
d. reach out to non-Christians.	

	Response
8. The best reason someone should attend a small group is to:	
a. learn Biblical solutions to life's problems.	
b. feel closer to God.	
c. grow closer to others.	
d. help create a place to invite others.	

Your Small Group Profile

Effective Christ-centered small groups exist to accomplish several important objectives. We'll use the acronym LIFE to remember these four important areas.



Effective Christian small groups provide:

L _____ - practical Biblical solutions for living the Christian life.

I _____ - in developing our ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ.

F _____ - relationships with others in the group.

E _____ - relationships and service that reaches out to the lost in this world.

The sentences you have completed relate to four areas of focus for a small group.

Total the scores from each line and enter the total on the lines below:

Totals for Line A (Lessons in Living): _____

Totals for Line B (Intimacy with God): _____

Totals for Line C (Fellowship): _____

Totals for Line D (Evangelism): _____

Lessons for Living

In this chapter you will:

- Discover how small groups can be a place of learning



Chapter 4: Lessons for Living

We've learned that effective Christ-centered small groups exist to accomplish several important objectives.

We're using the acronym LIFE to remember these four important areas.



Effective Christian small groups provide:

L _____ – practical Biblical solutions for living the Christian life.

I _____ – in developing our ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ.

F _____ – relationships with others in the group.

E _____ – relationships and service that reaches out to the lost in this world.

Lessons for Living

Many people look to a small group as a place to _____ new ideas that are practical, relevant and Biblical. As people explore a book or a passage of Scripture together, life-changing lessons can be learned.

Working together, members of Christ-centered small groups can discover the hope and truth that Jesus offered in the midst of life's _____.

Jesus encouraged his followers by saying:

- ✓ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matt. 11:28)
- ✓ "Take my yoke and learn from me." (Matt. 11:29)

Christ-centered small groups help participants find the truth, hope and rest that Jesus offers. We'll refer to these life-changing instructions as "Lessons for Living".

Definition:

"Lessons for Living" are the practical, Biblical solutions that small group participants discover as they seek to grow in their faith and overcome life's difficulties and challenges.



Five Tips for Learning in a Small Group

Lessons learned in a small group can be truly life-changing. As you seek to learn "Lessons for Living", consider the following:

1. _____ to God's Word with an _____ heart and mind.

The Old Testament tells of Samuel, who was willing to learn from the Lord. Even as a young man, Samuel had an open heart and an open mind, and said simply, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:9).

Having an open heart and an open mind means being willing to learn new things about the Lord. We are encouraged throughout Scripture to learn from the Lord:

"Today, when you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."
(Psalm 95:7)

2. Look for _____ ways to put lessons into _____.

Encountering God's truth enables us to change our actions. James, says, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. *Do what it says.*" (James 1:22)

The Bible has a number of passages describing the Lord's desire for obedience. Tragically, many of these descriptions in the Old Testament describe people not responding with the obedience that the Lord desires, such as this passage describing an encounter with "the son of man":

"My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice..."
(Ezekiel 33:31)

Learning in a Small Group, continued

3. Depend on the _____ for insight.

The Bible is clear that we cannot learn about God's truth without God's help. We are needy people, dependent upon the Lord for everything, including insight and guidance for our lives.

In Scripture, we are encouraged to "call out for insight" and "cry aloud for understanding" (Prov. 2:3) and the Lord will let us "know the word that sustains the weary" (Isaiah 50:4).

Jesus spoke of our need for God when He said that, "man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from God" (Matthew 4:4). He also described His desire to help those in need, by saying:

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:31-32)

4. _____ that God will teach you.

Scripture is filled with descriptions of God blessing his people. "For I know the plans for you" declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

Scripture also teaches that when we seek God we will find him. Jeremiah writes:

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you," declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 29:13)

Learning in a Small Group, continued

5. Be _____.

We learn that Early Christians "devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching..." (Acts 2:42) and "received the message with great eagerness and examined Scriptures every day" (Acts 17:11).

We need to be diligent in learning about God and His purposes
According to Proverbs, we will find truth as we diligently look for it:

"My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God."
(Proverbs 2:1-5)

An Expanded Definition:

To continue our definition of a small group, we might conclude that:

"a small group is...
a caring community
of Christians seeking to
grow together in their faith, by:
-learning Biblical principles."

Questions for Discussion

1. Which of the areas (discussed earlier) for growing in "Lessons for Living" might be the most challenging for people in your small group? Why?

- Listening to God's Word with an open heart and mind
- Looking for practical ways to put the lessons into practice
- Depending on the Lord for insight.
- Expecting that God will teach you.
- Being diligent.
- Other: _____

2. What obstacles might people face as they attempt to grow in each of these areas?

Listening to God's Word with a open heart and mind

Looking for practical ways to put lessons into practice

Depending on the Lord for insight

Expecting that God will teach you

Being diligent

3. From the list below, circle five books of the Bible you would like to study with a small group.

Books of the Bible		
Books of the Old Testament		Books of the New Testament
Genesis		Matthew
Exodus	Hosea	Mark
Leviticus	Joel	Luke
Numbers	Amos	John
Deuteronomy	Obadiah	Acts
Joshua	Jonah	Romans
Judges	Micah	I Corinthians
Ruth	Nahum	II Corinthians
I Samuel	Habakkuk	Galatians
II Samuel	Zephaniah	Ephesians
I Kings	Haggai	Philippians
II Kings	Zechariah	Colossians
I Chronicles	Malachi	I Thessalonians
II Chronicles		II Thessalonians
Ezra		I Timothy
Nehemiah		II Timothy
Esther		Titus
Job		Philemon
Psalms		Hebrews
Proverbs		James
Ecclesiastes		I Peter
Song of Solomon		II Peter
Isaiah		I John
Jeremiah		II John
Lamentations		II John
Ezekiel		Jude
Daniel		Revelation

4. Share your list of books of the Bible with others in your discussion group. Of the books of the Bible you circled, which book (or books) would you like to study first? Why?
-
-
-

5. From the list below, circle five topics you would like to study with a small group.

Potential Study Topics		
Asking Jesus to be my Savior	Grace	Money
Basic Christianity	Grief and Loss	Parenting Issues
Being Content	Holiness	Overcoming Adversity
Being a Christian in the workplace	How to Study the Bible	Perseverance
Changing Behavior	Humility	Prayer
Church History	Journaling	Sin
Confession	Joy	Sacrifice
Divorce Recovery	Justice	Salvation
Faith	Leadership	Sharing my faith
Fasting	Life of Christ	Success
Christian Disciplines	Love	Temptation
Developing a Focus and Purpose	Making Good Decisions	Worship
Forgiveness	Maintaining Healthy Relationships	Other:
God's Faithfulness	Marriage Enrichment	

6. Share your list of topics with others in your discussion group. Of the topics you circled, which would you like to study first? Why?

Personal Reflection

1. How do you feel about learning new things? Why?

- Confused
- Excited
- Cautious
- Other: _____

2. What has been the most important thing that you have learned about God? Why?

3. What specific steps would you like to take to learn more about God?

4. What obstacles might you face as you seek learn important lessons to help you grow in your faith? What steps could you take to overcome these obstacles?

5. What lessons could you help others learn? Why?

6. If you are a leader, what group of people do you feel most burdened to help learn important Biblical lessons? Why?

Notes

Intimacy with God



In this chapter you will:

- Discover how small groups can help encourage relationship with Jesus Christ

Chapter 5: Intimacy with God

We've learned that effective Christ-centered small groups exist to accomplish several important objectives.



We're using the acronym LIFE to remember these four important areas.

Effective Christian small groups provide:

L_____ - practical Biblical solutions for living the Christian life.

I_____ - in developing our ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ.

F_____ - relationships with others in the group.

E_____ - relationships and service that reaches out to the lost in this world.

Questions for Discussion

1. Working with your group, fill in the blanks below with words that describe God.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> N _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> O _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> P _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> D _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Q _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> E _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> R _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> F _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> S _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> G _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> T _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> H _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> U _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> V _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> J _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> W _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> K _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> X _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> L _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Y _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> M _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Z _____ |

2. Reflect for a moment on the list above. What one or two attributes of God stand out as the most significant for you? Why?

3. When have you felt close to God? Why?

4. When have you felt distant from God? Why?

5. What activities help you feel closer to God?

Intimacy with God

Christian small groups spend time _____ on Jesus Christ. They seek Him together and acknowledge their dependence on Him. Activities such as prayer, praise, worship, and reflection help participants develop their relationship with the Lord.



In the Bible, we learn about the Early Church's devotion to Christ and their desire to grow in relationship with Him:

- ✓ "They devoted themselves to...prayer. Everyone of them was filled with awe, and many miraculous signs were done by the apostles." (Acts 2:42-43)
- ✓ "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.." (Hebrews 12:2)

Definition:

"Intimacy with God" is the knowledge, assurance, and friendship that Christians can have in God because of the grace and love of Christ.

Question for Discussion

1. What word best describes your feelings about "Intimacy with God"? Why?

- Confused
- Excited

- Cautious
- Other: _____

2. How would you describe a group that is committed to growing in "Intimacy with God"?



What is Intimacy with God?

As you seek to grow in your relationship with the Lord, consider the following:

1. Intimacy with God means _____ of God.

According to the Bible, God knows us intimately. In Scripture, the Lord says,

- ✓ "...I know you by name" (Exodus 33:17)
- ✓ "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jer. 1:5)
- ✓ Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep..." (John 10:14)
- ✓ Paul writes, "The Lord knows those who are his." (II Tim. 2:19)

Not only does God know us, we were created to _____ Him. In Acts, Paul explained to the Athenians that God made the nations and orchestrated things on earth, "so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him" (Acts 17:27) Paul also encouraged Christians to "grow in their knowledge of God." (Col. 1:10)

This knowledge, however, is something that the _____ cannot impart. We learn in Scripture that, "the world through its wisdom knew not God" (I Cor. 1:21) The Lord says in Isaiah, "my ways are not your ways" (Isaiah 55:8).

According to Scripture, knowledge of God can be obtained only through one source, Jesus Christ, who said: "no one can come to Father except through me" (John 14:6-7)

Intimacy with God, continued

2. Intimacy with God means _____ with God.

According to the Westminster Confession: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever". Scripture teaches that God not only desires followers, but also seeks a relationship like that of a friend:

- ✓ "Abraham was called God's friend" (James 2:24)
- ✓ "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend" (Exodus 33:11)
- ✓ Jesus said, "You are my friends if you do what I command." (John 16:14)
- ✓ And, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, is my brother, sister, and mother." (Matt. 12:50)

3. Intimacy with God means _____ to God.

Intimacy with God means knowing that we need God. It is saying to the Lord, "I need You. I surrender my position and place my faith in You."

According to John, many do not recognize this need to surrender to God, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked." (Rev. 3:17)

Intimacy with God means repenting or acknowledging that we have turned away from God. According to John,

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:8-9)

Intimacy with God, continued...

4. Intimacy with God means _____.

Intimacy with God means having faith in things unseen. Christians can have this faith because God is faithful. According to Scripture, the Lord is good, unchanging, our protector and provider:

- ✓ James says that "every good gift is from God" (James 1:17)
- ✓ "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lam. 3:22-23)
- ✓ "God who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful" (1 Cor. 1:9)
- ✓ "He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.." (II Cor. 1:10)
- ✓ "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jer. 29:11)

According to Jesus, we should not fear because the Lord is trustworthy:

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)

We can trust God to answer our prayers because he cares for His people. We can also trust God to forgive us.

"If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness..." (Psalm 130:3-4)

An Expanded Definition:

To continue our definition of a small group, we might conclude that:

“a small group is a caring community
of Christians seeking to
grow together in their faith, by:
-learning Biblical principles and
-pursuing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”

Questions for Discussion

1. What obstacles might people face as they attempt to grow in each of these areas? Why?

Knowledge of God

Friendship with God

Surrendering to God

Trusting God

Activities

There are several actions/activities that your group might consider to help foster Intimacy with God:



B_____ – seeking God’s truth in His Word

C_____ – celebrating Jesus’ death and resurrection

C_____ – speaking the truth about ourselves and asking for forgiveness

I_____ – seeking God to help people inside or outside of the group

L_____ – seeking to hear God’s voice

R_____ – prayerfully seeking insight by journaling or Christian meditation

T_____ – gratefully acknowledging the things that God has done

W_____ – through song or deeds, simply adoring God and saying, “I love You.”

Questions for Discussion

- Using a scale from 1-10 (1 being the least needed, 10 being most needed) rate the activities that are most needed in your small group. Then, using a scale from 1-10 (1 being least comfortable, 10 being very comfortable) rank your comfort/confidence in leading or facilitating the following activities with your small group.

Activities to Foster Intimacy with God		
Activity	Needed in your Small Group	Comfortable/Confident Facilitating
Bible Study		
Communion		
Confession		
Intercessory Prayer		
Listening Prayer/ Ministry Time		
Reflection		
Thanksgiving		
Worship		
Other: _____		
Other: _____		
Other: _____		
Other: _____		

2. What activities did you identify that are most needed in your group?
Why?

3. What areas did you identify as feeling comfortable facilitating in your group? Why?

4. What steps can be taken to implement the activities that are needed for your group?

Notes

Personal Reflection

1. What would you like to see as a result of growing in intimacy with God? Why?

- Greater knowledge of God
- Renewed commitment to Christ
- Increased excitement about my faith
- Other: _____

2. How would you characterize your relationship with God right now?

3. How is Christ important to your daily life?

4. What specific things would you like to do to grow in your relationship with God?

5. What obstacles might you run into as you grow in Intimacy with God? What steps can you take to overcome those obstacles?

6. If you are a leader, or are considering leadership review your responses to the questions on page 50. What steps can you take to grow in your comfort/confidence in leading these areas?

Notes

Fellowship

In this chapter you will:

- Discover the benefits of friendship and support in a small group



Chapter 6: Fellowship

We've learned that effective Christ-centered small groups exist to accomplish several important objectives.



We're using the acronym LIFE to remember these four important areas.

Effective Christian small groups provide:

L _____ – practical Biblical solutions for living the Christian life.

I _____ – in developing our ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ.

F _____ – relationships with others in the group.

E _____ – relationships and service that reaches out to the lost in this world.

Questions for Discussion

1. What have been the most significant friendships/relationships in your life?
2. What qualities mark a good friendship/relationship?
3. How have you seen God work through the life of a friend?

Fellowship

The Bible is filled with accounts of God working in great ways in the lives of people to accomplish His purposes. The Apostle Paul, however, even in the midst of receiving great revelations from God, insisted on living a life with others.



For Paul, the Christian life was one marked by _____...fellowship with God, with the Spirit and with others.

In the Bible, the Greek word *koinonia* is typically translated as fellowship. Paul used this word to describe the close relationship that exists between Christians and Christ (1 Cor. 1:9) as well as the type of relationship that can exist among Christians.

“God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”
(1 Cor. 1:9)

Paul’s desire was that each member of the Body of Christ would make a unique contribution to the whole. For Paul, the New Testament life was one of *interdependence*. (Rom. 12:4)

“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”
(1 Cor. 12:27)

"In this way we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't. If you preach, just preach God's Message, nothing else; if you help, just help, don't take over; if you teach stick to your teaching; if you give encouraging guidance, be careful that you don't get bossy; if you're put in charge, don't manipulate; if you're called to give aid to people in distress, keep your eyes open and be quick to respond; if you work with the disadvantaged, don't let yourself get irritated with them or depressed by them. Keep a smile on your face.
(Romans 12:3-8 from "The Message")

For Paul, commitment, love and encouragement were normal characteristics of the life of the Church. He told the Christians in Corinth, "I have great confidence in you; I take great pride in you" and "you are in my heart" (II Cor. 7:3-4).

Paul even looked with special joy to the Day of the Lord's coming, because he could present to the Lord, all who had joined in the fellowship.

"For what is our hope or joy or crown of exultation before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? (I Thes. 2:19)

Jesus taught us, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Years later, the Apostle Paul chose these words to encourage Christian fellowship:

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2)

Definition:

Fellowship is the relationship and commitment that exists between people.

Small groups are a place to experience fellowship – to make friends and receive support, care, accountability and encouragement.

Questions for Discussion

1. What positive effects have you experienced from Christian fellowship?

2. How would you describe a group that is committed to fellowship?



Nine Thoughts on Fellowship

Fellowship among small group members can be life-changing. Consider these nine tips as you grow in relationship with others in a small group.

1. Growing in relationship with others takes _____, so we need to be _____ and _____.

It can be difficult to maintain and develop relationships. However, the Apostle Paul encourages us by saying:

- ✓ "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Romans 14:19).

2. Relationships take _____ to develop.

Relationships develop when group members spend time together. The more time your group is together, typically, the more you'll get to know each person in the group. We're encouraged in Scripture to: "not give up meeting together..." (Heb. 10:25).

Fellowship Formula:

Relationship = Intentional time spent + Commitment

Nine Thoughts on Fellowship, continued

3. To grow in fellowship we need to understand _____

_____.

Seeking to understand the needs of others means not focusing on your own needs. According the Apostle Paul, we should:

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:3-5)

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." (Rom. 12:10)

4. People in and out of your group need God's _____ and _____.

In a small group we can be used by God to extend His love, compassion and mercy through our actions and words.

- ✓ "...encourage one another and build each other up.." (1 Thess. 5:10)
- ✓ "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Rom. 12:15).

Nine Thoughts on Fellowship, continued

5. Other people need what _____ and other Christians have to offer.

Scripture teaches that each Christian has been given gifts by God to help others. We are encouraged to "Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) and to:

- ✓ "...consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (Heb. 10:24)

6. Fellowship grows as we give _____.

The Bible encourages us to give unconditionally, just as God has unconditionally given His love to us. Jesus taught that it was better to give than to receive. We learn about the Early Church that:

"There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need." (Acts 4:34-35)

Nine Thoughts on Fellowship, continued

7. Know that people will _____.

People will make mistakes when it comes to relationships. We learn in Scripture that it is vital for us to forgive. The Bible teaches us to:

- ✓ "...be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." (Eph. 4:32)
- ✓ "Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you.." (Rom. 15:7)

8. It is good to share "accountability areas" on a _____ basis.

One observer described fellowship as a place of "knowing and being known by others." One way to encourage fellowship in a small group is to share "growth or accountability areas" on a regular basis. In Scripture we are told to:

- ✓ "...confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." (James 5:16)

9. Ultimately, fellowship is all about _____.

In the end, it's all about Jesus. Because Jesus is love and He loves us, we can love others.

"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." (1 John 1:3)

An Expanded Definition:

To continue our definition of a small group, we might conclude that:

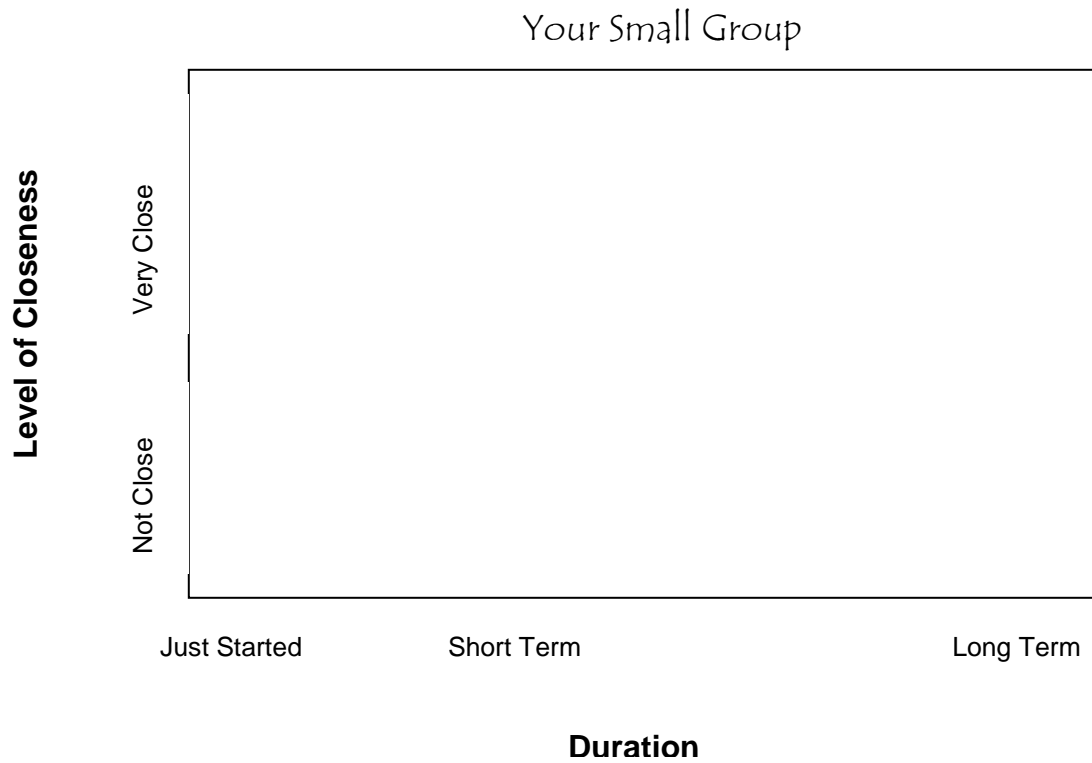
“a small group is a caring community
of Christians seeking to
grow together in their faith, by:
-learning Biblical principles
-pursuing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and
-drawing on the strength of others.”

Questions for Discussion

1. Which two things about fellowship are the most significant to you?
Why?

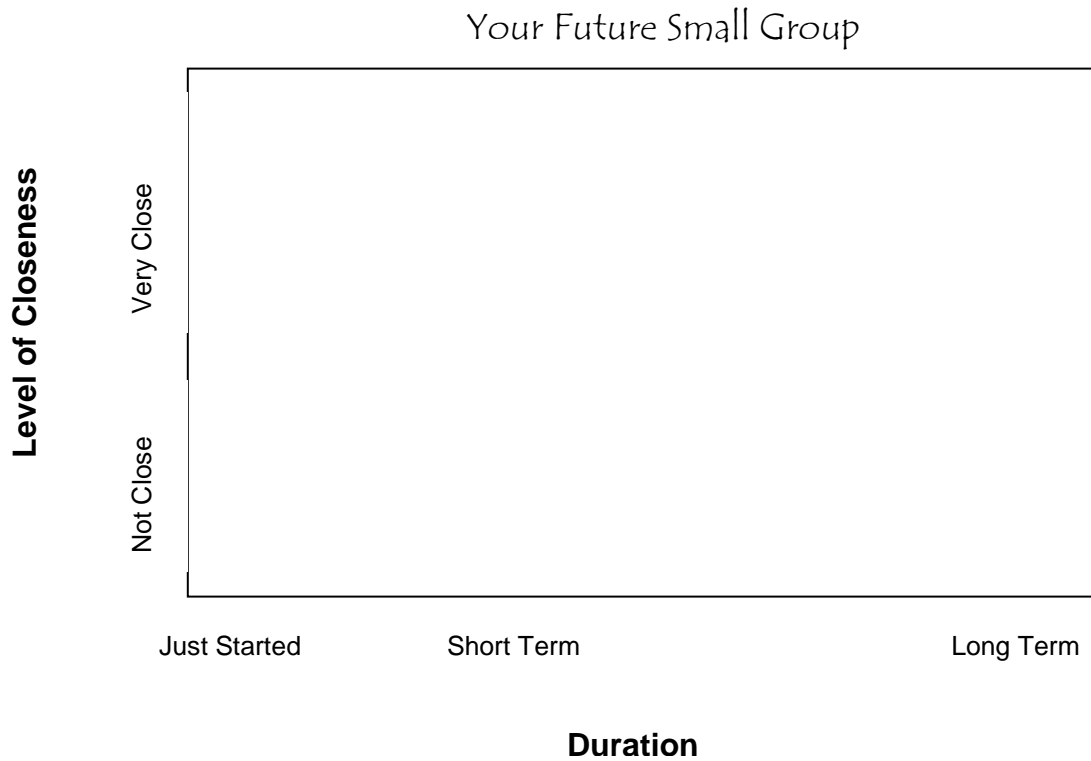
- Growing in fellowship takes effort so we must be persistent and intentional
- Relationships take time to develop
- To grow in fellowship we must understand other people's needs
- People in and out of your group need God's support and encouragement
- Other people need what you and other Christians have to offer
- Fellowship grows as we give away unconditionally
- Know that people make mistakes
- It's good to share accountability areas together on a regular basis
- Ultimately, fellowship is all about Jesus.
- Other: _____

2. Every group is different. Place a dot on the graph below to describe your group.



3. Where did you place your group in the chart above? Why?

4. Consider how you would like your group to grow in fellowship. Using the graph below, place a dot on where you would like your group to be in the future.



5. Where did you place your future group in the chart above? Why?

6. What specific steps or activities could your group take to grow in fellowship? When will you take these steps?

7. What is the most challenging aspect of helping your group grow in fellowship? Why?

Personal Reflection

1. What word best describes your feelings about "Fellowship"? Why?

- Confused
- Excited
- Cautious
- Other: _____

2. Using the list below, what would you like to see as a result of growing in "*fellowship*". Why?

- Greater knowledge of others
- Greater ability to serve others
- Increased knowledge of Jesus
- Increased excitement about my faith
- Increased faith
- Renewed commitment to Christ
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

3. How is fellowship important to your daily life?

4. How would you characterize your relationship with others in your group right now?

5. Using the table below, list each member of your group. Then, list the issues, difficulties or opportunities that each group member is currently experiencing. After prayerful consideration, describe an action step that you might take to encourage that group member. Finally, identify a date when you will do this step.

Your Group			
Name of Group Member	Current Issues/Opportunities	Your Action Steps	Date

Notes

Evangelism

In this chapter you will:

- Discover how a small group can reach out to others



Chapter 7: Evangelism

We've learned that effective Christ-centered small groups exist to accomplish several important objectives.



We're using the acronym LIFE to remember these four important areas.

Effective Christian small groups provide:

L _____ – practical Biblical solutions for living the Christian life.

I _____ – in developing our ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ.

F _____ – relationships with others in the group.

E _____ – relationships and service that reaches out to the lost in this world.

Questions for Discussion

1. From the list below, select a word that best describes your feelings on helping other people. Why?

- I am very quick to respond to someone in need
- I am not very quick to respond to someone in need
- I am sometimes quick to respond to someone in need.
- Other: _____

2. What obstacles get in the way of quickly responding to others in need?

Evangelism

As Christians, we are called to extend _____ to help those in need. Christian small groups can demonstrate the love and hope of salvation of Jesus through their words and actions.



Old Testament

In the Old Testament, God makes it clear that His people should help those who are in need.

The Hebrew people were told to:

- ✓ not charge interest to those who are needy (Exodus 22:25)
- ✓ leave a portion of their fields for the poor and alien to harvest (Leviticus 23:22)
- ✓ celebrate a Year of Jubilee every Fifty Years, to allow the poor to regain property that they may have sold and to release bond-servants from their work obligations (Leviticus 25:25, 40)
- ✓ have no poor among them "for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you" (Deuteronomy 15:4)
- ✓ not take advantage of someone who is poor or need (Deuteronomy 24:14)
- ✓ remember that the Lord is one who will "rescue the poor from those too strong for them" (Psalm 35:10)
- ✓ remember that the Lord has "been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in distress (Isaiah 25:4)

Jesus' Call

In the New Testament, Jesus continued this call for helping those who are in need.

When describing his ministry, Jesus said:

- ✓ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed (Luke 4:18)
- ✓ The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor (Matthew 11:5 and Luke 7:22)

He encouraged his people to invest in his kingdom by serving others:

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:32-34)

Jesus also encouraged his followers to actively help others by equating service to others as service to Him.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'
(Matthew 25:31-40)

Not only were physical needs important to Jesus, but spiritual needs were also important. Jesus gave his "Great Commission" to his disciples:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 28:19)

New Testament

In the New Testament, we learn more about helping those who are in need.

You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. (Rev. 3:17)

Reaching out to serve others is at the heart of Christianity. Serving others is something that small groups can do well. Group members can work together to reach their community, neighbors, friends and family with the love of Jesus Christ.

"The bearers of Jesus' word receive a final word of promise for their work. They are now Christ's fellow workers, and will be like him in all things. Thus they are to meet those to whom they are sent as if they were Christ himself. They are bearers of his presence. They bring with them the most precious gift in the world, the gift of Jesus Christ."

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*)

Groups can demonstrate the love and hope of salvation of Jesus through their words and actions.

- ✓ "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)
- ✓ Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." (John 20:21)

Definition:

Evangelism means presenting Jesus to others so that they may come to put their trust in God.

Questions for Discussion

1. In the past, how have Christians reached out to you?

2. What did they say or do that was helpful?

3. What was not helpful?



Small Group Evangelism

Groups can reach out to people within their small group and to people outside of their group.

Evangelism _____ a Group

Some groups will intentionally design their group to be a place where non-Christians can attend and learn more about God. They might use materials that are specifically created for “seekers”.

You might consider inviting your non-Christian friends to your group. Perhaps others will describe you as Jesus’ opponents described him,

- ✓ “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2)

Evangelism _____ of a Group

Your group also might decide to focus on reaching people outside of your group. This might be done at times other than during your group’s meeting. Your group might decide to serve neighbors in your community with a service project, take food to the poor, or help with a missions project.

Jesus focused on this issue of serving others throughout his teaching. When a dispute arose among the disciples as to who would be the greatest, Jesus replied,

“Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”
(Matt. 20:25-28)

Paul tells Timothy to command the rich to “do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” (1 Tim. 6:17-19)



Tips for Doing Small Group Evangelism

Evangelism done in and by a small group can be truly life-changing. Consider the following as you seek to do evangelism with your group.

1. _____ about what your small group can do to help others.

We need God's wisdom and guidance as we do ministry. God can provide insight into the needs of others.

"If you believe, you will receive, whatever you ask for in prayer." (Matt. 21:22)

2. _____ reaching out to others with your small group.

Your group leader might consider a Bible Study on servanthood, the lost, or caring for the poor. Your group also might consider studying the missionary journeys of Paul, as he was sent by God to reach others.

3. _____ to reaching out to others on a regular basis.

Regularly serving others is a good discipline. Jesus taught that it is better to give than to receive, your group can see that by helping others on a regular basis. Relationships can be built with those in your group and those you are serving as you work together on a regular basis.

Small Group Evangelism, continued

4. _____ an outreach coordinator.

There can be a number of details involved in planning an outreach event. An Outreach coordinator can help with the scheduling of the event, identifying the location and materials that might be needed.

5. Don't loose your focus by discussing too many _____.

Consider the doing the following to quickly decide on which outreach activity to perform: Pray for wisdom. Discuss potential ideas. Ask each group member to vote on their top three outreach projects to do with the small group. Ask the Outreach coordinator to help plan the event that received the most votes.

6. _____ someone who is already doing outreach.

Churches are full of people doing ministry. There might be someone in your church who is visiting prisoners in jail or visiting hospitals. Others might be serving children in need or taking food to the poor. Try to find out how your small group could help those already doing outreach in your

7. Remember to share your _____ with others.

Outreach events are an ideal place for you to learn more about others in your group (as well as each participants unique skills and gifts). Your group can learn more about God's love as you give rather than receive and demonstrate a genuine love and concern for others. It's helpful to share these experiences within your group meeting and with others outside of your group.

As your group commits to serving others you might find yourself helping to sort clothes for a homeless shelter, visiting the sick, packing and delivering bags of groceries for the poor or serving at a soup kitchen. There is no end to the things that your group could do!

An Expanded Definition:

To continue our definition of a small group, we might conclude that:

“a small group is a caring community
of Christians seeking to
grow together in their faith, by:
-learning Biblical principles
-pursuing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
-drawing on the strength of others and
-reaching out to those in need.”

Questions for Discussion

1. With your group, brainstorm 20 different activities that your group could do to help others. Quickly discuss each activity and list each item below in the "Name of Activity" column:

Outreach Activities			
Name of Activity	Activities of Interest	Chosen by Group	Date
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			
16.			
17.			
18.			
19.			
20.			

2. In the list on page 87, place a checkmark in the "Activities of Interest" next to the top three activities that you have an interest in doing with your group.

3. Add up all group members checkmarks to identify the top activity chosen by the group. Place an "X" in the "Chosen by Group" on page 87.

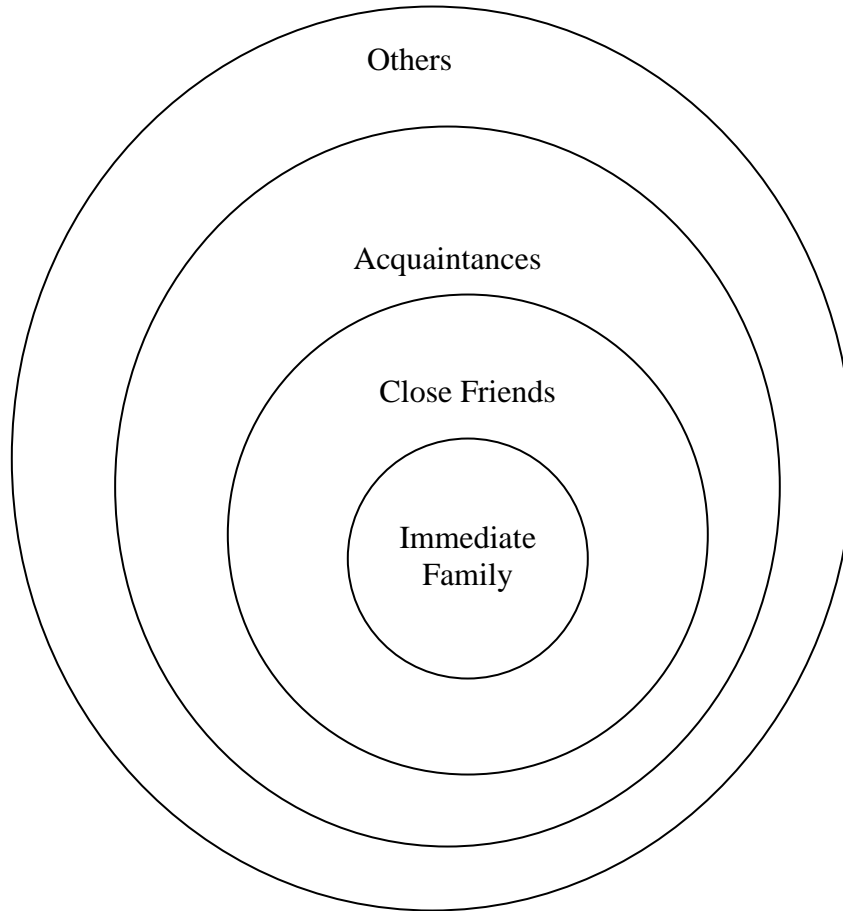
4. Identify a date for the outreach event. Enter the date in the "Date" column on page 87.

5. Identify an Outreach Coordinator to help plan the event.

6. How can this outreach event benefit others? Why?

Personal Reflection

1. The following diagram represents different types of relationships in your life:



2. Prayerfully reflect on different people in your life that may be represented in this diagram. What spiritual, physical or emotional needs can you identify?

3. What types of people would you most like to help?

4. How might a group reach out to these people?

Notes

Planning Your Small Group



In this chapter you will:

- Analyze your preferences and values for small groups
- Create plans for your next group meeting

Chapter 8: Planning Your Small Group

Effective Christ-centered small groups exist to accomplish four main objectives. We've used the acronym LIFE to remember these four important areas.



Effective Christian small groups provide:

L_____ - practical Biblical solutions for living the Christian life.

I_____ - in developing our ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ.

F_____ - relationships with others in the group.

E_____ - relationships and service that reaches out to the lost in this world.

In this lesson, we'll review each of these areas in greater detail.

Questions for Discussion

1. What things about small groups are you most excited about?
2. What things about small groups are you most concerned with?

Planning Your Small Group

-Identifying Small Group Values

Having a good experience with small groups involves understanding your values for small group relationships and understanding the values of others.



There are a number of things that people find important in small group relationships, including:

A_____ – people feel free to share their concerns and make mistakes

A_____ – attending the group as often as possible

A_____ – being yourself around others

A_____ – people make time for each other

C_____ are established to accomplish tasks together

C_____ – avoiding gossip or sharing group member's personal information outside the group

H_____ – speaking the truth in love

L_____ – seeking to understand the concerns of others

Small Group Values, continued

O _____ discussion within the group

P _____ – everyone is actively involved in the group

R _____ – communication is done in ways that communicate a consideration for others

Questions for Discussion

1. Reflect on the list on pages 96 and 97. In the list below, identify the most important values or attributes in small group relationships to you. Create your own description and share with others.

Rank	Name	Your Description
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

2. What challenges might your group face in pursuing these values?

3. What are some ways you might overcome these challenges?

Planning Your Small Group

-Identifying Small Group Activities

Having a good experience with small groups also involves understanding your preferences for small group activities and focus as well as understanding the preferences of others.



Refer back to page 16 and enter the totals from the assessment again:

Totals for Line A (Lessons in Living): _____

Totals for Line B (Intimacy with God): _____

Totals for Line C (Fellowship): _____

Totals for Line D (Evangelism): _____

Questions for Discussion - Analysis of Your Highest Area

1. Which area did you score the highest in?
2. Is this the area you would most like a small group to focus on? If not, which area would you want a group to focus on?
3. How could a small group benefit in focusing on this area?
4. Taken to the extreme, if a small group spent *all* of its time focusing on this area, what down-sides might there be?

Questions for Discussion

– Analysis of Your Least Preferable Area

1. Which area did you score the lowest in?
2. Is this an area you would least like a small group to focus on? If not, which area would that be?
3. What might be some reasons you choose this area instead of the others?

Questions for Discussion – Group Planning

1. What are some lessons your group might learn together?
2. What are some things your group could do to help grow in Intimacy with God?
3. How could your small group grow in fellowship?
4. What might your group do to reach out to non-Christians?

Questions for Discussion – Conclusion of Training

1. What have been the most important things that you have learned in the “Discovering Small Groups” training? Why?
2. What about the “Discovering Small Groups” training did you find the most challenging? Why?
3. If you could change one thing about the course, what would it be?

Closing Prayer...

Lord, thank You for the many blessings and gifts that You provide. Thank you for your love and for sending your son, Jesus to die for our sins. Thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to encourage us. Thank you for the opportunity to grow with other Christians where we can know and be known. In the weeks to come, Lord, help us grow closer to others and closer to You. Thank you Lord. Amen.

Notes
