

SESSION FOUR

SMALL GROUP NUTS & BOLTS

This session is designed to help you process through a variety of common small group challenges so that you are better equipped to build and grow your own small group.

PURPOSE

Before you do anything, you will need to clearly establish the purpose of your group. This will affect everything to follow.

- Main Purpose - Love God, love others, make disciples.

THE STUDY - CURRICULUM

- When it comes to identifying curriculum for your group, your coach is a great resource. Group leaders can also research and access curriculum from Right Now Media. For access to the Right Now Media library, visit: <https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Account/Invite/PrestonTrail>
- Whatever curriculum is used, it can't just be about teaching truth (Scripture). At the same time, it can't just be about life (social). God's word must collide with real life. That's what produces real change and spiritual transformation.

HOST

- What are the benefits of having someone other than the leader host the group?
 - You'll always have at least one other person/couple at your group.
 - They prepare the meeting place (set up the room, clean the house before/after).
 - They provide or organize snacks, make coffee, etc.
 - They can organize childcare.
 - They can help with calling group members, guests.
 - They offer partnership (support, encouragement, general assistance).
 - They help welcome people when leader gets tied up in conversations.
 - Having someone host creates a place for people to play, use gifts and abilities.
 - They can assist in crisis situations.
 - They can help the group start/end on time.
 - Is a potential leader apprentice.

LOCATION

- Some groups would like to rotate where the group meets from week to week. This is **NOT** recommended. What are some potential issues or concerns in doing this?
 - Consistency/remembering where the group is meeting/communication.
 - New people finding the group/connecting new people to the group.

- Issues regarding children, pets, allergies, physical challenges.
- Environment issues - rotating to new places can create unstable/unsafe environments.
- When considering different meeting locations, there are pros/cons:
 - Home
 - Safe, comfortable, promotes fellowship/relationship.
 - Coffee shop/restaurant
 - Public exposure, outreach, neutral, can limit sharing, interruptions, loud, distractions, cost.
 - Church
 - Intimidating for non-believers, sterile environment, ties up space that could be used for other purposes, not sustainable for a growing small-group ministry.
- What might some of the benefits be to filling groups with people from specific geographic areas (same neighborhood)?
 - Ease of getting to the group - People can walk to the group, get there quickly.
 - Childcare issues - Babysitters, kids at a neighbor's home.
 - Inviting friends/neighbors - Creates interest, people see neighbors going to your house each week.
 - Serving your community/neighborhood - The group can adopt neighborhood projects or help people in need.
 - Branching - When your group branches, it's still in close proximity.
 - Coaching/overseeing groups - If you branch a few groups and begin to coach them, all your leaders are in your neighborhood, so are the groups when you visit them.

FREQUENCY, BREAKS, & SEASONS

- Why is it important that groups meet consistently and frequently (weekly)?
 - Shooting for deep relationships, accountability, community, discipleship.
- Many groups follow the school calendar, but prolonged breaks can cause problems for the group and group members. What might some of these be?
- If a group wants to follow a similar rhythm as the school calendar, what might some solutions be for keeping the group tight and in God's word during breaks?
- If groups decide to meet throughout the summer, what are some things to consider?
 - If the leader needs a break/vacation, the apprentice can cover.
 - If the host needs a break, someone else in the group can host for a week or two.
 - Keep doing your regular curriculum (we always need to grow).
 - Anticipate that your group might be a bit smaller through the summer due to people taking vacations, etc. That's okay, the majority will show up each week.
- For groups that go year-round, when do they normally take a break?
 - Christmas and other holidays, a few weeks in the summer, etc.
 - Keep breaks short.

- Note: Make sure everyone has somewhere to go on the holidays.

FUN/SOCIAL GATHERINGS

From time to time, groups should deviate from their normal agenda/curriculum to have a fun night or purely social gathering.

- Purpose
 - Have fun together, share meals, invite new people, take a break between studies.
- Types
 - Anything really... camping, bowling, beach day, skiing, movie night, go to church together, mission trip, BBQ, game night, serve together, multi-group events.
- Frequency
 - About every 8-12 weeks.

CHILDCARE

- Is it okay to have some child-friendly groups and some adults-only groups?
 - Yes, variety is fine. Note that there is always a shortage of child-friendly groups.
- What are some creative ways to solve the childcare issue for groups?
 - The group hires a sitter for all the kids.
 - Parents hire their own sitter and use group meeting as a date night (sometimes finding a sitter can be difficult).
 - Older children watch the younger ones.
 - Older kids in the congregation meet this need as a way of serving the body.
 - Kids at a neighbor's house (parents are part of the group).
 - Couples rotate watching the kids each week (not the greatest solution).
- What might some challenges be to having children and/or youth sitting in the small group with adults? How does this affect the purpose of the group?

Additional considerations:

- Always let the leader and the group solve their issue (help them as needed).
- Set boundaries for the kids.
- Make sure everyone is agreeable to the arrangements for the kids and any associated costs.
- Make it a good experience. If the kids enjoy coming, it makes it easier on the parents. If you provide curriculum for the kids, make sure they like it.

STRUCTURE & AUTHORITY

- What is the structure of your small-group ministry?

- Elder, executive team, groups pastor, director, ministry leader/coordinator, coach, small-group leader, group member.
- Why is this important?
 - Biblical conflict resolution.
 - Go to next level of authority, not the lead pastor or elders (at least, not at first).

INVITATION

- Why is personal invitation the best way to fill your small group?
 - Personal, helps people feel welcome and comfortable.
 - Promotes accountability and quick response.
 - Helps to answer questions and overcome obstacles.
 - Promotes an easy transition into the group.
 - Greatly increases the chance a new person will actually come.
- Who should you invite?
 - Church family:
 - Meet people at church, be available before/after the service you attend to help connect people and answer questions. Talk to the people sitting around you at service (sit in the same area each week), look for new people in the lobby and strike up a conversation.
 - Friends:
 - Ask them.
 - Co-workers:
 - Ask them, too.
 - Neighbors:
 - Invite them through relationship. The group shouldn't be the first thing you invite them to (dinner, game night, etc.).
 - Community:
 - Live an invitational life. Be watching for God at work everywhere you go and have the courage and faith to join him. Invite people into your life, home, group, church, and into an intimate, personal relationship with Jesus!
- What do I say when inviting others?
 - Be real.
 - Tell why relationship is important to you (passion perspective).
 - Tell why relationship is important to God.
 - Don't hide the fact that the main purpose of the group is to learn about God and how to apply his word in our lives.
 - It doesn't matter where they are with God or what they know—or even if they own a Bible—as long as they are open to investigating the things of God, that's great!
- What are some other ways to fill your group?
 - Game night/ social night/ BBQ
 - Multi-group events where lots of people can come and meet all the home-group leaders in their area at once.
- Who has the responsibility for filling the group?
 - You do!

- What does the door to your group look like? Is it a “door wide open” group or a “door completely closed” group? (Note: Groups, by nature, are traditionally either open or closed.)
 - Door wide open - Pros:
 - Promotes outreach.
 - Allows others to invite people close to them.
 - Door wide open - Cons:
 - Can grow the group too quickly.
 - Difficult to multiply and no time to develop an apprentice.
 - Can keep a group shallow.
 - Will eventually cause the group to have a revolving door (reduces the value because it’s difficult for group members to know and be known).
 - Door completely closed - Pros:
 - Promotes in-depth sharing.
 - Increases discipleship and accountability.
 - Promotes deep relationship.
 - Door completely closed - Cons:
 - Can develop into a clique.
 - Limits outreach.
 - Limits ability to invite friends, co-workers, and others.

HEALTHY GROWTH

Most groups will have an open door (at least to some degree). The following are some things to consider that may help you grow in healthy ways:

- It’s better to funnel new people to new or forming groups.
 - Most people prefer starting with a new group or one that is just forming rather than walking into a group that has been together for a long time because:
 - It’s less intimidating.
 - Relationships are all just forming.
 - Everyone is new.
 - People enjoy being involved in something at the beginning.
 - It’s simple to fill new groups by letting people know a few weeks in advance that a new group is forming.
 - When you primarily place new people into the new or forming groups, it allows existing groups to go deeper and develop an apprentice without the challenge of dealing with an influx of new people.
- Fill a group and hold steady for a while.
 - Most groups will grow quickly to the optimum size (traditional small group is 8-12 people).
 - Closing the door or limiting the number of new people being introduced after the optimum size is reached has benefits:

- It increases the effectiveness of the intentional leader.
 - It develops and deepens the relational environment.
 - It encourages community within the group.
 - It advances the discipleship process.
 - An apprentice is developed more rapidly and can be released sooner.
 - It increases the ability of the group to be outwardly focused and have an impact on the community outside of the small group.
- There will always be tension when it comes to healthy growth.
 - If our groups are healthy, dynamic, and Christ-centered, they are going to grow! Growth means:
 - We will struggle to have enough groups for the demand.
 - We will always be pressed to have enough leaders ready to lead.
 - We will always be trying to raise up more apprentices.
 - We will always be looking for more host homes.
 - And just when we think we've figured it out, something will happen to change all of that.
 - The great thing is God is still in control, and our job is just to be faithful—he will figure out the rest. Let's do our part and trust God for the rest!

APPRENTICE

- How do you identify an apprentice? You look for someone who:
 - Loves God and is committed to Jesus as Lord.
 - Loves others (is others centered).
 - Exhibits fruit in their life.
 - Is spiritually mature (stage of growth - young adult +).
 - Is willing to submit to authority.
 - Is teachable.
 - Is humble.
 - Is available.
 - Is willing.
- How do you approach and call out an apprentice?
 - Many don't realize how important they are to God and furthering the Kingdom.
 - Many don't recognize their gifts and abilities and how these could be used for God's glory.
 - Calling out the gifts and abilities in a person's life can be a powerful thing. We call these ICNU (I see in you) conversations.
- What do you call them to? (commitment level)
 - Jesus calls us to a radical new life and serious commitment. He challenges us to count the cost before setting out on the journey. We should follow his example when calling people into God's service (don't soft sell it).
 - Fully discuss the role and all that goes into it, then vision cast the purpose and the Kingdom impact it can have. Discuss:
 - Their role as a shepherd.

- Their role as a pastor.
 - Their role as a disciple maker.
 - Creating community within the group.
 - Helping the group be essential to the community.
 - Relationship between them and you (intentional relationship/mentor).
 - Time commitment and expectations.
 - Their strengths.
 - Their weaknesses.
 - Changes that will need to be made in their relationship with God and their life in order to follow in this new way.
 - Their willingness and commitment.
 - Committing to praying about this decision.
 - Setting a time to meet again.
- How do you raise them up?
 - They will be intentionally watching everything you do—inside and outside the group.
 - You will give them places to play, handing over various roles during the group to give them experience.
 - You'll debrief with them each week to discuss what they are learning and what they saw in the group the past week; to teach them specific skills and to work on their strengths and weaknesses.
 - You will teach them everything you've learned—through this process of modeling, teaching and mentoring— about having a relationship with God, understanding God's word, applying God's word, being a shepherd and pastor, as well as discipleship skills, facilitation skills, building community within a group, being essential to the community, etc.
 - You might be providing them with, or steering them to, other resources (books, Bible studies, classes, etc.).
 - You will be taking them with you as you make hospital calls and minister to various group members, etc.
 - You will let them serve alongside you, and, eventually, you will watch them as they serve in front of you.
 - They watch you.
 - You do it together.
 - You watch them.
 - It's wise to have them observe other small-group leaders to learn from them as well because everyone has strengths and weaknesses. It's good to expose them to different leadership styles, etc.
 - You will allow them to lead the group numerous times—both when you are there and when you are not.
 - Eventually, you will send them out (multiplication).

MULTIPLICATION

- Why does a group need to multiply?
 - Kingdom purposes versus group/member needs.

- Depending on the type of group, every group has its size limits.
 - Typical small group should consider multiplying when it gets to around 12-15 people (this varies depending upon the type of group).
- Group size dramatically affects the four key areas:
 - Intentional Leader (ability to lead and be effective).
 - Relational Environment (safe, transparent, deep relationships).
 - Biblical Foundation (learning happens best in smaller numbers)
 - Reproducible Process (intentional relationship is a key to real discipleship; numbers must be kept small to accomplish meaningful discipleship).
- Why call it “multiply” as opposed to “split,” etc.?
 - More positive term.
- Will everyone in the group have the same response to the idea of multiplying? How might each of the following respond to the idea of multiplying their small group?
 - Infant - self-centered.
 - Child - still somewhat self-centered.
 - Young adult - others-centered, sees greater Kingdom purposes.
 - Parent - others-centered, God-dependent, Kingdom-minded.
 - Be sympathetic to objections and meet group members where they are in their spiritual maturity. Help them understand the need for multiplying.
- When would you begin to discuss the need for multiplying?
 - At the very first meeting - casting vision.
 - Periodically - to reinforce vision and purpose.
 - At the start of the multiplication process - 30-60 days out.
 - Throughout the multiplication process - updates.
- What are the key elements to include when discussing multiplication?
 - Kingdom purposes.
 - God’s perspective.
 - The lost, new Christians, opportunities created.
 - Growth for the individuals, group, apprentice, leader.
 - Addressing concerns and perspectives of the group members.
 - Recognize the impact multiplying has on relationships (growth pains).
 - Celebration.
 - Prayer.
- There are various ways for a group to multiply – pros/cons/considerations.
 - Leader leaves:
 - Pro: Apprentice gets to stay with the group.
 - Con: Apprentice doesn’t learn what it’s like to leave and start a new group. Sometimes it’s hard to be recognized as the leader when the group is used to someone else.
 - Apprentice leaves:
 - Pro: Apprentice learns all the challenges of starting a new group (inviting, establishing a relational environment from scratch, building trust and relationship, establishing leadership and authority, etc.).
 - Con: It’s difficult to do all of these things. Strong coaching is a necessity.

- Someone goes with the person starting the new group (another couple, etc.).
 - Pro: Supports the new group leader, may provide a host home, creates openings in the existing group, supports the discipleship process, biblical example.
 - Con: You tell me.
- 50/50 branch (**Not recommended**):
 - Sometimes you can do this in the same house when your group is too big, but you haven't fully developed an apprentice. Everyone stays together for the lesson, then they move into two groups for the discussion.
 - Dividing the group in half when multiplying often **isn't** a good idea. It can disrupt relationships, and the new group starts already half full.
- Turbo group launch (multiple leaders raised up to start new groups):
 - Sometimes you have a group that has so many potential new leaders (or the group was formed with this in mind) that you can use it as a new leader development group. New leaders can be developed quickly and several groups can be started in a short amount of time.

THE FIRST MEETING

Let's talk about your first small-group meeting. You have been preparing to lead your group, you've done a great job of inviting people to come, and now you need to figure out what to do with the people who show up for the first meeting. What elements will you include in your first small-group meeting, and why? Discuss each of the following:

- Sharing a meal for the first meeting (pros/cons).
- Welcoming each person.
- Doing an icebreaker (gets people talking and puts them at ease).
- Discussing prior small-group experience (helps you understand background and perspectives).
- Discussing faith background, if any (same as above).
- Discussing the purpose of the group (Kingdom, personal need for relationship, etc.).
- Discussing how the group will function/ground rules.
- Discussing the study/curriculum.
 - Note: You might want to do the story of the Lost Son, as in Session One, for your first study (discussing curriculum may be on the second meeting).
- Prayer requests/prayer.
- Vision casting (see below).

VISION CAST - FIRST MEETING

No matter what else you do in your first small-group meeting, the group leader will want to intentionally vision cast to the group. The purpose of vision casting is to share from a **personal "heart perspective"** why we as a group are going to get together each week. This

is a crucial step in setting proper expectations for group members and creating a relational environment for the purpose of discipleship. The vision cast should be accomplished sometime during the first part of the initial group meeting.

- What does it mean to vision cast from a “heart perspective”? Why is this so important?
 - Sharing your personal passion for an intimate relationship with God and one another. Discuss the role we play in each other’s lives that helps each of us succeed in our journey following Christ (high passion and emotion).
 - **It’s important for the leader to make this about them—their need.** This is a good time to use “I” statements. If you use “we,” this can make some feel uncomfortable (too much, too soon).

- How would you vision cast the following from a personal heart perspective?
 - The cost of doing life alone.
 - God’s plan (relationship with God, relationship with others).
 - How relationship with one another is crucial to our journey following Christ.
 - Importance of going deep—authentic relationship, transparency (love).
 - Importance of fighting for relationship—encouragement/admonishment (love), biblical conflict resolution.
 - Commitment to one another.
 - Commitment to the group.

Session 4 Discussion Questions:

1. Who could you identify to serve as an Apprentice with you?
2. How can you best approach calling them out and inviting them on as an Apprentice?
3. Why does a group need to multiply?
4. What is the biggest objection or obstacle to overcome to multiply our groups?