

# SMALL GROUPS

## From Start to Finish >>

Doug Fields > Matt McGill

# SMALL GROUPS

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## > How To Use This Resource

### **Why I love small groups!**

Many people, both in and outside the church, live lonely, unconnected lives. They have developed the skill of navigating through life with weak and powerless relationships termed “friendships.” Yet, within most of these friendships they remain strangers to our hopes, dreams, fears, and sin. Small groups are an answer to superficial living.

Today’s teenager is a product of an unconnected generation of adults. Different than their parents, teenagers want to talk, connect, and live life together in authentic, life-changing ways. Small groups within a youth ministry are a method to combat the bigness and isolation of our culture.

### **I love getting my students in small groups!**

In big groups...  
Students can hide and relate in inauthentic ways.

In small groups...  
Students can be known, loved, challenged, disciplined, and cared for.

Before I used small groups in youth ministry, many students would slip through the cracks. I would feel guilty because I could only disciple a handful of students. I knew a lot of names, but I could only know a few students really well. Now, because of our small group structure, I am confident a student won’t slip through the cracks when he/she is in a small group. I love ministering with this type of confidence.

### **I love watching my volunteers minister to students!**

In big groups...  
Adult volunteers can easily become “stand around” chaperones with little to do.

In small groups...  
Adult volunteers can discover the joy of being a shepherd of students.

## > How To Use This Resource

Before small groups, many volunteers would serve for short time periods because they felt like they weren't really contributing. If they weren't upfront (e.g. teaching, skit, announcement, etc.) they didn't feel needed. Now, as small group leaders they take the role of youth minister and make it their goal to disciple the few students entrusted to their care. Our volunteer turnover is minimal because they have become ministers (chaperones quit, ministers rarely do). I love ministering with the adults who have become long-term leaders.

### **I love growing big and small at the same time!**

Youth ministries grow through small groups.

When students are cared for and challenged to grow in their faith, their spiritual growth causes numerical growth. Evangelism is a natural bi-product of a life committed to Jesus.

When youth workers ask me, "How do I grow my group?" I respond by saying, "Care for the students God has entrusted to your care. Love them by getting them in a small group and aligning them with a caring adult leader."

### **I love sharing what I've learned with other youth workers!**

This resource is a response to the hundreds of youth workers who have asked me, "Where do I start with small groups?" I didn't write it to convince you of the need for small groups, I'm assuming you already have decided the value of small groups.

The reason for this resource is to help you through the process of starting small groups and provide you ideas that helped us during our small group journey.

This resource is divided into two parts. In part 1, you'll find a detailed 10 step process for creating a small group ministry from scratch and launching it at your church. In part 2, you'll find about 50 practical small group resources (99 pages) that we have used at Saddleback Church in our student ministry.

## > How To Use This Resource

### **I love saving youth workers time!**

Please feel free to use any of the resources on the CD Rom (that's why they are there). Take our name off, edit what you want, and don't worry about trying to "recreate the wheel". Actually, one of the favorite elements of putting this together was thinking about how much time this could save you. Also, check out the CD Rom to see some of the PowerPoint slides that we've created for you to use in getting the word out to your students. [Our only request at [www.dougfields.com](http://www.dougfields.com) is that you don't publish our material or put it on the internet.]

As I try to save you time, move through this notebook slowly. Don't try to do it all in one day. If you do, you may get a shallow idea of small groups that won't last beyond your first wave of opposition. I like to tell youth workers that I can't show them how to build a ministry fast, but I can help them build health. Health takes time.

### **I love not knowing everything about youth ministry!**

I started working with 7<sup>th</sup> grade boys when I was still a junior in high school in 1979. One truth I've learned about youth ministry in all those years is that I've got a lot to learn about youth ministry. As a youth pastor, I'm still in the trenches working full-time in the church and my learning cycle is always on "high". I want you to know that because I don't expect this to be a perfect document. I'm sure I've missed some ideas, principles, and steps in putting this together. This was written during some late-night sessions and I'm sure we've missed a few things and made some mistakes. Sorry...I'm still learning with you.

### **I love challenging my volunteers to take my title: Minister to Students**

If an adult volunteer pours time, counsel, biblical teaching and regular care into a student, he/she is playing the role of that student's youth minister. I challenge our small group leaders to act as ministers to their small group students under their care. At Saddleback Church, I have the title, Minister to Students, but I'm happy for small group leaders to own that title when they care for students in their groups. When a student has a track meet I'd rather the small group leader get an invitation rather than me as the youth pastor. I want the small group leader invited to the birthday parties, graduations, etc... If I challenge my leaders to take on the role of minister to their students, our youth ministry will grow. I can't care for very many students on my own.

## > How To Use This Resource

As you read this letter from a former student, you'll see the pastoral influence her small group leader had in her life (to be honest, I don't even remember this girl). This summarizes what I'm try to get small group leaders to do.

Kathleen,

If I were giving a sermon right now, I would begin with prayer and thank God for the dedication you showed me in being my small group leader. I love telling people, "Kathleen is my small group leader—she's the best!" Next to God, you have had the greatest influence in my life. I want to grow up and love people like you, Jesus like you, my (future) husband like you do, and be a small group leader like you.

What's amazing about you, is that all the girls in our small group felt like you liked them the most. We also felt your push. As I look back over my junior high and high school years, you loved me enough to challenge me to change. Thank you for always asking about my prayer life, my quiet times, my ministry, my heart for my lost friends, and to quote you, "My love for Jesus." Thank you for wanting to see me change.

I was talking to a friend at college and he said, "Kathleen sounds awesome. You should tell her what she meant to you." So, that's why I'm writing. I loved Saddleback's youth ministry, but if it wasn't for you and the small group I don't know if I would have loved church, God, and others the way I did. There's a lot more to write, but I'll tell you in person next time I see you.

I love you,  
Erika

This is a great example of why the youth minister doesn't need to try to minister to everyone.

## > How To Use This Resource

### **I love working with my friend Matt McGill!**

I've asked my friend Matt McGill to help me synthesize all that we've done at Saddleback Church and to find the resources that we've used that might be helpful to you. Matt was in my small group when he was a teenager. Matt graduated from my youth ministry in 1991, went to college, and has been working with me at Saddleback Church since 1995. Today, he the backbone behind our student ministry and runs everything when I'm not around (actually, even when I am around). He's one of the smartest humans I know and I can't imagine doing youth ministry without him. Aside from this paragraph, Matt and I wrote every word together. It's our combined prayer that this resource helps you get students in small groups,

In the trenches with you,

Doug Fields & Matt McGill

**Doug Fields** is the Pastor to Students at Saddleback Church in Southern California. He has been in youth ministry since 1979 and has authored 30+ books and developed a youth ministry resource company ([www.dougfields.com](http://www.dougfields.com)) to simplify youth ministry and save youth workers time. He and his wife Cathy have 3 children (one of which is a teenager in his youth group).

**Matt McGill** is the Assistant Pastor to Students at Saddleback Church. He has been on staff since 1995 and has known Doug since he first came to Christ as a 9<sup>th</sup> grader in Doug's youth ministry. He doesn't take credit for overseeing the youth ministry at Saddleback (but he should) but he does brag about his baby boy Max and his wife Misha (who was in Doug's wife small group as a teenager).

# SMALL GROUPS

## From Start to Finish >>

PART ONE > 10 Steps for Starting a Small Group Ministry



# SMALL GROUPS

## From Start to Finish >>

### PHASE ONE > Laying the small group foundation

#### STEP 1 > **DREAM IT SMALL**

>> Take time to consider what small groups can do for your ministry

#### STEP 2 > **SUPPORT THE DREAM**

>> Start the necessary groundwork

#### STEP 3 > **DETERMINE THE DETAILS**

>> Identify some essentials for a smooth transition

#### STEP 4 > **CLARIFY YOUR GROUPINGS**

>> Divide your students into small groups

## STEP ONE > Dream it small

### STEP 1 > DREAM IT SMALL

>> Take time to consider what small groups can do for your ministry

**Get alone**

**Pray**

**Dare to dream**

**Begin with the end**

**Think through the basic questions**

This is the step where you begin to dream about what you've already considered—small groups. This first step doesn't have any conventional rules to follow other than to follow no rules. I want to encourage you to begin the process by allowing your heart and mind to go for it. Experience the joy of playing the "what if" game as you think about what God could do through small groups to enhance the health of your youth ministry.

#### **Get alone**

Isolating yourself from distractions is very important. If you can, block out an entire day for this dream step. If you can't get away, unplug the phone and lock your door (and don't read your e-mail). If you don't have a white board to capture your dream ideas, tape a long sheet of butcher paper to your wall to write notes on. Do this ahead of time so the search for office supplies won't be distracting.

#### **Pray**

The dream process is both enjoyable and dangerous. You probably know that you will take some heat for what you're dreaming about (beginning small groups). Some will berate you with comments like, "We've never done it that way" or "I'm going to leave the church if you cancel the Wednesday night program for small groups." Be in prayer and seek God's wisdom and direction before you take any major steps toward change. Ask him to purify your heart and clarify your dream.

This entire dreaming process needs to be a conversation between you and God. "God, make me passionate about what you want our students to experience in small groups. Open my eyes to how you want to move in this ministry..."

## PHASE ONE > Laying the small group foundation

There's not a magic formula to this prayer time. Start by sacrificing your own desires and motives for God's direction. Use this time to be still, wait on him, and listen. As you dream, breathe in and out a simple prayer, "God, I need your wisdom and power... on my own, I can't do it."

### **Dare to dream**

Dreaming the "what if" is an important and helpful exercise. I frequently do this for just about everything from planning a message to brainstorming an event. If you were to walk into my office right now, you would likely see some form of a dream sketched out on my white board. (By the way, this notebook started as a dream on my whiteboard.)

It's fun to dream about what God can do if there is no risk or cost involved. Simply ask, "If I could do anything with small groups and I knew it would succeed, what would I do?"

As you dream about going small, dream big. Dream of resources you don't know how to get or can't afford. Dream of what it might be like if people asked to become small group leaders. Pretend that finding leaders isn't an issue and budgets are not a problem. Imagine that you have the best possible location(s) for small groups to meet. Dream! What could your small group structure look like?

As you dream, write your ideas on the whiteboard as fast as they arrive. Write irresponsibly. If you get an idea and think to yourself, "There's no way that can happen!" Write it anyway. If it costs too much, who cares? It's a dream. Write it down. It doesn't cost a cent to dream. You're on God's budget, his timing, and in his control. Allow yourself to spend some time seeing into God's infinite imagination.

### **Begin with the end**

Because you are dreaming, you have the luxury of working backward. Start by visualizing the end result without worrying about how to get there.

During the dream process, try to capture a picture of what a student from a small group would "look like" five years after graduating from

## STEP ONE > Dream it small

your ministry. Create a dream for how a small group will have impacted this student's spiritual life, family, friendships, ministry opportunities, and world view. Imagine what this student would be like if she had a God-fearing adult who invested in her life by caring for her, coaching her and challenging her spiritual journey in a safe environment.

Capture the essence of the dream by writing a concise statement or bullet points that summarize your thoughts.

Here are some of my dream points:

- I want students to be known and cared for by other students and adults.
- I want students to form deep, authentic relationships with peers and adults.
- I want students to grow spiritually.
- I want students to learn what it means to follow Christ.
- I want students to explore God's Word together.
- I want students to see adults who love Jesus.
- I want students to view their small group leader as their youth pastor.
- I want students to consider their small group experience as a highlight and one of the best time investments of their week.

If you don't want to take the time to dream, you're moving too fast. Put this notebook down and take time to dream. Don't dampen your dreams by rushing to logistics. Allow your heart and ministry to be blessed by dreaming recklessly for a while. This notebook will be here when you're done dreaming.

### **Think through the basic questions**

Once you've spent time dreaming the end "product," it's important to begin thinking about the "how" of your small group strategy. Begin filling in the gaps from the ideal to the real before you get to Step 2. During the next step you'll need to answer some basic questions for your critics and supporters. The answers to these questions will begin to formulate as you fill in the gaps.

## PHASE ONE > Laying the small group foundation

If you need help, consider these questions:

- Why do I want small groups?
- What biblical purpose(s) will small groups serve (fellowship, discipleship, ministry, worship, evangelism)?
- How will students benefit?
- How will the youth ministry benefit?
- How will families benefit?
- Who would I like to use as small group leaders?
- Would I buy or write curriculum?
- When would I launch small groups?
- Should we meet in homes?
- Where will small groups meet?
- Will small groups be part of an existing program or will they replace a program?
- What day of the week?
- What time of day?
- What resources will I need?
- How many groups do we want to start with?

There are probably other questions that you'll need to answer. You don't need to take the time to answer them on the same day as your dream. They are just part of Step 1. This step may take one day or percolate for a year. Keep your questions in mind and write down your answers as they come to you.

When your dream develops some details, it's time to communicate it to a few carefully selected people. Gather your notes from this step, keep praying, and prepare to share what God has brought to your heart with others. The journey has begun.

## STEP ONE > Dream it small

### CROSS REFERENCE > STEP 1: DREAM IT SMALL

>> If you want to read more information that might help you with this step you can check out the pages in either Purpose Driven Youth Ministry (PDYM) or in Your First Two Years In Youth Ministry (FTY).

#### **Get alone**

FTY 73-77

#### **Pray**

PDYM 33-39, 345, 354-356

FTY 241

#### **Dare to dream**

FTY 23-26

#### **Begin with the end**

PDYM 137-151

FTY 86-89, 213-232

## PHASE ONE > Laying the small group foundation

### STEP 2 > SUPPORT THE DREAM

>> Start the necessary groundwork

**Decide if your dream is worth fighting for**

**Meet with key supporters**

**Seek input from your supervisor**

**Synthesize your learnings**

**Go one-on-one with your critics**

**Prepare for additional conflict**

This step can be difficult because it will require leadership and being a leader isn't always easy. Leaders come to understand that the majority of people hate change. You may get threats ("I'm leaving if you do this") and opposition ("That's a stupid idea") because you are trying to take the ministry into uncharted territory. Or, even worse, territory that has brought failure or pain in the past and has left residual feelings.

Youth ministry is not without risks. Consider a few ideas that may enhance a successful transition into small groups.

#### **Decide if your dream is worth fighting for**

One of the key considerations with any change is the energy it will require. If you and I were discussing this step, I would ask, "Are you willing to go to battle for small groups?" I would then ask, "Do you feel passionate enough about small groups that you're willing to keep going when it gets tough?" The answer to these questions need to be answered before moving on to Step 2.

Bottom line: expect personal attacks, challenges to your leadership style, or questions about your competence. I've experienced all three from students, parents, and church leaders (you should see my therapy bill). Even if the opposition is subtle, it will still feel like an uphill battle since most people hate change—even if it's in their best interest.

Fortunately, I have outlasted my critics and stuck to the dream I believe God birthed in me. The critics who eventually gave small groups a chance became deeper followers of Christ because of their experience. But, what you're about to read and do isn't easy (actually, it's very easy to read...it's the doing that may result in tears).

## STEP TWO > Support the Dream

Here are three “worst case” scenarios you may experience;

1. Some people may leave the church.
2. Some people will stay and complain (although they’ll eventually stop).
3. Some people will try to run you out of the church.

If you don’t believe that small groups are worth the effort, I’d suggest you go back to Step 1, and spend more time in prayer and dreaming. Or take some time to evaluate your leadership and determine if you can stomach the conflict. This move will require leadership and if you’re not willing to battle when it gets ugly, there’s no use moving any further (since it may get ugly).

### **Meet with key supporters**

Before sharing your dream with everyone, meet with a few key supporters of your ministry. Choose people who are supportive of your leadership and care about the health of the ministry. Since you know they have the best interest of your ministry at heart, challenge them to ask tough questions about your dream.

Key supporters may ask questions that you haven’t thought of and highlight issues that could lead to trouble. They will also help you consider answers to problems you couldn’t solve on your own. Sharing the dream with people you trust will be good practice for when you share it with your supervisor and others.

Simply arrange a one-hour meeting with to you share your heart and small group strategy (in that order). Answer big-picture questions with confidence and show that you have thought through what you hope to accomplish. As you do, ask for their critical analysis of your dream.

It’s okay if all of the details aren’t in place because you are merely building support for your dream. Your goal is to prove that small groups are needed, your plan is feasible, you recognize your obstacles, and have plans to deal with them. At the conclusion of this meeting, ask for their support (“Is this something you could get excited about? Can I plan on your support if we continue to move ahead?”)



## PHASE ONE > Laying the small group foundation

### **Seek input from your supervisor**

After you have considered the input from the key supporters, pursue an opportunity to discuss small groups with your “boss.” Don’t rush to schedule this meeting—give yourself plenty of time to have think through your feelings, your logic, and your strategy.

At the meeting, ask for two things: (1) Advice (in addition to getting useful input, asking for advice may help your supervisor to feel ownership in the idea of small groups), and (2) Public, verbal support (ideally from the pulpit).

If you don’t get support from your supervisor, you may need to go back to Step 1 and rethink your dream. Because you and your ministry are under the authority of your supervisor, be sure to respect and honor the feedback he gives.

### **Synthesize your learnings**

Compile the feedback from your key supporters and supervisor by asking yourself:

- What positive feedback did I get?
- What negative feedback did I get?
- What good ideas can I give them credit for?

Compile the answers and prepare to use them as support (or ammunition) when you approach your critics. Remember to continually pray for wisdom and pure motives as you move ahead.

## **TIP > GETTING UNDIVIDED ATTENTION**

>> Only ask to meet with your supervisor for big changes (like moving toward small groups). By respecting your supervisor’s time you’ll find a better chance of getting undivided attention when you need it most. <<

## STEP TWO > Support the Dream

### **Go one-on-one with your critics**

Now that you have great input from people who support you and from someone who can fire you (your supervisor), you can now confidently share your idea one-on-one with those who may oppose change. Schedule short one-on-one meetings with the people who might try to dash this dream.

If you don't give your critics a forum to share their feelings with you, they will make one. They might talk about you and your plan behind your back or in meetings at inopportune times. I've found that taking this proactive step can neutralize the opposition and in some cases turn them into supporters. You will also discover that negative people usually aren't as opposed and reactionary to new ideas when you meet with them privately (as opposed to when you surprise them with an announcement in a group setting).

I've discovered that most negative people are insecure, critical, and often in need of more time and love than positive people. I'm not suggesting that all negative people will respond kindly to your changes, but they will appreciate the special attention and explanation (even if they don't tell you so).

### **TIP > DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS**

>> What I have found in my ministry is that people complain about their passions. For instance, a person may complain that non-Christian students will not have a place to go if you replace your midweek program with small groups. You can redirect that complaint as a service opportunity by asking, "Can you help me think of a way to prevent that from happening? I would hate to see that happen, but I also know that small groups are the direction our ministry needs to go." If the person agrees to help, you have just recruited a volunteer who may help develop your evangelism strategy.

By the way, I don't believe you have to cancel a program to have small groups. I'll get into this later, but this is one of the oppositions I had when I made the transition from a midweek program to small groups. <<

## PHASE ONE > Laying the small group foundation

In your conversation, you might say, “I know we’ve been on the opposite side of issues in the past so I want to let you know of an ‘experimental idea’ I’m working on. I want your input during the design phase.” Your humble heart can soften a resistant attitude.

As you unfold your plan, give credit to your supervisor and other key supporters to show the critics that input was received and valued. By doing this, you will communicate that you’re a team player and that you’ve got people who support your dream.

During your meeting(s) with the opposition, listen without interrupting and take notes. Don’t become argumentative and risk turning the meeting adversarial. Instead, use this meeting to care for the person and graciously share your excitement for the support you’ve already received for a transition to a small group ministry.

Be appreciative of their time. There will be plenty of time to think through the comments, questions and objections at a later time. Before you end the meeting, pray together and ask for support.

Your opposition may not support your idea. No matter how hard you try, some people will simply refuse to budge because your ministry dreams represent change. Some would not support a new idea if the Lord Jesus presented the idea himself. While some people have hard heart issues, this isn’t always the case. The Body of Christ is diverse and not everyone will agree to the same vision, priorities, and ministry methods. Don’t take rejection personally.

### TIP > KEEP FOCUS

>> Some people will try to drain you, control you, manipulate you, etc. It is important to keep focused on the end result of your dream. As you move forward, find ways to give credit to your opposition (as difficult as it may be). You want to value the input of others. The more you can make people feel appreciated, the more likely you’ll earn their buy-in for future ideas without having to ask for it one-on-one. <<

## STEP TWO > Support the Dream

Although, if you have a leader connected to your ministry who consistently doesn't support your efforts to create small groups, you might consider transitioning this person out of your ministry. While this is never easy, I assure you it may be essential if you're going to launch your small group program. Paul saved his harshest rebukes for those who were divisive, because he knew that ministry is hard enough without having conflict and resistance from within the Christian Camp. Proceed with gentleness, assure them it's not personal, and stand convinced of the necessity to make it happen.

### **Prepare for additional conflict**

Once you put leadership behind your ideas and spend time with some key people, you are on your way to begin pursuing the details of a small group ministry. As you prepare to take the remaining steps, you will probably meet more conflict. People will talk to people and not articulate your dream with the same passion. This could result in a lot of questioning and doubt. When you share with supporters and critics, you can ask them to keep the small group talk confidential for a while, but word will begin to leak. Because of this, you will need to be ready to encounter more conflict.

You won't be able to anticipate and disarm everyone who will oppose small groups. Don't allow this to paralyze you. Be a leader and be prepared to move forward. Have your list of benefits memorized and confidently present them to those who oppose change.

When you have adequate support for your dream (not total support), it's time to begin the next step—determine the details. I know that the word "details" can be scary for the relational, outgoing, "what's-a-detail"-type of youth workers. I'm regularly scared... and if I could learn how to think through details (or find people who can) anyone can learn.

## PHASE ONE > Laying the small group foundation

### CROSS REFERENCE > STEP 2: SUPPORT THE DREAM

>> If you want to read more information that might help you with this step you can check out the pages in either Purpose Driven Youth Ministry (PDYM) or in Your First Two Years In Youth Ministry (FTY).

#### **Decide if it's worth fighting for**

PDYM 344-345, 353

FTY 127-132

#### **Meet with key supporters**

PDYM 346, 65

FTY 244

#### **Seek input from your supervisor**

PDYM 346, 352, 65

FTY 156-164

#### **Synthesize your learnings**

FTY 239-252

#### **Go one-on-one with your critics**

PDYM 346-347

FTY 181-182, 249-250

#### **Prepare for additional conflict**

PDYM 347

FTY 127-146

# SMALL GROUPS

## From Start to Finish >>

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### > TO SMALL GROUP LEADERS

>> Hello small group leaders,

I love our staff meetings because it makes me aware of all the awesome things that are happening in our ministry. I thank God that he has brought together an awesome group of people who love him and like students. You are making a difference in student's lives.

We've just passed the halfway point for this school year. Congratulations on making it this far!

I wanted to take a quick moment to remind you of a few things about the small group time. There are three pillars for a healthy small group:

- Bible study
- It's application to everyday life
- Sharing

All three are important to foster growth and deepen relationships with your students. Unfortunately, not all three are easy.

I urge you not to neglect one "pillar" because it is difficult for you . . .

- Bible study is important so your students will learn to love the Bible on their own.

- Application is important so they have direction for their lives.
- Sharing is important so that you may know the unique needs of students.

Again, congratulations on a successful 'half' year!

Praying for your ministry,

### > SIX WAYS TO BE A STUDENT LEADER AT SMALL GROUPS

>> Small groups are a great place for student leaders to connect with other students on a level that is not normally possible at weekend services. Use this time to your advantage. Here are some ideas on how to be a leader at Area Bible Study Small Groups:

1. It is each student leader's responsibility to be a greeter within the home. Be friendly and introduce yourself to everyone, and be everyone's "friend". Socialize with your own friends, but make efforts to be a friendly face to unconnected people. Look for students who feel uncomfortable.

2. Remember people have been kind enough to give up their homes. As student leaders, set an example. Student leaders should try to arrive a little early to help set up and stay late to make sure everything looks better than when we arrived.

3. Each student leader should commit to pray weekly for their small groups and all the groups that meet within the home. Also, pray for adult leaders and thank God for the ministry they do.

4. Each student leader should also consider themselves an apprentice within their small group. Watch other leaders and see how they interact with students and lead small groups. You can grow as a leader by watching other leaders.

5. Outside of small groups, student leaders should be in a constant search for new students to join a small group. Because small groups are designed for Christians, you should be thinking of people who are interested in "Christian" things. This doesn't mean you can't or shouldn't invite non-believers, it's just not necessarily the best place for them to "check out church." On the other hand, most of the disruptions that happen in small groups come from students who aren't there to grow, connect, etc.

6. As a leader you should be plugged into a small group for your benefit. Always feel open to share. Remember leaders should be transparent. Don't let your duties as a student leader get in the way of your growth at a small group. Your spiritual growth is important!



### > SOME BASIC ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS

- >> Weekly accountability is tough! Each time we meet, everyone will read all of the questions--take a few moments to examine their life--and share a response to at least one of the questions.

#### **The Wonder Question**

1. Have you maintained an attitude of awe and wonder toward God?  
... or have you minimized him, placed him in a box, failing to contemplate his greatness?

Key issue: awe, wonderment, and WORSHIP versus ordinary, usual, and IDOLATRY.

#### **The Priority Question**

2. Have you maintained a personal (quiet) time with God?  
... or have you allowed yourself to become too busy for God? Have you exchanged a vibrant, tender relationship filled with rich communication for a superficial acquaintance with God?

Key issue: time with God versus time without God.

#### **The Morality Question**

3. Have you maintained integrity with the way you live out your faith?  
... or have you compromised what you know to be true with your actions?

Key issue: integrity versus compromise.

#### **The Listening Question**

4. Have you maintained a soft heart, sensitive to the things of God?  
... or have you chosen to remain on the easy path, refused to be challenged to move out of your comfort zone?

Key issue: uncomfortable versus comfortable

#### **The Relationships Question**

5. Have you maintained peaceful relationships and resolved conflicts to the best of your ability?

... or have you caused conflict or offense?

Key issue: peace versus conflict; resolution versus ignored.

Here are things I need to pray for this week:

### > THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS

- >> Telling someone what they need to know is seldom effective. Think back to all the pearls of wisdom you ignored from your parents... teachers... and even your pastor!

Telling someone what they need to know is ineffective for at least two reasons: a) The learner is passive and uninvolved b) The learner may not be convinced they need the truth, and therefore the lesson doesn't "stick."

The eternal truths of God and wisdom for everyday living are too important (and complex) to reduce to a lecture of platitudes and clichés.

As a Small Group Leader, you are a teacher of God's truth. One thing you ought to continually work to master is The Art of Asking Questions.

#### **The Benefits**

A good question puts the ball in the court of the learner. Aside from generating verbal interaction, everyone can answer the question quietly and softly in the privacy of their own thoughts...when you hear a question, it's almost impossible not to think about your answer. Questions create an opportunity for your students to become active participants. Good questions allow for self discovery, as after the need is recognized by the leader, he or she seeks to fill that gap in his or her knowledge, maturity, etc. Personal understanding and ownership can be facilitated by good questions. Teach people to think for themselves!

#### **Some Keys to Good Questions**

1. Think through a series of questions. Phrase the same thing in a couple different ways. Because people think differently, at times a single truth ought to be expressed in several different ways.
2. Discern the particular truth you hope to communicate, and then create good questions to lead your group there. Good questions build on one another and lead to a particular destination.
3. Ask questions that are understandable. In our curriculums, we have tried to be clear as possible. But don't settle for that! If you can say something better, then do it!
4. Use every ounce of imagination you have, and consider where your students are really "at." Use this wisdom to craft your question beforehand and to make adjustments during your small group.

## TOOLS > The Art of Asking Questions

5. Maintain eye contact. It's more personal and encouraging.
6. Don't settle for the "Right Answers." When someone gives you a quick answer, press them to determine confidence level—are they saying something they believe, or repeating something they've heard before. Ask them, "Ok, I hear what you're saying, but what does that really mean?"
7. Create confusion, don't shy away from things that are difficult and controversial. Don't let your students "off the hook" with difficult issues. Healthy confusion leads to growth. This is based upon the "Poor in Spirit" Principle: if a learner doesn't feel the need to learn, he or she won't.
8. Admit confusion. You don't know everything, so don't worry about hiding this when you're confused.
9. Be positive. According to the example set by Jesus, only hypocritical religious leaders deserve negative input...chances are you don't have too many of those in your small group.
10. Be focused. Being sensitive to the Spirit doesn't mean wandering around every spiritual truth, guided only the tangents of your group. Rather than covering a ton of subjects on a surface level, go deep with just one or two.
11. Repeat long answers with a quick summary, when one student talks for a long time, and is confusing, you'll lose the rest of your group. To bring them back in, give a quick summary, or gently ask for one.
12. Don't answer your own questions... or let other leaders answer.
13. When you ask a question, don't settle for just one answer from a single person—even if it's the "right" answer. Prompt further responses with phrases like "Good, who else...what's your take?" "Does anyone have something to add?" "Who agrees with what was said? Ok why?" "Who disagrees...why?"
14. Learn multiple sides of an issue. Consider common misapplications/misunderstandings/myths. This will help you create "healthy confusion" and present different angles on the same subject.
15. Be transparent. Share your inadequacies in understanding different truths.
16. Jesus commanded us to teach others to OBEY his commandments. Keep your discussions real. Head knowledge is for the classroom. You're at a small group; keep the significance of the conversation in front of your learners.

17. Learn to push things to the extremes. We often accept truths because they are nice in the few situations in which we apply them. Challenge the answers your students give you by applying them in all kinds of situations, test them for consistency and accurately consider the implications.
18. Have students write down especially good questions and tell them to journal on them. This is also great for questions you don't have a chance to get to... but be realistic, don't dish out a dozen questions!
19. Ignite your passion. If you're never passionate when you teach God's Word, spend a day or two fasting and studying and praying. If that doesn't work, you need to talk with someone about your spiritual health, and you probably shouldn't be leading a small group.

Next to salvation, God's Word is the greatest gift we have from God. YOU GET to COMMUNICATE IT! You don't deserve it neither do I. You aren't good enough, and neither am I. But the mystery remains: God will speak through you! Get excited about that...or get excited about letting someone else lead your group.

Excitement and passion don't mean doing back flips every week. Nor does it mean you'll always feel "up." I'm talking about the deep rooted joy that comes from walking in the Spirit. Sometimes, I come to my Small Group tired and worn out. Don't try to fake it, if you find yourself lacking, then run to God's presence.