

PRINCIPLES AND GOALS FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Do you want to have a good small group? Do you find it difficult to know what to do sometimes? These are principles and goals that will help you get the most out of your group and discussions.

I. TWELVE PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL SMALL GROUPS

1. Make the group do the work

In a lecture the teacher does the work, but in small groups the students need to do the work. The coach stays in the background and he should speak only 10-20% of the time. A good teacher is not measured by how much the teacher knows, but how much the student learns. It is a very common pitfall for instructors to speak too much!



The way you fight that is: don't give the answer. If a student named Simon has a question and says to group leader, "Paul, what do you think about this," Paul could show off what he knows. But a good coach says, "Thank you. That's an excellent question. Timothy, what would you answer to that question?" And guess what! Not only does this make it more interesting for the students, it is also much easier for the coach. But pride says, "They ask a question, and I must give an answer." Ask a university professor a question and he feels he must give an answer. He is the educated man, and he must know everything, and he must give an answer. But your students are different. They have already received the material, whether from the Bible or in a lecture or course. Now they need to talk and think about it so that they can clarify their understanding. Remember, when they ask you a question in a small group, the temptation is to give the answer, but don't give the answer. Let them work it through.

What will the group think of us? In the beginning they may feel very negative. For instance, when I first led a group in Ukraine, they got upset. At the end of our first seminar, they stood to their feet, they slammed the door, they said, "You came a long distance by train and all we did was talk, talk, talk. You didn't even give us a lecture. Not one lecture!" This went on for about four months until we finished the *Galatians/Romans* course. Then the same people said, "Oh, Abraham, thank you. It was so wonderful!" I asked, "What do you mean it was so wonderful? All we did was talk." "Oh no, I learned more in this course than I've learned in any single course in my whole life." So, you see, if you do the right thing, in time people will see, and it will bear fruit. You as a leader, are not educator, you are a trainer, you must simply be ahead of your culture. If you are convinced that this is right, then you just let people laugh or think whatever they want. But very likely by the time three different people have answered Simon's question, most people in the group will think, "Hmm, that was interesting."

As a coach the best thing you can do is to pull the answers together a little bit into a conclusion, "I hope that these answers help you, Simon. We had three answers: this, and this, and this. You can see that one is easier, that one is a little bit difficult, but maybe that one was the best answer. Does that help you?" And he says, "Yes, thank you." And the whole group will think, "Wow, that was good!"

If you were asking Igor a question, but he gave a wrong answer, you might say, "Okay, thank you, but maybe you were thinking more about the section in chapter two. Let me see if I can rephrase the question." Which leads us to our next point.

2. Rephrase questions

As you make the question a bit easier or more explicit, you build confidence in others, because now they understand and can give you an answer. It is very common for a coach to need to ask questions in a couple of different ways in order to communicate what they really mean.

3. Respect the views of members in your group.

Suppose someone said, "I think that Jehovah's Witnesses are not really so bad." Why? Because when he became a Christian, he got a Bible from a Jehovah's Witness. If you were to say, "How can you say that? That's a terrible cult," he will not say anything again. So, respect the views of the members of your group. Never put them down. Emphasize what is positive in his answer. For instance, a moment ago I told Igor, "That's a good idea, but I think maybe you were thinking about chapter two." I didn't say, "What a stupid idea that is. It's from a totally different chapter." I said, "It's a good idea, but from another chapter." And he thinks, "Oh, I made a mistake," not "Boy, am I stupid. I'd better keep my mouth shut." Emphasize what is positive in the answer.

4. Don't be threatened by controversy.

You don't want everybody to agree all the time. That's boring. And basically, that means they are not thinking on their own. If one student gives an answer and someone else gives another answer, then all the other people will have to make a choice. So, they all begin to think, "Hmm, it can't be like that. But I don't totally agree with him. Well, maybe it's like this." And you get another meaning. Now you as a coach can say, "Oh, that's a good idea. I think this brings us closer to the truth." Then everyone feels, "Oh, now we are getting good and now we understand it better." The student will want to try again, "Oh, then maybe it's like this." This time he has a good idea. Pretty soon you can say, "That's not exactly what I was looking for," or "That is close. Who can build on his answer?" Now they are thinking, they are learning.

Discussion is slower than lecture. A lecture can be done about twice as fast as a discussion, but what do you accomplish? You give a lecture, and halfway through you see the students looking pretty sleepy, so you say, "Do you need a break?" Now you've got their attention again, "What? Ah, break? Yes, yes." So, they were probably not learning a whole lot. That's one of the problems with a lecture. You think you have a good lecture, and you assume that means they are learning well. But when a person talks in a discussion, you know whether he understands the material or not.



So, controversy stimulates thinking, it refines it, and sometimes changes it. Don't be afraid about ending with some controversy. I have met lots of leaders who feel that before people go home everybody must agree. But age is different, experience is different, and other things are different. You don't have to say, "Do you see? Now, do you understand? Are you agreed?" We need to appreciate the differences in our people. One has been in Russia, one has been in America, another one has never even been to another province. Their feelings, their reactions are going to be different. They aren't totally going to agree on everything tonight. But maybe someone will come next week and say, "You know, I thought about that question, and maybe what you said was right." It happens all the time. So don't be afraid of some controversies.

5. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."

What happens when someone says, "You don't know??" You can frankly answer, "No, I don't know. I am not a professor. I am not an instructor. I am a coach. I am helping you to learn. I want to help you to grow spiritually. I want to encourage you to have spiritual fruit. I'm just like you and we are learning together, and we are serving God together. I'm sorry I don't have a good answer for your question." That's honest. And if it is a valid, important question, you can assure them that you will try to find the answer before the next seminar.

6. If you have new or shy people, you can direct simple questions to them

When there is a new person who has just come at the beginning of the session, don't ask him a difficult question about the material. Always show appreciation for an answer. If you have a shy person and you criticize him, he may never speak again because he is shy. But when you say, "Oh, thank you, that was good," he gains confidence. Then later on you can say, "Yes Slavic, could you maybe share an answer with us?" You have helped him express himself again. Then you say, "Thank you." Maybe the answer was not so good, but you can always say, "Thank you for participating," or "I appreciate you sharing," or "That is good. We need people who are willing to express themselves." You didn't say, "Oh, that's the very best idea I ever heard." You simply said, "Oh, yes. We need people who contribute." Slowly your students will learn how to participate. Just remember to give them simpler questions at the beginning.

7. Restrain a person who talks too much

Some people just like to talk. Many preachers are men who really like to talk. There is often somebody in a group who always wants to talk. The best music in his ears is his own voice. You may need to say, “Okay, let me see. I want to ask you the next question...” and you point at somebody else. Or you ask people by name. Or you say, “Yes, Volodia you probably know the answer to this. Let’s wait and ask some others first.” Maybe he’s been to seminary, or maybe this is the second time he is doing a study. It doesn’t mean he is bad, but you can still say, “Just wait a minute. Let’s hear from the other people first,” or “I’m sorry but you’ve already said a lot of things and I would like to hear some more from the quieter students.”

Another thing you can do is to talk to him privately after the meeting and say, “I really appreciate your help, and most of your answers are very good, but you know we have a few shy people here, and they’re a bit afraid of you. So, what if we let them talk first a little bit, and then maybe for some of the more difficult questions I’ll call on you.” You can have a bit of a private agreement with him.



8. Prevent inappropriate tangents

For people who like to go on tangents say, “This is a good topic for discussion another time.” A tangent is when someone starts to talk about something not related to the subject of the lesson. Let’s say you are talking about Paul and John Mark, and he says, “You know, that is just like what the book of Revelation says.” Next time you talk about Abraham and Isaac, and he says, “You know that is just like what the book of Revelation says.” And no matter what you say, it’s always like the book of Revelation—because that’s his favorite topic. Or someone may say to you, “Yes, but do you know in the book of Malachi...” or, “Do you know in the book of Jude...” and he always has other Bible information that you don’t have time for, and it’s not important information. We call that a “rabbit trail.” Time goes by and we didn’t do the lesson. So, you will need to say, “That’s a good thought, but we don’t have time right now. We need to discuss that another time or maybe after the lesson if you have a little bit of time,” and after the lesson people who are interested can talk about that.

9. Question people who frequently make irrelevant, unrelated statements

Ask them, “What verse did you get that from?” Suppose you are studying *Galatians* or *Romans*, and he says something about Easter. You need to say, “From what verse did you get that?” He might reply, “Exodus chapter 12.” Then you gently respond, “That’s interesting, but right now we must stick only to Romans or Galatians. Sorry, we just don’t have time for it. I hope you understand.”

10. Postpone giving answers to people who frequently bring up problems.

When someone brings up a problem, you can tell him, “I think as we go on this will become clear.” Many times, the problem is that he doesn’t know his question will be answered a few pages later by the material. On the other hand, they may get ahead of you, and you may need to say, “We will study this later. We will cover that in lesson six.” I’ve had students do that. They bring up a question from a lesson we haven’t covered yet, “What about this?” So, I pleasantly reply, “Oh, that’s the lesson for the next month. You must have been studying ahead. Good! We’ll study it next month.” And he feels good. You need to watch your time. You may need to ask him to discuss it with you after class. And you need to find out why he always has a problem. Is he studying the material or not? Is it beyond his comprehension? Does he need to feel important? Spend private time with him.

11. Focus the energies of potential leaders.

What to do with a person who is bringing in other texts that are good, but it is too much? You have a potential group leader there. He is ahead of the group. He has more information, or he has studied more. You just have to tell him that you don’t have time. You have to tell him that you have to stick to the particular text or lesson you are doing now. But think about using him sometime. Maybe he can co-lead with you one evening. You do some and he does some. Or you can begin to train him. He can take your place when you are sick, or you can’t come.

12. Discern what is “good” silence and what is “bad” silence.

Let's say you've asked a question and it's real quiet. You rephrase the question and it's still quiet. I have a colleague who is very good with those kinds of situations. He says, "I have lots of time, and I'm not going to give you answers. So, just tell me what you think. It doesn't matter whether it's right or wrong." And he just sits and waits. Now that's one way of handling silences, and that would be a good silence because people would be thinking. But it works both ways. For instance, let's say you are leading a session on a doctrine, and you ask a question about the Holy Spirit. Nobody gives an answer, so you say, "Come on, come on, come on! Give me an answer." People need time to think. They need some silence. However, if you ask a question and it's real quiet, and you begin to wonder, "Well, are they thinking, or what's going on?" And then you hear snoring. Oops! That probably wasn't a good quiet time. It was not a productive quiet time. You need to learn to discern what's a "good" silence and what's a "bad" (or empty) silence.

These are not just hints, they are principles. You need to memorize those principles, and you need to use those principles. Without them you will not be successful. They are basic principles. Now we will look at goals for small groups.



II. SEVEN SMALL GROUP GOALS

These seven small group goals are for any small group, whether it consists of unbelievers or elders.

1. Intimate fellowship

Because you sit in a **circle**, because you see each other's faces, because you talk together, an atmosphere is created in which intimate fellowship can take place. In a large church, people usually just sit in rows, and there is little or no fellowship. People have a need to share. It's very simple. The Bible says what your heart is full of your mouth wants to speak. Everyone wants to share: "I have the most wonderful vegetables in my garden," or "We're having difficulties with our children," or "I'm getting married next month," or whatever it is they have on their hearts. This personal sharing, as trust grows, provides for intimate fellowship. One of the goals of your group should be to become like a spiritual family.

2. Opportunities for spiritual growth through discussion and personal study

You need to ask yourself a question, "What do I want to happen spiritually in these people's lives?" You need to have a goal. Now, many coaches have a goal. What's the goal? To do lesson six. To do lesson eight. What did you do last night? Lesson eleven. That's not a goal that is oriented to people; it's just a bureaucratic goal. But the NLC goal is for spiritual growth. You have to be prepared if you are going to help your students grow through discussion and personal study.

a. **You need about 15 questions per hour to have a good stimulating discussion.**

That means every question, if it's a good question, can be discussed for four minutes easily. And some questions you can talk about for ten minutes.

b. **Ask questions not found in workbooks.**

We've had many coaches ask the same questions that have already been studied. You should ask a few of these questions so that you can see if your students have prepared and understood their assignments and so they are held accountable, but you need to ask other questions. If you are going to ask about fifteen questions, you need to have them written down. If you don't have them written down, the quality of the questions will not be good enough. Also, if you don't have them written down you will need to re-do the work of creating them every time you lead that lesson. But if you have good written questions and you keep the questions, next time when you lead, it will be very easy.

3. An environment where the principles of Scripture can be visibly practiced

This means application and accountability. Take every opportunity to help the students apply what they are learning. Help them to share with each other how they are putting these principles into practice. The *Practical Evangelism* lessons provide opportunity for accountability. You can say, "Our practical assignment this time was to share the gospel with 4 unbelievers. Who did that? What happened?"

Hold the students accountable to put these things into practice. Help them to share with each other the joys of practicing what they are learning. Help them to develop a burden to change their lives and the lives of other people.

It is easy for people to get into intellectual discussions, but application always needs to have the **major emphasis**. You can discuss the benefits and merits of different ways of presenting the gospel to unbelievers for five years, but the real issue is **doing it**.

Always emphasize practical assignments. Talk about them in class. Ask for testimonies about them: “Oh, you did the practical assignment? Wow! Man, that’s great! You’re the first student in our group to do that. Tell us what happened. What did you learn from it? How would you do it better if you did it again? How did you grow spiritually from it? “

4. Opportunity for meaningful prayer

In a small group people know each other, especially if you have a stable group and you have already done a couple sessions together. This provides a great opportunity for meaningful prayer.

a. *Your greatest struggle.*

It would be a splendid idea if you would share about your greatest struggle right now. For example, “My greatest struggle is to come again next week. Why? Because I just want to go home to my wife Tanya.” When you are in Moldavia for two months, that probably would be the truth. If you are willing to share a real need openly, the quality of your prayers rises way up. But if you say, “You know, yesterday I hit my thumb with the hammer, and it really hurts. Would you pray for me,” you will probably find that your prayer time won’t be very meaningful. You see, **you** set the standards. I have seen some wonderful things happen when the coach confessed a sin. It changed the whole church.

b. *Your personal spiritual needs.*

My spiritual need is to help somebody to find Jesus Christ. I don’t know if you lead people to Christ, but that’s my personal need. We have a lot of prayers about illness: “My aunt is sick. My grandfather had a heart operation. My grandson probably is going to be sick next week.” That’s not really what we are talking about. We need to look beyond the physical to see what God really wants to do in the lives of people.

5. Assistance for individuals to discover and develop their gifts.

In a small group many things need to happen. Somebody can learn to lead the singing, somebody can learn to pray, somebody can learn to lead a discussion, somebody can learn to give a testimony, and there are many other ways to participate that usually do not exist in a large group. In a small group where everyone knows each other there are opportunities to learn Christian ministry in a non-threatening way. Small groups should try to meet in **homes**. It actually is better than meeting in the church. You can give ministry assignments. How are you going to give an assignment to people in a large church? But in your small group you will only have around eight, nine, or ten people. Sixteen times in the New Testament “one another” is mentioned. Serve one another. Love one another. It is mentioned sixteen times! You must allow beautiful opportunities for people to discover their gifts.

6. Encouragement of a lifestyle pleasing to God

We are talking about holiness. Just recently I met a lady who had been at our worship services in our home in Kiev in 1990–1991. She said, “One of the things that was so helpful to me was worship in your home.” She was just a brand-new believer and didn’t know anything. Every week I asked them, “Can you tell us what God has done in your life this past week?” She explained, “It was so helpful because I knew you were going to ask that question, and I knew everybody had an opportunity to tell what God was doing in their lives that week.” She continued, “It always helped me to just think: Hmm, this week what has happened in my life? What has God been doing in my life?” Now eight or nine years later when she sees me, she still thinks of that question. She thinks, “Abraham Bible—spiritual growth.”

Here are a couple of things to think about:

a. *Personal impact on important people.*

The most important people in your life are almost always personal acquaintances. Think of Victor Hamm, Billy Graham, or other people. They are not the most important people in your lives. The most important person is someone that is close to you. Maybe it's a relative, maybe a friend, maybe a neighbor, maybe another church member, or maybe a member of your small group. You can encourage each other to have a lifestyle pleasing to God. In a small group people have the opportunity to demonstrate godly living by their testimonies, by their contact and caring for other people in the group. Either you can encourage them to become holy, or perhaps they will help you to grow spiritually. This is a real opportunity for spiritual impact.

b. New spiritual challenges.

They need someone to take them beyond the normal, someone who challenges them to be fanatical. When I was a young person some of my church leaders said, "Don't be fanatic." But now that I am a leader, I think just the opposite: "Be a fanatic, Ivan! Come on, be a fanatic!" We have enough lukewarm people. We don't need lukewarm people. We need Peters and Pauls and Johns, Elijahs, Esthers, Deborahs—people who are willing to lay everything down for what they believe. You have that opportunity to challenge and encourage and lift up people in your small group. Be wholly dedicated to God yourself, and then help others to be sold out for Christ.

7. Outreach to new people to bring them to the guidance and reproduction stages

You can casually invite someone to a group: "We have a small group meeting in a friend's home that is studying the Bible. We just talk together. Why don't you come? There are only four or five people." They think, "Well, maybe." If you say, "Please, come to our big church. We have people there waiting for you," the answer is likely to be, "No, I am busy." But you can invite people to a small group, and they can just sit in the corner. They don't have to talk. If they want to say something they can.

After a while you can bring them to the guidance stage. Maybe their life had been the same for three years already and now you brought them to a small group, and they say, "Hmm, that was interesting. Maybe I'll come again." And through the small group you begin to have an opportunity to guide them. That's what happens all the time with a small group of unbelievers. Then you can bring them to the reproduction stage: You say: "Why don't you bring your husband along?" or, "Bring your mother with you." Or they get saved and they want to bring another man to be saved. That's why we talk about reproduction. They themselves are getting involved.

To obtain these 7 goals you need to have focused lessons.

We close this section with a practical comment on **Focused lessons**.

Ask yourself the following questions about your lesson:

1. Is it clear?
2. Is it relevant?
3. Is it stimulating?

Are people tuned in to the lesson? Do they understand it, and are they involved in what the lesson is trying to teach? Has it brought new thoughts, new input into their lives?

4. How does it apply?

Have you helped your group find how this lesson will or can change their lives? Do they know how they are going to live differently when they go home? Is it more than just factual knowledge? Are the students involved in finding the applications?

III. EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

We are going to talk about different questions to ask when you meet new people so that you have an idea of how to get them to talk and to share. These are introductory or preliminary questions to help you get started in any small group.

A. Questions About the Value of Small Groups

There are six questions here which will help you to evaluate what kind of small group experiences your students have already had.

1. *What small groups have you been in?*

Suppose you are meeting with a group of new people, and you want to find out what they know about small groups. These are questions to ask so that you will understand how they will react once you begin to lead these lessons. They will share what groups they were in—maybe a small prayer group, or maybe a small group of unbelievers, maybe a Bible study class—and that gives you an idea of what experiences they have had.

2. *Which was the most meaningful? Why?*

You may need to simplify or restate this question: “Which group did you enjoy most?” “How did it help you?”

3. *Why do you feel that way?*

In other words, reasons why it was helpful or reasons why they didn't like it. To help find out the reasons, you can ask questions like these:

a. How often did you meet?

If it was once a quarter, there would be very few personal relationships in the group.

b. How many were in the group?

If they tell you there were sixteen people, you will understand why they react, “Well, we never got much chance to speak.” At this point you can explain, “That's because there were 16 people. That's way too many people to have good interaction.”

c. What was the purpose?

They might reply: “Well, I don't know. The elder wanted to. He just wanted us to be together and have some tea,” or “We just wanted to talk about the Bible.” If there was no specific goal, probably not much was accomplished. That's an important issue for each one. For each time that you have a group, you should have a written goal. What do I want to accomplish this time in this group? Or what do I hope will happen to Volodia and to Tanya this time? You need to have a clear purpose every time the group meets. You will see how difficult that is to do. But if you do it, your whole being will cry out to God. It will say, “Give me a goal.” Or “Help me to reach my goal.” You see, it focuses your whole brain and your whole heart.

Then you can ask the next question:

d. How long did it run?

You might hear, “Well, we met three times, but then somebody couldn't come and somebody else was late and it was summer, and it was vacation, and so we quit.” That man is evaluating a small group on that experience. So, when you say, “We are going to have a small group,” he may think, “Well, it's not for me. These things never last.”

4. *What problems did you encounter or observe?*

They may name some of the problems that we already talked about. Maybe somebody was monopolizing the conversation and doing all the talking. Or maybe the coach didn't have a goal, or didn't stick to the purpose of the group.

5. *List some of the pluses of the group.*

For example: “I was able to make new friends,” or “I learned a lot about the Gospel of John.”

6. *What were some personal needs met?*

Maybe he had some good experiences. Maybe he said, “Well, we met only five times, but it really changed my prayer life. It really helped me learn how to pray better.” Wonderful! Praise God!



B. Getting Acquainted Questions

These are questions that move to an even more personal level of becoming acquainted with the individuals in your group. You don't need to ask every question, but you do need to make sure that you get responses from everyone in the group to at least one or two of the following questions:

1. *How did you come to know the Lord?*

If you don't know the people this is a good way to begin, because everybody can tell how they got saved. Often this will help you understand where a student is at spiritually and what kind of spiritual background he has. It is also a good way to help them begin to share on a spiritual level.

2. *What do you enjoy doing the most?*

This will give you a bit of insight into his general character. If on the one hand he says, "I like to paint pictures" or on the other hand, "I like to ski in the mountains," you will have two different pictures. One is a picture of a quieter, artistic individual. The other is a picture of an active person who probably enjoys challenges.

3. *What is your least favorite task?*

He might say, "Doing finances. I can never keep track of my money." If you are meeting at his apartment, you might be looking around and thinking, "Aha, that's why it's so poor here."

4. *What do you consider to be one of your greatest needs?*

He may say, "Practical information for Christian service." Or "Information about how to lead a small group." Or "I would like to learn to preach or become an elder." You can use that to begin to talk about training for a little bit. You can explain what opportunities for study there are and how that might help him to move on in his spiritual life.

5. *Describe how you met your wife.*

This can be very interesting. Sometimes it will be funny, so people laugh and that loosens up the atmosphere. It will give you glimpses of how different people go about doing things. It can also give you added insight into their lives. For instance, he might say, "Well, I met my wife at a university." What does that tell you? That he studied at a university. Or he may say, "I met my wife in a hospital. She was a nurse there and I am a doctor." Or he may say, "I have known her family for years, and prayed about whether she was the wife God would have me marry." And you immediately begin to think, "Aha, this person is on that spiritual level." It gives you that information.

6. *Do you have a vision in your heart or mind that you would like to see take place?*

One of them may say, "I've been really praying about that village, and I would like to see a church started there." Another one may say, "I am always dreaming about riding around the whole world on a bicycle." These are getting acquainted questions. All of these questions can be used the first or second time you go to a new church, or a new area and you meet new people.

7. *If you knew you had only one day or week or month to live, how would you spend your time?*

I think I would phone up all the leaders in my province and I would say, "Well this is about it," and would give them my last parting words. That's a very interesting question, "What would you do if you had only one day?" Maybe you would sit home and hug your wife. The answer people give you will give you a little window into their souls.

8. *What are ways you are spending time with your children?*

Let's hope they don't say, "When I come home late at night, I give them a kiss while they are sleeping and I say a prayer for them, and then early in the morning I leave. The next day I do the same thing." In America they did some research on this subject. They found that on an average, fathers spend about five minutes with their children per week showing personal interest. If a person in your group is like that, it tells you how much of a vision he has to prepare his children spiritually. Many church leaders are interested in everybody else but their own children.

These are all questions that help the group members to get to know each other and feel closer together.



We have seen two categories of questions and how they follow each other. First were the questions about the value of small groups they had been in previously. Then we had “getting acquainted” questions. If you make notes on what they are saying, that will give you a good picture of the people in your group.

The next category will help us begin to tighten our focus.

C. Time Management Questions

1. Ask them what all their main activities are each week.

You can ask them to take a clean sheet of paper and just start writing. Most of them will start off writing something like, “Well, I preach, and I lead a Wednesday service and that’s about it.” So, you help them see the other things they are doing, “Oh, you don’t help your wife?” And he’ll answer, “Oh, yes, I buy potatoes every week.” That’s already one job that takes one hour. Now you help him again, “What else do you do?” This time he says, “Well, I sing in the choir.” Again, you urge him on, “What else do you do?” And gradually he’ll begin to see all the activities that take his time, “Well, I shovel the snow.” Or “I work in the garden. I have a cow and ten chickens and three goats, and five pigs.” So, they write down everything they do.

2. Have them write out their schedule.

This will help them to see how they are using their time. In other words, how much time does it take to do the chores if they have animals? Someone might remember, “Every night when I come home, I need to take the dog out for a half an hour for a walk, even though it’s real late and I’m so tired.” After they have finished writing down their initial schedule, you’ll need to give them some time to think. You need to stimulate their thoughts by saying something like, “Oh, that’s all in a whole week? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Seven things in a whole week? I do seven things in one morning.” Then they will begin to think, “Oh yes, there’s this and this and this.” So, you will need to make sure that they have filled this out completely as they are meant to. And now comes an interesting part.

3. Have them list if it’s well or poorly done.

Behind each item on their schedule, they can simply mark a plus if it’s well done or a minus if it’s done poorly. How well they do their work will affect what kind of results they get. What quality of milk will you get when you kick a cow, or what quality of milk will you get when you pat a cow or say nice things to it? Maybe some people think it doesn’t make any difference. I think how you take care of animals does make a difference. They respond to you. Then you ask the next question.

4. Ask them which activities they like to do.

Now they have probably begun to see that they are doing way too many things. In most cases people will be very busy, but they are not doing priority things. They are just busy. Somehow, they think they are pleasing God, yet deep down inside they always feel a little bit disappointed. Where is the success? Where is the fruit? What do they have to show? They can check off on the list, “I like to do this one” or, “I like to do number six and number eight.” And then comes a question that should stimulate new thoughts. Get them to think about what is important.

5. Ask for names of men they could disciple.

“Okay, how many people do you know that you could help personally if you had time—if you didn’t have to do all of these other things?” After they have written down the names of a few men, ask them the next question.

6. Ask them how close of a relationship they have with these people.

Perhaps one of these people listed is a good church member. You know what pastors do with their best church members in most cases? The best church member comes on Sunday morning and the pastor says, “It’s so good to see you again. I can always count on you every Sunday morning. God bless you.” And he thinks, “Well, it’s a good thing I don’t need to do anything for him.” But then an addict comes, and the pastor says, “Oh, how is it going? You still have problems?” And he spends fifteen minutes with that drug addict. Now this drug addict is still a drug addict. He hasn’t grown one centimeter as a Christian. You see the wrong priorities? If you would help the solid church member to grow in his Christian life, that man could talk to the addict or could begin to do other things. It’s a handicap that in

many of our churches we neglect working with the best people. We keep church leaders focused on the people with the biggest problems.

So, we've had them write down the names of some people who could be disciplined. Then you refer back to the question about activities they like. You take that question even further, "Is discipling MEN an activity that you would like to do? Have you thought about this? Do you see the value in it?" And from there you can begin to develop a discussion: "What do you need to change here in order to have time to train three men? Well, you wrote here about the choir." Or he says, "Maybe I could quit the choir." You might comment, "I see that you've put a minus by this activity. If you don't really like to sing, perhaps you could quit that activity to free up time for other things." Or "Is there another person that can sing in the choir in your place?" Choir is a wonderful instrument to teach and train new believers. I personally think there are many better spiritual activities for mature believers, because mature believers need to do other more spiritually productive things.

So, you see now through these time management questions, the idea is to show them areas that are weak or unnecessary. They should reject some of these things because they are not priority activities. So, there are two things they must do:

- a. They must set priorities.

And what are priorities? What does it require to make it a priority? The goal. And how do you get that? You must choose. "I will teach you, but I'm sorry, Ivan, I don't have time to teach you." Priorities will always require "Yes" and "No." And that's why many people don't like to do it, because it means rejecting something. It means maybe admitting that you are doing something that's not very important. So, the first thing is to set priorities and the other thing is:

- b. They will see that unless they train somebody to help them, they are never going to get all the work done.

That's why I came here. To help teach you how to train other people to do spiritual work. That's the purpose of Church Based Leadership Training — to multiply spiritual leaders, to multiply spiritual workers. That's why one of our key verses is 2 Tim. 2: 2. If you have too much to do, then I am just in the right place. I'm so glad I came. And I have fantastic news for you. If you'll study with me for one year and you'll learn how to help prepare other people, you'll have less things to do. You will have helpers. You can go on to higher priorities and you can do the things you want to do. You see what an encouraging motivational presentation it is.

That concludes this section. Now point D.

D. Evaluation Questions for New Group Leaders

This is a whole new level of questions that are not for new people, but for budding leaders. We are talking here to people who have begun leading another group. Maybe they've done it for three months or so. Maybe they have finished one series. You are now meeting with them, and you begin to ask some questions.

1. **What are your general feelings now that you have led a study group?**

This question will help you to pick up some problems as well as show whether a person has a vision for training other people. Another question is coupled to this one:

2. **Are you ready to continue?**

If they have a some students who are becoming active in the things for God, they are very likely motivated to continue. When you discuss the answers to the question "Are you ready to continue?" maybe somebody is not ready. "Oh, it was so difficult, I want to quit." But he hears other testimonies, and he says, "Uh, I didn't do this." Or "My students weren't prepared." Or "Oh, that's why it is not working." And through your group discussion he sees others who like it: he is successful, she is happy, "Well, what's wrong with me? Maybe I should continue, too." You get a lot more motivation from the comments of other people than if you the coach would lead this meeting yourself.

3. **What was your greatest joy?**

It's always wonderful to hear testimonies of success or how somebody was blessed or how somebody was helped or encouraged. And coupled to this question there is:

4. **What was your greatest frustration?**

Now notice that throughout this lecture whenever we have two opposite questions you always begin with the positive question first and then the negative question. Always a positive question goes first. So, what was your greatest frustration? The students didn't do the homework. That's about guaranteed. Unless you have a way of making it an exciting priority for them it will not happen. And if they don't do their homework, you have no training ministry. The key issue, and that's a Biblical issue, is, "Are they using the materials? Are they doers of the Word?" What did Jesus say? "I'm so glad that you are thinking about it. I'm excited you like my stories. I'm glad it spoke to your heart. I am excited you want to be a spiritual person." No, he said, "Go and **do** it." It's like the last line on the paper. What do you do on the last line of the paper? You sign it. And basically, that's what this is, "Be doers of the Word." And if you can get your students motivated to do their homework assignments, to do spiritual work, you will raise up "doers of the Word."

5. What have you seen as the personal benefit for yourself? Your men?

He may see that he is beginning to have several elders who are getting to be active in his church now. Or maybe he sees that now he can reach that village and start a new church there. I don't know how it will help him ride around the world on his bicycle. But starting a new church, that I can see.

And what have they seen as a benefit for their men? "Well, he is less critical. She is teaching better. He has built a better relationship with his wife." For instance, I received a testimony from one wife. They had been married only about three months, and he went to a *Basic Christian Life* group. He really didn't want to be there, and he really didn't do anything. He was just a listener, but he came back, and he got interested and after a couple of weeks he said, "Do you have a book for me?" And he began to do the lessons. Before the first course was over this brand-new wife went to the coach and said, "I am so glad that you came and led these *Basic Christian Life lessons* My husband is a totally changed person. He so much better and our marriage has improved so much." That's a wonderful testimony.

6. How do you feel about the dynamics in your group?

We've talked about group goals, and we've talked about group principles so the dynamics that the group member shares will show you how well these principles are working in the group he is leading.



7. Was there good participation and discussion?

I was in one group one time and the pastor asked a question and a student gave a short answer, and the pastor corrected his answer for twenty minutes to make sure that it was good. Then he asked another question and, guess what, nobody wanted to answer that question. Is that surprising?

8. Do you feel you could benefit from more instruction in the area of leading a group? What areas?

If they say, "Well, yes I need some help" it opens it up for you to do the twelve principles or seven small group goals or it leads to talking about what a coach should be doing in a small group, or examples of different types of questions. It gives you an opening to share. It helps them to become more expert.

9. How would you evaluate the workload for the students? Light? Too heavy? Just right?

You need to help them evaluate whether the pace is suitable to the group of students they are working with. If the students just cannot keep up with the work, then they need to add more sessions. The idea is not to get through it quickly, but to learn.

10. What problems did you face in implementing the seminar assignments?

The seminar assignments are basically the written assignments. The assignments that are in the workbook. And the connected question that we have is:

11. What problems did you have with the practical assignments?

The practical assignments are basically leading a small group, preaching, or doing evangelism or having a discipleship ministry. You need to always emphasize with your leaders how extremely important it is that all of the students are doing the practical assignments. The NLC goal is always to train for ministry and if we are not doing that it is no longer training--it is a useless accumulation of knowledge.

CLOSING

We have talked about 12 principles for successful small groups.

We have talked about 7 small group goals.

We have looked at exploratory questions for small groups.

These are all things that you should know and use. I always find this lecture on “Principles of Small Groups” interesting. I’m glad somebody taught it to me. I have used these questions often and they work. Thank you.

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

Practical assignment

Completed

- Make and implement a plan about how you will achieve each of the small group goals.
 - 1. Write at least one paragraph about how you will make a focused lesson for your next small group. How will your students live differently after this lesson?
 - 2. After your lesson evaluate which of the 7 small group goals you did meet, and how did you do that?

Please note: Bring the plan and evaluation to the next workshop.