

SIX CRITICAL TASKS FOR LIFE GROUP LEADERS



THE SIX BASIC TASKS FOR A LIFE GROUP LEADER

*This is a written form of a refresher training Terran Williams did with the Constantiaberg life group leaders – it is inspired by the Life Group Training Manual created by Roger Haynes.
Feel free to use it.*

THE SIX BASIC TASKS OF A LIFE GROUP LEADER ARE:

1. **MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS:** The why of small groups
2. **BUILD COMMUNITY:** The what of small groups
3. **CARE FOR PEOPLE:** The who of small groups
4. **FACILITATE CONTRIBUTION:** The how of small groups
5. **RAISE LEADERS:** The how many of small groups
6. **LEAD YOURSELF WELL:** The how long of the small groups

1. **MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS: The why of small groups**

Matt 4:19 - Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of people.

A disciple of Jesus is someone who is...

Called by Jesus – ‘Come’

Closer to Jesus – ‘Follow me’

More like Jesus – ‘I will make you’

On mission with Jesus – ‘fishers of people’

James 1:22 - Do not only be hearers of my Word, but doers also.

At the heart of discipleship is equipping people with God’s Word. Small groups that don’t keep God’s Word central cannot disciple people. Jesus defined disciple-making as ‘teaching people to do everything he commanded’ (Matt 28:19).

As a city-wide preaching team we work hard to give people a balanced diet every year, a great overview of Christian truths every year – so it is strategic of the small group leader to usually, not always, use the sermon-based group guide. The challenge as small group leaders is to close the gap between what people hear on Sunday and the lives we live on Monday.

Sundays help you be a hearer of the Word, small groups help you to be a do-er of God’s Word. We need both!

2. BUILD COMMUNITY: The what of small groups

John 17:22 – First reason for community: The Trinity

“I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one.”

Eph 2:14 – Second reason for community: The Cross

“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.”

John 13:34 – Third reason for community: The Command

“Love one another as I have loved you.”

There are 57 ‘one anothers’ in the New Testament. There is just one of those commands. Individualism is wrong. Listening to sermons and reading books is good, but incomplete. Discipleship only comes as you apply those Christian truths in the context of community, real relationships. Small groups are the place where we practice the one anothers.

The height of much of Eastern spirituality is isolation from people. The height of Christian spirituality is immersion in people.

An observation: small groups tend to thrive when there is some natural chemistry – some people who feel some affinity to other people. That’s why assigning people on a list to a small group leader on a list is so hit and miss. It’s better to get a small group leader to stand up on a Sunday and invite people to their group – those who feel they can relate to that leader will go to that group.

However, no matter how much you wish that everyone naturally ‘gets’ each other, there will always be an EGR person (an Extra-Grace-Required person). God will ensure this! These are people who are harder to love and get along with. They are heavenly sandpaper – you need them to become more loving and more like Jesus.

Small group leaders should introduce some practical things that facilitate the building of relationships – celebrating special moments in each other’s lives, hearing each other’s stories, having meal times, getting together outside the usual night (maybe a weekend away), and having an active Whatsapp group for example.

3. CARE FOR PEOPLE: The who of small groups

Community is one thing, but caring for people going through a tough time takes it to another level.

Heb 13:17 - Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

This verse speaks of the joy and responsibility of elders, deacons and small group leaders

having a shepherding concern for people. Small group leaders are to carry their people in prayer, and in love. Of all the people in the group you should do your best to know when people are going through a hard time, and do what you can to pray for them, listen to them, guide them and encourage them – and sometimes even challenge them.

Notice the plurality of 'leaders'. A good small group leader knows when to pick of the phone. When you need extra advice in shepherding someone n your group, call your community leader for wisdom and support. When a member of your group is making a big decision or is perhaps making a big mistake call your small group leader – let them know too. In some cases, they can help.

However, let's not overplay this shepherding role of small group leaders. In the New Testament there are about 4 or 5 places where shepherding is spoken of, but there are 57 places where it speaks of one anothering. Consider this one...

Rom 12:15 - Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

The bulk of care that Christians should receive should be from fellow believers, and this is supplemented by the care of shepherds. Shepherds supplement the care of the community. We need to tell our small group leaders to care for each other – celebrating with each other, and grieving with each other when appropriate.

4. FACILITATE CONTRIBUTION: The how of small groups

Rom 12:6-8 - We have different gifts: prophesying, serving, teaching, encouragement; giving, leading, showing mercy.

The job of the small group leader is like a orchestra leader. Your work is to facilitate the contribution of everyone else.

We should encourage people to be active in the church in their areas of gifting and passion. It's wonderful that they come to your small group, but if they are only receiving on Sundays, and receiving in small groups but never giving, they will be flabby spiritually – fed but under-exercised.

Within the group, always find ways to get people doing stuff. Allow others to facilitate the conversation (send them the Group Guide), or to host, or to organize a social, or to be the administrator, or the Social Justice champ. Give people a job. Get everyone involved.

And don't miss the opportunity to mobilize your group when your group is scheduled to serve on a Sunday meeting service. Here, the attitude of the leader determines the altitude of the group. You might want to be the captain of this time, or this is a chance to delegate to another to lead the charge in getting the group there, and doing the work with joy and a heart to serve.

James 1:19 - Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak.

When it comes to small group conversations, abide by this verse. This is not a chance for the frustrated wanna-be-preacher to preach. No, this is a chance for the group to ask the kind of questions that will enable people to 1) talk over God's Word and 2) the insights of the Sunday message, and 3) to open up our lives to each other and to God so that they can be healed and changed.

Some things to keep in mind for this conversation:

- Set the tone of openness and vulnerability. People will seldom be more so than you.
- Find gentle ways to draw quitter people out.
- Find gentle ways to quieten or refocus over-dominant people.
- Use sub-groups.
- Specialize in open-ended question that get conversation going.

Matt 18:20 - Where 2 or 3 gather in my name, there I am among them.

Small groups have 3 main components: a social time (with good atmospheric like lighting, music, snacks etc), a conversation, and finally – a prayer time.

The prayer time is a chance to create 'God-moments'. Create space to respond to the biblical insights in the conversation, and the sharing of where people are at, in prayer. Suggest 2 or 3 themes of prayer – for example, thanking God for what we have learnt, asking God for stuff and praying for each other. Sometimes pray as a whole group, sometimes in subgroups. Praying for people's needs is powerful. Also be open to the gift of prophecy, which is the x-factor in a prayer meeting.

5. RAISE LEADERS: The how many of small groups

2 Tim 2:2 - The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

Those who serve God in one way should make help others to do the same, who in turn help yet others to do the same. It takes leaders to make new leaders.

As such, one of the most important things you can ever do is look for people in your group who are 1) growing in God 2) are warm and 3) seem to be buying into the vision and values of the church – and then 1) give them chances to facilitate the conversation (send that week's Group Guide to them), 2) suggest that they lead one day because of what you see in them, 3) spend a little more time with them, 4) chat to the community leader about them and 5) invite them to Life Group Leaders training.

There are three ways to start new small groups:

1) You can multiply your group. One half go with you, and the other half with the other leader. Never call this 'splitting' – it's multiplying.

2) You can plant the new leader (or couple) and perhaps one or two other people out to start a life group from scratch. The strength of this is that new people are more likely to join a group that is just starting than join a freshly multiplied group where, though there is some space, new people already feel outnumbered and possibly a little on the outside (relationally).

3) You can ask someone to temporarily host a short-term group such as an Alpha group, with the possibility of the group becoming a permanent group thereafter.

6. LEAD YOURSELF WELL: The how long of the small groups

Over the years, I have seen many small group leaders flame out, or fall out, or burn out. We must learn to lead our own lives well and sustainably, so that we will be able to lead and serve in other people's lives too.

John 15:8 - If you remain in me, and my Word remains you, you will bear much fruit.

Lead yourself well by **developing and protecting a daily habit of devotions** – spending some everyday time opening your life to God's Word and presence. When you do this for a long time, but then miss it for a day you will be able to tell the difference. If you miss it for a week, your spouse or closest friends might be able to tell the difference. If you miss it for a month, your group will be able to tell the difference.

Mark 6:31 - Come with me by yourselves, and get some rest.

Lead yourself well by **developing habits of self-replenishment**. If your outflow exceeds your inflow the shortfall will prove to be your downfall. Three ways to find and guard these inflows is to:

1) Divert daily – everyday, try find a gap to do something that replenishes you emotionally. Note that entertainment seldom does this.

2) Withdraw weekly – the Sabbath is not a law, but it is a principle. Try to find a substantial period of time every week when you only do personally restorative things.

3) Abandon annually – plan holidays, and when there, don't take a holiday from God. Holidays afford a wonderful time to renew and deepen your relationship with God through your personal devotions and your relationship with the people closest to you.

Lam 3:40 - Let us examine and probe our ways and let us return to the LORD.

Lead yourself well by **refusing to tolerate and defend darkness in your own life**. Why?

1) I am not as strong as I think I am (1 Cor 10:12). You lie to you more than you lie to anyone.

2) Satan is plotting to defeat you. Be self-controlled and alert, the devil prowls around (1 Pet 5).

3) My life affects other people's lives. Your private sins affect other people. They're personal but they spill over in effect to damage others (1 Tim 4:16). You can never take a person farther than you are yourself.

4) So God won't have to judge me. 'If we examine ourselves we will not be judged by God' (1 Cor 11:31). How? Confess your sins to God for forgiveness (1 John 1:9), but then confess your sins to some trusted followers of Jesus for healing (James 5:16). There's no healing until there is revealing. None of us can get up again or stay standing without some people who love us and know us lift us up, and stand by our side. Men especially struggle to do this, which is why so many men fall. Don't be that man.

Eph 5:18 - Be filled with the Spirit.