

# *So You Want to Be a Small Group Leader?*

Small Groups are

The **C.O.R.E.** of Compassionate Caring

At

Northminster



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## Introduction

<sup>42</sup> “They continued steadily learning the teaching of the apostles, and joined in their fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone felt a deep sense of awe, while many miracles and signs took place through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> “All the believers joined together and shared everything in common; <sup>45</sup> they sold their possessions and goods and divided the proceeds among the fellowship according to individual need. <sup>46</sup> Day after day they met by common consent in the Temple,’ they broke bread together in their homes, sharing meals with simple joy. <sup>47</sup> They praised God continually and all the people respected them. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were finding salvation.” (Acts 2:42-47, Phillips)

Small groups have been part of church life since the very beginning of its existence. The first believers gathered in the Temple for worship and prayer, as was the custom, but they also met in individual homes for fellowship. The early church functioned as a true community of compassion and caring. They did what they could to meet each other’s physical as well as spiritual needs.

Christians in every church and denomination are recognizing the value of small groups for the growth and nurture of believers. They are vital to the health of any church, but are especially necessary in growing churches with more than 500 participants. Small groups provide a setting in which one-on-one ministry can take place and where believers can learn to care for one another while they grow in their faith. Small groups also help people to learn how to reach out beyond themselves to touch others with the love of Christ.

Here at Northminster, we believe that small groups are essential to the life of our church. **Small Groups** are the **C.O.R.E.** of **Compassionate Caring** at Northminster.

**C** = Community (Acts 2:44)  
**O** = Outreach (Acts 2:45)  
**R** = Relationships (Acts 2:46)  
**E** = Evangelism (Acts 2:47)

Small Groups personify what is known as *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is a Greek word most often translated “fellowship” or “community.” The words “fellowship” and “common” underlined in the scripture passage above represent the word *koinonia*. It is the common bond shared by all believers, which is our faith in Jesus Christ.

The small groups described in Acts 2:42-47 did all of the things we do in larger church settings today. Each group was, in its own right, a small church. In fact, the small group is best understood as the church in its smallest form. To experience community in a small group is the essence of what it means to be a church.

The following paragraphs are meant to give you an overview of what *koinonia* is at our church, our vision, our strategy and tactic, and our goal for small groups. We will also talk about the five foundations for *koinonia* groups, and the four basic forms they take.

**What is *Koinonia* at Northminster?** *Koinonia* at Northminster is a ministry that helps people care, share, learn, know, grow, pray, love, do, and be together in the Lord!

**Vision:** Our vision is to incorporate every committed member of Northminster into at least one small group in order to help as many people as possible to know and love the Lord.

**Strategy and Tactic:** Our strategy is to make small groups the foundation of everything that we do organizationally and programmatically at Northminster. We will do this by permeating the organization structure of the church with the dynamics and principles of small group life so as to foster the development of disciples, servants, and leaders in as many settings as possible

**Goal:** Our goal is to develop authentic community through small groups that allow people to connect with and disciple one another in the context of relationships and accountability.

**Foundations:** Every small group is built upon some kind of foundation, which can be a common interest, affinity, life-situation, or circumstance that the group members share. Groups can be formed for the purpose of doing a specific Bible or book study. They can also be formed to complete a specific task or oversee a ministry in the church. In general, *Koinonia* Groups at Northminster are built on one or more of the following five foundations:

1. **Fellowship** (Dinner groups, social groups, etc.)
2. **Discipleship** (Classes, Bible studies, new member groups, etc.)
3. **Serving** (Session, Deacons, Ministry Teams, mission groups, etc.)
4. **Evangelism** (Outreach, neighborhood groups, etc.)
5. **Worship** (Worship teams, choirs, praise teams, etc.)

**Forms:** Different groups have different forms. While it is certainly safe to say that no two small groups are ever exactly the same, every group takes a basic form. *Koinonia* Groups at Northminster primarily take four basic forms:

1. **Groups based in programs:** These are groups that exist to perform a specific ministry or task at Northminster. They include the Sunday School and Adult Education classes as well as the Youth Groups and other programs.
2. **Groups not based in programs:** These are groups that are primarily designed to build community and foster spiritual growth. They include the Men's and Women's groups as well as groups that meet weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly to work through a variety of study/learning options.
3. **Ministry Teams:** These groups represent the leadership groups within the church and include the Session, Deacons, and all the Teams that are responsible for the various areas within the church. They meet monthly and ideally include a small group component in their meetings.
4. **Groups that meet a specific need:** These are groups that are identified and formed by trained leaders (or leaders who will be trained) to meet a specific need within the church. New ministries are often first created and explored within the small group context.

## Section 1: Biblical Leadership - What is it?

### What is a leader?

A leader, according to the biblical model, is someone who leads by serving those he or she is leading. A leader is someone who leads by example. The purpose of leadership as defined by the Bible is threefold:

1. To lead God's people into mutual ministry with one another
2. To foster meaningful relationships that build up the Body of Christ
3. To enable God's people, through mutual ministry and meaningful relationships, to reach out to the world.

Paul defines the purpose of biblical leadership in this way in Ephesians 4:11-13:

*<sup>11</sup>The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup>until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.*

Biblical leaders are those who “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” A leader is someone who helps others grow in their faith, but it should also be noted that a leader never stops learning. Knowledge is only one of the components of effective biblical leadership. Discernment, compassion, and humility are also necessary. Jesus demonstrated all of these characteristics in his life and ministry.

Jesus provides us with the best example of biblical leadership. He most often used the image of the shepherd as the model for what it means to be a servant-leader. He saw thousands of God's chosen children with no one to care for them. Those who called themselves the shepherds of Israel often seemed more concerned with financial gain than with caring for the people God had entrusted to them.

It is important to make a distinction between the world's standard of leadership and the biblical standard. There are many different models of worldly leadership. In the worldly models authority is often closely guarded, rarely shared, and imposed on those below by those above. The Biblical model of leadership is characterized by an attitude of service and shared authority.

One model of Biblical leadership comes from the story of Moses in Exodus 18:1-25. This story actually gives us two distinct models for leadership, only one of which is effective for the situation in which Moses found himself. The model for leadership upon which Moses eventually settled on the advice of his father-in-law Jethro was a one where responsibility was shared. It involved mentoring others to take on some of the duties of leadership and giving over some of the tasks in order to be free for the duties that only he could perform.

Small group leadership follows this model. As a leader, you should always be looking for people in your group who can share in the leadership responsibilities. Remember that someone had to eventually replace Moses as the leader of Israel. While you may not train your replacement, ideally your group should produce leaders who can birth out of your group to become small group leaders in their own right.

Exodus 18:1-25 gives us a model for biblical leadership, but what does a biblical leader look like. There a lot's of different ideas out there, but we will look at only one of them. It is a model that is based on grace and has five characteristics.

## **The Five Characteristics of Biblical Leadership**

**A Biblical Leader** is characterized by **G.R.A.C.E.**

**G**rounded in God  
**R**elated to God  
**A**ttuned to God  
**C**ompassionate toward others  
**E**nergized about educating others

### **1. Biblical Leaders are Grounded in God**

Biblical Leaders effectively lead others by first being led. The best way to inspire obedience in others is to lead by example. Jesus never made a major move in his ministry without first consulting his Father in heaven. Your goal as a leader is not to gain followers who will walk behind you, but to gain followers of Christ who will walk with you.

*<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; <sup>13</sup> for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)*

### **2. Biblical Leaders are Related to God**

Biblical Leaders effectively lead others by demonstrating that they have a meaningful relationship with God. Jesus stayed connected to God by spending long periods of time in prayer. You grow in your relationship with God by spending time with him. Personal, private prayer is the best way to develop true intimacy with God. Don't worry about being perfect before you approach God in prayer. The important thing is to model for your group members an attitude of humility toward God and a willingness to repent when you have strayed from God's will.

*If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)*

### **3. Biblical Leaders are Attuned to God**

Biblical Leaders are people of faith. One definition of faith is choosing to believe in God even when you don't feel like it. Anyone can express belief in God when things are going well; it is an act of faith to believe, and believe in God, in the midst of a crisis.

Staying attuned to God is a matter of the head as well as the heart. The biblical leader must learn to stand firm even when he or she doesn't feel the presence of God. It is a mark of spiritual maturity to be willing to work on your relationship with God when your feelings aren't in tune with what your mind is telling you.

*<sup>13</sup> Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong.<sup>14</sup> Let all that you do be done in love. (1 Corinthians 16:13-14)*

### **4. Biblical Leaders are Compassionate toward others**

Biblical Leaders demonstrate compassion by caring for those they lead in times of need, but also by lovingly confronting when appropriate and necessary. Being compassionate and caring from a biblical standpoint means sometimes saying things that others don't want to hear. The word compassion means "suffering with" and is the act of identifying with those who are hurting. Sometimes that hurt can be healed through care, but other times it must be healed through confrontation.

*<sup>15</sup> But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,<sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:15-16)*

### **5. Biblical Leaders are Energized about educating others**

Biblical Leaders show their enthusiasm for leading by being prepared, which means spending adequate time studying the material that will form the basis of your small group study. It means being ready to answer questions that may arise, but also being willing to admit when you don't know something. Part of what it means to be a wise leader is to know when to ask for help and to know where to go for the answers to the questions you can't answer. Your group members won't expect you to have the answer to every question. They will respect you for being willing to admit that you still need to grow in your faith.

A significant part of your role as a small group leader is to demonstrate a love for learning and thirst for growing in your knowledge of God. Ideally you don't want to be the kind of leader who only imparts facts to the members of your group. Instead, you want to be the kind of leader who shares with your group members your enthusiasm for deepening your faith through your experience of God. Enthusiasm and a desire to grow spiritually will have a much greater impact on the development of your group than just having all the answers.

*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)*

## Section 2: Biblical Covenants

The Bible is filled with covenants. God enacted covenants with both individuals and nations. Some of the best examples are the covenants with Noah (Genesis 9:8-17), Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), and the Ten Commandments (Exodus 21:1-17). It should be noted that in each of these cases it is God alone who determines the conditions of the covenant. There is no reciprocity or negotiation in the forming of these covenants. But in each case God promises to do something for the other party to the covenant.

The notion of a binding promise is an important element of the idea of covenant as it is applied to small groups. In the context of small groups, a covenant is an agreement that the group makes together relative to their character and purpose as a group. It can include any number of elements, but there are a few that are common to every covenant. Before we can talk about those elements, we need to talk about why every small group needs to have a covenant.

A covenant provides the glue that holds a small group together. Without a covenant, either stated or unstated, a group will often be undisciplined and ineffective. When all the members of the group agree to a covenant it helps keep the group from becoming leader-centered. Covenants are necessary for the overall health of a group because they help create an atmosphere of trust in which group members feel safe sharing their deep-felt needs, concerns and spiritual struggles. There are many reasons why small groups need a covenant. Four of the most common ones are as follows:

### Four Reasons Why Every Small Group Needs a Covenant:

1. **Covenants provide a sense of unity** by providing a shared understanding of the group's purpose, direction and goals. The people in your group will have different ideas of what is involved in being in a small group. A covenant helps to establish a common understanding of what it means to be part of your group.
2. **Covenants help avoid misunderstandings** by laying down the ground rules for the group right from the start. If people know the "rules of the road" they can't claim to have acted in ignorance when they break some aspect of the covenant.
3. **Covenants provide a basis for evaluation** of the group's progress and growth. If the group doesn't change over time, it isn't growing. If the group isn't growing it isn't healthy. Regular evaluation is essential to the health of the group.
4. **Covenants give each member a personal stake** in the success of the group. If there is a sense of shared responsibility for the health and success of the group there is a much greater chance of growth and success. A covenant gives each member of the group a sense of shared ownership.

### **Typical Elements of a Small Group Covenant:**

Small Group Covenants are typically formed around logistics and values. Logistics have to do with time, location, length, study, and similar issues. Values have to do with how the group will act and interact with one another.

#### **Logistics:**

- ❖ Where will we meet?
- ❖ When will we meet?
- ❖ How often will we meet?
- ❖ Will we provide sitters?
- ❖ What will we study?
- ❖ What will our service component be?

#### **Values:**

- ❖ Attendance: Each member promises to give the group meetings priority.
- ❖ Participation: Each member promises to share in the discussions.
- ❖ Confidentiality: Everything said in the group stays in the group.
- ❖ Accountability: Group members hold one another accountable for individual and group goals as well as the clearly stated commands of scripture.
- ❖ Preparation: Group members should study assignments prior to each meeting.
- ❖ Outreach: The group should be open to others in the church and community and be actively seeking new members if the group is not full.
- ❖ Sensitivity: Group members should be moldable by the Holy Spirit and others.

### **Types of Covenants**

Every group has a covenant that is either stated or unstated. Generally speaking, there are three kinds of small-group covenants:

1. **The assumed covenant:** Everyone comes to a small group with an assumption of what the group should be like and what it should accomplish. But unless those assumptions are discussed openly, the individual group members will never be totally on the same page. If the group leader does not initiate a purposeful discussion of the need and make-up of a group covenant, that group is headed for an aimless and uncertain journey.
2. **The oral covenant:** An oral covenant is better than an assumed covenant since in forming the oral covenant the group has the opportunity to reach a common understanding concerning the direction and makeup of the group. At a minimum, an oral covenant should be established in every group around the issues of confidentiality and accountability.
3. **The written covenant:** The written covenant is the best type of group covenant because it commits the group's values, mission, direction, and purpose, and plan to paper. There is no ambiguity about the terms of the covenant. Each member can receive a copy of it, which can be a great help if there is a problem later on.

## Sample Small Group Covenant

- ❖ **Attendance:** I will give priority to my attendance at group and I agree to be at each session unless a genuine emergency arises.
  
- ❖ **Participation:** I will enter enthusiastically into group discussion and sharing.
  
- ❖ **Confidentiality:** I will not share with anyone outside the group the stories of those in the group.
  
- ❖ **Honesty:** I will be forthright and truthful in what is said: if I do not feel I can share something, I will say “I pass” for that question.
  
- ❖ **Openness:** I will be candid with others in appropriate ways and allow others to share for themselves.
  
- ❖ **Respect:** I will not judge others, give unsolicited advice, or criticize.
  
- ❖ **Care:** I will be open to the needs of others in appropriate ways.

**Signed:**

### **Section 3: Biblical Conflict Resolution**

This is probably one of the most feared aspects of small group leadership. The “bad” news is that conflict is bound to happen when groups of people interact. The “good” news is that it can be a positive experience for everyone involved if handled with care, prayer, and an understanding of the Biblical model for resolving conflict among believers.

Conflict takes many different forms. It is an inevitable part of small group life. It will happen, but probably won’t happen immediately because a certain amount of intimacy is necessary before real conflict can happen. This is one of the positive aspects of conflict: it is a clear indication that group relationships are growing and deepening. This makes it possible to more effectively apply the Biblical principles of conflict resolution to the situation.

Most often, one of the first types of conflict you will encounter is a member or members rebelling against your leadership. Again, this can be a positive occurrence because most often someone who competes with you for leadership of your group is a potential leader in his or her own right and can often be easily moved into the role of apprentice. Other early types of conflict include a group member who is being disruptive or who has broken one or more terms of the group covenant. But no matter what the nature of the conflict, the Bible provides some basic principles for dealing with it in the Christian context. The most common model for biblical conflict resolution is found in Matthew 18:15-17.

*Jesus: <sup>15</sup> “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. <sup>16</sup> But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”*

A careful examination of this passage yields six key steps to effective conflict resolution, which are as follows. (Note: this is from the 2003 Willow Creek Small Groups Conference)

#### **Step 1: Note the offense.**

Begin by honestly acknowledging that you have been offended or you have offended someone else. Even if we don’t think we did anything wrong, but someone else does, the principles outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 call us to engage in the conflict resolution process.

#### **Step 2: Acknowledge your responsibility.**

Whether you have been offended or you were the offender, you have the responsibility to keep your relationships authentic and as whole as possible.

#### **Step 3: (If offended,) consider genuinely overlooking the offense.**

In some cases, it might be appropriate to overlook an offense - if you are able to be genuine in doing so. The test is whether you can honestly forgive without confronting. To figure this out, take time to pray and sit with the situation for a time. Ask God whether you need to deal directly with this or whether you can let truly forgive and let this go. This is not appropriate for all offenses and is not meant to be a copout for conflict avoiders.

**Step 4: Take the log out of your own eye.**

Start with self-examination. Don't go into conflict resolution unprepared; take time to reflect on what you have contributed to the conflict.

**Step 5: Go in private.**

This is significant. Don't talk about the conflict with others. Don't bring it up in small group. Do it in a very respectful way. Sharing with a third party before bringing it to the person that has offended you, or you have offended, is a sin and can be destructive. (Note: There are some exceptions to this principle such as when there is an imbalance of social power, or in situations involving harassment or abuse.)

**Step 6: Show your brother or sister their fault (if you were offended).**

This must be done in an appropriate way. In Ephesians 4:15, Paul says to speak the truth in love. To do this you must, use the right tone, body language, and choice of words. It is important to affirm the relationship first. Throughout the process, stay open-minded and focus on getting to the root of the problem.

Or...

**Step 7: Confess and ask for forgiveness (if you are the offender).**

Remember the goal of conflict resolution is to win over your brother or sister in Christ through a biblical conflict resolution process

#### Section 4: Basic Bible Study

Every small group needs a study component. Most groups will use one of the many study books that are readily available. Some groups will use Christian literature as the focus of their study. Other groups will choose to study a book of the Bible or a biblical theme. All of these options will foster spiritual growth in the group, but there is no substitute for directly studying God's Word. Ideally, every kind of small group curriculum should ultimately move people into the Scriptures.

Unfortunately, many leaders are intimidated by the thought of preparing and teaching a Bible study. This section of the handbook is designed to show how anyone can prepare a basic Bible study that is appropriate for small group study and that can be a wonderful catalyst for the spiritual growth of group members.

There are a few important things to remember when thinking about basic Bible study for small groups:

- ❖ Small group Bible study is designed to help people share their lives and their spiritual journeys with one another.
- ❖ Small group Bible study is designed to be **inductive**, which means it uses the Bible to interpret the Bible.
- ❖ Small group Bible study is designed to discover/uncover a biblical principle or principles that can be applied to one's life immediately.

The advantage to the inductive study method is that anyone can do it. Bible study in the small group context is meant to result in a practical application. It is not normally study simply for the sake of learning about the Bible.

One of the best ways to begin preparing a basic Bible study is by reading the passage in several different translations. If you have access to the Internet, online versions of nearly every Bible translation are available. Two good sites on the Web are Bible Gateway (<http://bible.gospelcom.net>) and Bible Research ([www.bible-researcher.com](http://www.bible-researcher.com)).

It is also helpful to have, or have access to, a basic Study Bible. These are readily available in most bookstores. One of the best on the market right now is *The N/V Serendipity Bible for Personal and Small Group Study* available in most Christian bookstores and through Zondervan Publishing House ([www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)). This Bible is specifically designed for use in small groups and includes sixty ready-made courses for ten different kinds of groups. Each passage has three levels of questions in the margins designed to help get the discussion going and encourage participation.

Remember that the purpose of small group Bible study is not to make everyone an expert on the Bible. Instead, it is designed to discover and apply principles and truths that can be applied to the lives of the group members. The best way to uncover these truths and principles is through inductive Bible study.

## The Anatomy of an Inductive Bible Study

There are several basic methods of inductive Bible study. One of the most common, and easiest to use, has three basic components:

### 1. **Observation:** What does the text say?

- a. **Let the text speak to you.** Read it in several different translations. This will help give you a sense of the range of meaning of the Greek (New Testament) or Hebrew (Old Testament) original. It is also a good idea to read the passage in a Bible paraphrases such as the *Living Bible*, or *The Message*.
- b. **Look for the context.** Words mean different things in different contexts. The same is true of entire sentences and sections of Scripture. Ask questions (who? what? where? when? why? how?) of the text to arrive at the context. Knowing the context will help insure that you are accurately interpreting the text.
- c. **Examine the structure of the passage.** Look at how the passage is put together and how it functions. For instance, in a miracle story look at the interaction between the people involved and how they react. Try to rewrite the passage in your own words.
- d. **Note the key words in the passage.** This step involves listing all the words in the passage that seem important or significant. A good study Bible or Bible dictionary can often help you find the key words in a passage.

### 2. **Interpretation:** What is the meaning of the text?

- a. **What did the passage mean to the original audience?** A good Study Bible is invaluable in helping to determine the original intent or focus of a passage. We have to know what the truths, commands, promises, and warnings meant to the original audience before beginning the process of applying them to today. There are some basic one-volume commentaries available that will help with this step.
- b. **What is the main theme, idea, or point of the passage?** Write down in a single sentence the main point or idea of the passage. It may be a command, promise, principle, or warning. If the passage is a long one, there may be more than one theme or idea.

### 3. **Application:** What does this meaning apply to me?

- a. Is there a command (or commands) to obey?
- b. Is there a promise (or promises) I can trust God to keep?
- c. Is there something in the passage that convicts me of an area in my life where I need to grow or change?
- d. Is there a practice or a habit revealed by the passage that will help me grow in my relationship with God?
- e. What can I do right now in response to what I have learned by studying this passage?

## Example: Matthew 28:16-20

### 1. Observation

#### a. Let the text speak to you — read different translations.

<sup>16</sup>Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>16</sup>Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (New International Version)

<sup>16</sup>Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him-- but some of them still doubted! <sup>18</sup>Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup>Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup>Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (New Living Translation)

<sup>16</sup>Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. <sup>17</sup>And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. <sup>19</sup>Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: <sup>20</sup>Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (King James Version)

<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the eleven disciples were on their way to Galilee, headed for the mountain Jesus had set for their reunion. <sup>17</sup> The moment they saw him they worshiped him. Some, though, held back, not sure about worship, about risking themselves totally. <sup>18</sup> Jesus, undeterred, went right ahead and gave his charge: “God authorized and commanded me to commission you: <sup>19</sup> Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age.” (The Message)

**b. Look for the context.**

**Q. Who** is speaking and to whom?

**A.** Jesus is speaking to his disciples

**Q. What** is happening and/or what is being discussed?

**A.** Jesus is passing his ministry onto his disciples prior to him ascending to heaven. This is commonly known as the “Great Commission.”

**Q. Where** does the event take place?

**A.** A mountain in Galilee.

**Q. When** does this event take place relative to the whole Bible?

**A.** This event took place after Jesus rose from the dead, but before he ascended to heaven and before Pentecost.

**Q. Why** do you think this event or teaching is taking place?

**A.** Jesus wanted his disciples (and by extension, the church) to know that they needed to take over where he had left off and that he would be with them as they carried out their mission of taking the good news about Jesus to the world.

**Q. How** does this passage fit into the context of the book in which it is found?

**A.** This passage contains the last five verses of Matthew’s Gospel. It follows the story of the chief priests paying the soldiers who had been guarding Jesus’ tomb when he rose to say that his disciples had come and stolen his body while they were sleeping. It is the second resurrection appearance recorded by Matthew.

**c. Examine the structure of the passage.**

One of the key elements of the structure of this passage is found in verse 17, which says that the eleven disciples worshipped the Risen Jesus, but some of them doubted. Jesus knew they had doubts, but he went ahead and commissioned them anyway. One possible outline of the passage would be as follows:

- The disciples go to Galilee to meet Jesus in obedience to his command.
- They respond to his presence by worshipping him, but some have doubts!
- Jesus reminds them that God has given him authority over heaven and earth.
- Jesus commissions the disciples to “go and make disciples.”
- Jesus promises to be with his disciples “to the end of the age”

**d. Note the key words in the passage.**

**Disciples** — the core group of Jesus’ followers. Here it refers to the eleven who were left after Judas committed suicide.

**Worshipped** — the use of this word here indicates that the disciples believed that Jesus was divine and therefore worthy of worship.

**Authority** — people recognized Jesus as a person of authority during his earthly ministry. That authority continued — and grew — after his resurrection.

**All the nations** — refers to the whole world, both Jew and Gentile.

**2. Interpretation:** What is the meaning of the text?

**a. What did the passage mean to the original audience?**

Membership in the kingdom is open to all through baptism. It is the duty of every believer to share the good news of eternal life through faith in Christ with everyone he or she encounters.

**b. What is the main theme, idea, or point of the passage?**

Baptism (and the gospel message) is available to the whole world. Doubt does not preclude one from discipleship. Jesus' power and lordship is over all.

**3. Application:** What does this meaning apply to me?

**a. Is there a command (or commands) to obey?**

My status as a follower of Christ means that I am obligated to tell others about him and to tell them how to become his follower.

**b. Is there a promise (or promises) I can trust God to keep?**

Jesus is with me always, and especially when I am trying to serve him.

**c. Is there something in the passage that convicts me of an area in my life where I need to grow or change?**

I need to do a better job of telling others about Jesus. He is a gift to share, not a secret to keep.

**d. Is there a practice or a habit revealed by the passage that will help me grow in my relationship with God?**

I need to learn to worship and obey in spite of my doubts and not let them keep me from living the life that God wants me to live.

**e. What can I do right now in response to what I have learned by studying this passage?**

I can pray for an opportunity to tell someone about Jesus.

## Section 5: Biblical Shepherding & Care-giving

### Care giving — What is it?

Giving care is an important part of being a *koinonia* group leader. It comes naturally for some, but must be intentionally learned by others. There are some basic principles and practices that can help teach you how to be a care-giving *koinonia* group leader.

In order to adequately give care to your group, your span of care must be limited. This is one of the reasons why group membership is limited. No one can provide adequate care to more than 8-12 people at the level required by small group leadership.

If the small group is the church in its smallest form, then the small group leader is the pastor of his or her small group. Over the centuries the role of pastor in the local church has evolved into an ordained office, but this was not always the case. The Greek word that is translated “pastor” in Ephesians 4:11 can also mean, “shepherd.” One of the functions of a pastor-shepherd is caregiver. In the small group context there are three levels of basic care giving: primary care, mutual care, and backup care.

**Primary care:** This is the support and care that you as leader give to your group members. It will vary over time and from group to group. One of the basic elements of primary care is prayer. You should regularly pray for the members of your group. This also involves caring about what is going on in their lives. Ideally, group members will share their lives and life-struggles in the group, but whether they do or not, it is your responsibility as group leader to show an interest in their lives. Another aspect of primary care is regular contact through calls, emails, letters, or visits. This is especially important in crisis moments and may involve visiting or calling a group member who has been hospitalized.

**Mutual care:** This is the support and care group members give to one another. Most of this care will happen initially within the context of the group meetings. One of the tasks of the leader is to foster the development of mutual care within the group. This serves two purposes. First, it helps to build relationships among group members. Second, it takes some of the burden of care off your shoulders. Spiritual care giving among small group members is often more effective than pastoral care giving because of the deep relationships that develop in the small group context.

**Backup care:** The small group leader is not meant to be a trained counselor or therapist. There may be occasions when you simply cannot give care in a crisis situation. You should never try to solve problems you are not trained or qualified to address. Crisis situations should be referred to the pastor or an appropriate professional. In the event of a life or death situation, do not hesitate to contact the proper authorities for help.

## Section 6: Developing an Apprentice

**Premise:** One of the basic assumptions in the *koinonia* group process is that groups will multiply. More groups mean a need for more leaders. The best way to learn is by doing, which means that the best place for leaders to develop is within the group. The *koinonia* group provides a “laboratory” in which people can discern a call to group leadership and learn the skills and techniques necessary to do it. One of the passages in Scripture that talks about — one could even say commands — the development of apprentices is found in 2 Timothy 2:1-2

*You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well.*

In a very real sense, every member of your small group is a potential apprentice. All it takes to lead a group is the desire to do so and the willingness to learn the necessary skills and acquire the necessary tools. Let’s look at the topic of developing an apprentice by asking four basic questions:

1. What is an apprentice leader? An apprentice leader is someone who has been entrusted with some of the tasks of leadership. Ideally, your apprentice will be someone who has demonstrated an interest in sharing the leadership of the group. Your apprentice should also be someone who demonstrates some or all of the basic characteristics of a Biblical leader that we discussed in the first section of this handbook.
2. Why should I develop an apprentice leader? In order to have more groups, we need more leaders. Biblically speaking, once you accept the responsibility of being a leader, you also take on the responsibility of passing on what you have learned to at least one other person. The best way to become an effective leader is by being a leader under the guidance and direction of someone who can serve as a mentor.
3. How can I identify an apprentice leader?  
The best way to identify an apprentice leader is to begin by looking for group members who take the group seriously and who give it priority. As strange as it may seem, another good way to identify an apprentice is by considering those people who challenge your leadership. These people are often leaders who are frustrated because they have no opportunity to lead. Put them to work!

Try to look for people in your group who share the vision of small groups and who really seem to thrive in the small group environment. People who are passionate about small groups make great leaders and often require just a little nudge to get them thinking about becoming one. Look for people who are outgoing and who always seem willing to help with the tasks of leadership.

4. How do you develop an apprentice leader?

This is a simple question with a simple answer. The best way to develop an apprentice is by sharing the leadership of your group with him or her. This is the first step in becoming a full-fledged leader. Begin by sharing leadership of the group and then, when the time seems right, broach the subject of becoming a leader with him or her. Above all, pray that God will lift up an apprentice in your group whom you can mentor and train. Remember: you don't have to be a perfect leader before you train someone else. All you need is the desire to continue to learn and grow as a leader yourself.

Ideally, you should begin identifying an apprentice leader as soon as possible. In reality, you will probably be able to do this until the group has begun to develop. This will depend on a number of factors including how often the group meets and how well the members interact with one another. Often your apprentice will end up being the person with whom you found yourself in conflict over issues of leadership.

Remember that while a few rare individuals have a gift for leadership, the rest of us have to develop the characteristics necessary to become an effective leader. It takes time to learn the skills that you need to be a good leader. It is a journey that is never really complete.

Small group leadership is basically a combination of desire, character, and skills. If you have the desire to be a leader you can develop the character and learn the skills you need to be an effective leader. It takes time and a commitment to grow, but it is an incredibly rewarding experience.

## Section 7: Birthing & Leader Support

One of the signs of a healthy group of any sort is growth. If a group is growing, it is healthy. Most groups start out small and grow larger over time. This is usually an intentional process. If your group starts out with less than ten people you will want to involve your members in the ongoing process of inviting new members. The group should decide when and how often people will be invited. The process for inviting new members — and for discovering whom God has decided to invite to your group — is called the Open Chair.

### **The Open Chair — What is it?**

God's plan is that the Good News of salvation should be shared with the whole world (Matthew 28:16-20). This is the exciting privilege of the church. Since the small group is the church in its smallest form, each group (with a few exceptions) should always be seeking to add to its number those who need to experience fellowship with Christ.

The open chair is both a physical reality and a symbol. If your group is not yet at its capacity (twelve members) you should always have an empty chair at your meeting to symbolize the next new member of your group. The open chair is also a reminder that your group members should be reaching out to their lost neighbors co-workers, family, and friends with the good news about Jesus. Even if you don't need to fill the chair right now, you should be praying about who needs to sit in that chair when the next opening occurs in your group. The open chair symbolizes both an opening in your group and an opening in the Kingdom of God.

If you are diligent about this process and are successful both in inviting people to be a part of your group and assimilating new members, your group will eventually become too big to realistically add new members. When this happens, it is time to consider the possibility of birthing a new group.

### **Birthing: What is it and why should we do it?**

One of the keys to the success of any small group ministry is multiplication. This happens most effectively through a process called "birthing." Birthing is an appropriate analogy for this process because it involves pain, separation, and a sense of loss as well as celebration, joy, and an appreciation for what has been gained. In order for the birthing process to succeed, it must be intentional. Let's look at the concept of birthing by asking four questions.

**1. What is birthing?** Birthing is the term used to describe the process of group multiplication. In the early days of the modern small group movement it was compared to the process of a living, growing cell splitting become two complete cells. The metaphor of birthing was applied to this process as a way of acknowledging the pain, sense of loss, separation, joy, and celebration that are part of giving birth to a new group. Experience has shown that the process of birthing new groups is a complex one and that each group approaches it from a different perspective. This has led to the development of different models for birthing. We will look at these models a little later.

**2. Why should my group birth another group? (Do we have to?)** The short answer to this question is, yes. The only way groups can multiply is if they form new groups. While it is possible to continually recruit new leaders and new group members from the population of people who have never been in a small group, it is far easier to assimilate people into existing groups. It is also more effective because the group starts out with a core of people who are familiar with the small group experience. But before you anxiety level gets to high, bear in mind that the day of birth may be several years after the start of your group.

**3. How does the birthing process work?** The birthing process begins with a time of education and prayer during which the group learns about birthing and discerns when and how God is leading it to birth a new group. It works best if the group believes that it's purpose is to multiply and to give life to other groups. One of the best ways to foster the birthing process is through the following steps:

- a. Include the goal of birthing in your group covenant.
- b. Identify and develop and apprentice leader.
- c. Continue to invite new members into your group.
- d. Before the time of birthing arrives, continue to meet as a large group for prayer and fellowship and then divide into sub-groups for the study time.
- e. Take your time — don't rush the process. God will reveal the right moment to you and to your group.

**4. What are some of the models for birthing that have been tried?** An excellent diagram of some of the most common models is found in the section of birthing in the book *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*. These are the four basic types of birthing:

- a. **Leader births out:** The original leader births out of the group to start a new group and the apprentice takes over the original group.
- b. **Apprentice births out:** The apprentice leader births out to start a new group and the original group continues to meet with the original leader.
- c. **Group births a new group:** The apprentice and some of the members of the original group birth out to form a new group. Both groups begin the process of recruiting new members and growing towards birth again.
- d. **All members birth out (“Turbo”):** All members are apprentices and birth out to start new groups. This is a common model for training leaders.

#### **What kind of support can I expect as a small group leader?**

The current model for leader support involves quarterly leader support meetings and quarterly visits to each group by the small group pastor. One-on-one support with the small group pastor is always available by phone, email, or in person.

The church library contains a variety of basic Bible study tools. In addition, the small group pastor maintains a growing library of small group study resources and other materials that are helpful for leaders and leader development.

## How to Start a Small Group

1. Pray: Be specific. What need is God leading you to meet through a small group?
2. Choose a topic or focus about which you are passionate. It does not good to start
3. Don't form your group around a topic that doesn't interest you. Your lack of interest will be communicated to the group and it will fizzle — probably before it even starts!
4. Advertise: Bulletin announcements, flyers, and newsletter articles are all effective ways to raise awareness of your group in the church and community.
5. Personally recruit: There is no substitute for the personal touch. Pray about who would benefit from being in your group and contact them personally to invite them to be a part of the group.
6. Be patient. Wait on God's timing. When he is ready, your group will flourish.

## Resource List:

Arnold, Jeffrey. *The Big Book on Small Groups*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992, 2004.

Arnold, Jeffrey. *Small Group Outreach: Turning Groups Inside Out*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998.

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Stark, David & Patrick Keifert. *7 Steps to a Successful Small Group Ministry*. Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota: Church Innovations Publishing, Inc., 1994

*The Serendipity Bible for Personal and Small Group Study*. Littleton, Colorado: Serendipity House, 1996.