

YOUTH CATALYST

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SMALL GROUP FRAMEWORK

Small Group Coordinators Guide

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SECTION 01

BACKGROUND



VISION

The vision of the Youth Catalyst Project emerges from Philippians 1:14 and seeks to grow a generation of missionary disciples who live out and proclaim the gospel without fear. Our hope is that this guide will inform the practice of those serving in youth ministry, deepening the discipleship of young people, and inspiring fresh thinking and practice.

We believe, and research indicates, that intentional small discipleship groups are vital to this vision as they create a context that promotes spiritual growth. (1)

This is because intentional small groups provide:

- A sense of deep community for their members,
- A place that creates a focus on Jesus,
- An environment where people can bring their lives to scripture
- An atmosphere where people learn to pray deeply and use their gifts,
- A culture of hunger and accountability,
- A climate for actively developing new leaders
- And a community that seeks God's heart for the world and those that don't know Jesus.

And so our vision for this framework is to help youth leaders, whether serving in paid roles or as volunteers, create effective small group structures, based on tried and tested methods that are also rooted in theory and theology.

The aim of this guide is not to force you into a small group straight-jacket, but give some guiding principles that you can apply and adapt to your context. As you will see later on in this guide through some examples, the framework can be adapted to different contexts in a variety of ways.

Whilst we do not believe that there is only one model to follow for an effective small group, we do believe that there is plenty of helpful theory and theology that can help better structure this vital component of a youth ministry. This guide seeks to learn from good theory and theology and link them to a framework that can better help disciple young people in the way of Jesus.

In many places a small group structure will sit within broader range of youth ministry activity. Yet, we believe that intentional well led small groups should form the heart of any youth ministry provision. If you have a only few young people and are unsure how to develop their faith, then we suggest initially starting a youth ministry by building an intentional small group culture, before adding any other activity. Once you have an effective small group ministry we then suggest creating a discipleship pathway that feeds in and flows out of these groups.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is primarily concerned with the structure of a small group rather than the content or curriculum that will be studied. This guide aims to help you lay the key foundations vital to the life of an effective small group.

One of our key beliefs is that effective small groups, and discipleship in general, is contextual. Effective leadership needs to listen to God, the young people (and their families), and the unique context of your church, to establish the teaching content of an effective small group. Therefore, whilst we are not suggesting content, we will highlight various approaches to selecting material and discerning a curriculum that maybe useful for your setting.

Yet, whilst content should be contextual, we believe that we can learn a great deal from tried and tested structures and the theory and theology that underpin them. Our initial research suggested that many youth leaders across the UK are unaware of, or struggle to articulate, the theory and theology behind the way their small group practice. Many suggest that their small group practice arises either from copying forms they've seen elsewhere, or emerges from their own experience and personality. Our hope is that this guide begins to root practice in greater depth, adding some theory and theology to create more effective discipleship groups. Our belief is that when we know the theory and theology behind small groups we will be equipped to lead more effectively.

Key, but often rarely discussed, questions around launching and running small group ministries are "what are the components that comprise small group ministry? How do the desired components fit together? What theories support preferred approaches to small groups? And is there an educational philosophy that helps interpret and provides a grounding for the desired use of small groups?"⁽²⁾ Without an exploration of these ideas, small group leaders are simply left to do what is right in their own eyes⁽³⁾ In other words, Christian workers need theoretical understanding and training and not just encouragement, ⁽⁴⁾ which is often the heart of most training.

As such information about group dynamics, group structures, common issues, and multiplication methods needs to be intentionally taught and modelled if groups are to remain viable and transformative.⁽⁵⁾ Our hope is that this guide begins to lay a foundation for these things.

PRAYER

Whilst a large amount of this booklet is concerned with establishing a framework that small groups can operate within and the structures and techniques, theory and theology of small groups, these things only make a difference when we are praying and seeking the Father for all we do. Prayer has the potential to deepen our faith and passion, creating a hunger for the things of God, opening our ears to his voice and direction, and enlarging our compassion and heart for those we are leading.

Research suggests that the longer a leader spends developing their own intimacy with God in prayer, the more effective their small group will be. Furthermore, those who pray daily for their members are more likely to see their groups both deepen and multiply⁽⁶⁾ In fact, research directly links the time leaders spend in prayer, seeking God for their small groups members and meetings and the evangelistic impact of their small groups.⁽⁷⁾

As such, prayer is a vital component of this small group framework. Without prayer we are striving in our own efforts. As Spurgeon noted,

“prayer is the engine room of the church, without prayer the whole mill grinds to a halt.”⁽⁸⁾

Therefore, more than anything else we do, a culture of prayer and intercession, listening and waiting, needs to form in our youth ministries. Prayer needs to be the very foundation of any small group strategy and all the theory and thinking that follows, needs to be rooted in the life of prayer so that whatever is built arises out of communication with God.

MAKING DISCIPLES

The church as a whole, is currently struggling to connect with and retain young people. Whilst there are a number of factors influencing this, part of the reason is that “we have a discipleship problem in the church... We have forgotten how to make disciples. We have become good at building churches and maybe creating religious consumers – but have we neglected making disciples?” (9)

“the church in the West has largely forgotten the art of disciple making and has largely reduced it to an intellectual assimilation of theological ideas. As a result, we have a rather anaemic cultural Christianity highly susceptible to the lures of consumerism. This in turn works directly against a true following of Jesus. In our desire to be seeker-friendly and attractational, we have largely abandoned the vigorous kind of discipleship that characterised early Christianity and every significant Jesus movement since.”(10)

Young people are particularly vulnerable to a divergent belief known as Moralistic Therapeutic deism.(11) This view perpetuates an understanding of God as a divine butler and cosmic counsellor, someone who is on call to meet their needs and to listen to them, bringing therapeutic support when they need it, but who retreats to a safe distance and not actively involved in their lives.(12) This faith lacks the cost, commitment and call of real Christianity. Ultimately it is an empty faith, simply helping people to be nice, to feel good about themselves, but leaving God in the background of their lives,(13) lacking the holiness and depth of real Christianity.(14) As Mark Sayers describes this faith as seeking all the benefits of the Kingdom of God, but without the King.(15) It looks for justice, and peace and freedom and equality but rejects Jesus who brings those things into being.

This framework therefore, seeks to create climates in youth ministries that re-focus on discipleship, aiming to help form young people as followers of Jesus. Our goal must be to equip young people to become disciple-making followers of Jesus as Mat 28:18-20 encourages. Our aim is to equip young people to step back into this call to be part of Jesus’ disciple-making movement; with disciples making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples...

We want this disciple-making commission to be the heartbeat and definition of youth ministry, for it to reshape our focus as youth leaders.

DEPTH, CONSISTENCY AND ADVENTURE

Youth Ministry has been in a transitional season for a number of years. It hasn't been easy. What worked in the past now sometimes struggles, many are working with fewer young people, we've had a volunteer exodus post-covid, recruitment for paid roles is tricky and bureaucracy and the fear driven culture that young people are growing up is impacting faith development. And in this transition, where we cannot quite see the road ahead, and behind the framework articulated in this guide, are three approaches that we believe are essential to the youth ministry of the future.

The first of these approaches is depth. For too long, youth ministry has become associated with a Christianity lite, an entertainment model of faith development.⁽⁴³⁾ And the problem is in the complex world in which we live this shallow faith doesn't quite work. In a culture that is often described as a mile wide and an inch deep, our young people are hungry for depth. Our hope is that this small group framework helps leaders to facilitate greater depth in faith discussions with young people, opening them up to the deep wells of Christian thinking and practice.

The second approach we advocate is consistency. Our young people are growing up in what sociologists often describe as a social schizophrenia, where they become different people, with different value systems and characteristics in different areas of life. Whilst this has been a common issue for many years, in more recent times this compartmentalisation has become a survival skill, a way of coping with the pressures of life.⁽⁴⁴⁾ And so in a culture that seems to value both this internal inconsistency, and the external inconsistency of keeping ones options open, we believe that creating cultures of consistency is vital. We think that part of the discipleship process is about becoming whole, about doing life and faith in an integrated way. Our hope is that as leaders grapple with this framework it will help cultivate systems that model consistency and create cultures of consistency that lead our fragmented young people towards greater shalom..

The third approach we advocate is for youth ministries to invest in Adventure. Our fear driven, and pressure riddled culture steals life from our young people. They have a longing for more, but often feel like their lives are bland and uneventful. Faith is often something they inherit and then sleepwalk through, rather than actively step into. Jesus becomes an idea rather than a lived relationship. Our hope is that as this framework creates space for depth and models consistency it also crafts spaces of adventure, helping them discover the wonder of walking with Jesus, of knowing who they are becoming and stepping out to make a difference in the world.

And so we want to encourage you as you plan and prepare for small groups to see them as spaces that imaginatively foster depth, consistency and adventure in the lives of young people.

WHY SMALL GROUPS?

Our research locally and nationally highlights the importance of intentional small discipleship groups in the faith formation of young people. 64% of Anglican churches see small groups as the most effective way of discipling young people¹⁶ and important CofE reports^(17,18) also suggest that churches growing in young people are more likely to have discipleship groups which are shown to have a positive impact on young people's faith formation.⁽¹⁹⁾

In response to the fragmenting, individualism of western culture, small groups can play a powerful counter-cultural role, as they encourage deep community and create contexts for faith development.⁽²⁰⁾ In the increasingly urban, technology driven individualism and isolation of the modern world small groups combat loneliness and meet a longing for deeper interactions.⁽²¹⁾ Small groups also help people to better integrate biblical concepts into everyday life, at the same time as moving individuals beyond the passive receiving teaching mode of the gathered church⁽²²⁾ as they help individuals learn skills and take responsibility for their own spiritual development.⁽²³⁾

Interestingly, small group research indicates the positive impact of intentional small groups for individual discipleship. One study found that those who regularly attend small group are significantly more likely to engage with and memorise scripture, serve God, use their spiritual gifts, pray for others, seek forgiveness, attend church, fast, study, and share their faith more than those who attend church but are not part of a small group.⁽²⁴⁾ This is backed up by another study that indicated that members of small groups state that the group enhances their spiritual life, gives them a greater faith confidence, and aids forgiveness, prayer life and evangelism.⁽²⁵⁾

Furthermore, evidence shows that members of small groups are more likely to attend Sunday services and exhibit higher levels of giving than those not in small groups.⁽²⁶⁾

Lastly, small groups are positive for gender equality. They seem to reduce the gender gap that exists in church, with men being more likely to attend a small group than a service, and with women more able to step into significant leadership positions within small group structures.⁽²⁷⁾

Negatively, small groups are often critiqued for neglecting evangelism and social justice engagement. However, this is often because the groups have not had these components as a clear part of the small group purpose, or utilised structures that promote these activities. This often means that groups fall into the trap of focussing on encouraging members, building community and mutual support, and only offering a feel good spirituality,⁽²⁸⁾ rather than engaging in discipleship and mission.

Whilst small groups are vitally important for the future of the church they often need to be complemented by larger focussed teaching and worship times, alongside leadership development programmes and outreach opportunities.(29)

It can be argued that small groups are vital because they follow the pattern of Jesus' interactions with his own disciples. Jesus gathered both the 12 around himself, and a smaller group of Peter, James and John. There is also evidence of practice similar to small groups in the NT church where believers met in households for teaching, prayer, fellowship and the breaking of bread and they have been important in church history. The use of small groups existed in Christian communities without dedicated church buildings for several centuries and a key part of the protestant reformation was marked a growth in small groups, probably best exemplified by Wesley's groupings of classes (10 -15 members) and bands (4-5 members).(30)

All these examples are marked by a group commitment to collective learning, where communal interactions and scripture speak into the life of believers and that when ready, disciples are encouraged to replicate their learning with their own small groups.(31)

All of this challenges the view that discipleship is an individual pursuit. Rather, small groups demonstrate that discipleship is more effective in community, providing space for individuals to practice their discipleship together. Every time a group meets people are learning how to love God and each other, to use their talents and spiritual gifts, to show care for each other, to pray together, to pray for others, to discuss and help each other to put biblical concepts into action, and to find ways of serving and reaching out to bless others.(32) They help the church fulfil the great commission.

WHAT MAKES A SMALL GROUP?

One of the key definitions of a group is offered by Schultz who says:

A group is a limited number of people who communicate face-to-face, share a common understanding of an interdependent goal, influence one another, and express a sense of belongingness⁽³²⁾

Central to her ideas are that:

- Small Groups involve a limited number of people as over a certain size they become something else, either a crowd or congregation or mass gathering
- They involve face to face communication, or at least communicate in a way that recognises the individuality of each person
- They share a common understanding of a goal. In other words they have a sense of purpose. They are going somewhere, or achieving something together.
- The members influence each other and have an effect on each other, and share a common sense of fate, where what happens to one member effects the rest of the group
- Members express a sense of belongingness and identification to the group⁽³³⁾

These ideas are important as groups are being planned. Of particular importance is the idea of a group goal. Interestingly, groups often struggle if they have no goals beyond the sense of just being community. A group must exist for an aim outside of itself.⁽³⁴⁾

Yet, not all church groups are intentional, small discipleship groups. Groups may have many different aims or reasons for meeting, but there is something different about an intentional, small discipleship group. Small discipleship groups are not the same as a normal youth group, a Bible study, or other small communities within the church, even if they share similarities.

Some of these key differences are, firstly, that small discipleship groups are intentional or purposeful. They are intentional in that they have consistent leaders and members, they focus on discipleship growth and helping individuals to become more Christlike.

Rather than just imparting head knowledge, or biblical information, the heart of an intentional discipleship group is to help people grapple with their faith, and equip them to put on their new selves created to be like Jesus. As they do this, the intentional discipleship group helps disciples to make more disciples. This process reconnects mission and discipleship, which have often become separated. This re-emphasising of mission as a vital part of the discipleship process draws small group members into the adventure of following Jesus, revealing him to a world in need. Without this last focus, which is often missing, groups become stale, discipleship and evangelism become separated and groups become lopsided and inward looking, with discipleship becoming stunted.⁽³⁵⁾

GROUP SIZE

The final key thing about these groups is that they are intentionally small. They deliberately try to help people find belong in the “intimate” and “personal spaces” that we operate in. These two spaces have potential to form when either 2-4 (intimate), or 5-12 (personal) people gather together and are both marked by a level of honest sharing and confidentiality.⁽³⁶⁾

These size of groupings and the spaces that they produce have the potential of deep community, which is central to spiritual growth.⁽³⁷⁾ As such intentional small discipleship groups are usually between 3 to 12 people. With some suggesting that “the perfect size lies between eight and twelve people.”⁽³⁸⁾ Sometimes a group of ten is mentioned as the perfect number, “that is the time-tested, scientifically validated size that allows for optimal communication.”⁽³⁹⁾

It is this honest communication that is vital to the success of a small group and it has been noted that in groups of less than 5 people communication is likely to flow between everybody present, with everyone participating and interacting. However, interaction begins to tail off a little as groups reach 7 individuals, with quieter members often only talking when given space to, and directing their comments towards leaders. Furthermore, as groups continue to increase in size, talk becomes centralised around fewer people and whole group interaction and participation declines. As groups grow beyond 12 people, usually only 5-7 will contribute with the others remaining quiet. Therefore, for effective whole group communication the ideal group size is from 5 to 7 but small groups can cope with being a bit larger than this.⁽⁴⁰⁾

This is highlighted by the following table which shows the possible number of group interactions in groups of different sizes. As can be seen as the number of group members increases so to do the possible interactions. However, interactions increase far more quickly than members and individuals in groups larger than 8 people start to struggle to keep everyone in mind as unique persons.

Further, as group size increases communication becomes more formal and directed around fewer people. It is also likely that as groups become larger they run the risk of forming mini-groups within the main group. Again, as groups increase in size the likelihood of behavioural issues in the small group increases and negative group roles and negative group talk become more of a possibility and as such it becomes harder for groups to maintain a healthy sense of cohesion. Furthermore, as groups get larger the leaders role changes from being alongside to being more of a boundary keeper and as such conversation becomes less deep and honest.

The table(41), therefore hints at the idea that smaller groups maybe more effective in creating greater depth and increasing discipleship.

Number of Group Members	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Number of possible interactions	2	9	28	75	186	441	1016	2296	5110	11253	24564

As a result we recommend that effective small groups should always be below 15 members, and that when groups start approaching 10-12 in number they should be preparing to multiply, especially if they have consistent attendance.

It is also worth noting that even very small groups of three or four people can be incredibly effective and encourage discipleship. These smaller groups operate more in what the 'intimate space' and can be aid formation and growth. They are often more informal in style but can operate at a deep level. This is an important consideration as it means that churches with only a handful of young people (even just two or 3) can still host effective small groups. We highlight one example later on in the guide of a church intentionally building its small group practice around these smaller groupings because of the discipleship depth that such groups create.

Interestingly, Jesus seemed to operate using both of these group sizes, investing both regularly with the twelve and then also with a smaller group of three comprised of Peter, James and John.

All of the above emphasises that discipleship transformation is the result of deliberately formed relationships, where people choose to embrace others for their own growth, but also for that of others. As a result, small groups can be a God given gift to the church that provide an environment that builds community, enhances spiritual formation in all areas of a persons life, and grows their confidence and trust in Christ.

(42)

PURPOSE & GOALS

For small groups to work effectively they need to have a clear stated purpose. This purpose needs to be constantly reinforced by the group leaders, particularly as the group begins to form and come together. This is because if individuals within the group see the group as having a different purpose the group will be less effective and may even struggle, liable to go off in different directions.(45)

Our research suggests that effective small groups have three core purposes:

- 1.To develop the spiritual growth of the groups members
- 2.To provide deep and honest community that encourages and supports each member
- 3.To equip members with confidence, courage and opportunity to reach out so that the group multiplies

These purposes will need to be restated for your own context, but if these goals are not agreed and restated often, and if they do not become of primary importance to both small group leaders and each member, then other reasons for participating in the group are likely to come to the fore undermine the above goals.As such, small group leaders need to listen carefully, trying to discern each members motives for joining the group and see if they can be gently aligned to the above purposes.(46)

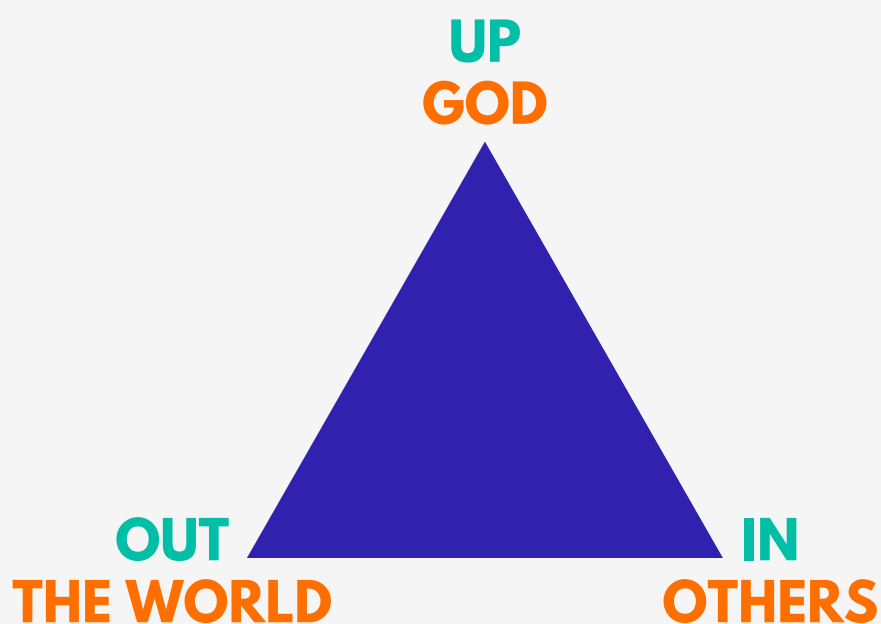
Another way of framing these goals is through the UP, IN, OUT triangle. Effective small groups pay attention to the UP, IN, OUT Triangle as these highlight the three purposes or important elements of the small group. Every week the small group should be encouraging a believers relationship with God (UP), their relationship with others (IN) and their relationship to the world (OUT).

We see these three characteristics lived out in the life of Jesus and they are offered as a model for all believers to focus on and grow in.(47)

As we will see as we unpack the framework later in this guide, all of these elements of the discipleship triangle form a core part of the structure of a small group, encouraging deeper connection to God, other believers, and the world around them. Whilst the framework supports the Triangle, an effective small group leader pays attention to these purposes making sure that they are emphasised every week, and that key ideas, in particular the mission element of the small group are not ignored or neglected.

Furthermore, an over focus on one of these elements runs the risk of skewing the group and limiting discipleship. Small group writers often critique community centred approaches that over-focus on the IN relationship and expect that as Christians gather to grow as a community the UP and OUT will automatically happen. However, research suggests that without the other two elements of the triangle the group will stagnate spiritually and only offer a 'feel good' spirituality. Whilst community focussed groups have a great potential for effective discipleship, the deep, intimate relationships that they provide are not enough to produce mature disciples of Christ.⁴⁸ The same is true for the other elements of the diagram, an over focus on the UP purpose, without a strong focus on the IN or Out aspects leads to increased knowledge, but often makes no difference to lifestyle. Similarly as an overfocus on the OUT purpose can lead plenty of good works, but shallow relationships with God and the rest of the group.

The effective group leader therefore, needs to pay attention to all three purposes and to review regularly how each is impacting the small group.



One final goal many effective groups pay attention to is for leaders to encourage a form of discipleship where the disciples can grow beyond the leaders.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Although scripture talks more about raising disciples than it does raising leaders, good discipleship should release new leaders. This is because when people are equipped as disciples they inevitably start influencing the world around them with the values of the Kingdom of God, bringing positive change beyond themselves.

SECTION 02

THEOLOGY & THEORY



INTRODUCTION

As mentioned at the beginning of this guide, one of the key concerns underpinning this framework is the need for small group practice to be linked to theology and theory.

It is vital that thought is given to these things as groups prepare to launch. Having a grasp of theology and theory brings a level of depth that facilitates innovation and also prevents leaders from undermining the small group experience that they are trying to create. Small groups are not automatically positive, it is possible for them to become unhelpful, and this is more likely when theological or theoretical principles are ignored and when groups are structured carelessly. When this happens discipleship can be negatively impacted, growth can become stunted, and people can feel excluded or overwhelmed.⁽⁵⁰⁾

As such, this section aims to give those establishing a small group system an understanding of some useful theology and theory that links to the framework we are recommending.

The first part of this section focusses on theology around discipleship, and explores its importance, approaches taken by Jesus, the formation process, spiritual styles, spiritual practices and 7 important trends in youth ministry that bring depth when worked out in the small group context.

The key theory then follows. Central to this is the forming, storming, norming, performing and mourning process of Group dynamics which gives an understanding of the journey small groups move through over time. Two other key pieces of theory follow, including the communication pyramid that aims to help leaders understand the level of risk and trust required for deep interactions, and an understanding of cohesion which is vital to building community and depth.

This theological and theoretical thinking has been deliberately included because it maps so well on to the framework later in the guide. Our belief is that when we know the 'why' and 'what' behind our practice of small groups we become better able to lead, adapt and contextualise for the benefit of the small group members.

JESUS' DISCIPLESHIP

Mike Breen in his book *Building a Discipleship Culture* discusses three core approaches to the discipleship process. These he can be described as Instruction, Immersion and Imitation.⁽⁵¹⁾ As we consider establishing intentional small discipleship groups it is vital that we pay attention to these ideas as all three need to be part of the groups we create. Interestingly, these three ideas map onto the way Jesus interacts with his disciples in Matthew's Gospel.

Firstly, Instruction is shown in Matt 5-7. Initially after calling the disciples Jesus initiates a period of instruction. We see this in the sermon on the mount with Jesus giving his re-interpretation of the Torah. The scene is marked by Jesus teaching and explaining the values and central ideas of his Kingdom. It highlights that part of the discipleship process is about creating understanding and that this often involves spoken teaching.

The second process is Immersion and is highlighted in Matt 8-9. After an initial period of instruction, Jesus is then shown travelling around the countryside with his disciples following after him. They are observers, up close and personal, watching and listening as Jesus demonstrates how to practically live out the values he has just spoken about. The disciples are immersed in the demonstration of the Kingdom that Jesus is revealing, seeing how he approaches life and others. They are immersed in his practices as he heals, provides, restores, corrects and challenges. The disciples get to witness the way Jesus goes about life.

The third process, imitation, can be seen in Matt 10. Jesus doesn't just instruct his disciples, and he also doesn't stop with just having them observe and listen to him. Rather he calls the 72 to himself and then sends them out to have a go, to copy, what he has been doing. The disciples get to put their learning into practice. They are sent out to imitate and emulate their master. They have learnt the theory, watched the practice and now they are disciples further as they are sent to do what Jesus has been doing.

These three processes, Instruction, Immersion and Imitation, are central to the discipleship process. Yet, very often church discipleship programmes and small groups stop overfocus on instruction and underplay immersion and imitation. As such, people are unable to see discipleship ideas modelled and so they lack confidence when they are sent out.

Further, when our discipleship is just about instruction it can become over-focussed on head knowledge, becoming slightly lopsided. This can lead to discipleship that either becomes information focussed or slightly pharisaic and moralistic. As such instruction needs to be balanced by the discipleship phases of Immersion and Imitation. These are vital components as they deepen understanding, build confidence and lead to application and equip believers to live differently. They move discipleship from just a head knowledge pursuit to learning a way of life.

THE DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS

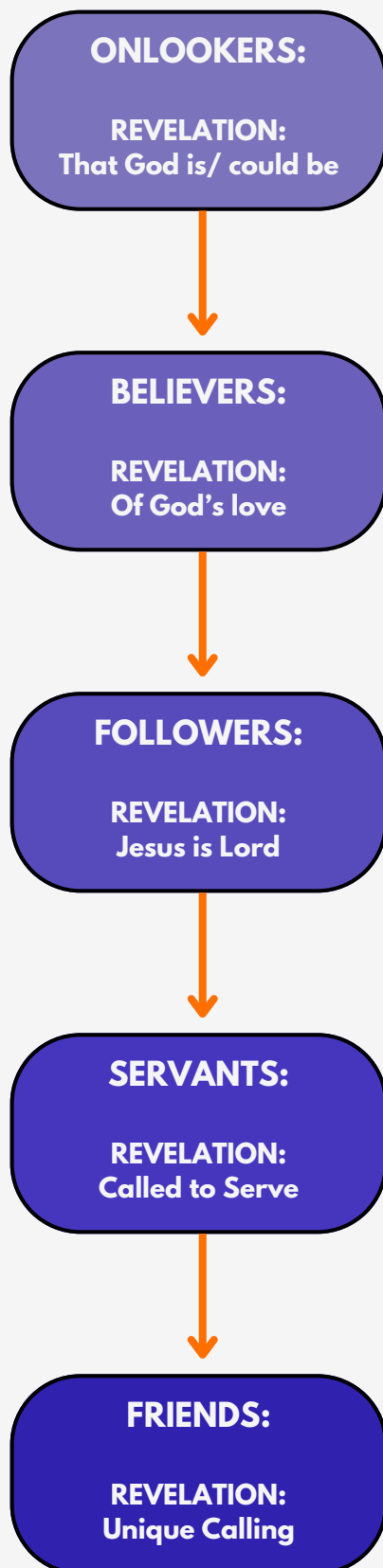
One way of viewing discipleship is as a journey into truth and freedom that it happens through a series of stages, or moments of revelation.⁽⁵²⁾ In this view discipleship deepens as individuals grasp a revelation and decide to agree with it. For deep discipleship to occur an individual needs to grasp and agree with several moments of revelation. This pattern of revelation is modelled after the process Jesus' disciples seem to follow as they grow in faith and follow Jesus more fully.

The First Revelation an Individual requires is the revelation that 'God is' or 'God could be'. This opens a person up to being willing to investigate the possibility of Jesus. We see this as the disciples begin to follow Jesus. They are unsure and uncertain as to his identity, but they are intrigued and what to investigate. At this stage the disciples become onlookers on the fringe of faith. This is often the place for those who are on the edge of joining a small group, or who have been invited to a group's social activities. The individual here, needs to see the community that is happening and hear stories about the positives of following Jesus. As they do they start to wonder as to whether God/Jesus might be real and worth investigating.

The second moment of revelation requires a revelation of God's love. Here an onlooker moves to become a believer. This happens as an individual starts to realise that God loves them. This revelation of God's love for them deepens their discipleship and results in belief. We see this in the disciples in a whole variety of ways, but perhaps the time they grasped Jesus' love most clearly is when he washes their feet, showing them the full extent of his love. Once an individual receives this revelation they often make a commitment to follow Jesus, but in many ways such a person is still in the infancy of faith.

The Third moment of revelation comes as an individual receives the revelation that Jesus is Lord. Here believers move to become followers. We see Peter grasping this in Mat 16 where he declares Jesus to be the Messiah. This moment of revelation builds a commitment in an individual and gives them strength to follow through the difficult seasons of life. Here people start to adjust their lifestyles, becoming more obedient to Jesus.

The fourth moment of revelation is the revelation that those who follow Jesus are called to serve others and look to meet the needs of those around them. This moment of revelation gives individuals a confidence and trust in Jesus which means they are willing to lay down their lives for others and to embrace the cost of following Jesus. We see this in Peter, when he says to Jesus, to whom else would we go... This moment of revelation moves people from followers to servants.



The final moment of revelation is the revelation that comes as individuals discover their own unique calling and gifting.

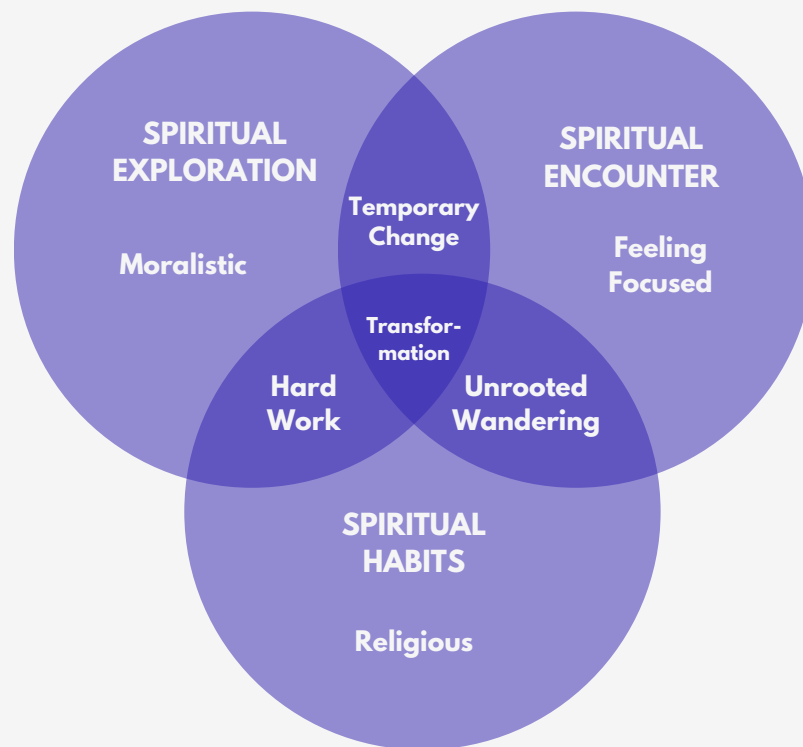
Peter receives this in his moment with Jesus when he is reinstated in John 21 with Jesus saying 'feed my sheep'. This moment of revelation equips believers to step out and reveal Jesus in their own unique way, and helps them become more like him. This moment moves servants to friends who know their master's business. This is the deepest level of discipleship, and sets a person up to pursue Christlikeness at a deep level.

Whilst the process leads to a level of depth, the discipleship process is not completed when one becomes a friend of Jesus as discipleship is ongoing. Often at this stage disciples have to continue learning and receiving again earlier moments of revelation which they rework into their lives in new ways.

This process can be helpful in the small group for several reasons. Firstly, it highlights the different stages of discipleship that people in your group may be journeying through. Secondly, it can help leaders move individuals towards deeper levels. Whilst we cannot manufacture moments of revelation for individuals. We can help them see what the process might look like and stand with them as they grapple with these moments of revelation.

THE FORMATION CIRCLES

Another key piece of theology that builds on the ideas of Instruction, Immersion and Imitation is highlighted in the diagram below:



The diagram highlights three core components of effective discipleship, Scriptural exploration, Spirit Encounter and Spiritual Habits. Each need to be part of the discipleship process and should be central to an intentional small discipleship group.

Formation, becoming like Jesus, happens as all three of these components become part of the life of an individual within a small group. Scripture needs to be explored, the Spirit needs to be encountered and spiritual habits need to be practiced. Spiritual habits include things like personal scripture reading, fasting, worship and prayer, but also include group practices like serving the church, and blessing those beyond the church who are in need.

Where only one of these formation components are found faith development can become stunted becoming moralistic, religious, or feeling focussed. Where two components are present, faith deepens but can lead to temporary change, hard work and effort, or become unrooted and wandering from orthodoxy. Where all three of these components are found transformation becomes more likely.

The aim of an effective small group is to make sure all these three components are encouraged within the small group. Discipleship happens as individuals have space to grapple with scripture, encounter God's Spirit and learn spiritual habits that they can apply in their day to day lives.

SPIRITUAL STYLES

Based on the work of Dave Csinos, (53) Spiritual Styles presents the idea that individuals tend to express and develop faith in one of four main ways. The work argues that each of these styles are a valid way of developing spiritually, but highlights that in helping others grow in faith we often over-focus on our preferred spiritual style, and ignore styles that may be more relevant to those we are working with.

As such, it is vital that we think about these styles as those facilitating small groups, because we tend to lead a session out of our preferred style, and because the young people in our groups may have a different spiritual style from us. Yet when we take into account the different spiritual styles we can help young people know and experience God more fully.

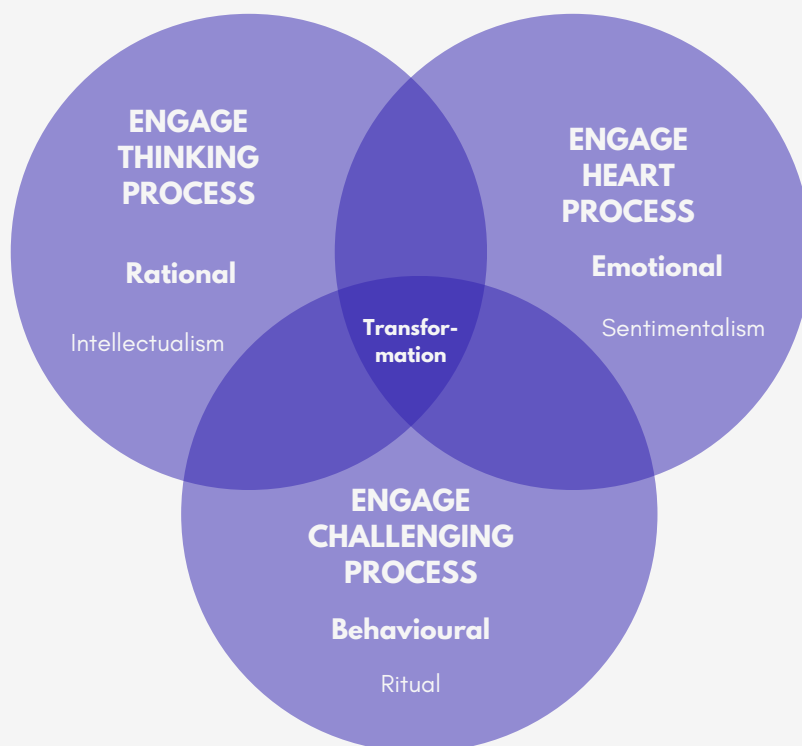
The 4 spiritual styles are highlighted in the table below:

WORD - Intellect	EMOTION - feelings	SYMBOL - Mystery	ACTION - Justice
<p>People with this spiritual style value the importance of words and their meanings. They like the concreteness, accuracy and clarity that comes with words. They know God as they learn about God and value the articulation of faith and the spoken and written form of words. They tend to engage well with preaching and Bible study. The Bible is central for those with a word based style.</p>	<p>People with this spiritual style value feelings as the core of spirituality. They value the sense of being moved and know God through deep emotional experiences, and is about getting in touch with and renewing the depth of the inner self. All feelings are valid, from grief, fear and anxiety to joy and happiness. Christians with this spiritual style often value, music, dance and drama and Jesus is often perceived / experienced in relational terms.</p>	<p>Those who prefer this spiritual style value abstract symbols, images and metaphors over concrete words and emotions and value the mysterious nature of God and faith. They like to sense God, and grow through a sense of union with Him. The beauty of nature, art and architecture are powerful for those with this style, as is silence, solitude, meditation.</p>	<p>Those with an action centred spiritual style value justice. Rather, than thinking feeling or sensing, this style focusses on seeing transformation in the world and meet God in activities that bring about change. This spirituality is more lived, than spoken or felt and see God in the cry of the poor or disenfranchised and have a passion and connection to the needs of the world, wanting to bring justice, freedom, healing and wholeness. They often see talk and contemplation as ineffective and instead want to focus on instigating change.</p>

Having an understanding of Spiritual styles is helpful in the small group setting and can aid the faith development of those within the group. Firstly, understanding these styles validates the differing ways people grow in faith and highlights the importance of not just focussing on one way of learning and growing.

Secondly, each of the styles is reflected in various components of the small group structure outlined in this guide, and as such utilising the framework enhances the faith development of a small group because differing spiritual styles are catered for as the group journeys through the course of a session. This can be aided further by deliberately thinking through and incorporating different spiritual styles in each section of the small group. More info and ideas can be found for each section at www.rootsontheweb.com/worship-and-learning-support/spiritual-styles.

Thirdly, the theory argues that although individuals may favour one or two styles, all four are vital for a healthy faith, word, feelings, symbols and action are important for everyone, and an overfocus on one style can leave individuals with a slightly skewed approach to faith development. As such, regular engagement with each style helps to build a healthy and well-rounded faith and fits well with the diagram below that suggests that the rational, emotional and behavioural aspects of discipleship all need to be engaged for a persons faith to be developed. (54)



7 SIGNS OF DEEP YOUTH MINISTRY

Based on significant research these 7 signs seem to underpin youth ministries that effectively disciple young people. As such, they can be extremely helpful building blocks that positively impact small group practice.

1) BELIEF - Deep Youth Ministry helps young people to know what they believe.

Our primary purpose is to help young people believe. To help them discover and decide whether or not to connect with the truth about Jesus and to give this belief substance so that it can remain when the circumstances of life test it. It is crucial that our young people can understand the gospel and the difference Jesus makes in their relationships with God, with themselves, with others and the world around them. This faith must not be abstract, but be rooted in the everyday realities and contexts in which they encounter. It must point beyond the God of Moralistic Therapeutic deism, and the Kingdom without the King, and embrace the cost, call, and commitment of following Christ.

2) INTERPRETATION - Deep youth ministry is rooted in helping young people to interpret the Bible and find meaning and identity for their lives in it.

We are a generation with more access to the Bible than any generation previously but we read it less than previous generations. Perhaps this is because in practice we have turned Scripture into a collection of proof texts about moral issues, an instruction or guide book, or maybe even a history book rather than a text that reveals a God who has moved, is moving and will move. Perhaps we've seen it as interesting rather than worldview forming. Deep youth ministry helps young people not just to find information from scripture, but to interpret their lives according to it. It helps bring the Bible to life, teaching its relevance and application for a life lived with Jesus.

3) ENCOUNTER - Deep youth ministry needs to be rooted in deep encounter.

Alongside helping young people to believe and interpret, youth ministry needs to be rooted in encounter with God. This is where faith becomes real, where God breaks into their experience and reality. One of our tasks is to facilitate moments where the otherness of God has potential to be present. This could be times of worship, waiting, or praying, or could be creative activities at one extreme, or silence and reflection at the other, but young people need these moments of encounter to connect them to Jesus. Often this involves creating time and space to slow down and meet with God, or encounter the Spirit as people pray for each other...

4) ARTICULATION - Deep youth Ministry creates space for a language of faith to develop.

Young people need space to articulate what they believe. Research suggests that young people with deeper faith are those that can articulate what God has done, what God is doing and what God might do in their future. As such young people need regular space to talk about how God has been involved or even absent in their recent lived experience. This is more than sharing their testimony of how they came to faith, although this is often a great starting point. Rather it is about encouraging young people to regularly reflect on the everyday moments they have with God, to notice them and speak them out, whether they are moments where God blesses or God is disciplining them. It is about helping young people to involve God in their story and giving them moments where they can speak that story out, either one to one, in small groups or in church-sized environments.

5) MISSION - Deep youth ministry seeks a to encourage young people to give their lives to contextual mission.

Young people's faith deepens as they step out to engage in mission. As a result deep youth ministry should be looking to equip and encourage young people into activities that help them change the world around them. This can be as simple as acts of kindness, invitations to an Alpha course, or ongoing evangelism or service projects. The aim is to draw them into activities that equip them to encounter and share faith with those outside of the church. Whatever it is, it is about creating concrete, current and contextual opportunities for mission. These opportunities must be more than talk, theory or future based and work best when modelled by adults, when young people can receive instruction, be immersed in the process of someone else sharing faith and then feel well enough equipped to have a go. And so deep youth ministry gives young people the opportunity to serve and reveal Jesus

6) FUTURE - Deep youth ministry is concerned with the future of each young person.

Too much youth ministry is reactive to the moment and gets focussed on helping young people to survive the difficulties, issues, hurts, pains and joys of growing up at the beginning of the 21st Century. But deep youth ministry is not only concerned with simply looking after young people for the few years they are our responsibility. Rather Deep Youth Ministry is about helping them grow and be shaped towards a future that is rooted in a God who calls them, creates them and crafts them into their new selves in Christ. Deep youth ministry prepares young people to live out this identity for whatever future may come. It calls out this God given identity, these Spirit given gifts and talents and equips yp for a future focussed on Jesus. It sees young people as potential leaders who can influence the world around them. And so deep youth ministry seeks the God given potential for each young person and helps them engage as individuals in a communal and personal discovery of what their future with God looks like...

7) COMMUNITY / FAMILY - Deep youth ministry is more communal than individual.

It's not that deep youth ministry does not value individuals – it massively does – but in deep youth ministry all the above components are rooted in community. Our goal is help young people find themselves in community. As it is in community, not isolation, that people discover who they are, how they might need to grow and change, and how to be honest, vulnerable and authentic. The heart of the gospel is a reminder to love God and love others and this can only be worked out in and through relationships with each other. Deep youth ministry therefore creates a community where young people can go deep and be deep, where they can practice real love – that forgiving, persevering, patient, kind, tough love that allows honesty, reality, authenticity without harsh judgments and rejection. It is about creating a climate where they don't have to put on masks or engage in the pretence of the airbrushed world we live in. Secondly, deep youth ministry is also concerned with family, both the sense of family young people are looking for, but also encouraging yp to think of their own families. It encourages intergenerational approaches to faith formation where families can grow together.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

One of the ideas that is central to the development of healthy faith, alongside Scriptural Exploration and encounters with God's Spirit or presence is the establishment of spiritual practices in the life of the believer.

Spiritual practices are vital as they provide a depth to a believers walk with God, and help to give a stability to faith when difficult seasons arise. And so one of the aims of a good small group is to model and equip members with spiritual practices to aid their faith development beyond the group.

Richard Foster discusses 12 disciplines in his book *Celebration of Discipline* and splits the habits he describes into 3 categories as outlined below. He argues that the disciplines help us live patiently and wisely and help us overcome some of the destructive ways in which we think and live, bringing about transformation of our inner person. (55) He makes the point that "the spiritual disciplines are the means of God's grace for bringing about genuine personality formation characterised through and through by love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self control (Gal 5:22-23)" (56)

The Inward Disciplines

Meditation prayer fasting and study

The Outward Disciplines

Simplicity solitude submission service

The Corporate Disciplines

Confession worship guidance celebration

It is useful for the inward disciplines to be encouraged in the small group setting and these may have particular relevance in the Word and Waiting sections where discussions and practice around these habits can take place.

The outward disciplines again can be discussed in the Word, Waiting and Witness sections. These are much harder to model in a small group session, but do contain ideas that can be caught as well as taught, as group members see and take on some of the practices of their leaders.

The Corporate disciplines can be modelled and practiced together throughout a session, but particularly in the Worship section. They could also be discussed and unpacked through the Word component.

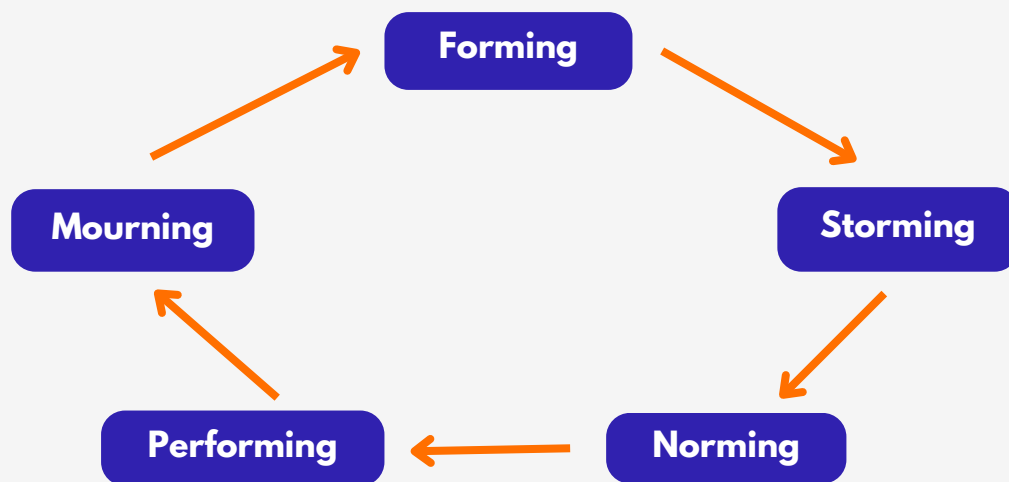
Spiritual disciplines are not a work that earns us merit before God, rather their purpose is to lead us into God's presence, so that he can work in us. (57)

GROUP DYNAMICS

All groups, regardless of their purpose, journey through a series of stages. This happens on two distinct levels. The first level is at the 'meeting' level. Each time a small group meets it is likely to engage with the stages listed below. This micro level engagement is necessary as a group has to reform every time it meets, before negotiating its way to performing, and navigating an ending.

However, a group will also engage with these stages at a second level, a more long-term level, over one to two years. At this macro-level a well led group will journey through the 5 stages, each one lasting several weeks, becoming more effective in its discipleship and mission as time passes.

Understanding these 5 stages of group life is vital for leaders. Each stage is unique and even a basic awareness of the 5 stages can transform a group, allowing leaders to match the group stage to various components of the framework that will follow. The following seeks to describe the stages (58):



Stage 1—Forming

The forming stage is the initial process where building community is vital. In this stage people with a variety of backgrounds and expectations are joining together and the focus of the group should be on creating friendships and nurturing trust. It is a time where people often feel uneasy, but excited about what a group can do for them. Even individuals who know each other well outside of the small group context need to form and build community together. It should be a time when everyone is made to feel welcome, valued, and like they belong. Groups that don't form effectively struggle to share at authentic, vulnerable and deep levels. In this stage leaders can help the group to form by helping people to feel at ease, creating space for everyone (especially quiet members) to share, create conversation around low risk subjects, and model the sort of interactions that demonstrate the sort of contributions and listening that are necessary. Welcome questions (Ice Breakers), and social times are often important as the group Forms, as is thinking about hospitality, lighting, seating, sounds, aromas and food.

Stage 2—Storming

If a group forms effectively and creates an atmosphere where people feel welcomed and included, groups will normally enter the second stage, known as storming. The storming stage is a time where group members are focussing on themselves and their needs for the group, boundaries are pushed, and where disagreements and conflict may occur. For some groups this stage can at times feel slightly uncomfortable, whereas for others, it can be more difficult and stressful. However, it is a vitally important stage in the process of a groups life as it deals with personal differences and brings clarity around the groups purpose. One of the ideas foundational to Christian community is that Christians 'bear with each other in love' (Col 3:13). The love that Christ calls his followers to exhibit is not the cheap, brittle, plastic love of the world, but the deep, sacrificial, persevering, committed love of Jesus. At this stage the different agendas, faith levels, and expectations around the groups purpose all come to the fore. Storming is healthy and important as it brings these differences into the open so that common vision, purpose and values can be established.

Navigating the storming stage requires leaders who focus on Christ, who model a self giving attitude, and who hold the vision, purpose and values of the group and help it through this often turbulent stage. Leaders will need to gently encourage, reinforce the idea of commitment, and hold boundaries. Some group members may well leave in this season often because they have misunderstood the purpose of the group. However, deeper relationships often form through storming, especially if issues are not ignored or brushed under the carpet, but addressed with love, firmness and kindness. Some groups often feel close to giving up at this stage, but it is important to persevere if possible. The worship section and a focus on God's presence, alongside reminders of the bigger vision of the group often help the group through this stage.

Stage 3—Norming

The norming stage is where the group moves beyond surface level encounters and disagreements to deeper relationships with God and each other. People are excited to meet and a level of depth and honesty starts to be felt. At this stage members are beginning to find genuine support and community in the group and the group begins making key strides towards its discipleship purpose. The ways of the group are starting to become 'normal' for those attending. Members often start to speak of wanting to go deeper in knowledge of, and relationship with God. At this stage the biggest hurdle that needs to be overcome is the Bible study mentality, where knowledge about God becomes more important than encounter, transformation and mission. Another problem here is that the task of doing the study, or of completing whatever material is provided can take priority over a grappling with scripture where the group brings the reality of their lives to the text. At this stage the leader can fall into the trap of trying to be the fount of all knowledge and intellectual discipleship can take priority over lifestyle transformation and action. Giving people space to share their stories and examples is often vital, and the group should be encouraged to move beyond simply moralising biblical texts, but rather help them experience a sense of God's voice and leading through scripture. When groups are at this stage, grappling with scripture should be the priority, but praying for each other and thinking beyond the group should not be ignored.

Stage 4—Performing

This is the stage that most groups long to reach, when the group is functioning well, where people feel like they belong, where encounter with God is happening, where discussion of scripture is leading to transformation, where prayer for each other is helping people to discover who they are becoming, and where the group is starting to think more deeply about those outside the group. In this stage praying for each other and mission beyond the group become the focus of the small group. A group that is performing well will see greater relational depth, deep times of prayer for each other and new people connecting to the group. Members will be discovering their gifts and using them to serve each other. The group will also be planning how to fulfil God's call to mission, which could be through group missional responses, (prayer walking, social action, homeless shelter serving etc), relational evangelism and linked events (socials, BBQs, invitations to Alpha etc), or both. The key here is to keep the group thinking missionally so that mission is re-connected to discipleship and not seen as an activity for super Christians. Leaders will often need to model mission to their group and then release members to have a go, celebrating the groups efforts and attempts even if they don't result directly in new believers.

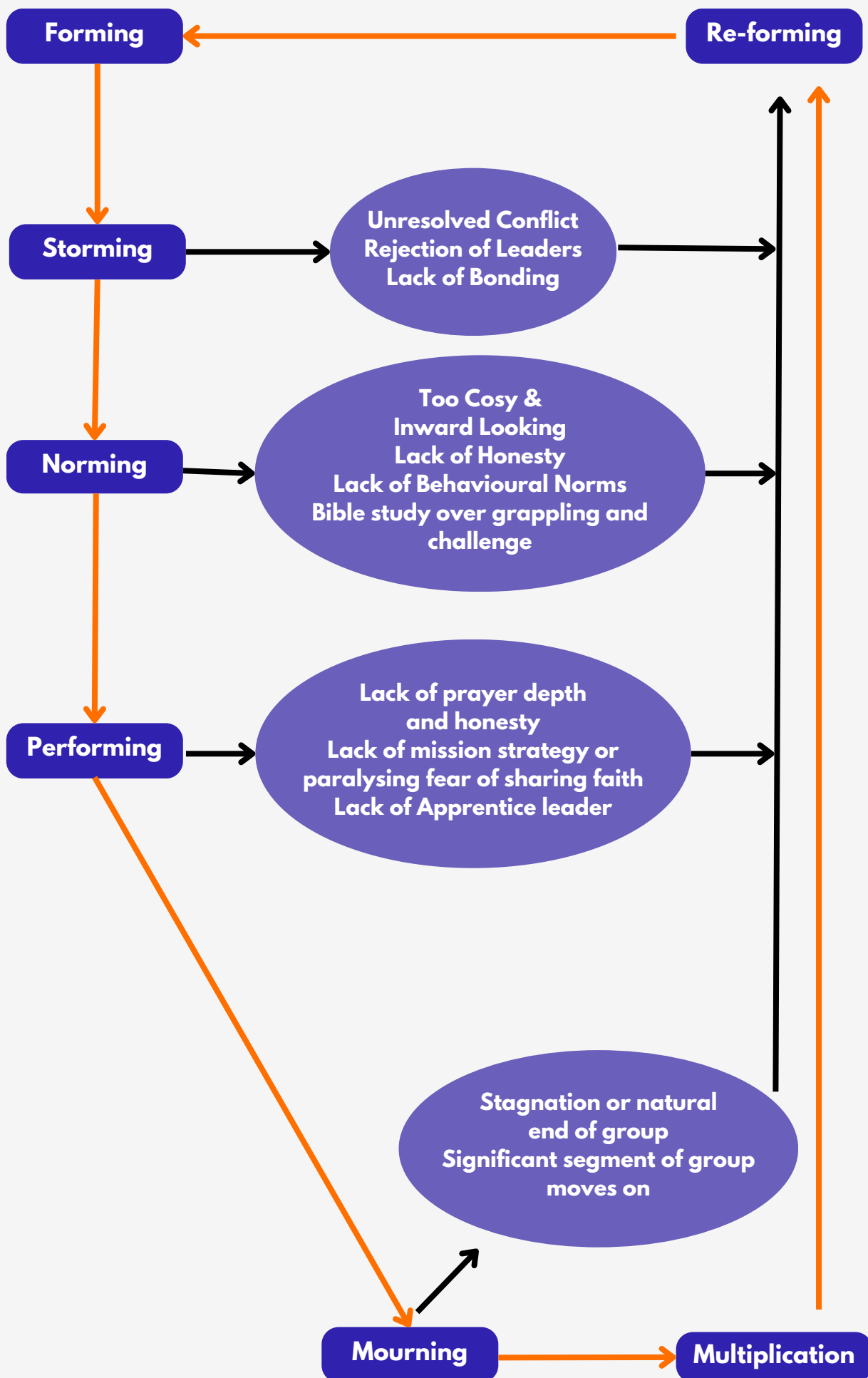
There are two dangers for a group in the performing stage, fear and comfort. Often a fear of rejection or ridicule will stop people stepping out or sharing their faith causing a group to turn inward. At the same time a sense of comfort can emerge where the group doesn't want to add new members because they don't want to lose the depth they have discovered together. However, without growth, groups often become stale and stagnate, slipping back and getting stuck at the norming stage. As a result, leaders need to equip members with a courage to overcome their fear, and constantly remind the group that the goal is growth and that multiplication, and that producing fruit is a good thing. As such, leaders will be helping the group listen to God and planning events and activities at which they can serve together. Leaders will also need to be investing in apprentice leaders at this stage so that there are potential leaders on hand who could lead an offshoot group as it prepares to multiply. In reality, the performing stage cannot last very long as groups either multiply and restart the cycle, or end up not quite growing and end up stagnating and needing to reform.

Stage 5—Mourning

The last stage of the small group cycle is the mourning phase. At this stage, the group becomes aware that an end is in sight for the current group. This maybe because the group has become stuck and needs to re-form, because the group is about to multiply, because it has reached a more natural end and has stagnated, or because several members of the group are all moving on (often to university). We shouldn't be afraid of letting groups end. It may feel painful and for some in the group, like something is being taken away, but groups have a natural life span, and sometimes rather than keep them alive artificially we need to take them to the cross, so that resurrection can occur. Whatever the reasons, the key value of the mourning stage is celebration. The life of the group and what God has done through it should be marked and celebrated. Even for groups that have not quite managed to multiply, the group should still remember and praise all that God has done and the growth that has occurred. Although multiplication is an aim, it is God that causes new seed to grow and it is not an automatic process.

However, alongside celebration, the mourning stage is usually marked by two opposite reactions. Firstly, there are those who have so loved the group that they try to keep the group together beyond its time together. They are likely to arrange get togethers for the group to maintain the sense of community that they've experienced with the group. These people become more committed. Secondly, however, there will be those who want to jump straight into the whatever is next. For people like this, attendance will become more sporadic and less committed as they seek to engage with the new thing. They will become more apathetic. It is important for leaders to remain committed in this phase and to keep pastoring the group into what is to follow, to acknowledge an ending, but usher people towards a new beginning. In this way a leader points to the example of the death and resurrection of Jesus, of letting something die in order for something new to emerge. There is grief in this process, but also wonder and hope. The mourning stage is often tough for the whole group to navigate but often sows seeds that lead to new fruit.

The diagram(59) on the following page highlights the importance of the small group cycle and shows various issues that are likely to need to be resolved at each stage. The green arrows indicate a successful navigation of the cycle, whereas the dark arrows indicate possible problems. A failure to deal with issues means the group is likely to need to reform, perhaps with new members or leaders, in order to become effective again.



Two key problems that can hinder the cycle

It is worth highlighting two opposite problems that can hinder the group cycle just mentioned. The first of these is Inconsistency. Groups that have a high level of inconsistency often struggle as the group ends up in a cycle of constantly forming and re-forming. Groups can cope with a degree of inconsistency, with people missing a meeting every now and then, but if several members, or worse leaders, are consistently inconsistent then the group dynamics will be impacted. As such, leaders must work hard to mode consistency, and pay attention to the balance of meetings and break weeks. Whilst there are no right or wrong patterns to meeting, it is sometimes better to meet only in term time rather than every week, or to meet for three weeks in a row and have a couple of weeks off rather than meeting fortnightly as inconsistency in a fortnightly schedule has more of an impact. Giving members a level of responsibility, either for activities around the group or sections within the meeting, can be helpful in building ownership and enhancing regular attendance.

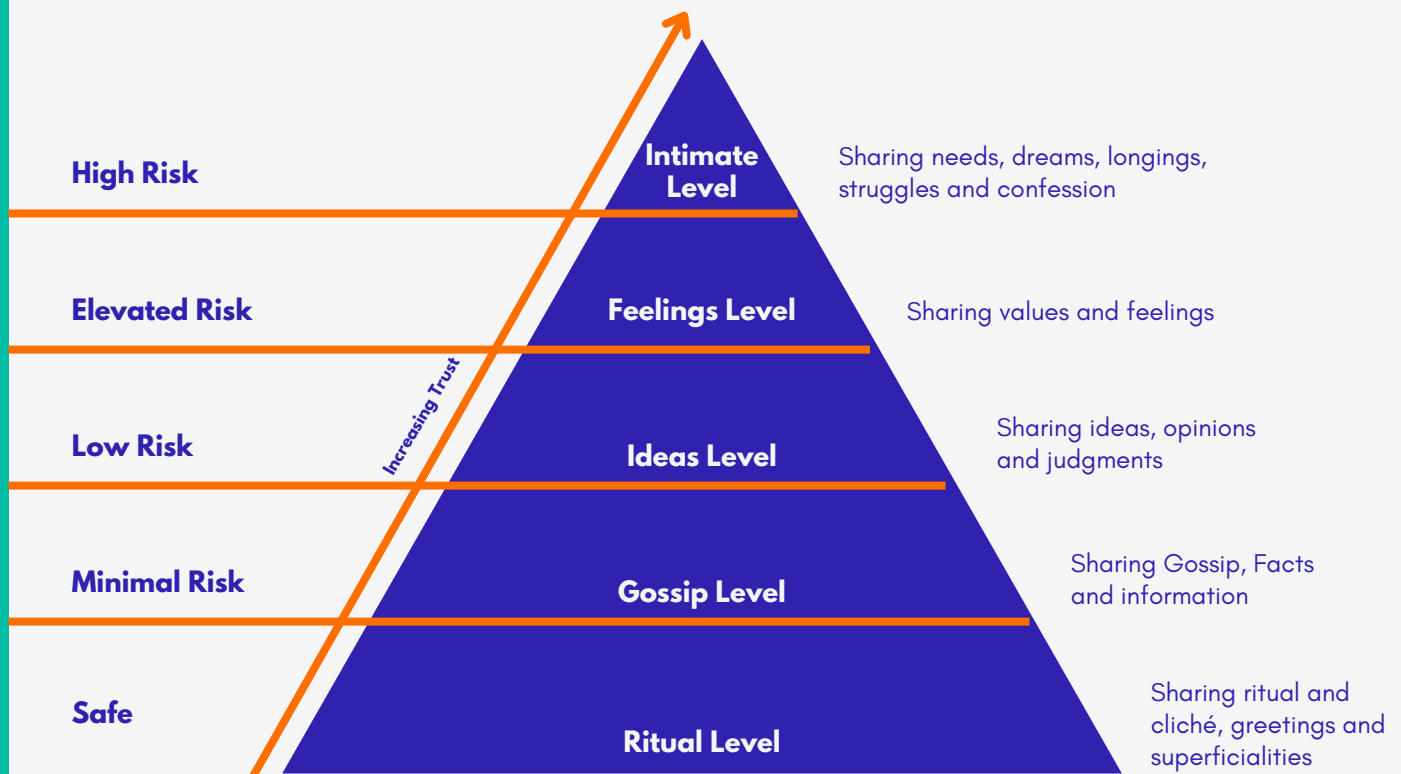
The second, all be it positive, problem that can impact the cycle is Growth. Often as a group journeys into the deeper stages of the cycle and starts to perform, growing in maturity and faith confidence, the group is likely to invite new members to join. These new members instantly impact the group and can disrupt the level of depth and honesty that their was previously. This can be unsettling for some and members can feel like they have lost something as the group welcomes the new members. However, if only one or two join, the group tends to pass through the initial stages at a much faster rate, returning to the latter stages and greater depth fairly quickly. Excitingly, new members are also likely to increase the contacts that a group has with those on the fringes of faith, and so the addition of just one or two new members can help the group reach the multiplication stage. Again, this can feel like a loss to some, but it should be seen as extremely positive.

Group Dynamics & Goals

As has previously been mentioned, every small group needs goals in order to thrive. Research indicates that the leader who fails to set goals has about a 50% chance of multiply their small group, however that figure rises to 75% when leaders actively set goals.⁽⁶⁰⁾ All small groups should be shaped by the goals of 1) growing the spiritual maturity of their members, 2) drawing them into deep relationships with each other and 3) moving towards multiplication. However, it is also useful for groups to have smaller goals linked to their group stage. These goals keep a group progressing and prevent stagnation. The chart on the following page gives an example of what this might look like as it passes though each group stage.

Group	Small Goal	Evidence	Key Scripture
Forming	Growing Friendships	Shown in sense of friendliness, or in stories of the group being in contact beyond the session	A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.
Storming	Encouraging One Another	Shown in the words people use to describe each other in the group	Do not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage one another
Norming	Honest Sharing	Shown in personal stories, listening well and praying for each other	Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed
Performing	Pursuing Spiritual Gifts and sharing faith	Shown in prophetic prayer and stories about people inviting their friends to the group	But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth
Mourning	Celebration and effective transition	Shown in positive talk about the group that is preparing to end and excitement about the new plans	In all my prayers for you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus Phil 1:4-6

THE COMMUNICATION PYRAMID



This diagram shows the stages of communication that are possible for a group. As a group journeys together and trust is built, the higher levels of interaction become more possible. Each level becomes more risky as communication becomes more honest and requires increasing vulnerability. From the ideas level up the possibility of rejection becomes larger and it takes more courage and a greater sense of security for an individual to share.

The theory suggests that a group has to pass through each stage, establishing trust, before being willing to communicate at deeper levels. As with group dynamics, this happens over the course of several months, but also to a certain extent takes place each time a group meets. As such, in order to reach the higher, desired levels of communication, where transformational discipleship becomes more possible, trust, a sense of security, time, and commitment is needed. Leaders need to actively create a culture that fosters these things to create this depth of communication.

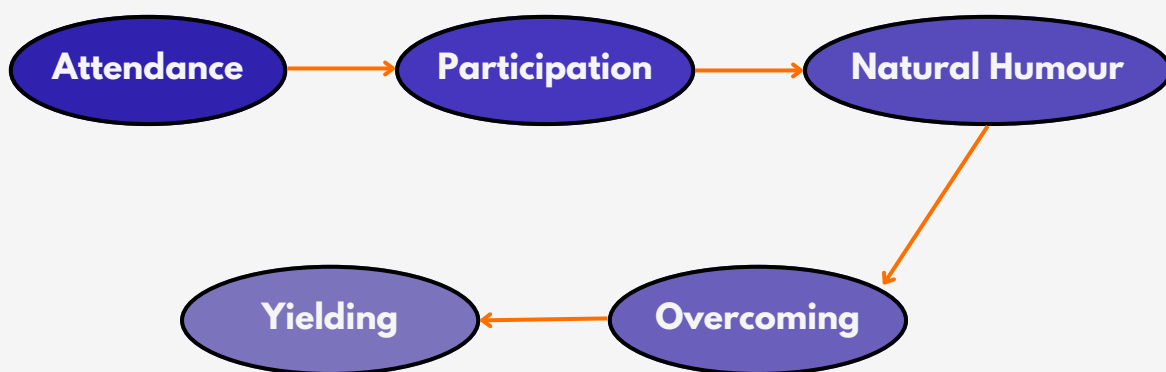
Central to this is a leadership alertness to things that undermine communication trust. These things can include excessive banter, the dismissal of someone's ideas, interruptions, or a lack of listening.

Interestingly, even in the most secure groups, where there are high levels of trust, a group will not spend very long in any one session at the intimate level. In fact it may be as brief as a few minutes, but in those few minutes deep work can happen as people begin to drop their guards, lower their masks and let people in to the reality of their lives, thinking and feeling.

This diagram is also helpful in that it correlates well with the framework suggested later in this guide. As will be highlighted, the framework is designed to lead people towards deeper communication. Each section, of the framework builds on the section before and carries the possibility of deeper communication, helping the group move towards a greater possibility of discipleship transformation.

COHESION

Cohesion is a central idea within group theory that describes the sense of belonging and ownership individuals feel towards a group. Cohesion builds communication depth, and deepens relationships. It enhances the purposes of a group and helps make the group feel like a space where people are comfortable contributing, sharing and even disagreeing. Increasing the sense of cohesion increases the likelihood that individuals will help each other to grow as disciples. It is useful for leaders to have a basic understanding of processes that can increase group cohesion and so that they can intentionally work to build it in to the life of their small group. (61)



The level of cohesion in a group is usually shown through 5 indicators:

- 1.Attendance—the greater the cohesion the more consistency there will be in attendance
- 2.Participation—as cohesion increases participation from the whole group will increase, particularly those who are quieter, or are not verbal processors
- 3.Natural Humour—as cohesion grows humour often increases and feels more natural and less awkward
- 4.Overcoming—as cohesion increases the groups ability to deal with difficult moments, unpleasant experiences, and effectively support suffering individuals also increases.
- 5.Yielding—As cohesion grows and people feel like they belong they don't just receive from the group but start to give back to it, and start to think of the collective 'group' identity rather than just thinking of themselves. As such they start to yield to the group, prioritising it over themselves.

Whilst cohesion forms naturally and overtime, leaders can aid the process of cohesion in the following ways:

- 1.Reminding people that they have a choice about whether or not to attend. This often involves helping them recall why they wanted to be part of the group in the first place
- 2.Reminding the group about the vision and purpose of the group, that in meeting you are part of Jesus' plan to reveal the nearness of the Kingdom of God.
- 3.Increasing social time, particularly undertaking activities that have the potential of building a group history or that make group memories.
- 4.By rewarding or blessing the group as a whole. This could be through encouragements, little gifts, or experiences that show appreciation.
- 5.By creating unique or regular experiences that are special for that group. This could be as simple as visiting a coffee shop together once a month, or honouring birthdays in a way that creates a 'tradition'.
- 6.By encouraging and modelling the sharing of personal stories, struggles and testimonies
- 7.By leaders modelling appropriate vulnerability and honesty
- 8.By leaders maintaining contact with the group between meetings in a way that continues the group experience.

Cohesion is built on trust and so anything that undermines trust can undermine the cohesiveness of a group. Leaders need to pay attention to their communication, to potential areas of conflict or disagreement and be aware of things like grumbling and gossip, and a lack of clarity as to why the group is meeting or looking at a particular topic.

SECTION 03

THE FRAMEWORK



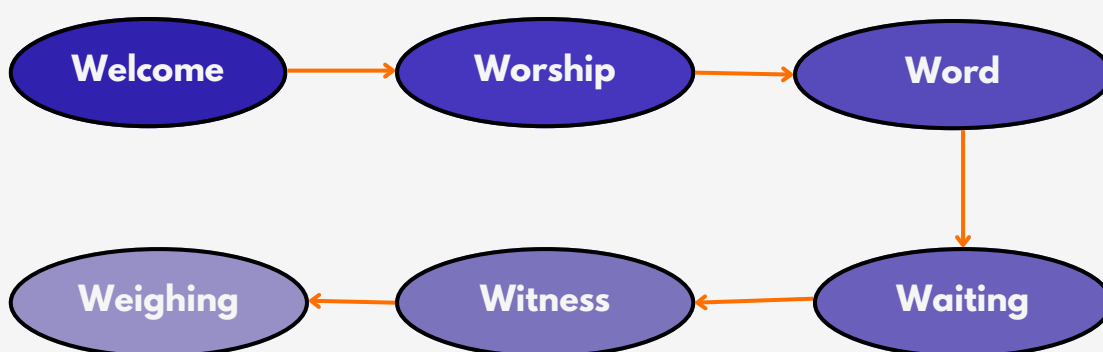
SESSION STRUCTURE - 6WS

The framework we are recommending is based on the 4Ws framework developed by Ralph Neighbour⁶² and that is recommended by both Fusion and Comiskey a key small group researcher and thinker. We have made two significant changes to the original 4Ws framework, adapting the structure to create deeper links with the theology and theory of small groups outlined previously.

As such we recommend a framework based on The 6Ws. These are Welcome, Worship, Word, Waiting, Witness, & Weighing. These Ws link effectively to the theory and theology outlined at the beginning of this guide. Whilst the Ws are not designed to be a straight jacket, they are deliberately designed to help create an effective small group climate. The Ws are designed to work together to produce an effective meeting where the key components happen every week, helping a group grow together, encounter God, grow as disciples, pray deeply and bring transformation to the world around the group.

Each W has its own aim, and works best when they are followed in the order stated. The Welcome creates a culture for open sharing, The Worship focusses attention on God and seeks to encounter Him, the Word allows the group to hear God's voice through scripture so that growth in faith and understanding can happen, the waiting seeks to draw the group into God's presence so that they are equipped to live out what has been discussed, and the Witness leads the group to join in with God's mission in the world. The Final W, the Weighing, seeks to review the small group to make sure that leaders are continually reflecting, learning and developing in order to keep everyone growing in faith, hope and love.

Each of the 6Ws are described in more detail on the following pages and some ideas are highlighted to give examples of the type of activities that can make up the content of each section. There is also a table on page 54 that gives rough timings for how long each W should take at different stages of the small group cycle. This is intended to provide guidance rather than be used strictly, but can be helpful for those who worry in the initial stages of group bonding that they are not 'getting anywhere' and to make sure that groups at the performing stage are focussing on equipping each other and stepping into mission and or evangelism.



WELCOME

Leader's who create a caring environment where loving relationships are genuinely found, see more new people members.(63)

The welcome is deliberately employed to get a group talking. The Welcome is not for games or other activity, (or though they can be used from time to time) but is there to create conversation. The Welcome should put people at ease and help them enter into conversation around low risk subjects, often using fun icebreaker questions. Research shows that individuals who speak early on in a meeting are much more likely to speak again at other points in the meeting, but if people don't share early, and particularly if they are introverted then they are less likely to speak at all.(64) Furthermore, as a general rule, the sooner people speak, the more engaged they will be throughout the meeting.(65) As such the welcome should help people speak, giving them confidence for further sharing as the meeting develops.

In the Welcome it is vital that Leaders will make sure that each person contributes, and that listening is happening effectively by the whole group. It is helpful to go around the group person by person asking them to answer a simple, often fun question. It can be helpful to draw out quieter members early on as this gives them confidence to share again. Whilst the use of random icebreaker style questions may seem slightly forced, they are particularly useful in the early stages of a groups life as the answers people give provide clues that help each person to know and be known, often in fun low risk ways. These interactions are vital as the stories we share about ourselves shape our identity and help the group to learn about each other and make connections.

If this section is led effectively, it provides a platform for how listening and contributions happen throughout the rest of the meeting. It should limit people talking over each other, and give space for quieter personality types to contribute so that there are no silent members.

This stage is vital in the forming stage of the small group cycle and more time should be given over to this section when a group is in its early stages of meeting. Over time a group might like to move beyond icebreaker style questions and share answers to questions around Good News and/or God News . This offers a slightly deeper level of conversation and helps a groups to begin meetings at a more significant level.

Example welcome questions: If you could have a super power what would it be? What movie character would you most like to be? If you could have only 5 apps on your phone what would you choose? What is the most significant thing that has happened to you in the last week?

WORSHIP

The second section of a small group is the Worship section. This section is designed to help a group move towards its vision, reminding them of why they are meeting. The worship time fixes the groups attention on God, and seeks to thank God for who He is and what He has done. It celebrates His character and goodness. The Worship aims to moves a group from 'person' centred interactions to God centred ones, and begins to deepen the communication of a group as people offer more personal thoughts and feelings.

Worship in the small group is often more reflective and creative than simply singing songs together each week, which can be a little awkward for some in such a setting. The worship time often involves reading psalms, creative prayer ideas, liturgy, silence and contemplation. The idea is simply that the Trinity is worshiped, honoured and adored. The worship should create the possibility of encounter with God's presence, as it is often through worship that the boundary between heaven and earth becomes thin and people begin to sense the more of God's presence.

The worship time is also vital for a group that is beginning to storm. As a group moves from forming and into storming, the worship section both reminds a group of why it is meeting, but also takes the focus away from internal struggles and places the focus back on God, his words, works and wonders. Worship times should be participatory, involving the whole group, but be focussed on God rather than on those present.

Ideas for Worship Times

- Use youtube worship videos
- Read psalms or other scriptures that praise the trinity
- List God's attributes from A-Z and pray into those
- Share bread and wine
- Read pieces of liturgy
- Use stones / candles / nails / leaves
- Wait in silence
- Meditate on verses that reveal something of God's nature
- Pray 50 thanks / praise prayers together
- Recite the Jesus prayer together Luke 18:13
- Check out www.smallgroups.com/meeting-builder/worship-ideas/

WORD

The Word section is about exploring scripture, and teaches people to interpret and apply biblical ideas to their lives. The aim of the Word section is to help people bring their lives and questions to the text. It should help the group grapple with what the text meant, but also what it means today. It will help a group explore theological ideas and themes and identify and articulate what they believe, giving them a language of faith.

This section resonates well with the idea of Instruction as the first stage in discipleship, the verbal passing on of faith. But rather than instruction being spoken over people by a teacher or preacher it should be discovered through the discussion that emerges. As a group looks at scripture and grows in knowledge, then its members are better able to apply that knowledge to pursuing Christlikeness, serving others and revealing Jesus in the world.⁽⁶⁶⁾

Rather than pouring knowledge into individuals, an effective Word section helps group members discover truth for themselves, articulate their beliefs, and models and connects them to a spiritual discipline that they can engage with beyond the group.

Deep learning occurs as the group explores their thoughts, feelings and emotions in light of scripture.⁽⁶⁷⁾ Rather than just head knowledge, discussion becomes vital in the exploration of these things, with reflection on scripture followed by self-disclosure a significant method that leads to transformation within the small group. Again, this happens most effectively when the group has a high degree of trust and security, and is unafraid of sharing their true selves. As a result, leaders need to be aware of the presence of mistrust, masquerade, and cover-up within the group as these will undermine the spiritual formation.⁽⁶⁸⁾

A helpful way of viewing the Word section is in light of 2 Cor 10:5, Rom 12:2, & Gal 5:16 where the goal investigating scripture is to help group members to take every thought captive, and make them obedient to Christ, to learn to listen to God's voice in scripture and prayer, to be transformed as their minds are renewed, and to learn to walk in step with the Spirit.⁽⁶⁹⁾

Yet, the focus of a small group is not about community, or even biblical understanding, rather it is focussed on making disciples who make more disciples⁽⁷⁰⁾ and so exposure to the content of scripture is vital for the growth of group members⁽⁷¹⁾ but there is also more going on in an effective small group.

As such, and contrary to a traditional bible study where this section would be the focus of the small group every week, the Word section becomes the most important focus as the small group emerges from the storming and begins to norm. However, the Word section becomes less of the focal point as the group moves towards performing.

This is not to say the Word section is unimportant, but rather recognises that at different stages of the groups life other elements become vital.

The Word is vital as the group begins to norm, and conversation relating scripture to life can help to take the group deeper, facilitating transformation of group members.

Furthermore, A good Word section should provide a model for how believers undertake their own personal quiet times, teaching them the spiritual discipline of study that can be used in their lives each day. There are various approaches to a good discussion of scripture from questions leaders prepare in advance through their own study and reflection, to using study guides and printed/downloaded material and even video teaching. Video teaching can be useful for a short season in the small group, but shouldn't be used regularly as it tends to lead groups in discussions around the ideas and interpretation of the teacher on the screen rather than encouraging the group to grapple with scripture for themselves.

As such, we have found the following approaches to unpacking scripture in a small group helpful as not only do they help create discussion, but they also effectively teach people a model of bible study that can be used beyond the small group, and so build a spiritual habit. The Swedish Bible study method (outlined on page 81) is very helpful as it not only does it create a memorable model that can be replicated by an individual, but also because it asks individuals to write down answers before speaking. This process of writing not only aids deeper reflection, but gives quieter members more confidence in contributing.

Other helpful approaches include,

- SOAP (Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer),
- Lectio Divina,
- OREO (what do you Observe, How does it Relate to your life, what in the passage needs Exploring, how can you Obey what God is saying through the passage)
- The EMAW method (A command to obey, a promise to believe, a sin to avoid, an application to make, a verse to learn)
- The Discovery Bible Method (what does this teach us about God, What does it teach us about humanity, how does the passage apply, and who are you sharing your learning with).

All of these are useful because they create memorable ways of engaging with the text that can be duplicated by the individual as part of a spiritual discipline. Hestenes', book, 'Using the Bible in Small Groups' is also recommended as a resource highlighting ways in which leaders can use scripture effectively.

WAITING

Whilst the Waiting section should be part of all small groups from the very first meeting, it becomes the core part of the groups time together as it starts to enter the performing stage. In this season the focus of the group becomes praying for and serving each other.

Yet this section is vital every week as it takes the session beyond a being just a Bible Study or Bible discussion, to being a time where the groups seeks God's equipping to live out what has been discussed. It moves the group from theory to practice.

This section also has the potential to help group members encounter God's voice, and provides space for members to listen and pray for each other. There is a whole variety of actions that can happen in this time, but it often involves times of confession, commitment and calling. As a group grows in trust and cohesion and moves beyond polite prayers, times of deep intercession and perhaps waiting on the Spirit may be introduced. Silence, listening, and meditation are also often employed in this time, and depending on tradition, so to are times of seeking and practising prophecy, tongues, healing and other spiritual gifts.

Interestingly, our initial small group research indicated that the main, and often only, way prayer happens in groups is for people to talk about their needs and then have the group pray into these. Whilst this is an important part of group prayer, if it is the only way groups pray it can reinforce Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, that God is just their to meet our needs. As a result the Waiting time deliberately tries to move beyond just praying this way, and to open the group up to being led and equipped by Jesus.

The aim is to create space for God to speak, lead and equip the group.

This part of a small group is vital, and carries within it the possibility of deep change as space is made for the Holy Spirit to give insight and help the group apply truth to their lives.⁽⁷²⁾

As such this section takes the session beyond a mere Bible study and connects scripture to reality of life that group members experience on a daily basis. Importantly this section can deepen the encounter of the group with each other and also make space for possible encounters with God.

The Waiting time is also important as it moves the group beyond discipleship as just instruction and instead helps the group to be immersed in the practices of discipleship, seeing them happen in other members lives, before they are encouraged to imitate those practices as they try to live out the teaching beyond the group.

This section also ties into the 7 signs of deep youth ministry, as it begins to help people discover who they are becoming in Christ. As people pray for each other and listen to God, they open themselves to the possibility of God's guidance and His leading of them into their future with him.

Finally, this section, is particularly helpful for groups who want to move into more prophetic times of waiting. Whilst this requires a depth of understanding, skill and prayerfulness to lead, it opens the small group to the potential of deeper interactions. Those overseeing small groups should spend time training and equipping their leaders who want to introduce more prophetic elements into their small groups. Such training needs to be undertaken with an awareness of safeguarding implications in mind so that any practice is undertaken safely, appropriately and creatively.

Ideas for waiting times include:

- Giving God space to speak and people to listen (see John 10, Psalm 29, 81)
- Praying over each other what has been discussed
- Waiting in silence
- Confession, repentance possibly using liturgy
- Prayerfully writing down an action to undertake in the week
- Using candles, journals, music to reflect and pray
- Laying hands on each other and seeking the equipping of the Spirit
- Creating prayer stations or prayer spaces
- Praying prophetically or using spiritual gifts

WITNESS

Just like the Waiting section, the Witness is a vital part of the small group even in the early stages of a groups life. However, it becomes much more important once a group is performing well.

The Witness is designed to move a group towards joining in with God's mission in the world. This could be through either missional social action type responses or through relational evangelism or a combination of both. Whatever the outworking of this time it is interesting to note that research indicates that groups which have an outreach focus, see more visitors, more conversions and more new members in their groups.⁽⁷³⁾

As such there is huge value in helping the group to engage in missional activities together. Whether encouraging friendship evangelism or social action projects, this 'doing of discipleship' often accelerates and deepens the faith development of a group.

This component, perhaps more than any other prevents a group from merely looking inward, and from over-emphasising 'thinking' that can lead to a dry, cold, idealistic intellectualism, whereas there is something about 'doing' alongside others, that the Witness encourages, that brings faith to life and equips disciples.(74)

Interestingly, the church has often separated this thinking and knowing from doing. Yet, doing also promotes a sort of knowing. There is something about doing that encourages discovery and that can be vital in the formation process. Again, Jesus did not just instruct his disciples, but helped them become immersed in his ways, before he sent them to imitate him. He taught, they watched and then he sent them to step into a broken and hurting world to reveal His Kingdom. As they stepped out, not only did they bring transformation to others, but they grew themselves, their characters, words and actions changed.(75)

This is therefore, a key part of what the Witness is about, it aims to re-connect the often separated understandings of discipleship and mission/evangelism, alongside actively making a positive difference in the world and in people's lives.

And so the Witness seeks to ensure that each week members begin to connect with God's mission in the world. For some groups this is about praying regularly for non-Christian friends, before they plan small group socials, and invite those friends into the life of the group. For other groups injustice issues become paramount and groups seek to better understand, pray into, and then serve in a way that brings Kingdom life to those around them.

Both these approaches create a sense of ownership around mission and evangelism within the group, and enable the group to do more than just talk in theoretical terms. These activities also have a way of drawing out gifts and calling in individuals and giving them a sense of passion and purpose to join in with God's work in the world.

The Witness often begins in prayer, either for causes or individuals, before leaning into periods of planning where the group thinks about how it can practically join in with God's mission, (perhaps hosting a BBQ or going to a homeless shelter). The last stage is around Acting, where the plans become a reality. It is vital that leaders make sure the plans happen, and that they take a lead in actually hosting the BBQ, or in turning up at the homeless shelter!

Interestingly, this section often gets squeezed out, forgotten, or lost in a small group and the discipleship impact on the group both internally in the lives of members, and externally in lives beyond the group, is drastically reduced. However, a good leader will make sure this section is prioritised. They will pay attention to the stage of their group and ensure that more time is given to this W as the group matures, making sure there is space for prayer, planning and action.

WEIGHING

The last W doesn't usually happen in the small group itself, but rather is a time of Weighing and reviewing the meeting after the group has left. This process is vital and yet it is one that is often neglected.

Weighing doesn't have to take long but helps group leaders assess various aspects of a session and seeks to answer 6 key questions:

1. **What was good?** This question is simply designed so that leaders think positively about the session. It seeks to help leaders think through what they or others seemed to enjoy, what seemed to go well, where the signs of life and growth were, and whether a particular section or topic seemed to grab the group. Here a leader is trying to link the individual session to its purpose of achieving UP, IN, and OUT.

2. **What Struggled?** Here small group leaders look back at the session asking what may have missed the mark, or been difficult, and what the possible reasons might have been. Did each section go as hoped, were people distracted, is the group storming, is someone dominating the session, did you, as leaders, deal with tangents effectively?

3. **Where Was God at Work?** This is about reflecting on things God may have been doing in the group or in people's lives. These things might be part of your steady journey, or may have been new or surprising pit stops. Were there mustard seed moments, the beginnings of God doing something new, or things that felt like a leap forward? Were there moments of real encounter, deep prayer, or engagement where people seemed to 'get it' for the first time? Who was engaged / disengaged and when and is there anyone you need to follow up with? This question asks leaders to notice how each person seemed to engage with the session. Were there things that seemed to capture, motivate or inspire people and were there things that seemed to lose individuals. It is also good at this point to examine whether people were missing, or whether there were new people, and to have a conversation about whether anyone needs following up. Research suggests that one of the keys to growing, developing and multiplying a small group is how well leaders do at contacting those who are on the fringe of a group. Simple contact between sessions can be very effective at drawing in those on the fringe.⁽⁷⁶⁾ One of the key markers in people committing to groups is simply the feeling that they feel noticed and valued by those leading – this question helps you notice how well you are noticing others. Using this question effectively can also help you plan better sessions and create a deeper community

5. What stage of the small group cycle (Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, Mourning) do you think your group is moving through? Again understanding this aspect of your groups life can help you plan better sessions, as you can allow more time to explore the appropriate W to develop your group.

6. What might you need to build on? This question seeks to determine whether there is a key idea or action that you need to build on in coming weeks. Was there a moment of prayer that the group became energised by, is there a justice issue, or a scriptural idea of value that seems appropriate to develop, are their friendships that need to be encouraged, do you need to ask some people to share by name, do you need to try and sit people in different places, do you need to work towards deeper communication levels?

Whilst weighing is crucial, it can sometimes be discouraging as it is not always apparent in a moment that the group is moving forward. However, the journey of transformation is often slow and whilst we might not see much change in an individual week, when we look back over longer periods we can often see the progress both in the individuals and the group. As such leaders shouldn't be discouraged if an individual week, or even a few weeks in a row seem to struggle, this could be part of the storming stage. However, as we journey with a group over time we should be able to see the signs of life and growth of the group as a whole, and its members.

EXAMPLES

The following are ways in which the framework has been developed in different contexts and are provided to show the innovation and contextualisation possible using the framework. They are not exhaustive, but are designed to show what is possible. The more the framework is understood the better the possibilities for innovation. All these models involve at least the termly training of leaders, have undertaken a risk assessment and have thought clearly and extensively about safeguarding implications.

1. **Gathered**

All the groups meet together in one place, usually the church building, there is food and worship with everyone together, and sometimes an introduction to the theme being studied, before the groups gather in their own individual spaces to go through the first 5 of the 6Ws. Leaders meet after the session to weigh the groups together. Groups meet on a weekday evening every week in term time and socials and mission activity happen at another time.

2. PoDs

PoDs aim to meet three times a month and change days they meet depending on availability. They meet in public places, like coffee shops, and tend to be much smaller groups, of up to 5 (at which point they multiply). They undertake the 6Ws in the public place, and tend to follow the Ws in an informal way, paying more attention to issues arising in conversation over and above any material provided. Scripture is examined using the Swedish Bible Study or similar method, and leaders fill in a review form at the end of the session. Undertaking discipleship in such places often builds missional confidence and makes it easy for new people to join.

3. Huddles

Groups meet independently of each other in a variety of locations in the area around the church (often in the church building, or public places, or for adults in people's homes). They may meet at different days and times, but all share the same material and approach which is provided centrally. Groups are responsible for planning their own socials and missional activities which often take place at what would be the usual small group time. Groups come together on a Sunday, either weekly or monthly, to celebrate and worship together.

4. Sunday AM

This model sees groups meeting around the church building on a Sunday morning. It is often used for young people's small groups alongside a church service, but can also be utilised by adult groups. Here, groups begin in the morning service before forming into regular groups to look at the 6Ws. Again the same content is usually provided for each group. Once a month, to once a term, groups will stay in the service for a celebration that they contribute to in some way.

5. Sunday PM

This model is very similar to the model above but takes place in the space usually created by a Sunday evening Gathering. Some groups will remain in the service for the whole time and then begin the small group time in rooms around the church after the service.

6. Intergenerational Households

Each group gathers in a household often on a Friday evening over a meal. Groups are comprised of 3-6 families. Everyone eats together, and engages in the Welcome together. There is often the space for younger children and teenagers to interact in a social way separately, whilst the adults worship (alongside the children and teenagers who want to be involved). All are welcomed back to look at Scripture which often follows the Swedish Bible Study or other simple Bible Reading approach in smaller breakout groups, which also undertake the Waiting section together. Material is determined by group leaders. The Witness is usually done altogether and the leaders weigh the session briefly at the end of the evening.

7. Tables

Groups meet for the first three weeks of month over a meal in people's homes. Groups meet usually meet on either a Tuesday or Thursday evening. On the fourth evening of the month groups are encouraged to run a social or undertake a mission project, and on the fifth there is often a celebration or worship evening. Wednesday evenings are kept free for Alpha, or similar courses, which run regularly through-out the year and to which small group members are encouraged to bring their friends / contacts to as a step before joining the small group.

8. Cells

The cell church model places the emphasis on discipleship on groups that meet in homes. The whole church becomes organised around the cell as the basic building block of the church. Cells meet weekly to follow the 6Ws and every 4-6 weeks or so, join with the other cells for a celebration, that often creates space for baptisms and visionary teaching. Because the cell groups are so vital, the gathered church hosts very little else apart from the celebration, and leadership training, to make sure that nothing competes with the ministry of the cell. Cells usually form through friendships, but there have been some successful models that focus on interest groups, where a group meets around a particular interest and then develops cell groups out of and alongside these groups, with the interest group being an easy place to invite new and like minded people, who as relationships build can be invited into the cell.

TIMINGS

Timings of each component of the small group are adaptable to the group stage. As a group moves through each stage of the group cycle different components of the structure become more important. Whilst there are not hard and fast rules to timings, as each group is different and will operate with its own culture, the table below gives an indication of roughly how long each component should take in the life cycle of a group. The performing section is split into 2 groups, the first when the group begins performing where the group is praying and equipping each other through the waiting time, and a second, when mission and evangelism becomes more of the focus of the groups activity and the group is pursuing multiplication more intentionally. The timings are based on a 90minute meeting and are simply a suggestion.

You will notice that in initially when forming the bulk of the session is concerned with the Welcome section. However, as the group begins to storm extra time is given to the worship. When Norming, the Word section becomes most important, before the Waiting and Witness times take precedence as a group begins to perform. Groups move through the Ws at different rates, but it often takes between 4-7 weeks for a group to move through each stage.

Having this information is vital for leaders, firstly so that they are not discouraged when they seem to be spending lots of time in the Welcome and not moving into deeper discussion, but also to keep groups on track, as more established groups should be pushing towards spending more time on other elements of the meeting, particularly the Waiting and Witness.

Stage	Welcome	Worship	Word	Waiting	Witness
Forming	40	10	25	10	5
Storming	20	20	30	15	5
Norming	15	10	40	15	10
Performing - Equipping	15	10	25	25	15
Performing - Mission	15	10	20	20	30
Mourning	20	20	25	20	5

SECTION 04

LEADERSHIP



LEADERSHIP

‘The degree to which small groups achieve their purpose depends heavily on the leadership of the group’⁽⁷⁷⁾

Whilst all members of a group exert influence on the group, the leaders influence on the group, and their contributions have a significant impact on the groups purpose and direction.⁽⁷⁸⁾ This is because leaders are constantly giving off signals that can strengthen or undermine the purposes of the group.

As such leaders need to be aware of what they are communicating and make sure they navigate the goals between growing community, learning from scripture and focussing on mission. This is often a balancing act as too much emphasis on community can keep the group from its discipleship purposes, whereas too great a focus on scripture can lead to academic learning and reduce honest participation and application, whereas an over-focus on mission can limit a groups depth in communal intimacy and discipleship understanding. As such leaders need to be equipped to balance these things effectively. Groups need a strong relational connection alongside a strong biblical focus, and missional goals.⁽⁷⁹⁾

As such the training of leader is vital. Small group leaders will require ongoing training, and this leadership development needs to be prioritised by both leaders and churches. Training should cover biblical knowledge, group dynamics, personality assessments, group assessments, spiritual formation, and group growth⁽⁸⁰⁾ and should also include practical skills including creating community, leading group sharing, leading bible studies, leading group prayer, keeping the group focussed on its task or mission, group reproduction, and problem solving.’⁽⁸¹⁾ Leaders should also be well informed about each of the 6Ws and the theory and techniques behind these.

The leadership of a small group can therefore feel like quite a demanding role. However, it is an extremely rewarding one, and is likely to deepen the discipleship of those who undertake it as they serve, and bless others. The additional demands can limit some from wanting to lead, which are usually for one or more of the following reasons:

1. A lack of desire to lead a small group
2. A lack of Skills in group dynamics
3. A lack of social support or pastoral care for the potential leader
4. A lack of Biblical knowledge ⁽⁸²⁾

Interestingly, all of these can be overcome with good training and support. The first category can be overcome as vision is shared with potential leaders, and when they see that the benefits of leading outweigh the costs. Part of this therefore involves communicating positively about the role of a small group leader and how it inspires

both ones own faith development and that of others also. The lack of desire is also overcome as church leaders express regular public gratitude for their small group leaders.(83)

The regular training of leaders helps ease the second issue that prevents people from leading. It is strongly recommend that all leaders should be trained in building community and in understanding group dynamics alongside creating participatory learning, group cohesion and general group leadership skills as all of these topics better equip leaders to host an effective small group and reduce the fears of potential leaders.(84)

Thirdly, in terms of support, small group leaders need to be provided with their own social support and pastoral care so that they feel valued and equipped to lead. This often looks like regular contact with someone overseeing small groups and time with other leaders at training events. Leaders should also receive training in providing pastoral care and have some of their fears about time commitment to pastoral support alleviated.(85) This maybe as simple as leaders knowing who they can refer people on to within the church structures.

Fourthly, many potential leaders are put off because they do not feel like they are Bible experts. Leaders should be both reassured that extensive biblical knowledge is not necessary, but also be equipped with some tools and techniques to help unpack scripture. Whilst the facilitation method does not require vast biblical knowledge, leaders require a hunger to learn so that they move beyond superficiality.(86)

Leadership is therefore a vital component of the small group and churches wanting to invest in small groups need to make training and support of small group leaders a priority. This is especially the case as small group research indicates that leaders who empower their group by training and equipping others to lead, who foster a community of care, have an outreach focus, and who empower their members, see more people come to faith.(87)

Furthermore, research findings also show that Churches can create transformational small groups by fostering three types of activity:

1. Encouraging an atmosphere of intercession
2. Actively coaching small group leaders
3. And by equipping all church members and leaders in discipleship and evangelism(88)

These activities seem crucial in aiding discipleship. Interestingly, churches that simply promote small groups, often by emphasising their importance in Sunday notices, don't necessarily produce effective small groups, especially if the above three activities are not happening.(89) As such the key to successful small groups, is less about promotion, and more about establishing the right culture, training and prayer, with the ongoing support and development of leaders being vital.

COACHING & FACILITATION

Traditional models of small groups see the leader as an expert often in the mode of a teacher or preacher who seeks to fill the rest of the group with their knowledge and wisdom. However, several studies,⁽⁹⁰⁾ indicate that young people grow more as disciples when they can grapple with the text themselves, share ideas, interpretations, ask questions and reflect on both their spirituality and lifestyle.

As such, the traditional 'transmission of knowledge model' where a teacher lectures and the students listen and make notes is said to be limited as it is impossible for educators to transmit to students everything that educators think they should know. Studies also indicate that students struggle to retain information effectively in this style of teaching, perhaps only retaining 5% of information 6 weeks later.⁽⁹¹⁾ Furthermore, rather than a mastery of facts and information, spiritual growth is measured not in sermons heard, or bible verses memorised, but by life application.⁽⁹²⁾ Discipleship, therefore, can be more effectively nurtured in the sharing of real life situations through the interpersonal relationships of a small group.⁽⁹³⁾

Another danger of the knowledge transmission model is that it creates a form of dependency that becomes an obstacle to individuals grappling with scripture for themselves.⁽⁹⁴⁾ This method also ignores the many teachable moments and questions that arise and cannot be anticipated, from simply doing life.⁽⁹⁵⁾

As such, this framework recommends leaders take on more of a coaching style when it comes to leading. This taps into ideas that suggest that individuals learn best through self discovery and by relating personal experience to any material. As such, small group leaders should avoid using monologue and instead create space for discussion around the biblical text which promotes self-learning and helps individuals discover meaning for themselves. Retention of information is also improved through discussion as people remember more of what they say themselves rather than what they hear. Discussion can also highlight a lack of understanding, bring clarity, and more naturally integrate application and is more effective than using transmission of knowledge models to create learning in the small group.⁽⁹⁶⁾

Whereas teachers look to impart knowledge and information, a coach seeks to equip a group to think, to discover and to apply truth for themselves, creating space for growth by suggesting techniques. Coaches tend to ask questions rather than give answers, and a good coach steers a group through a discussion, encouraging members to participate, rather than dominating the time themselves.⁽⁹⁷⁾ The aim of a small group is for discussion to flow between all who attend.⁽⁹⁸⁾ As such, the key is not to preach or teach, but to ask open questions that help people to link the text to their lives, to be challenged and reshaped by what they are reading in scripture.

Closed, rhetorical, and leading questions that expect an obvious answer should all be minimised.⁽⁹⁹⁾ Rather than tell a group what God's voice is saying, a good coach helps the group to hear the possibilities of God's voice that may emerge through a passage of scripture.

Therefore a small group leader should avoid the mindset that he or she is the primary communicator in the group⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ and perhaps only speak 30% of the time, with the other 70% made up of the sharing by the members of the group.⁽¹⁰¹⁾

Good coaches model effective listening and are aware the following traps of poor listening including 1) refusing to listen by talking more than listening, 2) pseudo-listening where the leader looks like they are listening externally but internally they are processing their own thoughts, 3) listening selectively where they only respond to the subjects that interest them, and 4) listening to evaluate whereby they judge the speaker rather than understand the speakers thoughts feelings and frame of reference.⁽¹⁰²⁾ Rather effective listening focusses on the message and often restates understanding before offering comment. It should create an atmosphere of self disclosure, where communication at the higher levels of the communication pyramid is more likely, and as such creates a greater degree of possibility that people will be changed through the interactions of the group.⁽¹⁰³⁾

As such the job of the small group leader is "to kindle participation among the group members. The focus is the personal application of Bible knowledge to daily life. This emphasis digs deeper than hearing information. It's a time when confession, inner healing, transparent sharing, and renewal happen."⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

A good coach facilitates discussion by affirming and encouraging others in their comments, expressing their own feelings, and encouraging others to do likewise. They harmonise opposing views, and seek out responses by name from those who haven't spoken in a while, and encourage personal application responses to the discussion. A good leader also gently refocuses discussions that have gone off track and responds empathetically when people share feelings. They will be good at summarising and drawing together previous comments and also challenging the group with new questions.⁽¹⁰⁵⁾

Coaches are also aware of incorrect or inaccurate theological views and when too important to ignore, challenge gently with comments such as 'what impact does that idea have on our understanding of God?', or 'I can understand why you might think that but....', or even ask the group 'what does everyone else think?', or 'what does the text say?'. These methods allow a leader to challenge potentially theologically incorrect views without squashing the individual sharing and often drive the group back to the text, reinforcing the value of scripture.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

LEADERS PREPARATION

One of the key tasks of a leader is their preparation for the small group meeting. Leaders need to undertake some general preparation as well as think through each section of the small group.

General Preparation

Small group “leadership begins with heart preparation. A heart that is pure before God is the only foundation for leading a [small group] meeting. Without a heart for God, the meeting consists of only dry routines and rituals”.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

This heart preparation opens the leader to the voice of God and allows the Spirit to speak and guide the meeting, creating the potential for a deeper experience for the small group.

A leader should make sure they spend time, at least weekly, praying for each member of their small group, and prayer should be key to any preparation. Research suggests that prayer is more important than study when it comes to leading a small group, and making space to listen to God and seeking his heart for the meeting should be at the forefront of any preparation.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ Leaders need to remember that hosting a transformational group depends more on God than on the leader, yet at the same time a leaders own relationship with God impacts how the whole group will experience God.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾

When it comes to preparing for a particular session a leader should spend time in prayer asking God what He wants to do through the small group. This listening is vital for leadership, and is crucial to the discipleship process. Leaders who learn to listen end up modelling a vital component of discipleship to their small groups.⁽¹¹⁰⁾

Alongside prayer, a leader should be reminding people about the meeting in advance, maybe through social media, or other suitable means, and checking in with any one who has not been present. It is a good idea for leaders to keep a register of those who are attending and to review this regularly, as sporadic attendance may mean an individual needs support.

Welcome

It is a good idea to think about the order that individuals within the small group are asked to contribute. Quieter members should be included as early as possible to give them confidence to speak in the rest of the meeting. However, they may not want to be the first to speak. Verbal processors and extraverts will also need to be encouraged to let everyone else contribute and not to interrupt when others are sharing.

Worship

Make sure that you understand how the activity praises God and helps people focus on him. Ensure that you have all the resources that you need and that any technology is working and that adverts etc won't interrupt the worship, particularly if you are using YouTube videos.

Word

The leader should make sure that they are familiar with the passage and have thought through some of the key things that may arise from a group discussion. Leaders should prepare for the discussion through personal study of the passage alongside the use of other study tools.⁽¹¹¹⁾ This preparation can be as simple as highlighting and thinking through any questions that the passage raises, but it is important to remember that leaders who have grappled with a passage themselves are more likely to be able to lead a deep discussion than those who are encountering a text for the first time.

Waiting

Whilst this section might need to adapt due to the discussion that occurs, it is worth thinking through how you would like to wait and what that waiting might look like for your small group. Again, making sure you have the resources necessary is vital, particularly if you are doing something creative. If you are wanting to engage more prophetically in this time, then make sure you have thought through the instructions people will need to feel safe, comfortable and able to engage.

Witness

Know whether you are in the 'praying', 'preparing' or 'acting' stage of the witness section. If you are praying make sure you have the details to prompt those in your group who might have forgotten who or what they are praying for. If you are in the preparing or action stages then make sure that you have a plan to explore these things helpfully and that you have the necessary resources or information so that you can bring clarity to group members.

Duration

Preparation should take no more than an hour. If it is taking too much longer, particularly for the Word section, then you maybe in danger of turning the discussion into a teaching time. If it is taking less than 30 minutes then you may well be under preparing and not praying for the group, or not listening for what God wants to do.

CULTURE & HOSPITALITY

Central to forming a culture and a hospitable space is the use of the physical location we meet in. Environmental factors such as lighting, temperature, aromas, sounds, aesthetics and seating all have an impact on how people interact with what a sessions content. The physical space can create and encourage awe, intimacy, formality or informality, and participation, and yet it is often overlooked in the process of shaping a small group meeting. Successful leaders spend time crafting the spaces they use to make sure they are in sync with the culture they are trying to establish.

Seating

Seating is important. Chairs used should be comfortable and for effective communication to occur, chairs should be arranged so that people are able to sit in a circle, and chairs should be roughly the same height. This enables each member to see and hear every other person easily and means that eye level will be similar. This aids both communication and creates a helpful equality around authority.⁽¹¹²⁾

A leader should also be aware of outlyers, those members who maybe communicating something about their feelings, by choosing to sit slightly outside the circle, or on the floor when chairs are available, or who constantly leaves the meeting as these may be clues to an individual's needs.⁽¹¹³⁾

Focal Points

Leaders need to think carefully about focal points within the space, ensuring that the space feels welcoming and pleasant to be in. The room shouldn't be messy or have too much going on in the background, and nothing should interrupt the sight lines between members.¹¹⁴ Crosses, pictures, and Bible's could be used as focal points to highlight their importance, and if you are using technology make sure sight lines to screens are clear.

Lighting

Lighting shouldn't be too bright so that people feel like they are in a spot light or in a waiting room, but neither should it be so low that people can't see each other or their Bible's clearly. Lighting is vital in creating the right atmosphere. It should feel warm and inviting, cosy and comfortable.

Sounds

A good leader thinks carefully about the sounds that are part of the space. Music can be a great way of helping people feel welcome and comfortable, and can help people talk as it means people are speaking into silence. However, thought needs to be given to whether the music selected fits the tone of the meeting. Music shouldn't be too loud and should be turned off once the meeting begins so that it doesn't become distracting.

Aromas

Thought needs to be given to the aromas in the space. Everybody's house has its own smell, that hosts become nose blind towards. It is sometimes worth lighting a gently fragranced scented candle and not cooking strong smelling foods before people are due to meet.

Temperature

Think carefully about the temperature of a space. Too cold and people will be uncomfortable, too warm and people are likely to become drowsy. In a confined space the temperature should be just below what is comfortable as it will rise as people occupy the space, and it is often helpful to have a window open a little to maintain air flow.

Food

Food and meals are vital to creating the right culture and demonstrating hospitality. Meals can help people engage and interact. If you are eating together then food should be simple, well presented, and take into account any dietary requirements. There should also be enough in case one or two new people join. If you are not eating a meal together drinks and snacks can also be a simpler way of creating a welcoming atmosphere.

House Rules

If you are meeting in someone's home it is useful to find out about any house rules that they have and communicate them before the first meeting so that members can come prepared. This is useful if hosts expect shoes to be off, or food to only be eaten in certain rooms, or drinks to rest on coasters etc. Having this sort of information helps people to feel more at home in the space and avoid making mistakes that bring about a level of self consciousness.

TONE

One of the key things leaders should pray into when preparing for a small group each meeting is the Tone for that week. It is important to think about Tone as it shapes the way a session will be delivered. Tones are important as they shape the messages we communicate. All spoken communication carries a sense of tone, and they create the feeling or atmosphere behind the words that are spoken. Tones are shaped by the energy of the leader, their word choice, pitch and emotion. As such, it is important that leaders are aware of their own tone, and try to bring an appropriate sense of tone to a session.

There are a plethora of Tones that can be adopted and each will shape the meeting, helping or hindering the way the content is interacted with by the group. Tones can encompass anything from atmosphere's that are upbeat and joyful to those that are sombre and reflective, or be focussed and heavy, or light and engaging, and everything in between.

As part of their preparation leaders should be praying and listening to God for the type of tone that might be most helpful. This should be done after thinking through the material and asking God what might be the most helpful tone to explore the content.

Leaders should then think carefully about the words, phrases, actions, pitch and style of voice that will help facilitate that tone of the small group. Tones start to be established as the first people arrive, but become increasingly important as the group moves from the Welcome and into Worship.

Sometimes a group will come with a completely different tone to the leader, and either the leader will need to gently correct the tone of the group, through their words and actions, or adapt their intended tone to that of the group.

As leaders grow apprentices they should share the sense of tone they are hoping to see in the small group with the apprentice leader so that the apprentice can lead their section in a way that fits with the overall tone of the meeting.

Overtime groups will naturally adopt a certain set of tones and it is the leaders responsibility to make sure that these are in line with the culture they are seeking to establish.

POWER & MODELLING

Another key issue for leadership is the use of power. Leaders need to consider how they exert their power used to influence within the small group. Rather than use power for their own benefit, leaders in the way of Jesus are called to serve (Mat 20:24-26). The leader has 5 sources of power available to them:

1. their legitimate positional power,
2. their use of rewards,
3. their use of punishments,
4. their Referent Power or charisma (the influence arising from the relationships of trust that they have built with members and that arises from members admiration and respect for the leader),
5. and their expertise.

As well as making sure their own use of power is legitimate, a group leader needs to be aware of the power and influence of other members who might impact the group negatively. This often arises because of how other members use their expertise, or referent power to reshape the group, influencing it in unhelpful ways. A good leader will pay attention to the power dynamics in the meeting, and remember that their role is to serve and facilitate at the same time as holding the group to it's sense of vision.
(115)

In many ways, small group leadership is about modelling the life of Christ to members of the group. The small group leader needs to model to the group not just how to effectively lead each section, but also how they should be lived out. They need to model the key goals of communal relationships, evangelism/mission and the process of spiritual growth.

As the small group leader invests in these things at a personal level and grows and changes, practicing a degree of vulnerability and transparency with group members, other members of the group will be drawn into the discipleship process. As the leader shares their own journey of application, the group are more likely to apply what they are learning.(116) This echoes the teaching of Paul when he writes encouraging the Corinthians to imitate his way of life, as he seeks to live faithfully, (1 Cor 4:15-17).

As a result, leaders who articulate and model the belief that scripture speaks and transforms are likely to see the Bible transform the lives of their members.(117) A key text in this regard is Jesus' comment in John 8:31 'if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'. This is also true of other aspects of the small group with leaders who are passionate about and model community, worship, waiting and evangelism all likely to impact the members of the group positively.

LEADERSHIP BEYOND THE GROUP

One of the key things that churches need to think about as they begin to think about implementing a small group structure is the requirements of leaders beyond the small group setting. We have already discussed the importance of prayer, preparation and training but churches often seek to give small group leaders a whole host of other responsibilities, from roles on PCCs to serving on other teams and being available for leading and preaching. Yet, if churches really value the small group as a key vehicle for discipleship then small group leaders need to be freed from as many other competing leadership demands as possible. This is because as a small group grows, and as the leaders build a community of disciples that seeks to reach the lost, the small group role can widen.

One of the key things it is important for churches to think through is how pastoral care happens through the small group. The natural way that this often happens is that as a leader creates a communal atmosphere and begins helping the group align their lives to scripture a trust is built. This trust means that group members will often seek out the leader when they have concerns, or experience problems, or need someone to listen, or give wise counsel. This pastoral load can sometimes be quite demanding and so it is important that leaders are aware of the expectations around pastoral care. As such, churches need to think through whether small group leaders should carry the pastoral load or whether there are mechanisms in place for leaders to refer people on to a central leadership team. It is important to be clear about these expectations as the small groups are first formed, rather than try to try and adapt later on.

Another consideration is whether churches are wanting to encourage a form of every member ministry around pastoral care. This may happen naturally as individuals share in the small group and others they have formed connections with seek to offer support. However, if this is to become practice, it is likely to need encouraging, particularly as we have a culture that likes to defer to leaders. Yet, when we equip and encourage the group to minister to each other, we increase the capacity of pastoral care and give away responsibility that increases discipleship. This modelling also has the benefit of discouraging a co-dependency where the group becomes dependent on the leader and the leader ends up needing to be the one to solve all the issues. It is important to note, that there will be times when individuals need expert support, and this should be encouraged alongside any models that seek to equip every member ministry.

Two other tasks are important for leaders either to do themselves or delegate to members of their group. The first is around contacting members of the small group. Most groups will have some sort of digital group chat, but there should also be safe mechanisms for individual support and follow-up. Digital groups help maintain weekly contact and can encourage the development of a group identity and provide care and encouragement throughout the week.

This could be as simple as meeting reminders, or posting encouragements or prayer requests, but these are important as they enhance group cohesion.

It is also worth making sure that anyone missing from the group is contacted in some way, just so that those members feel included if they miss a week. Again, this contact can be delegated by the leader, but belonging is increased when people feel like they've been missed or noticed. Data protection and safeguarding guidelines should be followed whenever electronic communication is used, which is likely to mean having parental permission, using work phones, contacting in sensible hours, and on age relevant apps, and you will need to check your policies regarding this.

A final form of contact that is helpful is for leaders to be encouraged to adopt is to follow-up with those who have attended the group for the first time. Again a simple text, email, phone call, or social media message that thanks the new member for coming and encourages them to return can make all the difference.

All of this can become quite time consuming, but deepen the impact of a small group.

Some leaders give tasks to apprentice leaders, or split tasks among the group, as part of giving away ownership and/or raising up other leaders. Some leaders find creating roles around some of the following tasks helpful:

- General Comms and encouragements
- Follow-up of New Members
- Birthdays and Celebrations
- Socials
- Researching and planning Mission / Evangelism Projects
- Verse of the day / encouragements
- Hosting / providing food drink
- Planning socials

This list is not exhaustive but aims to give an idea of some of the tasks outside of just leading the group that can increase belonging, deepen a group and make it more effective.

IDENTIFYING LEADERS

There are lots of models when it comes to looking for leaders and apprentice leaders. However, we recommend looking for FAST leaders, those who are Faithful, Available, Servant-Hearted, and Teachable.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ Below is a quick run-down of these qualities.

Faithful

Faithfulness in this view is the trustworthiness, or the integrity of a person. Do their words and lifestyle match? This trait is vital for leaders and although an individual might be talented and fruitful, if he or she is not faithful, then the person will struggle to engender trust.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ Faithfulness also looks a lot like spiritual maturity which is the primary preferred quality of a leader.⁽¹²⁰⁾

Available

Availability is all about whether an individual has the time to lead. We all live in a hyper-busy reality with a multitude of competing demands, yet leaders need to be present week in week out. This consistency is absolutely vital for the small group leader. A leader may have gifts and talents in leadership, they may be faithful in lifestyle, but if they are not available then their leadership will be ineffective. Availability demonstrates an individual's priorities. People make time for the things that are important to them. To be unavailable to lead, is therefore to model that the group is of less importance than other demands.⁽¹²¹⁾ This therefore means that individuals who demonstrate consistency are showing the initial signs of being able to lead, and perhaps shouldn't be overlooked for leadership opportunities.

Servant Hearted

The next trait to look for in an individual is servant-heartedness. Jesus prized this aspect of leadership and we should too. Do you see the potential leader serving, are they willing to help in ways that bless others and make their lives easier? Do they seem to serve in unseen ways and as they do point away from themselves, or do they need, or seek credit or validation when they show kindness. "If a potential leader is not ready to serve then they are not ready to lead".⁽¹²²⁾

Teachable

Finally, is the potential leader teachable? Has the potential leader a view of discipleship that sees it as an ongoing task, or do they feel like they have made it? Is there a humility and an eagerness to learn and keep learning or is there a sense of pride within the individual?⁽¹²³⁾

Teachability is closely connected to humility, a good leader needs to be able to accept correction and be willing to learn and grow, listening to others, and not just dominating with their own ideas, knowledge and opinions. Teachability is central to leadership as it keeps them pursuing and learning from Jesus.

Alongside these key traits potential leaders also need good social skills, the ability to listen, to draw alongside and encourage others. Some leadership skills such as drive, determination and the ability to motivate and inspire are also important⁽¹²⁴⁾ but none of these are as vital as the FAST criteria.

Furthermore, one final key trait of an effective small group leader is the ability to give away leadership, to train and equip others to lead. Again, the 6Ws are particularly helpful in this regard, as rather than giving away the whole of the leadership of the small group to an individual, potential leaders can be developed by mastering each component or section of the small group over time. This can happen for several potential leaders simultaneously, as the overall leader can model each of the Ws and then, give different members responsibility for leading different elements of the 6Ws each week. In this way new leaders can be trained through Jesus' discipleship process, being instructed, immersed, before imitating what they have had modelled.

DEVELOPING APPRENTICES

Right at the heart of this small group framework is the idea that small group members will grow in spiritual maturity and that the groups themselves will grow and multiply. Central to both of these aims is the need to identify, train and release leaders. Small groups should be 'leader-breeders' as they provide an atmosphere and structure where leadership development can thrive.⁽¹²⁵⁾

Several small group experts see the key role of the small group not as recruiting members, but as training leaders.⁽¹²⁶⁾ As such there is a sense in which all members should be seen as potential leaders with something to give back to the group. Whilst we are aware that some see leadership as a specific God given gift, this framework wants to encourage groups to invest in and develop leaders. This is because small group systems that communicate that only certain people can lead often create low glass ceilings that end up with people feeling frustrated and incapable, that limit potential, creating stagnant groups that struggle to grow because leadership development is stunted.⁽¹²⁷⁾

In contrast, small group leaders who make leadership development an important goal are more likely to grow and multiply their groups.⁽¹²⁸⁾ Here, small group become the perfect training ground for developing leaders because people are able to learn in the process of doing.

This idea of training and releasing leaders goes back to Jesus and was followed by Wesley in his system of bands and classes. Wesley is said to have put one in ten, perhaps one in five, to work in significant ministry and leadership. As a result, Wesley was able reach multitudes, and made leaders of thousands of ordinary individuals.(129)

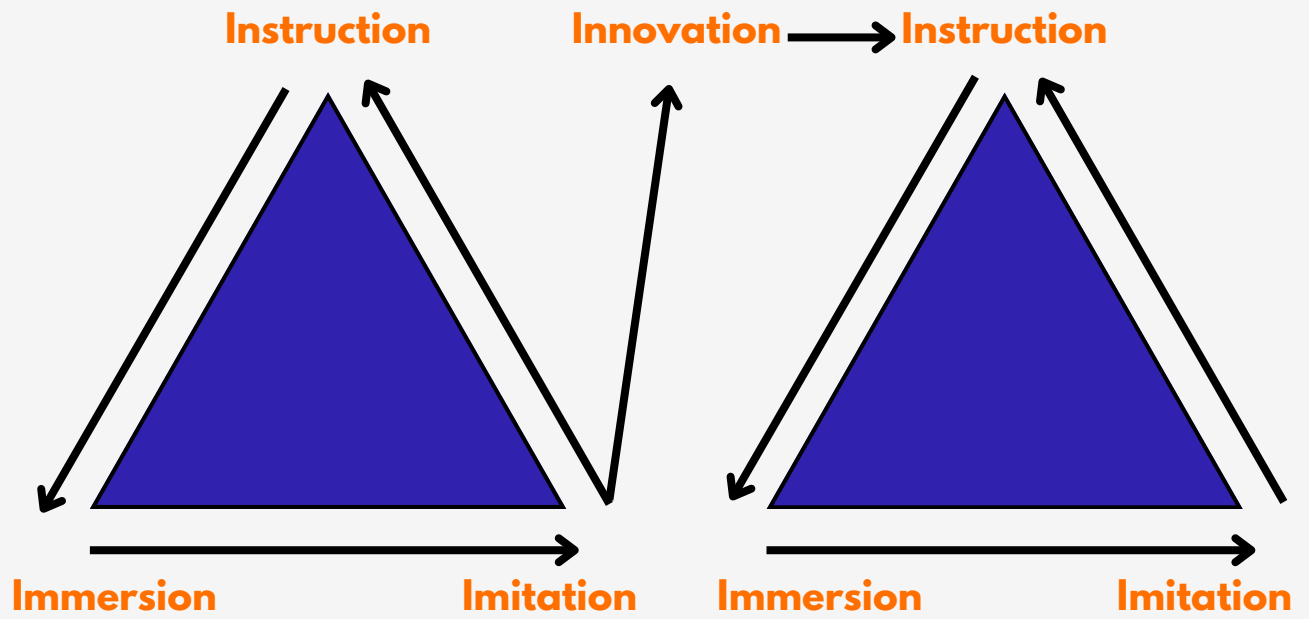
As such, the small group leader should follow this example and identify, train and release potential leaders. Research also indicates that leadership development is the most important factor in the ability to multiply a group, with small groups that invest in three or more apprentice leaders doubling their capacity to multiply the group.(130)

As such we suggest using the FAST model to identify potential leaders within the small group and to constantly assess group members according to those criteria. At the same time responsibility for various aspects or sections of the small group should be given away. We also recommend that churches expand their search for potential leaders, especially looking to raise up new small group leaders from among young adults.(131)

As such, One of the central ideas of this framework is its ability to grow leaders. Most of the components in the framework are designed so that they are simple to delegate. Effective delegation has several helpful benefits:

1. It gives members of the group regular responsibility
2. The increased responsibility increases belonging
3. It helps members grow in their giftings
4. Delegation leads to increased creativity as individuals bring fresh approaches
5. The process of delegation trains leaders.

As a consequence, this process of delegation is vital to the small group. Rather than centralising leadership in one individual, the small group can be used as a training ground for new leaders. Potential leaders are welcomed into the discipleship triangle of Instruction, Immersion and imitation within the safety of the small group. Initially, a potential leader can be instructed in how to lead a section of the framework, before watching closely as the leader leads, becoming immersed in the practice of the overall leader, before entering the final stage of being released to imitate and have a go. They then receive feedback and further instruction, can watch again, before imitating once more. Over time, the apprentice leader will develop in such a way that they begin to Innovate, leading in a way that is natural and authentic to them, where they have grown in competence and confidence enough to lead effectively and begin training others.



SECTION 05

MULTIPLICATION



MULTIPLICATION

This framework is built on the idea of multiplication. We suggest that effective groups should try to replicate themselves, by adding new members until they reach a threshold whereupon they seek to multiply from one group into two.

One of the keys towards moving towards multiplication is making sure that the Witness time is prioritised in the small group. This becomes more important as the small group enters the norming and performing stages. However, even in the very early stages of a small group's life together the witness should be encouraged and the aim of multiplication should be regularly stated.

Research suggests that leaders who encourage members to invite visitors every time the group meets are twice as likely to grow as those who do so only occasionally or not at all.⁽¹³²⁾ As such the role of leadership in encouraging multiplication is vital.

It is also worth noting that most people who join churches in the West come through the influence of a friend, relative or acquaintance⁽¹³³⁾ and with people looking for deep community, in the midst of a loneliness epidemic the community encountered in a small group can be a powerful way of helping individuals outside the church find friendship and faith.

One statistic worth highlighting, is that research suggests that for every 25 people invited to a small group, only 15 will say they will attend, and from these 15 only 10 are likely to show up. Of those 10, only 5 to 7 will be regular attenders a month later.¹³⁴ This seems to parallel the ideas of Jesus in the Parable of the Sower. Further, marketing consultants suggest that a people need to hear a message or invitation 7 times before they will move towards acting on the message. As a result, small group leaders need to create an invitational culture within their small group, praising every attempt, even if there are many rebuttals or no shows from individuals. Celebrating all invitations is vital to keep the small group enthused about multiplication. Alongside this invitational culture, small groups should make regular time, especially in the performing stage, for socials or mission activities that may draw others in. These social gatherings can be an important stepping stone to an individual joining the group.

The other key to multiplication is to have trained apprentice leaders who are ready to lead. The sooner a group has an apprentice, the sooner it is ready to multiply. Research suggests that leaders need to be Faithful, Available, Servant-Hearted, Teachable and willing to lead rather than having particular skills or giftings. As such, small group leaders need to invest in training apprentice leaders from the early stages of a small group's beginnings so that new leaders are ready to be deployed.

When Is A Group Ready For Multiplication?

Unfortunately, there is no error proof way to multiply a group. Multiplication, as well as a new beginning, also involves loss and change. As a result leaders need to be both brave and sensitive as they consider multiplication, recognising the uniqueness of each group.

Generally, groups start to be ready to multiply when 10-12 people are coming regularly. Often groups struggle to maintain attendance consistency once they hit 10-12 people as the dynamics of a group change at this point with conversation centring around fewer people, creating less opportunity for contributions, and the original intimacy of the group struggles to feel as deep. Sometimes, this leads to groups having 15-16 members with many who are irregular. This maybe an indication that a group missed a multiplication window or may mean there are other factors for the sporadic attendance that need investigating.

Leaders, from the earliest days of a small group, should be preparing for multiplication by keeping and studying attendance records, and constantly reminding their group about the multiplication goal. Once 10 people are attending regularly, leaders should be regularly mentioning and discussing what the process might look like as this helps to ease the small group into the positive change that multiplication brings.

Multiplication often works best where it can happen as process. Initially, as a group moves towards multiplication and where there is space, a group should continue to meet together as one big group for the Welcome and Worship, and then form off into different rooms for the rest of the Ws. It is often worth letting individuals choose by themselves which group to be part of, and any decisions about how groups multiply should always be based on friendships.

After a few weeks of forming into two consistent smaller groups after the worship, have the groups meet to greet each other in the same building, but run parallel meetings from the beginning. After a few weeks of this groups should continue to meet but in separate locations.

If there isn't space to run parallel meetings in the venue then as long as groups are prepared well, they can form into two groups in different locations after a few weeks of consultation and discussion.

About a month after any multiplication it is worth gathering the two new groups for a social so that they can interact again. This may also be a great time to invite even more new people and welcome them into the life of the groups. In the following weeks the two new groups can continue to meet separately.

For groups that have got to 15–16 members, and who have inconsistent attendance, multiplication is still possible, using the process above, but usually needs leaders to draw people back into the group, and remind them of the vision. This often helps people to re-commit, or helps leaders identify whether other factors will continue to keep attendance sporadic, which may indicate the group should not quite multiply.

Whatever the case, leaders should always talk positively about multiplication, acknowledging the loss of old friendships, but pointing to the future possibilities and praising the group, and rather than use phrases like dividing, splitting or separating, use phrases like, forming, growing and multiplying.

Some research suggests that it takes a first generation small group about 1 year to 18 months to multiply, but that this becomes faster once groups have already multiplied, with some previously multiplied groups multiplying again in under 26 weeks.⁽¹³⁵⁾

Two of the keys that unlock multiplication are the depth of community within the small group and the goal and desire to draw others into the group. Where these work in harmony, alongside an evangelism or mission focus, multiplication becomes more likely.

This goal or desire to draw others into the group is vital in aiding multiplication. Groups need a collective desire to change and grow. There are six key factors that impact the likelihood of change and growth, with multiplication becoming more likely when:

1. There is a strong sense of belongingness within individuals to the group
2. The attraction of the group is stronger than the discomfort of change
3. The members agree that change is needed / positive
4. Communication around change includes the whole group
5. That change doesn't occur alongside threat or punishment
6. That each individual can see / measure the progress towards the change⁽¹³⁶⁾

Further change and spiritual growth is also more likely when the group has a view of scripture, and explores scripture, as an authoritative source that encourages change.⁽¹³⁷⁾

Part of the leadership task therefore, is about encouraging change and growth and preparing a group for multiplication. It is not always an easy process, and there are no hard and fast rules to navigate this stage. However, change and growth is vital and stops groups stagnating and becoming closed and inward looking.

REFORMING GROUPS

Sometimes rather than multiplying, groups need to be reformed. There are a variety of reasons as to why a group may need to reform, from people moving away, to a group getting stuck somewhere in the group cycle and not moving towards multiplication.

Reforming groups is mainly about encouraging and celebrating what has been good, before finding new groups for those involved. Even for groups that have really struggled it is important to thank them and celebrate with them. Most often leaders of groups that need to reform can feel fragile, and usually they have given sacrificially to make the group work. They need to be thanked and encouraged so that they continue to lead in the future.

For groups that have been together a couple of years and are not moving towards multiplication, then it is worth remembering that much of the thinking around discipleship groups suggests that they have a natural life-span, and that if a group doesn't multiply within a couple of years, it is unlikely to do so in the future.

As such setting a gentle two year limit on each group can be helpful. This two year limit prevents groups from existing beyond their productive time. Whilst this can feel like a loss to members of a group who have grown in intimacy, it actually helps the church, as groups can reform and new deep relationships can be built, aiding the sense of community throughout the church. As long as this is communicated at the beginning of the small groups life, and leaders know and are on board, and regularly communicate this to the group, then reforming groups that don't manage to multiply becomes less of an issue.

Another idea is to host a service or gathering for small groups every (other) September, thanking and celebrating the life of all the small groups, marking the ending of some, before forming new groups. Such a gathering would also be a great place to invite and encourage church members not in small groups to so that they can join a small group for the first time.

Sometimes small groups need to reform because they don't quite gel, there are personality clashes, or leaders move away before training up an apprentice. In these situations the person responsible for the entire small group programme should visit that group to thank everyone for participating, and subsequently spending time with each member to think through other potential groups.

It can be tempting to think that groups that don't multiply or that need to reform as having failed, but just because they haven't quite achieved the intended purpose there is usually lots to celebrate, and the group will need plenty of encouragement for giving it a go. Also, groups that need reforming provide valuable lessons that help improve the whole small group process.

SECTION 06

RESOURCES



CURRICULUM & CONTENT

Establishing a curriculum and content each week can feel overwhelming and whilst this guide is more concerned with the theory, theology and structure of small groups, we recognise that discerning what to explore is important.

As such we recommend three approaches to curriculum and content:

1. **Values based approaches**

Values based approaches seek to help a group explore certain key biblical values so that they can be applied to members life. In this method a number of values are selected and then studied in turn across the year, with that value being approached from a different perspective and bible passage each week. One such approach takes the following values that emerge from Acts 2 (worship, community, prayer, discipleship, prophetic serving, and mission/evangelism) and sees them applied on a termly basis across the year, again with each value being explored from a different scriptural angle each week. The advantage of this approach is that these particular values connect well with the 6Ws, meaning that the very structure of the small group reinforces the values that are seeking to be understood and applied (e.g. The welcome = community, The Worship = Worship, The Word = discipleship, The Waiting = Prayer and Prophetic Serving, and The Witness = Prophetic serving and Mission/Evangelism) In other words each week the components of the small group encourage each of the values to be practiced within the small group, even if one has a specific focus for that particular term.

2. **Theme / Character based approaches**

Another approach to content is to explore Theological themes or Biblical characters each time a group meets. Themes and characters can provide excellent inspiration and aid discipleship. Themes help bring theological understanding and connect well to everyday life and can widen discussion beyond the Biblical text and help people think theologically, whereas as an exploration of different characters can provide instruction for small group members regarding how they should / shouldn't live as disciples of Jesus and often provide identifiable examples or both good and bad behaviour and the grace of God.

3. **Biblical Book based approaches**

Another helpful approach is for small groups to work through books of bible in turn, with a section of scripture explored in turn each week. This approach is useful because group members get to grapple with the breadth of scripture, engaging with some of the more difficult sections, and so it widens the discussion and knowledge of the group. This approach can encourage intellectualism if not managed well, but it is often helpful in helping people understand the sweep, context and narrative of scripture.

One of the things we advise caution over is for small groups sessions to be based on the Sunday teaching series or video teaching resource. The reason for caution is that these approaches often creates conversation around the preachers ideas rather than scripture itself, and if people miss a Sunday in particular, they often feel like they can't contribute.

Other approaches to content can involve topical issue based sessions. However, we would again urge caution around some issue based teaching as it can result in overly moralistic applications and can miss the nuance of the Biblical text. Overtime this can mean that members see scripture as a moral guidebook rather than the living and active word of God.

SWEDISH BIBLE STUDY

[Insert - Value / Theme / Title]

[Insert - Bible Passage]

Locate Passage (in 30 seconds - could use Bible project)

Where is it OT / NT?

What sort of writing

Who was it written to?

What sort of writing

Who wrote it?

Where does it fit in the narrative?



What grabs you as you read this passage / what stands out?



What questions arise / what do you find hard to understand / what is difficult within the passage?



What is God saying to you through the passage? How does this relate to your life? How do you feel about it?



What is the main point of the passage?



Have you read something like this in Scripture before? How does this relate to Jesus?



What is your response to the passage? Is there something you might do? Is there someone you can share the ideas of this passage with that may help them or reveal Jesus to them? Who can you bless as a result of reading this passage?



Is there anything else you'd like to discuss that comes out of this passage?

Rationale

This Swedish Bible study helps a small group grapple with a text. The first three questions are the most important and help individuals bring their lives to the text. These three questions are helpful in taking a Bible Study away from moral point teaching, often creating unexpected avenues of exploration and providing useful tangents. Further because people write down their answers, either individually or in pairs, everyone has something to share or contribute rather than just the verbal processors. The last four questions explore the context of the passage and help people make connections with other parts of scripture. The process also gives group members a method of studying scripture beyond the small group helping them to practice the discipline of study by themselves.

ONGOING TRAINING IDEAS

We have mentioned several times throughout this guide that small group leaders need ongoing training. This training should involve a degree of theory, theology, pastoral care and prayer.

Once small group leaders have a good understanding of the 6Ws and how they should be applied in your context then we suggest creating training sessions using some of the following ideas...

The First session, 'A leader's devotional life and how to pray for your group', might well be the most important as research indicates that the small group leaders devotional life sets the bar for the small group, and that it is more important than ongoing training when it comes to multiplying a small group⁽¹³⁸⁾:

- A Leader's Devotional Life and How to pray effectively for your group
- How to set effective goals for your small group
- How to Set a Healthy Hospitable Welcoming group Culture
- How to lead a small group worship session
- How to facilitate a bible discussion
- How to lead a Waiting time
- How to prioritise the Witness
- How to build and increase group cohesion
- How to support group members beyond the small group
- How to share faith and encourage other small group members to share faith
- How to raise up apprentice leaders and involve more people in leadership (give away responsibility)
- Group Dynamics Refresher - The Characteristics of Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing and Mourning
- How to prepare a group for multiplication
- How to Dealing with difficult moments (people) Over-Talkative people, Silent members, Tangent Creators, Arguers, Jokers, Interrupters, the know it All, The casual attender, etc...
- How to encourage positive group roles
- Safeguarding in the small group
- How to Increase the depth of a session

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

This last little section aims to give a quick overview as to how to start or relaunch a small group process from scratch.

One of the most significant mistakes a congregation and its leaders can do is to jump on the small group bandwagon and seek out leaders in a hurried, careless fashion and “Churches often start small groups without having first addressed the fundamental issues of this ministry:

- How will we form groups?
- Who will lead our groups?
- How do we address problems in groups?
- How will groups relate to our church?
- What happens when a small group becomes a large group?

“When leaders are recruited and groups formed without intention, disaster lurks.”⁽¹³⁹⁾

Establishing an effective small group structure takes about three months from the initial thinking to the implementation of the first groups. There are two main ways to start, with a big launch and invite the whole (or significant proportion of the church to join), or to start small and begin with one or two groups that begin slightly under the radar but overtime end up reshaping the culture... There are strengths and weaknesses of both approaches, but starting small, perhaps with a group of potential leaders, is often helpful as the initial group are more likely to catch the vision and feel of an effective small group. The group can then be slowly widened over time, before being multiplied. This often helps groups to have a similar feel and identity, and helps with training and the overall sense of group effectiveness.

The following highlights the steps that need to be considered:

Gather a small team to:

Pray

Begin to Pray about adopting a small group structure and imagine what it might look like in your context. Are there unique things that God is wanting to communicate to you?

Think Through the Structure

Identify the general structure around your small groups, When, Where, How frequently, and for how Long will groups meet. Will meetings involve food and drink? How will multiplication happen? How does the structure fit and impact other areas of church life (Sunday services, lent courses, prayer and worship nights, Alpha, PCCs etc). What are the non-negotiables that you want every group to follow, and what is more optional?

Membership

Think about membership of groups – what ages are they for? How will groups be comprised? And how will potential members be initially recruited. Are groups geographically located, based around particular interests? How will new people find out about the groups?

Content

Decide how content for the small group will be made available. Will it be values led, Themes or character driven, or Bible book based. Decide who will provide material, will it be set centrally or up to each small group to determine. How will you equip leaders with the material they need?

Budgets

Small Groups cost money. Are you expecting each small group to manage its own expenses, or will each small group have access to a budget of some description and what will this be used for? Have you made money available for leadership training and celebrations?

Pastoring

Is there an expectancy that small group leaders deal offer pastoral support to those in their small group, or should they refer individuals on to a central team?

Leadership

Begin to identify some key leaders who will lead the first groups and begin to train them in the framework. Model your way of leading with the potential leaders.

Locations

Make sure that potential hosts are on board and fully know what's required, or church buildings are available and booked long term.

Ongoing Training of Leaders

Make sure you have thought through how frequently this will happen and who is responsible for it. Make sure rooms are booked and that time is allocated for preparation to discern and plan what training sessions will look like.

Communicate

Make sure that in the weeks before the launch effective communication is happening. That leaders and hosts have all they need and that potential members know how to sign up.

Launch

Set a Launch date and begin your small group experiment.

DEALING WITH DIFFICULTIES

There are a whole host of issues that can arise within a small group, but often they boil down to the negative group roles that individuals adopt or the type of talk that is encouraged or discouraged in the group.

In terms of 'talk' there are 5 types of communication that leaders should encourage in their members.

1. Vision Talk – Conversation that relates to where a group is going and what it is trying to achieve. This is often about dreaming together.
2. Task / Topic Talk – Conversation that relates to the session material you are exploring. This often takes discussion to deeper levels.
3. Role Talk – Conversation that relates to how and where people fit within the group. This helps people find their place.
4. Consciousness Raising Talk – This is conversation that is positive and life- giving that encourages the group to think of themselves as a group. This helps build morale, create a group identity and develops the 'we' feeling within a group.
5. Encounter Talk – This consists of personal communication often at the needs level, and includes group responses of empathy, sharing, listening and support.

However, it is also possible for unhelpful communication to be found within the small group and it is important for leaders to identify this and its possible causes and gently steer conversation back to more positive talk. It is also vital that leaders begin to tell the difference between encounter talk that is sharing something difficult and personal and the types of destructive talk listed below.

1. Demoralising / Negative Talk – conversation that saps life from the vision and aims of a group, often expressed in can't be done comments, complaining, moaning or apathetic responses.
2. Rebellious Talk – conversation that undermines the leadership of the group or its values and structures. Can be displayed in anger and discontent
3. Damaging talk – conversation that undermines community and people's sense of belonging, that makes individuals question their involvement. This is can be through gossip, rumours, put downs, bullying and excessive banter.

In terms of negative group roles, people tend to display these for a whole variety of reasons, from personality clashes, to attention seeking behaviours, and disappointments and personal issues people have brought into the meeting that have happened outside the group.

When individuals enter the small group, they come with their life baggage and while individuals often try to keep this hidden it often leaks out in our interactions with others, particularly as we start to feel safe in the company of others.

As such, a small group can bring out some negative group roles in individuals that can side-track a group or make it hard for them to step into their deeper purposes. It is also worth noting that often the negative behaviour that manifests in the group may be a cover for an issue that lies below the surface. As a result, leaders need to discern the difference between patterns of negative behaviour that individuals can fall into (or even be boxed into) in group situations, and between behaviour that has a root in a more complex issue that might need addressing outside the meeting.

Examples of common negative group behaviours are highlighted below. It is worth thinking in advance of useful approaches to challenging these negative traits so that your group does not become side-tracked by them.

The Over Talkative Person	The Silent Member	The Withdrawer
The Tangent Creator	The Arguer	The Saboteur
The Habitual Liar	The Constant Joker	The Know It All
The Interrupter	The Aggressor	The Over-Discloser
The Casual Attender	The Gossiper	The Insensitive Person
The Super-Sensitive Person	The Self-Righteous Person	The Joyless Person

SAFEGUARDING

At the heart of this guide is the recognition that we need to provide care and protection to those we are working with and to promote a safer church.

As such, those leading and hosting small groups should be aware of good safeguarding practice and be familiar with the Parish Safeguarding Handbook

(www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/20190-10/ParishSafeGuardingHandBookAugust2019Web.pdf).

Leaders should be recruited safely, receive safeguarding training and know how to respond to safeguarding concerns, being aware of their parish and diocesan safeguarding officers.

If someone begins to make a disclosure of abuse the following is helpful(140):

RESPOND

Do:

Listen, take what is said seriously, use open questions, remain calm, take into account the person's age and level of understanding, check if they mind you taking notes, check that you have understood correctly, offer reassurance that disclosing is the right thing to do, establish only as much information as needed to be able to tell your PSO, DSA, what is believed to have happened, check what the person hopes to happen as a result of the disclosure, state what you are going to do next.

Don't

Make promises you can't keep, make assumptions or offer alternative explanations, investigate, contact the person about whom the allegations have been made, do a physical or medical examination.

RECORD

Make some very brief notes at the time, if appropriate, and write them up in detail more fully as soon as possible, do not destroy your original notes in case they may be required later, record the date, time, place and actual words used, including any swear words or slang, record facts and observable things, not your interpretations or assumptions, don't speculate or jump to conclusions.

RESPOND

If there is immediate danger to the individual contact the police, report the issue to your activity leader, incumbent or PSO. The PSO will contact the DSA within 24 hours who will give advise of the next steps. If you have any doubts contact social services or the police More info can be found in the Parish Safeguarding Handbook.

SECTION 07

FOOTNOTES



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