

SESSION THREE

SMALL-GROUP INGREDIENTS

If you've attended the Empower group leader training (Session 1 & 2), you know there are four key elements of a small group:

- Intentional Leader
- Relational Environment
- Reproducible Discipleship Process
- Biblical Foundation

No matter what type of small group you are doing, all groups should have these four key elements.

There are many types of small groups: couples, co-ed, men's, women's, Re-Generation, Re-Engage, affinity, etc.

In this session, we'll look at the various ingredients of a small-group meeting. We want to learn what happens from the time the leader begins to prepare (before group) to when the last person walks out the door.

PREPARATION

- What are some important things the intentional leader should do to prepare for the group?
 - Spend time with God, pray
 - Study preparation, questions, homework
 - Contact the host, apprentice
 - Attend to details: childcare, special needs, group issues
 - Follow up with invited guests, new members, "strays"
 - Review prayer requests from the previous week

WELCOME

- What does a good welcome look like?
 - Verbal, physical, front door versus a wave from the couch, by whom?
- Why is it important to welcome people well each week?
 - Feel valued, loved and appreciated, better able to care for people and discover needs.
- When do you stop welcoming regular attendees?
 - Why would you stop? When *don't* people need to feel special and welcome?
- How can a "welcome" happen before someone even arrives at the group meeting?
 - New member, existing member, guests.

- Call or text before, meet for coffee, give them a ride, send an encouragement.
- How do you make a new member or guest feel welcome without feeling weird?
 - Give personal greetings and introductions, spend time with them, learn about them.

STARTING PROMPTLY

- What are the **benefits** of starting the group on time?
 - Shows we value people and their time.
 - Sets proper expectations
 - Helps establish safety in the group
 - Promotes good sharing, learning, prayer
 - Helps to end the group on time
- What are some **consequences** of *not* starting the group on time?
 - Devalues people, makes them angry/resentful
 - Makes it difficult on people with children when the group goes long
 - Brings pressure and chaos to the group due to time restrictions
 - Changes the environment, restricts sharing, growth, relationship
 - Conveys poor modeling, sets an expectation that it's okay to be late
 - Makes a group unsafe, people will stop coming to the group
- What are excuses for being late to the group?
 - Work, kids, crisis, transportation issues, weather, forgetfulness, etc.
- Life happens. People are going to be late to group occasionally. How do you set appropriate expectations regarding starting on time and coming in late?
 - Always start on time
 - Vision cast the importance of starting on time and re-emphasize when needed
 - Let people know you want them there even if they are late
 - Help people know how to enter the room/group when they arrive late so the group doesn't focus on them; no derailing the group
 - Ask people to let you or your host know if they can't make it or will be late
- How do you confront people who are chronically late and/or whose excuses for being late are a little weak?
 - Discuss this with them before or after the group privately
 - Start by asking questions
 - Value the person and let them know they are important to the group
 - Let them feel the weight of their actions: the consequences to the group and to you as the leader
 - Help them overcome obstacles/issues (but don't take it on yourself)
 - Set proper boundaries
 - Take corrective action when needed
 - Don't push a problem off onto another group/leader
- You've had all the talks and have done all the right things with them, but the person continues to be late. What do you do?

First, ask yourself:

- Are the needs of the individual greater than the needs of the group?
- What's an example of Jesus holding people accountable or asking for commitment? What did he do when they refused?

Then:

- Offer alternative relational environments/relationships
- Ask them to return when they can make the group a priority (sounds harsh, I know)
- Keep door open to them

OPENING PRAYER

- Why is opening the group in prayer important?
 - Invites God and the Holy Spirit into the group.
 - Sets the tone and focus.
 - Provides a clear transition from the day/life/fellowship time to the study/discussion.
 - Can address specific concerns or issues for an individual or the group.
 - Can reinforce expectations, purpose, ground rules.
- When and why would the leader want to be the one to do the opening prayer?
 - Calm nerves, get focused, ease into the study.
 - Address specific issues/concerns.
 - Reinforce expectations, purpose, ground rules, etc. (planting seeds).
 - Model praying aloud (for people who are new to it).
- When and why would the leader appoint someone else to open in prayer?
 - Gives others a place to play.
 - Shows transparency/willingness to be cared for: "Susan, will you open us in prayer and, honestly, I've had a difficult day and am having a hard time getting focused – would you please include me in your prayer?"
- What are a few things to consider when asking others to pray?
 - Talk to them before the group starts.
 - Make sure they are comfortable.
 - Set expectations.

ESTABLISHING GROUND RULES

- How and when do you communicate ground rules to the small-group members?
 - First meeting
 - Make sure you vision cast properly. Explain how the ground rules help the group achieve the purpose of the group, honor one another, and glorify God.
 - Cover the ground rules in detail (Model from Session One).
 - Second meeting

- Review the rules.
- Ask the group what they remember and fill in the holes.
- When new members come to the group.
 - Cover *in* the group versus *outside* the group (before/after).
- When the group needs reminders.
 - Review as needed.
 - Compliment when you see one lived out.
 - Take the person breaking the rules aside if the behavior continues.
 - Plant seeds in prayer or at the start of the group.
 - Vision cast in communications to the members during the week.

ICEBREAKERS

- What is an icebreaker and why is it used?
 - It's a fun, short exercise to get people talking and sharing.
 - It breaks down walls and encourages transparency.
 - It's an easy way to help people become known and to know others.
 - It promotes participation in the group discussions.
- When would you use an icebreaker?
 - New groups - first meeting.
 - Forming groups - first few meetings.
 - Fun nights when people invite friends, co-workers, family.
 - When groups need to lighten up a little.
 - Groups that have just multiplied into a new group.

THE STUDY - CURRICULUM

- How can the four key elements of a small group help determine the type and depth of study to be used in a small group? (Example: How might a 60-minute video curriculum help or hinder you in the following areas?)
 - Intentional Leader
 - Will it add to or take away from the value of the intentional leader?
 - Relational Environment
 - Safe, transparent, relationships - know and be known, community, accountability/encouragement/admonishment.
 - Reproducible Process - Discipleship
 - Identifying where people are in the process of spiritual maturity.
 - Learning what they need to move forward (leader and members - self-discovery/introspection).
 - Walking beside them (leader or other group members).
 - Disciples making disciples.

- Biblical Foundation
 - God's word.
 - In context.
 - Personal application - life change and sanctification.
 - Equipping - teaching it to others.
 - Appropriate for maturity level of the group.
- Discuss the importance of a balance between **TRUTH** and **LIFE**—it can't just be about truth, and it can't just be about life (social). Truth must collide with life to produce spiritual transformation.

ASKING QUESTIONS

- In Session Two, we asked which way works better when calling for responses from the group: to go in order around the circle or having them answer "popcorn" style (allowing members to answer as they feel ready/comfortable). Which did you decide is the better approach? Why?
- Review: In the first session small-group experience, the leader asked only one question. We emphasized the leader should have more than one question for the group, but to be selective on the type and number of questions to ask. This was important for what reasons?
 - Helps to focus the group on the main point or issue.
 - Increases depth of sharing.
 - Encourages everyone to contribute to the conversation.
 - Helps the leader focus on people rather than curriculum.
 - Helps the pace of the group. Makes it slower, more controlled.
 - Helps the leader and group members cooperate with the Holy Spirit.
- Let's review some key components of developing good questions for your group.
 - Ask open-ended questions designed to get people to share deeply.
 - Correct interpretation - what is God saying, context, author's intended meaning (AIM).
 - Challenge them to apply God's word in their lives - personal application.
 - Challenge them to use what they've learned to help others learn and grow - evangelism/discipleship.

CELEBRATE

- Why might celebration be an important component in a small group?
- What can you celebrate in a group?
 - Answered prayers.
 - Victories.
 - Growth.
 - Sharing Christ with others.
 - Serving one another.
 - Decisions for Christ.
 - Baptisms.
 - Ministry opportunities or group service projects.

- Group functioning as the early church (Acts 2:42-47).
- The challenge for a leader is that you can't celebrate what you don't know about!

CLOSING PRAYER

- Prayer, especially the closing prayer time, often is compromised by the leader due to time restraints (group going long, not managing time well, etc.). It's important for leaders to set aside 30 minutes at the end of each group meeting for prayer.
- Why is closing in prayer important?
 - Deepens relationships and intimacy within the group.
 - Builds community.
 - Promotes transparency.
 - Raises accountability.
 - Provides another opportunity to invite the Holy Spirit into the group.
 - Models the importance of prayer.
 - Provides opportunities for growth (sharing, praying out loud, a place to play).
 - Encourages development of spiritual disciplines.
 - Encourages group members to minister to one another.
- What are some intentional things the leader can do during the prayer time?
 - Encourage everyone to share a personal prayer request.
 - Write down each prayer request as they are shared (have pens/paper available).
 - Designate someone to open and someone to close (choose wisely).
 - **Encourage** everyone to pray.
 - Set the expectation for people to be praying during the week.
 - Follow up with people on their prayer requests.
 - Send prayer texts, leave prayer voicemails, etc.

FELLOWSHIP

- How might a 30-minute time of fellowship following the closing prayer help to create a relational environment?
- How can this time be used as a buffer in case the discussion or prayer time goes long? Why might this be important (especially for a new leader)?

ENDING ON TIME

- Is ending on time important to the members of a group? Why or why not?
- What can the leader do to help the group end on time?
 - Set proper expectations regarding the ending time.
 - Help people move out the door (hosted groups verses leader-hosted groups).
 - Vision cast inside and outside the group.

- Ask to meet during the week if there are issues that need more attention.
- Encourage people to fellowship during the week.

Session Discussion Questions:

1. Of the Small Group ingredients, identify two areas of strength for your group and two areas of weakness.
2. What specific action steps can you take to make positive change for the area of weakness?