



◆ Small Group Curriculum ◆

Rationale for Small Groups

Church small groups have been in the church for a long time. Wesley started Holy Clubs consisting of 10-12 same sex persons meeting regularly for personal accountability, prayer, and spiritual reflection. Sunday schools began in England but soon took deep root in American Christianity and flourished until recent times. The idea of small groups is not new. In looking at the book of Acts, especially chapter 2, one sees elements of small group life contained therein.

Stetzer and Geiger¹ indicate that almost 8-in-10 (79 percent) of those surveyed agreed that small groups are very important in the church. Two-thirds said that their church regularly starts new small groups. They further say they “saw widespread agreement, but perhaps not widespread engagement.”

Small groups are about more than what you need to know, but who you need to know and how you need to know it. In other words, community and processing life together are more important components of small groups than mere content. The problem facing some in church life is this: the gift of teaching should not be equated with the gift of lecturing (or preaching!).

Fisher and Ellis (1990) emphasize that most of the definitions of a (small) group indicate the sharing element among members as the key factor, which defines the existence of a group. The sharing might be focused on perceptions, motivation, and goals, as well as around tasks, such as in a scenario group session. This sharing element can be greatly influenced by the group dynamic or climate of the group.

Studies have shown that when looking at long term group retention, the ability to apply knowledge and solve problems, critical thinking and development of positive attitudes, results consistently favor small discussion classes (McKeachie & Kulik, 1975, McKeachie, 1994). The bottom line is that people learn, they are more likely to continue to return when they are active participants rather than passive listeners. Moreover, they not only learn but learn more.

1. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2015/march/4-reasons-small-groups-are-vital-to-your-churchs-health.html>

Benefits of a Small Group

There are numerous benefits to hosting and multiplying small group life in your church. The list below is not in order of importance but shows a variety of important reasons for doing small groups. The list shows the direct benefits to the individuals who participate in a group as well as the benefits to the church body.

Benefits for Participants

Small groups allow participants to:

- Discover and engage with a range of perspectives, ideas, and backgrounds.
- Have more active involvement.
- Helps participants to clarify their attitudes to and ideas about the lesson, as they test their own ideas and attitudes against those of others.
- Encourage students towards self-study of Scriptures.
- Engage in peer learning and sharing responsibility for learning.
- Experience life change in a safe environment.

Benefits for the Church Body

Small groups also benefit the body as a whole in the following ways:

- Small groups make churches more personal.
- Small groups provide a nearly unlimited leadership development pipeline.
- Small groups can promote more effective evangelism since "Come over to my house" is a much easier invitation than "come with me to church."
- Small groups provide the best opportunity for "one-anothering."
- Small groups can actually produce more unity of heart and mission.

How This Small Group Study Works

The study provided with The Gift materials lasts 5 weeks. Each week is based loosely on the sermon topic but allows leaders to venture more widely in the topic. Each session comprises 3 movements, with sub-elements, as noted below.

Movement 1: Loving

- *Welcome: Giving a biblical welcome to all who attend.*
- *Warm-up: Consists of a question or game to deepen relationships with one another.*
- *Worship: Spending time in a worshipping posture.*

Movement 2: Learning

- *Absorbing the Word: This is the interactive exploration of the Biblical topic.*
- *Applying the Word: This is spending time in personal and groups reflection on what the word is saying to the group.*

Movement 3: Living

- *Serving the Group: This moment provides opportunity to invest in one another and help serve any needs the group may have.*
- *Serving the World: This is designed to launch the group into proactive and purposeful action to bring others to know Jesus, either through the small group or the main meeting event.*

As you begin to utilize these studies, make sure to provide a connection between the small group time (which may have guests who do not normally attend your congregation) and the main worship event. Pray for the participants. Allow God to speak through these studies.



◆ **December 16, 2018** ◆

“Persevering in Tough Times”

Movie: The Chronicles of Narnia

SYNOPSIS

Christmas is one of the most difficult seasons for many people in our country. In fact, the joyous festivities are a constant reminder of deep need or loss: the lack of income to buy presents or food, loneliness due to a lost loved one, or the reminder of a fractured relationship. Put another way, for countless people across our city, it feels like winter but never Christmas. But there is good news. In the dark seasons of life, the Lion of Judah offers us hope, strength, and companionship. He walks with us through the icy places back to valley of light.

PREPARATION

As you prepare for the session, the following reminders will contribute to a great night of group.

- Pray for each participant
- Study each scripture and process the meaning of each for your own life
- Prepare the space where you will be meeting to make it comfortable and festive.
- Soft music playing as people arrive might be helpful in setting the tone for the meeting.
- Be ready 15 minutes before the advertised time.
- Prepare seasonally appropriate snacks.

Movement 1: Loving (20 Minutes)

Welcome (10 minutes)

Greet each person as they arrive. Make sure to spend time with each person in the group. If there are new people, introduce them to others in the group. Make everyone feel at home. Direct them to the snack table.

Warm Up (10 minutes)

- Is there anything you are hoping for this Christmas?
- Can you think of something that you or someone else achieved and it took great perseverance?

Prayer

Lead in a short prayer to begin the Learning Time.

Movement 2: Learning (30 Minutes)

Absorbing the Word

- Read Hebrews 11:1, 8-10
- Name someone that you know that demonstrates tremendous faith.
- Why did you mention this person? How does one measure faith?

Read Romans 5:3-4

- When a person thinks of individuals that have strong faith, it is often a child or an older person. Why is that?
- Why do you think Paul says, ‘suffering produces perseverance’?
- Can you think of a time in your life that has been true? Share this experience, if you feel comfortable doing so.

Applying the Word

- Read James 1:12?
- What are ways that you have learned to ‘persevere’?
- Is there something happening in your life that is robbing you of hope? In what ways are you persevering through the experience?

Movement 3: Living (20 minutes)

Serving the group

- Faith allows us to persevere when life feels like winter (cold, little growth, dark). Pray for those in your group that are experiencing a time like this. Remember to pray for one person at a time.

Serving the world

- Is there something very practical that could happen that would help someone that is lacking hope, persevere a little longer? Commit to making that practical thing happen this week. Make sure you share with the person, “suffering produces perseverance” and you wanted to brighten their day with hope. Maybe thank them for the perseverance they are showing in the midst of their suffering.
- Consider implementing the suggested Missional & Outreach Ideas included with this series.

CLOSING

Read together this closing prayer

Father, we can only bow to you when we face loss and suffering. May these things increase our faith. We know that suffering and loss produce perseverance, and our perseverance produces hope. Give us the faith that says, “whatever my lot, you have taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul.” Amen.