

PASTORING THROUGH SMALL GROUPS

by Bill Scheidler

I. THE DESIRE OF THE CHIEF SHEPHERD (John 10:7-18)

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I have everything I need. ² He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. ³ He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. ⁴ Even when I walk through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. ⁵ You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You welcome me as a guest, anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. ⁶ Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever. Psalm 23

Jesus is the Great Shepherd of the sheep and has certain desires in relationship to the sheep. As leaders, we must all share these desires.

- A. To care for all the needs of the flock (Psalm 23:1; Jer. 23:4)
- B. To raise up strong marriages and families (Mal. 4:6)
- C. To bring each person to a place of personal maturity (Eph. 4:13)
- D. To foster strong inter-personal relationships among the sheep (Eph. 4:16)
- E. To assist and equip each person in finding and fulfilling their place of ministry (Eph. 4:11-12)
- F. To be available to each member of the body for counsel, support, encouragement, and comfort (Psalm 23:3)
- G. To gather lost sheep and integrate them into the flock (Ezk. 43:12-16)

II. THE PROBLEM

- A. The generation in which we are living is working against us (Acts 2:40; II Timothy 3:1-7).

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: ² For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! ⁶ For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, ⁷ always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1. Self-centeredness and covetousness
 2. Divorce and anti-family mentality
 3. Irresponsibility and rebellion
 4. Isolation or lack of socialization
 5. Educational system and humanistic value system
 6. Sexual upheaval
 7. Neighborhood crime and general suspicion
- B. The church growth phenomenon compounds the problem. Five changes can occur in a church that grows.
1. The church can become program orientated rather than people orientated.
 2. The church can easily slip into pulpit pastoring rather than people pastoring.
 3. The church can become an assembly hall rather than an assembly line.
 4. The church can become an orphanage rather than a family.
 5. The church can become a ministry center rather than a ministry factory.
- C. As a church grows, different structures are needed to effectively minister to the people and assimilate new growth.

III. THE SOLUTION

- A. Moses' solution to overseeing 3,000,000 people (Ex. 18:17-26; Deut 1:9-18)

¹⁷ So Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you do is not good. ¹⁸ Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. ¹⁹ Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. ²⁰ And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. ²¹ Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. ²² And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. ²³ If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace." ²⁴ So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. ²⁵ And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. ²⁶ So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves.

Exodus 18:17-26

1. Concentrate in public on the preaching and teaching of the word, focusing on practical principles of living.
2. Divide the congregation into smaller segments.
3. Place over these segments, individuals who are qualified and responsible.
4. Work to train and equip these individuals to feed on their level.

B. Jesus' solution to feeding the 5,000 (Luke 9:14-15; John 6:10-11)

When the day began to wear away, the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the surrounding towns and country, and lodge and get provisions; for we are in a deserted place here." ¹³ But He said to them, "You give them something to eat." And they said, "We have no more than five loaves and two fish, unless we go and buy food for all these people." ¹⁴ For there were about five thousand men. Then He said to His disciples, "Make them sit down in groups of fifty." ¹⁵ And they did so, and made them all sit down. ¹⁶ Then He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude. ¹⁷ So they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of the leftover fragments were taken up by them. Luke 9:12-15

Then Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when He had given thanks He distributed them to the disciples, and the disciples to those sitting down; and likewise of the fish, as much as they wanted. John 6:10-11

1. Raise up and invest yourself into teachers.
2. Spend enough time with them so that they share your heart.
3. Give to them that which they need to focus on others.
4. Divide the congregation into small groups.
5. Have the trained disciples feed the small groups.

IV. THE PURPOSE OF SMALL GROUPS

A. Pastoral Care and Discipleship

God has definitely given His church the burden for pastoral care and discipleship. Our desire should go beyond just birthing people into the Kingdom, but it should involve providing effective covering and accountability that precipitates growth, and bringing people to a place of personal fruitfulness and ministry. It is impossible to pastor a crowd in any individual way. The cell group approach is a biblical way of feeding a multitude of people.

B. Building Relationships and Fellowship (Developing Community)

It is clear that God wants the individual members of the church to be more closely linked to one another so that they can be in a position to better minister to the needs of one another as the Bible clearly directs. This was a top priority of the church in the Book of Acts and the cell group helps to keep people from being alone in the midst of a large number of people. This is more important for the more passive, reserved and quiet personality, and yet all will benefit greatly by their involvement.

C. Assimilating New People into the Church

Whether people are newly saved or simply new to the church, there needs to be a means whereby they can quickly feel a part if they are going to be permanently established and genuinely committed to the vision of the local church. It takes several years to feel a part of a crowd, but in a few, brief contacts in an intimate setting, people can feel loved, cared for and needed.

D. Evangelism

God wants every believer to be reaching out to others in their sphere of influence. The cell group is a perfect place to introduce new people to other believers in the Body of Christ. Through the cell group, it is possible for them to gain the support and the relationships that they need for them to be established.

V. THE VEHICLE—THE SMALL GROUP

A. The Early Church utilized the home for accomplishing their purpose.

The Dynamics of the Early Church—Acts 2:38-47

Then Peter said to them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” ⁴⁰ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” ⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. ⁴² And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³ Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵ and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶ So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:38-47

And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. Acts 5:42

- B. The Small Group is an excellent context for Christian virtues and interpersonal relationships to be developed and cultivated.
1. It provides a context where someone new can be identified immediately with other members of the church.
 2. It provides a context where people can get acquainted with those who live close to them.
 3. It provides a context where people can be made aware of needs in the body of Christ.
 4. It provides a context where people can get more intimately involved with each other through practical expressions of love.
 5. It provides a context where the people of God can get a vision for the salvation of their own communities.
- C. There are many way in which the Small Groups can be structured to encourage people to get more involved in the lives of others.
1. Focus on personal sharing...not preaching. All personal sharing must be guided but people need an avenue of expression.
 2. Have projects involving help within the small group itself.
 3. Have fellowship times outside of the small group.
 4. Take on an outreach project as a small group.

It must be remembered that the small group is not meant to compete with the other programs of the church. The small group is meant to supplement whatever else is going on and provide that which is not available through any other arm of the church.