

THE WORLD NEEDS MORE SMALL GROUP LEADERS

**Communities Together on a
Mission for Jesus**

**The training manual for leaders of
Life Groups at Gateway Church**

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This edition, April 2009, by Matthew Hosier. Chapters 1-4, and 17-28 are copied almost entirely from material prepared by P-J Smyth, and used with his permission.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

By yourself.... but it's better together!

You can of course read this booklet by yourself – I hope that it works as a stand-alone resource for an individual. But it is really designed to be used as a training manual for new Small Group Leaders. Teach a section or read a section together, then discuss things, apply things and pray for each other, and generally fire each other up to 1000 degrees centigrade to leave that room burning hot for Jesus.... 100% radically committed to being the best Small Group Leaders that you can be for Jesus!

Mix with radical faith

Hebrews 4:2 speaks about two groups of people who heard the same message – one group were changed forever and the other group dozed off! The difference was that the first group mixed what they heard with faith, and the other group didn't! So when you read, be like the first group believing that what you read is true and possible for you to do in God's strength. This book, mixed with faith can be a tool for God to radically develop you into a great leader.

And then take action...

Winston Churchill once said, *"Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened."* Don't do that! Seize hold of the truth in each chapter and never, ever let it go.

PART ONE

THE WHY

CHAPTER 1

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS MORE SMALL GROUP LEADERS

Come on, be honest: do you think that I am going a bit over the top by saying that *the world* needs more Small Group leaders? Maybe I am exaggerating things a little to make you feel special so that you will be willing to take on the leadership of a Small Group? Or maybe I am just one of those melodramatic Christian writer types? Or maybe I am absolutely correct...

Here is the math....

God desires the world to be saved
(John 3:16-17)

Local churches are the means to this end
(1 Peter 2:9)

Small Group leaders are the heart of a local church

I want you to be reading this with your heart beating faster than usual, and with goose-bumps breaking out on your arms, and with your breathing getting a little irregular, and a flush developing on your cheeks! As I write this I am praying that these words will reach out from the page and grab you and shake you out of the dungeon of being average and moderate, and propel you out of the mundane into the plan and perspective of God! Are you ready?

Why not the church needs more Small Group Leaders?

The thing that I am desperate to stress is that the church does not exist for itself, but for the nations of the **world**. God said to Abraham that he was forming a people for himself in order to bless the **nations of the world** (Genesis 12:1-3). And Jesus commissioned the church to go to the **peoples of the world** (Matthew 28:19, Acts 1:8). I mean, two thirds of God's name is **Go!**

Mighty churches make mighty impact on the world, so

mighty small groups
make
mighty churches
make
mighty impact on the world.

A high view of church = A high view of Small Group Leaders

Small Group leaders are the driving force of a church, so in order to get excited about Small Group leaders we need to get excited about Church. The church is the most important thing in the world. It is the reason for all creation, and for all eternity the community of God will be in heaven with Jesus (Revelation 21:1-4).

Terry Virgo, who leads the Newfrontiers family of churches, speaks of a local church as *“a Spirit-filled community of believers who are deeply excited about Jesus, and determined not only to love the Lord and one another, but also to reach out to the community and win the lost.”*

Bill Hybels, who leads the Willow Creek Association of Churches, speaks of a local church as *“a community of people who are radically devoted to Christ, irrevocably committed to each other, and relentlessly dedicated to reaching those outside God’s family with the gospel of Christ. The church is an unstoppable force for good in the community and a testimony to God’s unfailing grace.”*

The Church: God’s agent to advance his kingdom

In Acts 1, Jesus met with his disciples and spoke about the kingdom. Throughout the gospels he had spoken mostly about extending the kingdom. But the big question was *how was it going to happen in an on-going, sustainable, healthy manner?* The answer? Wham! ... Acts 2 and THE FIRST LOCAL CHURCH is born in Jerusalem. From that moment on, history is the story of the establishment and multiplication of vibrant local churches that become lamp-stands in communities. This is how the kingdom is advanced!

Church: The fullness of Christ to fill the earth (Ephesians 1:22-23)

Christ fills the church, and through the church will fill the earth, one person and one community at a time. In Romans 15, Paul declared that from Jerusalem around to Illyricum he had ‘fully preached’ the gospel of Christ. How could he say this? Because he had *planted churches* in every region that would ‘fully reach’ their regions. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that God intends the Church to *“not merely escape hell, but to be a people that will astound the world”*. Churches are designed to astound the world into bowing its knee to Jesus.

The Church: A cause to live and die for

Martin Luther King said if a man has not found a cause to die for, he is not fit to live. Jesus lived and died for the church (Ephesians 5:25). Will you? He laid down his life for the church. Will you?

Conclusion

Because of God’s high view of the Church we have a high view of the Church, and consequentially *a high view of Small Group leaders in the Church.*

A final thing: are Small Group leaders more important than the other gifts? No. We are a body and one part is not more important than any other part.....but they are really important!

CHAPTER 2

WHY WE NAME SMALL GROUPS THE NAMES THAT WE DO

What are your options?

I have heard Small Groups in churches called many different things including *Home Groups*, *House Groups*, *Cell Groups*, *Buzz Groups*, *Family Fellowships*, *Life Groups* and good old *Small Groups*. The name isn't as important as what the groups do, but different names have been chosen at different times to reflect different priorities:

Home/House Groups: This name reflects the fact that Church doesn't only happen in a special building or on a Sunday – our faith is to be worked out in our homes. The downside of this name is that we can start to confuse being 'homely' with being introspective and cosy, rather than missional. Also, not every small group necessarily meets in a home, E.g., you might meet in a coffee bar instead.

Cell Groups: This name was adopted by many churches in recent years because it emphasised the way that groups are meant to grow and multiply like the cells in a body. The downside of this name was that to those outside the church 'cell' was often synonymous with 'terrorist'!

Small Groups: This does what it says on the tin, but is not very exciting!

Life Groups

We have decided to call our small groups *Life Groups* because we want to emphasise the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ is about life. When we come to faith we step into life, life that is for now and forever. And this is a life that needs to be worked out with other believers in a local church – in community. We want our small groups to be *missional communities*, and calling them *Life Groups* seems a good way to sum this up. Its all about life!

But there is no magic in a name!

Some churches thought that by changing the name of their groups to the latest concept that amazing things would start to happen in their old, tired, stagnant groups – and it didn't! Changing the name of *Home Groups* to *Cell Groups* will not improve things! The key thing is to overhaul the philosophy of the group. For the purposes of this book I will simply call them **Small Groups**.

CHAPTER 3

WHY WE ARE TOTALLY CONVINCED OF SMALL GROUPS

I am convinced of the necessity of Small Groups from **scripture**, from **common sense** and from **experience** – I have seen them work. Here are 10 compelling reasons to do Small Groups:

1. Small Groups are the biblical model of discipleship and extending the Kingdom. The biblical model of discipleship, almost from cover to cover, is a combination of small groups and large groups working together. Moses took Jethro's advice and ran Israel as a small-group-based church (Exodus 18:17-27). Jesus' prime ministry thrust was training just 12 men. The program of the Early Church was "in the temple" and "from house to house" (Acts 2:46), and many of the epistles were addressed to smaller house churches.

2. Small Groups don't just save people but they also add people. (See Acts 2:41&47.) Getting people *saved* is sometimes easier than *adding* them properly to the church! If they don't get added to the body, at best they will be ineffective, and at worst they will die. People get properly added when they get involved with meaningful community and meaningful mission...and Small Groups provide both these aspects.

3. Small Groups create a context for great commitment. Commitment simply means involvement. Every member of a Small Group should be involved and committed. 1 Peter 2:5 says everyone should be a "living stone", and in a Small Group that can easily become a reality. Small Groups enable us to live out the Priesthood of all Believers (1 Peter 2:9-10).

4. Small Groups create a context for the great commandment. People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care. Even with the best intentions, if caring is left to chance, then it will not happen consistently. Small Groups break the crowd down into reasonably sized groups who can form genuine friendships. Our expectation is that every member of Gateway will be willing to join a Small Group, because we cannot promise to care for them and disciple them effectively any other way! Small Groups are the care 'net' of the church.

5. Small Groups create a context for the great commission. God's plan is for a church to grow by "making disciples." As numbers increase, Small Groups ensure that the quality of teaching, care and discipleship does not diminish as numbers increase. We can increase quantity without losing quality.

6. Small Groups enable us to obey the command to *shepherd the flock of God*. The first few verses of 1 Peter 5 exhort the elders to effectively *oversee & shepherd the flock of God*. Proverbs 27:23 says "*Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds.*" Small Groups are shepherding tools that help in knowing and caring.

7. Small Groups are where we can "equip the saints to do...". Our job is to 'equip the saints to do' (Ephesians 4:12). Small Groups are an effective vehicle for this.

8. Small Groups provide a forum to apply scripture. James 1:22-23 speaks of being doers and not just hearers. At Sunday meetings we receive 'steak on the plate', but in our Small Groups we can cut it into smaller pieces to chew on and digest together, and especially to talk about *application* in real life.

9. Small Groups catalyse leadership training. Small Groups are the place where most leaders in the church start to lead! It is through Small Groups that we can identify and develop leadership gifts.

10. Small Groups make church-life simple. I believe that 90% of evangelism and discipleship can happen simply via excellent Sunday meetings and mid-week Small Groups. If these are all that you do, so long as you do them well, you will have a great church. Feel free to add in other ministry areas, but make sure that they do not distract from these two prime areas.

Because Small Groups are so important we prefer to think of Gateway as:

A church of Small Groups rather than a church with Small Groups.

Small Groups are not just a programme we pursue, but the beating heart of what we are.

CHAPTER 4

WHY SOME SMALL GROUP SYSTEMS FAIL

1. Lack of senior leadership involvement

A Small Group system will not work if the lead elder, elders, and key leaders are not deeply involved. Please understand that this is absolutely crucial. Unless the elders are continuously living a life that declares *I am sold out on small groups* then before long we will be wondering why the small groups are struggling.

It is a spiritual law that what is in the head is in the body. If the elders are convinced of Small Group life and are committed to it, then the rest of the church will follow suit.

2. Lack of application and perseverance

Leaders that take on a small group system as a quick fix solution for care and growth in their church will not know success, and after a few months will toss out the system declaring that *'we've tried it and it doesn't work, at least it doesn't for us.'* Every time that I have witnessed this it has been when the leader has delegated the Small Groups to someone else, because in his heart-of-hearts he doesn't really believe in them, or he is too lazy to immerse himself in learning and leading a new thing, and then persist through the teething pains and the steepest part of the learning curve.

3. Lack of other essential values in the church

If the church is void of some of the essential characteristics of what a church actually is (E.g., abounding grace, freedom of the Holy Spirit, anointed and God-appointed leadership, etc.) then no matter how good your Small Group system is, it will not work. It does not matter how wonderful the wineskin is...it still doesn't produce wine! The wine of God must fill your Small Group system!

4. Lack of focus

D. L. Moody once said, *"The trouble with a great many men is that they spread themselves over too much ground. They fail in everything. If they would only put their life into one channel, and keep it in, they would accomplish something."* This can be helpfully applied to the matter of Small Groups in a church. Church works best when it is simple, and avoids getting too busy on multiple projects and ministries that tend to sap energy and effectiveness. If you chase too many rabbits they will all get away!

Our church has three targets:

- Sunday Meetings
- Life Groups
- Other ministries (E.g., Alpha, Beta, etc)

But here's the thing: *other ministries* must never be allowed to compromise or dilute Sundays or Small Groups. We want to be brutally intentional about consistently doing these two things well, and *other ministries* must orbit around these two suns as complimentary ministries, but never competitive ministries.

5. Lack of on-going leadership development

A Small Group will only be as good as its leader. Quality leaders mean quality Small Groups. And you cannot multiply the number of Small Groups without a constant supply of new leaders. Sadly, some church's production of Small Groups grinds to a halt because of *slow or no* new leader production.

6. Lack of sound administration

Imagine your car is refusing to start. You call a strong guy to push start you, and his strength alone propels your car for about 30 metres and then you let out the clutch, the petrol comes through, and off you go!

Similarly, a church can only be propelled on raw vision for a short distance, and then solid systems need to quickly start coming through the pipes or things will grind to a halt. Without good administration and systems, our precious people will soon get weary and disillusioned. But obviously the administration must serve them rather than throttle them!

CHAPTER 5

WHY WE STRUCTURE OUR SMALL GROUPS THE WAY WE DO: THE 10 WEEK CYCLE

Small Group life cycle

Typically, churches have Small Groups that run indefinitely. Someone is asked to lead a group and they carry on leading it until they – or the group! – drops dead. We think this is a mistaken approach.

Think about it, pretty much everything in life operates in seasons:

- Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter
- The working week, the weekend
- Football season, Cricket season

Thinking in ‘terms’

Growing up we get trained in this seasonality by being at school with its system of terms and holidays. Even if you have not been at school for decades, the chances are you still in some way think about life in terms of ‘terms’. It makes intuitive sense that not every day is the same as every other day and not every week the same as every other week. We all experience this seasonality in our own bodies as well – I feel more alert in the mornings than I do in the afternoons; I have more energy in May than I do in November. It’s just the way we are made.

As we are made this way it is crazy if in the church we try and do the same thing every week, forever! Yet this is what many churches do with their Small Groups.

Recognize this scenario?

...The typical Small Group starts with lots of enthusiasm and high attendance. After a few weeks people start to get tired, and to make excuses for not showing up (it’s a busy period, there’s a lot going on). A few new people are added to the group along the way, but they don’t necessarily feel very welcome, and all the time other people are dropping out. The group leader doesn’t seem quite sure what he is meant to be doing week by week, and in the end it just feels like a duty to go along, rather than something that is fun. Over time the more spiritually lively members of the group start to look for other outlets for their gifts and dreams and start nagging the pastor about starting up a myriad of new ministries in the church. There is still a bit of paper somewhere that has an outdated list of who is in which groups, but no-one seems to be talking about Small Groups anymore. If anything, they seem a bit embarrassed about them...

We want to avoid this! Keeping our groups *short-term*, and keeping them *focussed*, helps us to keep them *fresh*.

Thinking in 10’s

At Gateway our groups run on a 10 week cycle. For 10 weeks Small Groups meet together. Then for a few weeks the groups don’t meet, before starting up again for another 10 weeks.

NB When we say that groups don’t meet, that doesn’t mean that we stop meeting together!

What happens in our Small Groups is what should be happening naturally in the church anyway. We should naturally be getting together, eating together, learning together, witnessing to Christ together. The trouble is that the pressures of life mean that without a *system* to help these things take place they tend not to. That is why we have Small Groups. But when Small Groups aren't officially meeting, we would still expect the church to be friendly towards one another!

The advantages of meeting for just 10 weeks at a time are these:

- It gives everyone a **clear 'start' and 'stop' date**, which makes it easier to get high levels of commitment to the groups. Before a new term of 10 is about to start we ask everyone to sign up to a Small Group and express their commitment to attending it for those 10 weeks. If you don't sign up, you can't go along!
- It **takes pressure off group leaders**. If leaders don't have a good time leading a group, they only need to keep going for 10 weeks before they can legitimately take a break from leading. We don't want group leaders to feel that they have signed up for something from which there is no escape except by committing a mortal sin or dropping dead!
- It gives **clear, regular, points at which new people can sign up** to join a group. Joining an established group can sometimes be hard for people. By having regular points at which everyone is signing up to join groups it makes it easier for new people to get involved.
- It makes it **easier for people to move between groups**. We would rather people moved groups than stayed in one they are not much enjoying. Running the groups for only 10 weeks at a time makes this easier to do.
- It is **healthy to have periods of more intense activity followed by periods of rest**. This is why God gave us the Sabbath – one day in seven to take a break from the normal demands of life. It is why athletes do interval training – periods of intense exercise followed by recovery that enables the body to become more efficient than just jogging along at the same old pace without a break.
- It makes it easier to plan **good quality material for the groups to use**. It is super tough to keep groups well resourced 52 weeks of the year but three blocks of 10 is much more manageable.

Conclusion

There are times when we really want to put the pedal to the metal and get everyone in the church running as hard as they possibly can to advance the kingdom of God. But no-one can keep this pace up indefinitely. We all need a rest at times! Limiting our Small Groups to terms of just 10 weeks helps us get this balance of work and rest.

PART TWO

THE HOW

CHAPTER 6

PLAYING “FOOTBALL” 1: FRIENDSHIP

There is no magic in fancy codes or abbreviations, but as leaders we are always on the lookout for helpful templates and phrases that help people keep the main thing the main thing. At Gateway Church we have come up with the acrostic FOOTBALL (Friendship – One-anothering – Outreach – Teaching – Body Life) as our plumbline for Small Groups. Ok, its actually FOOTBL, but you get the idea! These five things are the guts of our Small Groups, the measure we use to assess whether our groups are running as they should. Every group is different, and will reflect the gifts of its leader and group members, but we expect every Small Group to reflect these five areas to some degree – we want everyone playing football!

Adventure, Purity, Compassion

Playing FOOTBALL in our Small Groups will help us towards our vision of being an adventurous people, a pure people and a compassionate people. It is in our Small Groups that our vision will be effectively worked out.

Friendship

We all need friends.

We expect the gospel to be effective, and as result for Gateway church to grow numerically. The bigger it gets the happier we will be! This is because we want as many people as possible to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ and be added to His church. We like big crowds but know that the big crowd is not always the easiest place to make friends. Have you ever had the experience of being in the middle of a big crowd of people but feeling very alone? The reality is that being in a big group is not the easiest way to actually meet people – in order to make friends we have to get out of the crowd and into a smaller group.

Small Groups are a place to make friends

Without a Small Groups system it is much harder to get to know other people in the church, certainly once the church gets larger than house church sized. In our experience Small Groups provide the context in which to develop friendships, so not having Small Groups is a huge mistake. We want every member of the church to be in a Small Group because we want every member of the church to have friends in the church.

Friendship is different from ‘intimacy’

While not having Small Groups would be a big mistake for a church to make, another mistake is to promise too much of the relationships that will be formed in a Small Group. Talking about joining a Small Group so you can, “Develop *intimate relationships* with others” is enough to send many people – especially men – running as fast as they can in the opposite direction! Not everyone wants that level of intimacy, certainly not at first. So what Small Groups should offer is the opportunity to get to know some people, be friendly with them, and build genuine community.

CHAPTER 7

PLAYING “FOOTBALL” 2: ONE-ANOTHERING

The thing about friends is that they help one another.

We understand Small Groups to be the most important aspect of the pastoral care system in the church. The Small Group is the place where someone can say, “This week has stunk!” and have others pray for them and help them practically. Pastoral care cannot happen primarily through paid professionals chasing around after us – it happens as a group of friends talk and pray together about their joys and struggles. If you are not in a Small Group it is going to be hard to care for you.

The Bible contains many exhortations to “one-another” one another. We are told to:

- Love one another
- Encourage one another
- Instruct one another
- Live in harmony with one another
- Welcome one another
- Greet one another
- Care for one another
- Comfort one another
- Agree with one another
- Serve one another
- Bear one another’s burdens
- Bear with one another in love
- Be kind to one another
- Be tenderhearted towards one another
- Be forgiving to one another
- Sing to one another
- Submit to one another
- Teach one another
- Admonish one another
- Exhort one another
- Stir up one another to love and good works
- Confess your sins to one another
- Pray for one another
- Show hospitality to one another
- Serve one another
- Show humility to one another

Thoroughly working through this list of *one-anotherings* would keep any Small Group busy indefinitely!

These are all things that cannot happen at a distance – they have to happen up close, and that means they must happen in a Small Group, amongst friends. We want to build community on a mission for Jesus. On this mission we must one-another one another. Only Small Groups can do this effectively.

CHAPTER 8

PLAYING “FOOTBALL” 3: OUTREACH

If there is one word we would use to sum up what the church is about it is, “Mission!” Outreach has to be at the centre of our Small Groups because it is central to Jesus’ plan for his church. He has commissioned us to *“Go! and make disciples of all nations.”*

Small Groups can be visualised like an aircraft: One wing is more relational (Friendships, One-anothering) while the other is more activity based (Teaching, Body Life). But central to Small Groups – the fuselage – is mission (Outreach). Without the fuselage the wings would drop off and the plane wouldn’t go anywhere! This is one of the reasons that people in churches that try to focus most on pastoral care tend to complain most that they are not being cared for. If the church isn’t *going*, even if every church member had their own personal pastor, there would still be a sense of discontent. We are meant to be on the move, and will be forever ineffective and grouchy if we are not.

Mission is the pivot around which Small Groups must be centred.

Every believer a missionary

There is a mistaken view that missionaries are people working on their own in foreign countries to whom we occasionally send some money. Wrong! Mission is something that happens when communities of believers (churches) commit together to make the gospel known right where they are.

Part of this mission is sending people to start new communities on a mission for Jesus in other nations. We are passionate about this! But those of us who do not go to another nation are to *go* to our neighbours in the place where we live. Every one of us is called to be a missionary right where we are, and Small Groups must facilitate this.

Communities on a mission together for Jesus

We want all of our Small Groups to operate as a missionary team. This means being intentional in thinking about how to communicate the gospel with those around us. Imagine you were going to be a missionary in Africa – the kind of things you would want to think about are these:

- What criteria would you use to decide where to live?
- How would you approach secular employment?
- What standard of living would you expect as pioneer missionaries?
- What would you spend your time doing?
- What opportunities would you be looking for?
- What would your prayers be like?
- What would you be trying to do with your new friends?
- What kind of team would you want around you?
- How would you conduct your meetings together?

The thing is, you also want to think this way in reaching out to the people where you are living right now!

There needs to be a shift of mindset so that we don’t only see mission as something other people do in other countries, and so we don’t think of outreach only in terms of something like

bringing people to the Alpha course. We are to be people on a mission! Our whole lives should be an outreach event!

Small Groups can engage in mission simply by being friends with those who don't know Jesus, and helping those friends see the truth of Jesus' story worked out in the lives of believers. There are specific things we can do, like inviting friends to a baptismal service on a Sunday, but we mustn't limit outreach to this.

Declaration, Invitation, Incarnation

These three words sum up different ways that we do mission.

1. Declaration is when we state what it is we believe about Jesus. There are times when this is an appropriate approach. It is what Peter did on the day of Pentecost, when 3,000 responded. It is what I do when I preach.

2. Invitation is when we ask someone to explore what we believe or to come along to an 'outreach event' that the church is running. This is what we do when we ask someone to come to Alpha.

3. Incarnation is what we do when we display the gospel through the way that we live. Jesus became *incarnate* when he took on human flesh. In the same way we must take on and live out the gospel so that people see its truth and reality in us. Small Groups should make the gospel incarnate. The *body* makes the message real! This is how we do mission!

CHAPTER 9

PLAYING “FOOTBALL” 4: TEACHING

When Jesus commissioned the disciples to “Go!” he told them to go “teaching” (Matthew 28:20). Teaching is a core activity of church life. At our Sunday services we devote a considerable part of the meeting to teaching, but this then needs to be applied and worked out in our lives. The best place for this application is in a Small Group, where there is the time and space to discuss the Word of God together, and help one another be true to it.

We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments in their original writing are fully inspired by God and accept them as the supreme and final authority for faith and life.

In addition to being birthed through a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit, the church was also born into a devotion to the word of God. Not only are we passionate and intentional in pursuing the things of the Spirit, but we are equally devoted to sound theology and doctrine. Philip’s first question to the Ethiopian was not, “Do you *feel* it?” but, “Do you **understand**?”

So fundamental was the spread of the Word in the New Testament church that Luke described the growth of the church in these terms: ***The word of God spread*** (Acts 6:7); ***The word of the Lord continued to increase and spread*** (Acts 12:24); ***The word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power*** (Acts 19:20). Luke could have said that the churches multiplied, or that the number of disciples grew, but on these occasions, he spoke about the ever-increasing impact of the **word** of God.

Even after his resurrection, fully equipped with a body that could appear and disappear at will, Jesus did not overwhelm his disciples with supernatural tricks, but, opening the Scriptures, *explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself* (Luke 24:27). This was consistent with his earlier ministry in which we read, *Jesus saw a large crowd and had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began **teaching** them many things* (Mark 6:34).

Teaching isn’t an optional extra in church life. It is absolutely essential. We want our Small Groups to be a place where we learn together and teach one another.

CHAPTER 10

PLAYING “FOOTBALL” 5: BODY LIFE

Every believer is called to be a minister (2 Corinthians 5) and every believer is to be equipped to minister (Ephesians 4). Small Groups are the perfect place for us to do this. In a Small Group there should be an experience of spiritual gifts, of prayer, of worship. Small Group is where we get to practice our gifts, and where no-one minds if we make a mess of things and fall on our faces – our friends will be there to pick us up again!

Here is a check list of what we believe about spiritual gifts to encourage you in their use in your Small Group:

- A spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church. That's *any* gift, not just the 'supernatural' ones.
- Only believers have spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 2:14). Non-believers have gifts, but they are not spiritual in the sense that they are used in response to the Spirit and to the glory of God.
- Every Christian has at least one gift (1 Corinthians 7:7).
- No-one receives all the gifts (1 Corinthians 12:27-30).
- No single gift is given to everyone (1 Corinthians 12:29-30).
- Gifts are given by God in grace. I cannot earn or work for a spiritual gift (Ephesians 4:7).
- The Holy Spirit decides what gifts I get (1 Corinthians 12:11).
- I am to develop the gifts God gives me (1 Timothy 4:14).
- It is a sin to waste the gifts God gives me (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).
- Using my gifts glorifies God and grows me (John 15:8).
- Spiritual gifts are not for my benefit but for others (1 Peter 4:10).
- Spiritual gifts are given to produce maturity and stability in our church family (Ephesians 4:11-14).
- Each of us is called to serve primarily in the areas where we are *gifted*, and secondarily in the areas where we are *needed*.
- Be aware of the “gift projection” tendency. This is when we expect others to serve the way we do and have similar results. By God's grace all of us are different!
- Using my gifts without love is worthless (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)!
- It is easier to discover your gift through ministry than to discover your ministry through your gift. In other words, don't sit around waiting for spiritual gifts to drop on you from heaven. Instead, start serving and see what gifts God releases in you.

From this check list you should be able to see why Small Groups are the ideal place to use our spiritual gifts. In Small Groups we can use the more *practical* gifts such as leadership, administration, and serving. We can also use the more obviously *supernatural* gifts like tongues, prophecy and healing.

We encourage every church member to serve in some practical way at our Sunday meetings at least once a month, and we expect spiritual gifts to be exercised during our meetings. This is important, but Small Groups are the place where more people can feel more directly involved.

Small Groups are where we do *Body Life*.

CHAPTER 11

PLAYING FOOTBALL WITH RHYTHM, 1: STORY

Further on in this manual I give lots of practical guidance as to how you can run a successful Small Group meeting. The trouble is, it is all too easy to get focussed just on the *meeting* when what we want our Small Groups to do is develop *community on a mission for Jesus*. In order to do this there are six “rhythms” we want every Small Group to pulse with.

Learning to tell stories

Everyone loves a good story, and Small Groups should be a place where we can tell our stories, as part of the bigger story of what God has called us in to.

A love of stories is not something we have to learn – it is just hardwired into human nature. My children have loved stories from as soon as they were able to communicate in any meaningful way. At first the stories children love are very simple – ‘duck goes for a swim’ – but quickly the stories get longer and more complicated. Small children (very irritatingly!) love to hear the same story over and over again. As we get older we like to hear the same story strung out over a long time, as in a two hour movie or a novel, or even over a lifetime, as with *Coronation Street!* Some of the best moments in my family are when someone says, “Remember when...” Stories are important to us.

The big story

There are many types of story, and they can take many different forms, but they can all be pretty much boiled down to just two broad categories: The *Love Story*, and the *Rescue Story*. Everyone’s personal story will contain elements of these types of story, and everyone’s personal story can at some point be connected with the story of God:

The Love story: *Boy meets girl. Fall in love. Live happily ever after.*

This is probably the most common story of all, and is told and retold in countless forms from ‘high culture’ (*Romeo & Juliet*) to ‘folk culture’ (*Snow White*) to ‘pop culture’ (*Sleepless in Seattle*).

Most people’s stories will contain a lot of this story, because it is the story of relationships. Everyone has a story to tell of love fulfilled, broken or unrequited. This is the story that fills acres of newspaper print and celebrity magazines. It is the story other people tell us whenever we sit down together and say, “Tell me about yourself...”

The love story is also the story of the Bible because God’s story is about him winning for himself a bride, the love of his life, who he will lavish his love on forever. From Genesis to Revelation the story is all about a God of love and the consequences of that love. Out of the overflow of his love God created the universe and people to fill it. Out of love God pursues relationship with these people, even when they sin and mess everything up. Out of love God chooses a people for himself – Israel. Out of love God remains faithful to Israel, even when she divorces him. Out of love God comes to the earth in Jesus Christ to win his bride back for himself. The climax of the whole story is a wedding feast when Jesus and his Bride are at last brought together in the new heavens and earth.

Of all the types of story there are, this is really the one big story, because every other story is really in some way about our search for love.

The Rescue story: *Boy meets girl. Fall in love. Girl captured by evil monster. Boy kills monster, gets girl. Live happily ever after.*

Many of our most popular movies and TV shows are rescue stories: *Die Hard*, *24*, *The Matrix*. A hero does something impossible and saves the day. Often the story ends with him getting the girl, but it might be something more than that, like Oscar Schindler rescuing hundreds of Jews from the gas chamber.

This story connects with us so powerfully because many of us (especially men) indulge a fantasy to do something heroic, and because in some way all of us need rescuing (from addictions, disappointment, mundane jobs, debt, etc.)

This is also a Bible story because Jesus is our great hero who rescues us from our most deadly enemy – Sin and death. Jesus does the impossible in going to the cross, but, just as the closing credits are about to roll, he bursts back into life unconquered and undimmed. The last enemy to be destroyed, as 1 Corinthians says, is death. This is the big one. In films, the last enemy to be destroyed is always the head villain (it wouldn't be quite the same if Alan Rickman died half way through *Die Hard*, or if Jack Bauer killed the chief terrorist by 11am). The last enemy is always the most dangerous villain of all, and the reason why the other villains are there. It's the same in Scripture. Death is the biggest of the enemies and the explanation for the others. If there was no death, there wouldn't be any war or injustice or fear or sickness. So if you can abolish death, you can totally strip all the other enemies of their power.

And that's the Gospel of Jesus and resurrection. On Easter Sunday, the biggest of all the villains was totally and completely undone. The tomb was empty, and it still is. And that means that at least one person has conquered the grave, smashed the last enemy, and overturned the curse of death that has afflicted every human since time began. A champion only has to be killed once. Death had a pretty strong track record, until it faced Jesus, to whom it had no answer whatsoever. His resurrection life was simply too powerful. So, as Paul taunted: "*Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O grave, is your sting?*" (1 Corinthians 15:55).

Telling our stories

Every other type of story there is (tragedy, comedy, parable, myth, legend, biography, fairytale, fable, mystery, whodunit, epic, etc.) will contain at some point these two greater stories.

The way that we get to know people is by listening to their stories. In our Small Groups we need to listen to one another's tales of love and rescue. We need to share together the stories of what God has done for us, and we need to help others see how God's great story connects to their personal story. We need to help people see that they can actually become part of the story of God – that he is the one who loves them, and can rescue them.

What a story!

CHAPTER 12

PLAYING FOOTBALL WITH RHYTHM, 2: LISTEN

As well as telling our own stories we need to learn to listen to one another, and to the stories of the people around us.

Everyone has a story, and that story can always be connected in some way to God's story. I got talking recently with a young woman in a coffee shop who told me something of the story of her life – how she had been let down by her parents, how her children had been placed in the custody of her previous partner, how her life was boring and empty. She was a classic case of someone who needed to be connected to the story of God – to a story of love and a story of rescue.

Jesus often listened to peoples stories, and then responded to their issues with a story of his own. Think about the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)...

A lawyer came to test Jesus, and asked him, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

What is the story here? What can we guess about this man? We are not told much about him, but from his occupation and his question we can discern something about his story. As he was a lawyer we can guess he was used to being right – at least in his own eyes – and that he had a well developed sense of his own self-sufficiency. From his question we can guess that he had a certain sense of superiority – he was here to test the orthodoxy and logic of this upstart builder from Nazareth.

We can guess that this man was low on love.

Jesus doesn't respond to this man with arguments of fact or logic. Instead he tells a story – a story that will force the lawyer to a logical conclusion, even though it is not the conclusion he wants to reach, and that will expose his need to step into the story of God's love and rescue.

"Which of these three – the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan – was a neighbour to the wounded man?"

"The one who showed him mercy."

Jesus said, "You go, and do likewise."

The woman I talked to in the coffee shop didn't suddenly fall on her knees in repentance and gratitude to Jesus. There is no record that the lawyer was converted by Jesus' story of the good Samaritan. But it is by listening to other peoples stories that we can begin to tell stories of our own about the goodness and greatness of God, and by these stories draw others closer to God.

There is a real skill in story telling, and a real skill in listening. I am often not very good at either. Often I think, *"This is how I should have told the story"* the day after I have been listening to someone! But as a community of God's people we can together learn to listen and to tell. The evidence of our lives will tell its own story, even if at times our ears and our mouths fail us.

In our Small Groups we want there to be space for people to tell their stories, and for the group to disciple one another by connecting the story of the gospel to our own experiences. For every story we have to tell there is a gospel application: *You've had a tough week; you're struggling*

with an addiction; you've suffered abuse; you feel let down – how does a story of love connect with this? How does a story of rescue offer you a way through?

And as we listen to the stories told in our town we will begin to work out how we can apply the gospel to our neighbours. As we listen we will ask questions: *What is that people are talking about? What concerns do they have? What are their hopes and ambitions? Where do they get their sense of identity?* And we will find that the gospel offers the best answers to all these questions.

Listen!

CHAPTER 13

PLAYING FOOTBALL WITH RHYTHM, 3: CELEBRATE

Christians should be good at celebrating.

Reasons to party

Of all people on the earth we have the most reason to celebrate. We have received the grace of God; we have been forgiven, justified, redeemed; we have a sure and certain hope of life forever with Jesus; we have stepped from death into life and from darkness to light; we are inheritors of the promises and co-heirs with Christ. *We are Good News people!*

We see this **inclination to celebration** in the story of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin and Prodigal Son, in Luke 15:

What woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

God rejoices over us, which means we are free to rejoice as well. Our Christian joy should not be so deep that no-one can ever find it! Instead, we need to find as many excuses as we can to throw a party!

Celebration stories

Celebrating is good not only because it is fun, but because people celebrate when they have a story to tell. If we are going to be good at telling and listening to stories we need to be good at throwing parties! Think about it – people celebrate when:

- They pass an exam
- They get married
- They get a promotion
- They have a baby
- They reach 18

All of these reasons to celebrate tell a story: *"I worked hard and passed this exam!" "We fell in love and now we're going to live happily ever after!" "I'm no longer a child – you've got to take me seriously!"* When we celebrate these things we open a door for story telling, and so open a door for the story of the gospel.

We should look for every opportunity to celebrate, both with the people in our Small Groups and with those who don't yet know Christ. **Wouldn't it be great if we had the reputation for being the most fun people in our street!**

Learning to say "thank you!"

Celebrating is also great because it helps us learn to be thankful people. If we are always on the lookout for an excuse for a party we will be much quicker to give thanks to God for all his grace to us. In your Small Group celebrate every birthday, every wedding anniversary, every exam passed, every baby born, every engagement announced, every lost coin found.

CHAPTER 14

PLAYING FOOTBALL WITH RHYTHM, 4: BLESS

When we learn to live in constant gratitude towards God, and to be a party throwing people, we will be a blessing to the earth. *Blessing* is a somewhat alien concept in our culture, but it is a theme that runs strong and true through Scripture...

It all begins and ends with blessing

The opening scene of the story contains a blessing: *God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth..."* (Genesis 1:28) Adam and Eve step out from this blessing when they choose sin over obedience, but **God's blessing is not thwarted by sin**. His plan is still to gather a people for himself – a people who will know his blessing and be a blessing. Hence the great covenant promise to Abraham, *"I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing."* (Genesis 12:2)

As Christ followers we have entered this covenant of blessing, because we are now counted as children of Abraham (Galatians 3:7-9; Hebrews 6:13-20). And just as the story started with blessing, it ends there as well: *Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life* (Revelation 22:14).

Blessed and blessing

Now, in this time between the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham in us and the dawning of the new heavens and earth, we are to live with a sense of the blessing of God and to be a blessing to the world. We are to do this even when the world is hostile towards us: *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing* (1 Peter 3:9). Probably the most famous portion of Jesus' teaching is his declaration of blessing on those who seek God's kingdom rather than the kingdom of this world:

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matthew 5:2-12).

Read through the Bible and you will find time and again incidences of the blessing of God being declared. A reoccurring theme in the Old Testament is the handing on of blessing from father to son, or leader to disciple. When we read these accounts we can do so through the eyes of our culture, where someone a bit soppy and religious might say to us, "Bless you" and we know it doesn't really mean anything. But read these accounts properly and you see there was a real expectation of *power* in the blessing. Look at the story of Jacob stealing Esau's blessing from Isaac in Genesis 27 (Go on! Look at it!). Esau is distraught when he realizes that Isaac's best blessing has gone to his brother, because he knows that blessing will be effective.

As those who have received God's powerful blessing we need to get into the habit of blessing other people, and doing so with faith and power. In our Small Groups there should be blessing. This might be the blessing of practical support and encouragement, but it also needs to be strong spiritual blessing when we pray for one another in the name of Jesus and believe in the blessing of that.

This blessing should not remain only within the church. We need to look for opportunities to be a blessing to those around us who do not know Jesus. As the Apostle Peter puts it, *This is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people* (1 Peter 2:15).

How can we become people who are a blessing to our wider community?

Any number of ways! Here are a few suggestions:

- **Pray!** Pray for our town. Pray for local politicians, headteachers, the local Chief Constable and other people of influence in our community.
- Take a Saturday to **help** some elderly people tidy their gardens.
- Hand out **free** ice-creams to tourists stuck in traffic.
- **Pick up** litter; report broken paving stones.
- Get to **know** the owner of your corner shop; **talk** to the person on the supermarket checkout; **smile** at people.
- Hold a street party to **celebrate** something (doesn't really matter what – any excuse will do!).
- Be a **generous** tipper – just as God's grace to you is outrageous and undeserved, make his grace known by being unusually generous.

In your Small Group deliberately strategize ways in which you can be a blessing. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Christians had a reputation for being **the biggest blessing in town!**

CHAPTER 15

PLAYING FOOTBALL WITH RHYTHM, 5: EAT

Eating together is a sign of acceptance and love. Communion and the sharing of meals should be a regular part of our Small Groups. We also need to eat with lost people so we can get to know their story, work out how to bless them, and celebrate with them.

For followers of Jesus, *eating is at the very centre of our faith...*

1. We were made to eat

Genesis 1:29 *God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food."*

We were created with physical needs, and were created to be dependent upon others. Every time we eat a mouthful of food it is a sign of our dependence – we depend upon shops to supply food, wholesalers to supply shops, farmers to grow food, the soil to produce food, earthworms and micro-organisms to keep the soil healthy – and ultimately all this depends upon God.

We are creatures and food is God's *grace* to us. Jesus taught us to "Remember me..." Whenever we eat we should remember God's grace to us.

2. We will always eat

Revelation 19: *'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the lamb'*

We won't experience the same physical needs in the new heavens and earth, but food will still be important. In glory we will still want to celebrate God's grace, and celebration always involves food.

God has given us an invitation to the greatest celebration of all – the wedding feast of the lamb.

3. Christians eat together

Sharing food is a fundamental expression of love and acceptance and Christians must practise love and acceptance! Hospitality is *not* a spiritual gift: All of us are to be hospitable:

Romans 12:9-13 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.*

Hospitality is an essential Christian characteristic, which we are to do joyfully:

1 Peter 4:9 *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.*

The reason that being hospitable can make us grumble is that it tests faith ("will we have enough?") and it tests servanthood ("am I willing to be put out?") We should not grumble, but be faithful servants and offer hospitality.

Hospitality doesn't have to be elaborate to be meaningful:

Proverbs 15:17 *Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred.*

Also, we should extend hospitality to those beyond our normal friendship group, and especially to those who are not believers.

4. Food helps us communicate

We often use the language of food to help us express emotion. Jesus used food language to describe himself:

John 6:48-57 *I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever...Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.*

Jesus makes a graphic point here – being a Christian is full-bodied and full-blooded. We need to feed on him. Our desire for God should be like a starving man's desire for food:

1 Peter 2:2-3 *Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

5. God always makes covenant around a meal

The Mosaic covenant was inaugurated around a meal:

Exodus 24:9-11 *Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.*

Whenever the Israelites sacrificed they also ate. *Their religious celebrations were Feasts.* And Jesus chose that his disciples would remember him through a meal...

The Lord's Supper

When Jesus was about to finish his ministry on earth by going to the cross, he gathered his disciples and commanded them how they were to remember him once he had returned to his Father in heaven. The means of remembrance was to be in a meal, the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper should be the high point of our worship together.

Why should we celebrate the Lord's Supper? The purpose of the Supper is proclamation – proclaiming the death of Jesus. We celebrate and proclaim Jesus' death because it is his death that has bought us salvation. So the Supper is to be taken repeatedly as a repeated reminder of what Jesus' death has accomplished for us.

This proclamation is repeated but temporary. It is only "until he comes." So taking the Supper reminds us as well of the certainty of Jesus' return. Christ's death is not the end but the beginning of the end – there is a future for all the people of God.

The Lord's Supper is a meal: The first Lord's Supper took place at the time of the Jewish Passover. Whereas at the Passover a lamb was sacrificed, now Jesus was going to be sacrificed. Whereas at the Passover the liberation of Israel was celebrated, now the liberation of all the earth was to be celebrated. Just as the Passover was eaten in a home, so the early Christians would have eaten the Lord's Supper in a home. At the Passover the head of the house would break bread at the beginning of the meal and proclaim what God had done; he would later pass round wine and again proclaim God's deliverance. Jesus followed this pattern in the Lord's Supper and so did the early churches.

Eating together demonstrates unity: When we eat a meal with someone it is a sign of acceptance of them. In the Passover meal everyone in the household ate the meal together, demonstrating how each of them had been rescued by God. The Lord's Supper was similarly intended to demonstrate unity among the believers. When we share the bread and wine it is a powerful sign that God has accepted us and that we accept one another. It is a sign that we are part of one body.

We should celebrate! Food and celebration go hand in hand. We would never have a birthday party or wedding without food. When we take bread and wine in the Lord's Supper we celebrate what Jesus has done for us. We celebrate this meal "until he comes." We celebrate looking forward to the greatest celebration of all, the wedding feast of the lamb. And we celebrate because we are gathering to Jesus – we are coming into his presence.

The key is proclamation: We proclaim Christ's death in terms of victory and not in a morbid reflection on the sufferings of Christ. The New Testament never dwells on the sufferings of Christ; instead it celebrates the achievements of the cross. The word 'proclaim' has the ring of victory not defeat about it, and this is how we should celebrate the Lord's Supper. We participate in the Supper as a sign of what we have become: participators in Christ, one loaf, one body.

Communion is not just some strange religious rite that is out of keeping with contemporary culture. It is a powerful proclamation – of what has been done, what will be done and of who we are.

In large groups and in small groups: We regularly celebrate the Lord's Supper in our Sunday meetings. Communion in this setting cannot normally take the form of a proper meal and inevitably has to have a certain formality about it in order that the bread and wine can be distributed "with decency and order." Exactly how we celebrate the Supper in this setting will vary from time to time but every time we want there to be celebration and proclamation! Taking the Supper together in the gathered congregation is a powerful declaration of what we believe and whom we have come to worship.

Celebrating the Lord's Supper in a Small Group can have an even greater depth of meaning. In a Small Group we can have a proper meal together, during the course of which we boldly declare and proclaim what Jesus has done.

Get Eating!

We want a lot of food to be consumed in our Small Groups. Where better to tell our stories and the story of God than around food? How better to celebrate than by eating together?

CHAPTER 16

PLAYING FOOTBALL WITH RHYTHM, 6: RE-CREATE

There are two beats to this rhythm: **Recreation** and **New Creation**.

As new creations in Christ we have entered into rest:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

Because of what we have experienced we now have a mandate to bring new life to the earth and to draw damaged people into Sabbath rest. The trouble with the word 'rest' though (especially when we put 'Sabbath' next to it) is that it can sound very dull. So I prefer to use the word 'recreation'. Real recreation is proper rest – when we de-stress and de-tox. Often this kind of rest is active. For example, I get rested by running – running is my recreation.

Jesus has called us into his rest – into recreation – by taking the toxin of sin from us. He has made us new. Our world is desperately short of real recreation. A lot of what people call "leisure" actually just stresses them out further! In our Small Groups ("*communities on a mission for Jesus*") we should work out and demonstrate what it means for us to be new creations, enjoying the rest of Jesus' yoke.

Made to re-create

In the book *A Passion for God's Story*, Philip Greenslade writes:

*If it is true that human beings are the **crown** of God's creation, it is equally true that the Sabbath is the **goal** of creation. Everything God has made aspires to that end. The Sabbath sanctifies time. It invites us to look back to the God who rested from his creation task and model our lives on the rhythm of God's labour and rest. It encourages us to imitate God's creative labour as worshippers, not restless workaholics.*

Time is relative, and according to Albert Einstein, "There certainly seems to be less of it than there used to be." Re-creation frees us from the tyranny of time by reminding us of the timelessness of God and by allowing us to get back into a rhythm that is God-shaped, rather than technology driven. Modern communications mean we are always and everywhere available, and always measuring time. As I write this, I have a watch on my wrist, a clock on the computer, a clock on the desk phone, a clock on my cell phone and a clock on the wall. My computer diary is synced with the diary on my phone and both are programmed to ping at me when it is time to move from one task to another. I am running a couple of email programmes and am also on Facebook, Twitter and Skype.

All this technology helps me to run things efficiently (well it can, so long as I am efficient with it and not merely distracted by it!) but it can also start to function like a dictator.

All of us need time – a Sabbath – when we cut free from this technology and this time tyranny.

Overthrowing the god of time

It is good at times to turn off your phone, or leave it at home. It is amazing how difficult many people find this, as if without the phone some disaster is bound to befall them. But – truthfully now – how often is that phone call absolutely essential?

J. John writes that, *“In twenty-first-century Britain things are so messed up that some people seem to feel more guilty about relaxing than they do about adultery.”* I think this is true, or, even more bizarrely, some people feel a stronger sense of betrayal in turning off their phone than they do in neglecting their partner.

Re-creation should involve practices that deliberately dethrone time from its god-like position in our lives. While this shouldn't become an excuse for being late for church (!) it does give us permission to turn off the phone, shut down the computer, unplug the TV, and actually talk to someone, or go for a walk, or simply have an afternoon nap.

Learning to travel light

If we don't develop deliberate strategies like these we will find that time is always running away from us. Time adheres to the law of the suitcase. Have you noticed that when packing to go on holiday you always have slightly too much to fit in your suitcase? It doesn't matter how big your suitcase is, it is never quite big enough. Time works the same way in that work always expands to fill the time allocated to it. If you allow seven days a week for work, work will take all seven days, and still leave some over. The way to solve this problem is not by simply working harder, but by reducing the size of your suitcase. Pack light, pack clever, and only fly with hand luggage – it makes life much easier.

We want our Small Groups to help in this process of learning to travel light. In community, as we tell our stories about what Jesus has done for us, we learn to let go of the baggage that life would pile on us. We learn to enjoy our freedom as God's new creations. We learn to take time to re-create together, and by doing this we bring new life not only to our church but to our town.

CHAPTER 17

HOW TO KEEP A SMALL GROUP MEETING ON TARGET: THE FOUR W'S

Friendship, One-anothering, Outreach, Teaching and Body Life are the plumbline for our Small Groups.

Story, Listening, Celebrating, Blessing, Eating and Re-creating are the rhythm which we pulse with.

Get these things right and you won't go wrong!

But you are probably still looking for some help as to how to actually run a meeting. We have found it is helpful to have a simple structure on which to hang a Small Group meeting. This is what we call *the Four W's*.

What are the Four W's?

The "Four W's" refer to the four ingredients of the weekly meeting that the Small Group has together. Using the Four W's will help you to plan and run a great Small Group meeting, but let me hasten to say that the Four W's, just like any system, needs to be constantly invigorated and made fresh and exciting by good leadership and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

How do the Four W's look when the Small Group gathers?

The basic program of the meeting can vary from week to week but, as a guide, I would suggest:

- Welcome 15mins
- Worship 20mins
- Word 30mins
- Witness 10mins

Starting and ending on time

People get to work on time, and school on time, and college classes on time, and movies on time, but find it surprisingly hard to get to Small Group on time! Whilst we must not fall into the trap of being *event centred* rather than *people centred*, we do need to encourage time discipline and respect for each other's time. Agree together what time the meeting will begin and end and try to stick to that. Poor leadership usually results in overly long meetings – and don't kid yourself that everyone loved it and didn't notice the time – they are probably just too shy to tell you to buck up as the leader! I am more eager than most for God to break in and do the unexpected, but I have found that sticking to time is a sure way to build trust and attendance in a Small Group.

The following four chapters unpack the Four W's.....

CHAPTER 18

HOW TO DO WELCOME

Creating a welcoming atmosphere

The Bible exhorts us to develop in the gift of hospitality, so think through the whole process of someone arriving at your Small Group. Is there sufficient parking? If you have cats and dogs, would it be helpful to lock them away for the evening? How about some nice background music? (Or are you playing music which is too loud for people to be able to hear one another without shouting?) Are you ready to help people bringing small children? Would offering drinks at the start help relax people? Can you meet people at the door? Windows open or closed? Lighting bright or dim? (Dim is normally a bad idea – people tend to drift off to sleep!) Layout – just the right amount of chairs, preferably in a circle.

The aim of the Welcome section

The aims are to (a) put people at ease at the start of your time together, and (b) help people to continue to get to know each other and create community. If you get everyone talking and laughing you have probably had a successful welcome! Sometimes it can be helpful to do some kind of icebreaker type game, but this can also feel a bit forced and false – if people are all chatting happily anyway you probably don't need to do one. If there's no ice to break, you don't need an icebreaker!

Some icebreaker icebergs to avoid!

- Avoid interrupting a great pre-meeting buzz. If there is a great buzz and everyone is naturally chatting and catching up, then you might be wise not to interrupt the natural icebreaker that is already happening! Rather scrap the planned activity, and after a while you can gather people and move straight into worship.
- Avoid making the icebreaker too long – 15mins max.
- Avoid icebreakers that make people feel awkward or embarrassed, especially when the group is new and people are first getting to know one another – you want them to come back the next week!
- Avoid being unprepared. There is nothing worse than someone making it up as they go along!
- Avoid complex icebreakers. The best ones are usually really simple E.g., “What does your name mean?”
- Avoid using the phrase *icebreaker* – that usually creates ice! It is better to launch in saying something like, “*Ok guys, before we worship together, let's quickly go around each saying (and you describe what you want from people E.g., “What was the best and worst part of your week.”*”

Icebreakers that help you learn about each other

- Say the best thing and worst thing about your week
- What was the happiest moment of your life?
- Divide into pairs, quickly swap the basic details of your lives (E.g., age, job, where you live, etc.) and then introduce each other to the group.
- If you were invisible for a day what would you do and why?
- What is the greatest compliment you have ever received?
- Who is your best friend?
- What is the one thing that you want to accomplish next week?
- When was the last time you did something for the first time?
- If you could change places with a Bible character, whom would you choose? Why?
- Who has had the greatest influence in your life since we last gathered?

- What is your favourite time of day?
- If all married couples, ask What caused you to marry your spouse?
- What are some of your goals for the year ahead?
- If you could take a free 2 week trip to any place in the world where would it be and why?
- Give everyone a piece of paper and ask them to draw a picture of their jobs or whatever they do on a daily basis. Explain your sketches.
- Inform everyone that they have just been given £1,000,000. Let each share how they would use their newly gained fortune.
- Have you had an answered prayer recently? – share the story.
- Who has been the greatest influence in your Christian life & why?
- What encouraging action have you done to someone this week?
- What do you still want to accomplish with your life?
- For what are you thankful?
- Share the most meaningful scripture to you and why is it so meaningful?
- How do you relax?
- If you could not fail, what would you like to do?
- One thing that I do not understand about the opposite sex is...
- Mention two things that make you mad and two things that make you happy.
- What is your occupation? What do you enjoy about it?
- How many brothers & sister do you have & who are you closest to?

Interactive Icebreakers that promote teamwork

- Divide in three groups each doing a simple kids puzzle. Make it a race.
- A quick round of charades
- A quick round of Pictionary (or other games like it)

CHAPTER 19

HOW TO DO WORSHIP

As you probably know from experience, worship in a Small Group can either be wonderful...or pretty painful! Before looking at a few do's and don'ts, it is important to understand the situation that we are dealing with in a Small Group worship time – it is not the same as big meeting worship like on a Sunday, and it is important that we do not try to replicate Sunday worship in Small Group. (One of the reasons we insist on our Small Groups being relatively large – 12-20 people – is that this helps the worship dynamic.)

Advantages of Small Group worship over Sunday worship:

- There is more opportunity for everyone to be involved
- It is a more intimate setting
- There is more room for creativity in worship

Disadvantages of Small Group worship over Sunday worship:

- There are usually less skilled instruments and voices
- There is not the rousing feeling of loads of voices together
- Clapping can be inhibited if people are holding songbooks.

How can we have excellent times of worship in Small Group?

1. Be convinced of the value of the worship time: This is a vital W! God loves our worship. He loves our love and attention. And we were created to worship and adore him; it does us so much good to lift our gaze to who he is!

2. Remember that worship is about him....not me! When there are only a few of you at the meeting, and none of you is a mighty musician or singer, don't be surprised that worship feels harder work than at a larger meeting. But this is not a bad thing...unless of course you feel worship is all about *your* comfort and *your* enjoyment. Wonderfully, God always comes amongst worshippers and makes it highly enjoyable, but the point is that our worship is *for him!* *So what if voices are scratchy! So what if the song lacks the backing of music! God hears the heart attitude not the music!* You will need to teach your Small Group this one – if they can grasp this truth then it can transform a hesitant, self-aware group into a team of expressive, God-aware worshippers. Go for it, O Leader!

3. Choose songs sensibly: I suggest that one or two group members have the responsibility for choosing four songs each week. Hopefully, that line-up will change on the night because other people are spontaneously starting songs, but this line-up of four songs is a good back up. Choose songs that are simple, easy to sing and well known. Avoid anthem style hymns and songs that only work with a big band or a multitude of voices, even if they are your favourite!

4. Have strong emphases on true, New Testament, Spirit-filled, body-participatory worship: This is the key. Did you register that? This one is *the key* to great Small Group worship. Participation should be at the heart of worship. Look up 1 Corinthians 14:26. You must teach your group to contribute spontaneous prayers, read verses, bring prophecies, pictures, tongues and interpretations in-between songs. If your group is not very good at this then say, *“Ok, after the first song Fred please either pray or read a verse, and then after the second song please could Alex, and so on...”* Again, this is what it means to be a leader – teach them and coach them into these things....and then I assure you, your worship time together will be

amazing every week, and no one will really care if a song is a bit off key, because songs become just one small part of worship!

5. Be creative: It is nice to mix things up every now and again and do something a little unusual. For example, you can give out pens and paper and give everyone a couple of minutes to write a few lines of praise to God – a kind of mini-psalm. Then read them out one-by-one punctuated by prayers or songs or anything that can elaborate the theme of the mini-psalm. Other ideas include incorporating worshipful poetry, or incorporating listening to a tender song of worship from CD.

6. Be sensitive to guests: This does not, repeat not, mean dialling back your time of worship and going boring and putting a prohibition on the gifts of the Spirit. On the contrary, Paul explains to the Corinthians that prophecy and tongues will cause the Unbeliever to exclaim *God is really amongst you!* But it does mean being very hospitable to visitors by (a) having an atmosphere of love, acceptance and normality throughout the evening, and (b) explaining the 'ground rules' before you start worship. I usually say something like this to put new people at ease and provoke regular members to participate: *"Ok guys, for this time of worship, as usual, the rules are that there are no rules. Let's sing some songs but have them punctuated by prayers, reading of scripture, pictures, prophecies and tongues and interpretations. And if you are not sure what some of things look like then don't panic and just enjoy..."* Better still, the person who invited the new person can have a one-on-one chat with the new person before worship to put the person at ease. But don't apologize for our worship – rather get them excited but relaxed!

7. Leave people wanting more: You need leadership wisdom each time to know whether to extend the worship time or stop it and move onto other things. If you feel that God's presence seems to be there in a special way and everyone is engaged, then you can prolong the time of worship, but still end the Small Group on time, so be aware that longer worship means shorter something else. But as a rule I would advise you to leave people wanting more.

Common questions

Do we have to sing in our Small Group?! No! Singing is not compulsory, and depending on what else is happening in your group meeting it might not be appropriate (E.g., if you are having a meal together and a discussion that flows out of that time you probably won't end up singing). But we are looking for a significant degree of spiritual freedom in our Small Groups, and this almost inevitably leads to singing. The New Testament does instruct us to "*sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs*" to one another (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16) and it would be strange if we only did this on Sundays.

What if a song is started in *totally* the wrong key? No problem. It is not a show! So just have a laugh together and restart, or carry on making a joyful noise!

Should we use songbooks? I think so. Projected words on the wall is expensive and can feel a bit over-the-top in a small group. Hopefully many of the group will know most of the songs off by heart so they can be free to clap and raise hands and so on, but song books are valuable for new songs and most importantly helpful for new people who may not know any songs.

What about using backing CD's? Some groups have been known to use the backing of a selection of songs from a worship CD, to which they sing along. It is not that I oppose this so much as I *prefer* the purity of voices and worship offered up to God without any props, and I love the freedom to bring contributions that a small group experiences in unaccompanied worship. Tracks on CD also often have long instrumental breaks, which can feel awkward when you are

worshipping in a Small Group. So I would warn against creating dependency on a CD, but maybe it would be helpful once in a while.

What about breaking bread in Small Groups? This should be a regular part of your Small Group. We want Small Groups to spend a lot of time eating together! Remember when Jesus and his disciples were in the upper room and how they celebrated the Last Supper – it was as a Small Group! It was a time of close fellowship and community, which is just what we can enjoy too. Small Group is the perfect place for us to break bread and drink of the cup in remembrance of Him.

What if worship is really poor in our group? It will almost certainly be because you haven't yet cracked Point 4 on the previous page concerning participatory, Spirit-led worship. Maybe invite someone else in to help coach your group into this.

CHAPTER 20

HOW TO DO WORD

What Word is and isn't

The Word time in Small Group is definitely not the place where you can practise your skills as the next Billy Graham, although an emerging teaching gift may very well be highlighted in this context. Be aware of talking too much. It may be a place in which your desire to teach grows – this is not bad, but just remember the current assignment. Some ways to teach in a Small Group are by:

- Ensuring everyone is included and involved
- Getting the discussion going in the right direction
- Ensuring that there is practical application to the questions, rather than leaving lofty ideas floating around (James 1:22-23)

More tips on facilitating the Word time

1. Be prepared. Because the Word/discussion time is usually based on the Sunday preach, then it is good for the person leading the Word time to be at the Sunday meeting!! Our church produces a weekly Word Outline for the Small Groups based on the Sunday teaching that suggests a Bible passage to read together, and a few questions to get a discussion going around those verses. This helps the person leading the Word/discussion very much.

2. Start by reading the passage. Often it is good to get each person to read a verse out loud. This gets everyone involved and opening their mouths in a safe way. Or you can all stand and read the passage out loud together – doing this helps people connect better with the Bible, and shows that you are taking it seriously.

3. The art of question asking: As the leader of the Word section, you should lead off by asking a question to get the ball rolling. **Keep things Bible-based.** Opinions other than scriptural opinions are not what the discussion should focus on. Hear people out, but your job is to promote God's Word. A practical tip is to start with a verse and then return to verses whenever there is the opportunity.

4. Look for the key thing: During every discussion there is usually one thing that will be raised at some point that you will sense is the key thing that God wants you to focus on and 'pray home'. When you sense that, you need to begin to lead in that direction. Say something like "I think that that this may be the key thing that God wants to impart to us tonight, so let's talk a bit more into this one..."

5. Never get 'heated' about non-essential things. Keep it relaxed and mature and God-focused.

6. Don't go on too long. Don't feel you have to cover everything. Allow the Holy Spirit to work on your people in-between meetings.

7. It is usually best to end by breaking into pairs and praying for each other. Pray into some of the things that emerged out of the Bible and discussion.

How do you stop a chatterbox dominating?

You can redirect: Once you have realized that you have a 'talker' who is the first out of the blocks to answer every question, you would be wise to direct questions at other people by

name. This at least limits his talking and gives others a chance. Also, you can say something like, *"Guys, we are running tight on time so let's limit our comments to a minute or so each"*.

You can gently interrupt: If you feel that you need to interrupt them, do it lovingly and with a twinkle in your eye. Maybe you could say something like, *"Fred, this is important to talk about some more, but I wonder if we could pick this one up together over tea, because I would just like us to touch on one or two other things before we end?"*

You can chat to him afterwards: If Fred continues to show a lack of group awareness then you must talk to him. You are responsible before God to disciple him so be brave and talk to him directly with love. You could say something like this: *"Fred, I want to encourage you and thank you, and also give you a tip, if I may. You are such a live wire and always willing to contribute where others may not be. Thanks for being so upbeat! But, I think that you should try to hold back a bit more in order to give others a chance."*

If things don't change, you'll need to talk to him a little bit more firmly and directly. But the thing is, you should be friends by now, and friends just tell friends to 'zip it' in a loving, natural and inoffensive way!

CHAPTER 21

HOW TO DO WITNESS

Be clear on this...

This is such an important part of the Small Group, because the aim of the Small Group is of course the same aim as the church, which is of course the Great Commission of Jesus to *Go and make disciples*. Along the way people must get cared for, but Jesus did not say that that the main aim of the Church is to cuddle each other, rather to win the lost! Small Groups stagnate fast if they go into holy-huddle mode. Come on guys! Let's keep our eye on the ball!

What happens in the Witness section?

The aim of this part of the evening is to keep the Small Group outward looking and active in terms of provoking each other to live contagious and evangelistic lives.

- One week it might be going around asking each other how relationship building with X,Y and Z is going.
- Another week it might be 5-10mins of prayer for X, Y and Z.
- Another week it might be planning a Small Group event to invite unsaved friends to so that friendships can develop with unbelievers.
- Another week it might be planning how to capitalize on a forthcoming Guest Event in the church.
- Another week it might be planning how you can *celebrate*, or *bless*.
- A lot of the time it will mean sitting down to eat with people.
- And *all of the time* it means thinking like a missionary!

A Fishing Family

When Jesus said "I will make you fishers of men" (Mark 1:17), the image they had was of a team of fishermen working together with a net, not a lone-ranger on a river with his trout rod enjoying the solitude! You can do so much more together than apart!

Some Spurgeon quotes to motivate us:

'Perhaps you have been too quiet and too silent. Get up and speak for Jesus, and see whether the honey does not come into your mouth at once... Preaching the gospel is to us a matter of life and death; we throw our whole soul into it. We live and are happy if you believe in Jesus and are saved. But we are almost ready to die if you refuse the gospel of Christ.'

'I would freely give my eyes if you might but see Christ, and I would willingly give my hands if you might but lay hold of him.'

'My anxious desire is that every time I preach, I may clear myself of the blood of all men; that if I step from this platform to my coffin, I may have told out all I knew of the way of salvation.'

'Brethren, we have only to have faith in God's Word, and speak it out straight, and we shall see proud rebels yielding. No mind is so desperately set on mischief, so resolutely opposed to Christ that it cannot be made to bow before the power of the words of God.'

'I would sooner bring one sinner to Jesus than unravel all the mysteries of the Word, for salvation is the thing we are to live for.'

CHAPTER 22

HOW DO I DEAL WITH IRREGULAR ATTENDANCE?

Why do people gradually stop attending?

When someone begins to come less and less frequently, there is always a reason for it. Occasionally it is a valid reason such as they are now having to work night shifts, or the baby is very sick and so on, but I have to say from my experience that people mostly don't come because

1. They are not enjoying the Small Group, or
2. They are struggling with some kind of sin (ranging from apathy and lack of commitment through to some more obvious sin that causes them to feel guilty and withdraw).

What can we do about it?

Don't do nagging phone calls. Instead, you need to *meet up with them and have a loving but frank chat* and find out what is going on. When I have these chats with people I usually use the following format:

- Normal chit-chat to put them at ease
- Ask how they are doing. Probe with a few questions about work, money, marriage, health and so on.
- Say that whilst you don't want to pester them, you and the group are missing them, and are concerned that the group is meeting at a time that is inconvenient to them.
- If the problem is just lack of commitment, try giving them some reasons why Small Group attendance is so important:

Some reasons why Small Group attendance is so important:

1. Because **Jesus did**. Luke 4:16 says that Jesus attended church *as was his custom*.
2. Because of the **discipline of assembly**: Hebrews 10:24-25 affirms the importance of the habit of meeting together, and the blessing that it is to others.
3. Because you never know when **God will speak** a crucial word to you.
4. Because it is an **example and encouragement** to other believers.
5. Because it helps everyone realize that they are **not alone**.
6. Because it is the **community of God on display**.

CHAPTER 23

HOW CAN WE DISCIPLE NEW BELIEVERS?

My experience is that for a new believer to get established in God, he or she needs the following:

1. To attend the **Sunday** meetings (for preaching, worship and generally being part of the bigger thing).
2. To attend a **Small Group** (for FOOTBALL).
3. To be **water baptised** and **Holy Spirit** baptised.

But there is one other thing that needs to happen: the new believer must have one primary mentor in the Small Group who does a **short, systematic new believers course** with them one-on-one. Without this, important foundations are missed and the new believer may well fall away.

Get Started

I have written a 7-part booklet called *Get Started* that I recommend to you (you can download this from the Resources section of the church website). You meet for half an hour a week for 7 weeks (or an hour per week for 4 weeks) with the new believer, and both of you read one chapter per week that ends with a couple of questions to answer. Here is the Contents Page that will give you a feel for what is in *Get Started*:

How to use this book

Chapter 1	New Life
Chapter 2	New Power
Chapter 3	New Mission
Chapter 4	New Appointment
Chapter 5	New Family
Chapter 6	New Fight
Chapter 7	New attitude to Money

What are the benefits of *Get Started*?

- It establishes the person in the foundations of the Christian faith
- It builds a strong friendship with the person who they do it with
- It equips the new believer to be able to do *Get Stared* with someone else
- It sets a standard of discipleship and basic doctrine in the church

PART THREE

THE WHO

CHAPTER 24

THE ROLE OF THE ELDERS

In Chapter 4, I unpacked the six causes of failure of Small Group systems in a church:

1. Lack of senior leadership involvement
2. Lack of application and perseverance
3. Lack of other essential values in the church
4. Lack of focus
5. Lack of on-going leadership development
6. Lack of sound administration

Please note that 1-5 are all dependent on the elders in the church. The stark reality is that if the *elders* are not convinced of something then it will not work.

The Elders are the trendsetters

Let's go through the above six points showing the key role that the Church elders plays in each:

1. The elders must themselves be 100% hands-on involved in Small Groups, and ensure that the other key leaders follow this example.
2. The elders must hold the church on the course of Small Groups even when times are tough and the learning curve is steep.
3. The elders are ultimately responsible for all the values of the church. For example, if the church is not interested in fullness of the Spirit, then you will find that the elders aren't either – what is in the head is in the body. And no aspect of church life, including Small Groups, can work properly without the fullness of the Spirit.
4. The elders are ultimately responsible for the rhythm and focus of the church. Above anyone else, they need to ensure that other ministries do not compromise Small Groups.
5. Again, the elders attitude to leadership development is what makes or breaks leadership development.

CHAPTER 25

THE ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR

The Small Group supervisor has oversight of several Small Groups.

How does a supervisor emerge?

It is preferable for a person to start as a Small Group leader, and demonstrate the ability to raise up new group leaders.

Is a supervisor necessary?

Yes, because Small Group leaders need ongoing care, support and envisioning. Leading can be lonely, but several Small Groups on mission together is never lonely.

Should the supervisor also lead a Small Group?

The pro of leading one is that you are really doing the stuff, but the con is that you are less free to visit the other groups in your care. So, if you do also lead a Small Group, it is wise to have a solid deputy who can lead when you are out visiting.

How does the supervisor keep in touch with the Group Leaders under his care?

I suggest that the Small Group leaders meet together with their supervisor once per month to catch up, plan, pray and encourage each other. In addition to this, the supervisor would certainly want to get regular personal time with each Small Group leader to love them, care for them and develop them.

Three characteristics of a great supervisor

Firstly, they will be **experienced and skilled** Small Group leaders able to develop the leaders under their care.

Secondly, they will have **pastoral gifting**. They will be caring and encouraging on a consistent basis causing the Small Group leaders and their groups to feel loved and safe.

Thirdly, they will be **good team-builders, vision-casters and motivators**. They will be able to provoke Small Groups to evangelise and grow and multiply.

CHAPTER 26

THE ROLE OF THE SMALL GROUP LEADER

I think there are three main roles that a Small Group Leader should play:

The Visionary Role: The leader is the visionary one who normally takes the lead in setting the direction and pace for the Small Group. This is probably the most important contribution that the leader makes. The Leader must always be motivating and drawing the group on in God, and especially towards the goal of mission.

The Decisionary Role: Whilst we wouldn't want leaders to be authoritarian and dictatorial, there will be times when the leader needs to make decisions.

The Delegatory Role: The leader is the one to coordinate who does what, and help hold them accountable to their responsibilities.

Let's talk more about delegation

It is not an option! It must be done! The more you delegate the more you will enjoy leading the Small Group. When Small Group leaders get burnt out it is almost always because they have not given attention to delegation. Delegation is right at the heart of a Godly style of leadership and anything less will frustrate and prohibit both the leader and the people in the group.

And people want to do jobs, and in turn feel part of the community and mission. People will support something for which they feel responsible.

How can I delegate?

1. Sit down with a person and explain what the job is and why you think that they would be good at it.
2. Then talk them through in detail what the job entails, and give them any resources that they may need to do the job.
3. Allow them to get on with it, but give them immediate feedback, and then ongoing feedback and encouragement.

What jobs should I delegate in a Small Group?

In our Small Groups we aim to get one or two people doing each of the following jobs:

- **Welcome:** A team of 2 people who do the 'ice-breaker' part of the evening.
- **Worship:** A team of 2 people who lead the singing part of the evening.
- **Witness:** A team of 2 people who lead the Witness part of the evening.
- **Word:** This will usually be led by the leader who will gradually involve others in leading this part of the evening.
- **Prayer List:** A person to keep a list of prayer needs and requests and keep bringing these before the group.

- **I.C.U. coordinator:** ICU means intensive care unit. You need a person to organise the group when there is a crisis. For example, if a member is sick then this person would notify the group and organise visits and meals to be delivered as appropriate. Or if a unbelieving friend of a member is moving house, wouldn't this be a great time to mobilize the Small Group to help out and strike up a friendship and show the love of God?
- **Administrator:** A person to do a Contact List for the group and be the email/text/Twitter/Facebook hub when news needs to go out.
- **Food:** A person to organise a roster and remind different people each week to bring a bit of food. Cheap, simple food is best.

Let us now look at 10 characteristics of great Small Group Leaders...

10 CHARACTERISTICS OF GREAT SMALL GROUP LEADERS

There are obviously many leadership traits that I could mention here, but I have restricted the list to those that I feel are the most important:

1. Be loving and relational. If you were accused of being a *really loving Small Group leader*, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Small Group Leading can be summed up in 5 words "*Love God and Love People*". Matthew 22 gives us no option – our relationship with people reflects our relationship with God. The most successful Small Group Leaders are *people people*. They might be weaker than other people in terms of doctrine and administration, but they have the likeability factor!

2. Be available. Availability is the main ability that God requires of us.

3. Be faithful. If we are to be used and promoted by God, we need to be faithful in the little things, the natural things, and another man's things (Luke 16:10-12). Start with what you can do, don't stop because of what you can't do! Begin to weave and God will give you the thread. The woods would be very silent if the only birds that sang were the birds that sang the best. Theodore Roosevelt said, "It is better to be faithful than famous". Make it your aim not to do extraordinary things, but ordinary things well.

4. Be teachable. You need to be willing to be led by your supervisor. We are committed to being humble men and women, always remaining teachable and open to correction and change. Henry Adams said, "*They know enough who know how to learn*". Abraham Lincoln said, "*He that won't be counselled can't be helped*". When you are through improving you are through. The moment you stop learning you stop leading. Advice may be hard to swallow but the best medicines always are!

5. Be enthusiastic. Enthusiasm is actually a characteristic of spiritual maturity. All the bible heroes were highly enthused with God and the extension of His Kingdom. The Greek word *entheos* means *God inside*. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm. Pessimism never won any battles. Make it your aim to be the most enthusiastic person in your Small Group. Thomas Carlisle said "Give me a man who sings at his work!" Be like a kettle – even when it's up to its neck in hot water it continues to sing! The more you complain the less you obtain. Have a strong will not a strong won't.

6. Be a role model. In 2 Timothy 2:2 we see three other generations being affected by Paul's hand-over-heart. Whilst Small Groups need good, strong leadership, Small Group is all about releasing *others* to minister and lead. A Small Group leader's motto could be *"anything I can do I can help you to do better"*.

7. Be full of the Holy Spirit. Small groups must be full of the Holy Spirit, therefore the leader should be Spirit-filled and Spirit-led. John Wesley made the first rule of his Class Leaders (Small Group leaders) that *"they are to be men full of the Holy Spirit."* Martin Lloyd-Jones said, *"I can forgive a preacher almost anything so long as he leaves me with a sense of God."* But you can only carry the presence of God if you are full of the Spirit.

8. Be servant-hearted. Paul held as his primary identity that he was a *servant* (Philippians 1:1). Leadership is to serve not be served. Jesus reminded us that even the Son of God did not come to be served but to serve. Small Group leadership is all about serving.

9. Be prayerful. Praying for those in your Small Group is the primary role of the Small Group Leader.

10. Lead by grace rather than law or manipulation.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR SMALL GROUP LEADERS

Leading a Small Group might sound a daunting task, but actually we want to make it easy for people to lead. All we ask is that group leaders are church members who support and demonstrate our expectations of church membership:

Protecting the unity of the church

- by acting in love toward other members,
- by refusing to gossip and
- by following the leaders.

Sharing the responsibility of the church

- by praying for its growth,
- by inviting the unchurched to attend and
- by warmly welcoming those who visit.

Serving the ministry of the church

- by discovering their gifts and talents,
- by being equipped to serve by the leaders and
- by developing a servant's heart.

Supporting the witness of the church

- by attending faithfully,
- by living a godly life and
- by giving generously.

CHAPTER 27

THE ROLE OF THE SMALL GROUP TRAINEE LEADER

Who is this person?

The trainee leader is someone in the group who has been identified as a person who will themselves lead a Small Group next time around.

What if I don't know for sure who is a potential trainee? Then don't make anyone a trainee for now, because you will setting them up for disappointment if they do not emerge as suitable for the job.

How does a trainee develop?

Let's use this brilliant scripture to explain how a Trainee Leader develops:

*“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others”
(2 Timothy 2:2)*

In the presence of many witnesses: I think this refers to getting trained on the job amongst other people rather than tucked away in a classroom. The primary equipping of a trainee is not academic or theoretical, but through practical hands-on experience. Small Group leading is more *caught than taught*. Actually, everyone in the Small Group is *catching* how to lead a Small Group, but the trainee has the privilege of having the leaders primary input, and also of attending meetings with the Small Group supervisor.

Entrust: Leading a Small Group is a *trust*. The trainee must realize the seriousness of shepherding the people, and understand that it is a responsibility.

Reliable: The trainee must be reliable. Faithfulness and dependability are more important than giftedness and skill. The trainee should be a regular attendee of the Small Group and be a pillar of strength, support and availability to the leader. Luke 16:12 says, *“If you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?”*

Qualified: The trainee must be prepared to submit to a process of training and equipping that will prepare him/her to lead a new group in the future. In addition to on-the-job training and faithfulness, trainees should be taken through a training manual such as this one.

One final caution

Some people are outstanding assistants – real pillars in the group and a great support to you, but they may not actually turn out to be good Small Group leaders. May God give you discernment!

The role of significant others

As well as his Small Group of 12, Jesus clearly had three guys that he sank extra time and attention into – Peter, James and John. Similarly, I want to encourage you to work closely with your Trainee Leader *and two or three others as well*. They will be people that can help you care for the other people. Draw close to them, envision them, and give them responsibilities. It is out of this group that your trainee may well emerge.

But this group doesn't sound that important...

I do not want you to think that this group is not important! Small Groups with a leadership team of three to five (leader, trainee and some significant others) are always chunky, successful groups which the leader loves leading because he/she does not get worn out because the load is shared. Furthermore, it will be a Small Group with leadership depth that can multiply repeatedly.

As our Small Groups run for just ten weeks at a time you will not have long to develop these significant others, so from the very first meeting look to delegate responsibility out to those you feel can handle it.

CHAPTER 28

THE ROLE OF EVERYONE

Here are five things that you will want all of your Small Group members to operate in:

1. The power of presence

Just being there each week without fail is a powerful encouragement to the others in the group. By making a solid commitment to your Small Group, to be missed only in times of emergency, you send a very clear message to the other members that *you all matter very much to me*. Conversely, inconsistent attendance sends a somewhat less encouraging message of *I don't mind coming, but it's not that important. If I feel a bit tired or something else crops up then don't expect me. Being with you and encouraging you isn't a very high priority for me*. Therefore, simply our presence, even without necessarily saying much when we are there, is a powerful encouragement.

2. The power of preparation

Praying prayers, reading verses, bringing words, and sharing testimony are things that everyone can do! Doing these things makes a HUGE difference to the group and bring it such life and vitality. It is much easier to do these things if you come prepared to do them!

3. The power of prayer

Paul's friend and fellow worker, Epaphras, would have made an excellent Small Group member because according to Paul he was always "wrestling in prayer" for the Colossians, that they might "stand firm in the will of God." Paul concluded that in doing so Epaphras was "working hard for you" (Colossians 4:12-13). Praying for others is hard work, and one of the most loving and significant things that we can do for our fellow group members. Making a meal for someone is a more satisfying way to serve others because we see the result in their lives of our labour, but prayer is a quiet and inconspicuous form of ministry and you don't always see the results!

4. The power of testimony

A powerful way of loving others in your group is to be willing to share your own life with them. By opening up and sharing our joys and struggles we can do others a great service, by showing them that they are not alone in their struggles and by encouraging them to open up as well. Of course, it is not good to indiscriminately dump all our issues on the group, nor to talk too much! And some things are best shared one-on-one with someone in the group later on.

5. The power of 'outside meeting things'

Small Group life is not only about meeting once per week. Phone calls, hospitality, financial assistance, gifts, social times together are vital things to develop genuine friendship in the group. Remember, we are looking for Small Groups to be communities on a mission for Jesus, and this must mean more than just having a weekly meeting together.

CONCLUSION

COMMUNITIES TOGETHER ON A MISSION FOR JESUS

I hope that by now you are as excited about the power and potential of Small Groups as I am.

We have got to break the mindset that sees Church as something we do for a couple of hours on a Sunday, or mission as something that other people do in other nations. We need to get out of the way of thinking that divides life up into slices of a pie – a slice for work, a slice for family, a slice for hobbies, a slice for God. We need to stop seeing church as just one of the many balls that we are juggling, and that sometimes we have to let go.

As Tim Chester and Steve Timmis put it in their book *Total Church* (which I recommend you read):

The prevailing view of life today is that of an individual standing on his or her own, heroically juggling various responsibilities – family, friendships, leisure, chores, decisions, and money. We could also add social responsibilities like political activities, campaigning organizations, community groups, and school associations.

From time to time the pressures overwhelm us, and we drop one or more of the balls. All too often church becomes one of the balls. We juggle our responsibilities for church (measured predominantly by attendance at meetings) just as we juggle our responsibilities for work or leisure.

An alternative model is to view our various activities and responsibilities as spokes of a wheel. At the center or hub of life is not me as an individual but us as members of the Christian community. Church is not another ball for me to juggle but that which defines who I am and gives Christlike shape to my life.

If we genuinely understand ourselves to be part of the people of God and understand the mission that Jesus has called his body to we will not see church as merely an activity we attend. Instead we will want to work out what it means to be part of community, and we will want to work out what it means to be on mission with that community. Our Small Groups should be the place where we put this into practice, where we work out the life of Christ at work in us.

To sum it all up:

- We want to be a church *of* Small Groups, not just a church *with* Small Groups.
- We want church to be something we *are*, not something we *attend*.
- We want our Small Groups to be *communities together on a mission for Jesus*.

Let's get going!