

DIVIDE & MULTIPLY

DEVELOPING AND MAXIMIZING
YOUR SMALL GROUP MINISTRY



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Developing and Maximizing Your Small Group Ministry

I. Why Small Groups?

◆ ***Provides for the building of friendships and closer relationships***

The most memorable aspects of a person's "faith journey" are the relationships which influence them along the way.

◆ ***Provides a family / community atmosphere***

Teenagers will seek attention somewhere, some way—we can help them find it in healthy, positive ways.

◆ ***Provides support and accountability***

As relationships develop, students will begin to take stock in each other's lives, encouraging and challenging each other toward spiritual growth.

◆ ***Provides context for deeper learning***

Increased individual attention and participation yields greater retention and practical life change.

◆ ***Provides more direct leadership connection***

Adult and student leaders are able to focus more personal attention on ministry to fewer students.

◆ ***Provides for "smallness in bigness"***

Small groups help counteract the isolating tendencies of a vast culture or a large youth ministry.

◆ ***Provides greater growth potential***

As more students are engaged in direct, personal ministry, your group will attract other students in and out of the church.

◆ ***Promotes discipleship***

Jesus made His most direct impact (on the world) by investing heavily in the lives of a few close followers.

II. Breaking Into Groups (Divide and Multiply)

* ***Grade / age level***

--tends to add maturity level relevance to discussions, and inhibit the formation of cliques based on interests or existing friendships

* ***Guys / Girls***

--fosters greater intimacy and deeper, more open sharing in discussions and ministry

* ***Schools / areas / locations***

--fosters deeper friendships among Christians who must support one another as they live out their faith in everyday situations

--allows greater accessibility to nearby homes as places for informal weekly meetings

* ***Common interests***

--raises the groups basic "comfort level"

--tends to more effectively reach those with similar interests

*** Ministry Teams**

--provides a context for personal growth, ministry and fellowship among those who work together in preparation for services and outreaches

*** Varied / new relationships**

--takes students out of their comfort zone, allowing them to develop new relationships
--promotes unity within the group as a whole

***Regardless of how you divide into groups, vary the structure periodically (not frequently) in order to give kids a different perspective.

III. Running the Group (Meeting Format)

❖❖ Provide a **warm** and **friendly** atmosphere (music, comfortable, etc.)-- Students should feel at home.

❖❖ **Welcome Time** (about the first 5-10 minutes)

- Set the tone for the meeting with personal interaction and a welcome reception.
- Introduce students to one another if not acquainted.
- Snacks/appetizers can be available right away if necessary.

❖❖ **Creative Communication** (10 minutes)

- Make introductions.
- Plan unique mixers, ice-breakers and “get-to-know-you-better” activities.
- Have fun and encourage participation.

❖❖ **Praise and Worship** (10-15 minutes)

- Use student leadership if possible.
- Make sure you have a stereo or boom box if needed.
- Duration of time depends on ministry flow, personality and comfort level of group.

❖❖ **Bible Study and Exploration** (20-30 minutes)

- Keep it **discussion**-oriented.
- Don't worry about getting through everything as you have it outlined.
- Encourage students to bring Bibles, and dig into the topic deeper on their own.

❖❖ **Life-Connect and Application** (10 minutes)

- Allow students to focus on their thoughts and feelings, but bring them down to practical application.
- Turn the discussion toward specific, personal, and practical matters.
- Help students answer the question, “What do I need to do now that I know this?”

❖❖ **Corporate and Personal Ministry** (10 minutes)

- Constantly communicate that “We're in this together -- to grow”.
- Have volunteers pray for the group to live what they have learned.
- Pray for individual needs. Pray **with** each other, not just **for** each other. (Help meet others' needs.)

❖❖ **Food and Free Time** (You could have food at the beginning if it works better for your group.)

- Have a variety of options, but not overly organized.
- The group that **Prays** and **Plays** together **Stays** together.
- Encourage the interaction and inclusion of everyone.

❖❖ **Make sure to provide personal connection and ministry throughout the week.**

- Keep in touch with members of your group during the week and in other services.

VI. Facilitating Group Interaction

If others are listening, most people are more than willing to offer their views. However, the key is not *what* you ask-- but *how* you ask. It can make the difference between a lively conversation and a dead one.

*** Asking the “right” questions isn’t even enough--you must ask questions right.

A. Generating Discussion

■ **Encourage students to verbalize their views.**

- Students must feel free to say what they think -- without feeling self-conscious.
- What students discover for themselves sticks with them longer than anything you tell them.

■ **Be grateful for every answer.**

- Students should feel appreciated for their input--if you can’t always affirm their views, still affirm them as individuals willing to participate.
- As students feel free to say what’s on their minds, they will trust you and the group (and themselves) more, creating a growth environment.

■ **Don’t be satisfied with the first response to your question.**

- Avoid setting a question-answer-question-answer pattern. Instead, ask for several responses; then provoke the speakers to interact and dialogue with each other. This way, you move them from merely responding to you, toward conversation with each other.

■ **Keep the discussion moving.**

- Don’t let a couple or a few students monopolize the discussion. Move on to subsequent questions. Students will still learn more from frustration with an unresolved issue than satisfaction with a thorough response.

■ **Be alert to individuals and their responses.**

- If a student gets interrupted, go back and invite that student to share what they started to say. Tactfully encourage responses from quieter, possibly very thoughtful, students.

■ **Don’t be afraid of silence.**

- Don’t jump right in and answer your own questions. Give students time to consider the question they just heard. Let them know you are comfortable with silence and willing to wait for discussion to begin. (Students also learn that you will not always “rescue” them.)

■ **Turn difficult questions back to the group.**

- Don’t feel the need to answer every question. Use these “stumpers” to generate opinions and lively discussion. “Good question, what do the rest of you think?”
- Help students examine what they believe by constantly asking for their thoughts and opinions. (You will benefit by understanding where they are in their spiritual journey.)

■ **Be open and willing to learn from your group.**

- With discretion, be honest about your spiritual struggles and victories, and let students be an encouragement to you.

B. Crafting Questions that Get a Response

*** This skill is vital for effective group and personal ministry. Jesus often ministered to people more with His questions than with His answers--inviting people to search out the truth.

❖ **Avoid “yes” or “no” questions.**

--Stay away from questions beginning with “Is there...?” “Are they...?” or “Do you think...?” These tend to stall the discussion.

--Ask more “**Why?**” questions --provoking exploration, opinions, and discussion.

--Keep them simple and open-ended enough to provoke thought, yet specific enough to apply to real life situations. “How?” “Why?” “What would you do?” “When have you felt...?”

*****Your questions rather than your answers will make your group a dynamic one.**

❖ **Don’t ask questions that assume an answer.**

--ie: “Why was Jesus upset...?” (This assumes He was upset and that there is an exact answer.) Such questions reveal too much, leaving students little room to discover implications and insights for themselves. Your goal to help students explore and discover answers rather than to give them answers.

❖ **Don’t ask for a response without following up.**

--ie: “How many of you ever...?” and other “show of hands” response questions are no more effective than “yes” or “no” questions, unless you follow with “Why” or “How?” questions.

--Then, the initial response can help draw them into a direct relation to the issue you present.

❖ **Craft questions that are relevant to your students.**

--As you craft your questions ahead of time, think about where your students are--their maturity, spiritual level, trials,...

--People are more likely to talk if questions clearly reflect issues in their own lives--and what they learn from the discussion will be more valuable for their spiritual journey.

❖ **Learn how and when to ask direct questions.**

--A student’s level of growth and trust determines what is appropriate. Don’t put people on the spot or make them shy away from discussion. Sometimes it is better to follow up with individuals personally, outside of the group setting.

❖ **Ask questions that deal with feelings as well as facts.**

--Your goal is to engage your students’ hearts as well as their minds.

--The longer your group is together, the deeper, more “personal” your interaction can become.

C. Three Levels of Bible Study Questions

▲ **Observation (Questions of fact)**-- “What does the passage say?”

--Ensure that students have explored the details and know the facts before launching into interpretation.

--Groups often get off on tangents because they start interpreting the text before they grasp the facts.

▲▲ **Interpretation (Question of meaning)** --“What does the passage mean?”

--Questions beginning with **why, how, or explain...** encourage students to share thoughts.

--They combine observation with thought, moving people from simply reading a passage to getting involved in it. Like Jesus’ parables, your questions should draw students in so they see how the passage speaks to their lives.

▲▲▲ **Application (Questions of personal relevance)** “What does this passage mean to me?”

--These questions add a personal touch, calling for personal reflection rather than objective response. They shift from general discussion to specific application.

--Typical questions: “Which person in the passage do you relate to most?” or “If you were with Jesus in this situation, what would He say to you?”

*****Practical application is the most important part of the lesson, and discussing it helps students develop a more personal understanding of their faith and discover how to be Christians in their day-to-day lives.**