

## Small Group Philosophy of Ministry

### **The Purpose of Small Groups is to . . .**

**“EQUIP” AND “ENCOURAGE” ONE ANOTHER TO LIVE GREAT COMMISSION LIFESTYLES** (Mt. 28:19-20) by developing and nurturing interdependent relationships that are focused on practical biblical instruction, fellowship, prayer/praise, and outreach. As the Small Group Ministry matures and God permits, new leaders are identified and mentored for spawning new groups. Typically, each Small Group will move through two stages of maturity.

### **The Developing Stage (typically the first 6-12 months)**

*Practical, Biblical Instruction:* Learning Scripture and applying it to everyday circumstances so members increasingly think and act “biblically” in all of life. This activity primarily involves the systematic exploration and explanation of God’s truth in the context of teaching and open discussion. Some guidelines for teaching and open discussion are:

- ✓ Sharing passages that speak to the situation; i.e., minimize opinions and maximize truth
- ✓ Teaching and admonishing one another without displacing our Wonderful Counselor and Paraclete
- ✓ Encouraging obedience to the clear teaching of God’s Word
- ✓ Extending grace to all by allowing every member the necessary space to grow; i.e., no unbiblical demands or ideals imposed upon other members (Jm. 2:13)
- ✓ Respectfully disagreeing with others and/or requesting one-on-one discussions for further clarification

*Fellowship:* Sharing how God is uniquely moving in us as we experience His progress in our personal lives, our church, and our world. Useful guidelines for Fellowship are:

- ✓ Commitment to practicing the “one another” principles found in Scripture (e.g., Jn. 13:34-35; Rom. 12:10; 14:13; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:2, 32; 5:21; 1 Th. 5:11; Jm. 4:11; 1 Pt. 1:22; 5:5; 1 Jn. 1:7).
- ✓ Attending small group meetings regularly (Heb. 10:24-25)
- ✓ Sympathizing with others without offering unwanted/unnecessary counsel or guidance (Pr. 10:19; 17:27; Gal. 6:2)
- ✓ Growing in love for other members by meeting individual/group needs where possible (Gal. 6:10; 1 Pt. 1:22)
- ✓ Sustaining a healthy, biblical dependence upon others yet taking responsibility for our personal growth

*Prayer/Praise:* Expressing our gratitude and needs to God in the company of other group members. This activity entails bringing requests to God with thanksgiving as we expectantly await His response (Dan. 9:17-19; Philip. 4:6; Jm. 1:5-6) and exalting the work of God in worship and song. Guidelines include:

- ✓ Being honest and transparent with group members without compromising our personal intimacy or confidentiality with God, spouse, or others
- ✓ Reflecting carefully upon God’s activity in ourselves and others so we come prepared to offer words of encouragement, genuine requests, and thanksgiving (Rom. 14:19; Philip. 1:3)
- ✓ Heartfelt singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs that are addressed to the Lord and to one another (Eph. 5:19)
- ✓ Seeking God’s answers with a biblical expectancy (Mk. 11:24; Lk. 11:9-10; Jn. 16:23)
- ✓ Respecting “silent” prayer requests (Pr. 14:10)

*Outreach:* Communicating the Gospel message in a biblically faithful, culturally relevant way so as to bring others into an understanding of their need for a committed relationship with Jesus as Lord and Savior. The Gospel message is to be defined for clarity and defended for purity as the only means of eternal hope and happiness (Acts 17:2-4; 1 Pt. 3:15). The primary, though not exclusive, means of declaration is through relational-evangelism built on trust, biblical lifestyles, and a keen application of Scripture to human need (Jn. 4:10; 1 Thess. 1:4-9).

### **The Maturing Stage (typically after 6-12 months)**

The Maturing Stage is built upon the core elements of the Developing Stage. A group in the Maturing Stage will typically experience a sequence of six phases that cultivates spiritual and relational depth which, when mature, culminates in the fulfillment of the ministry objectives as stated above. A small group in the Maturing Stage will encounter:

1. *Change in Overall Dynamics:* Intimacy is enriched, authentic worship is realized, and accountability is increased.
2. *Level of Commitment:* Members experience the personal value of their small group so that dedication grows accordingly.
3. *Sense of Ownership:* Not only are others’ needs identified, but members actively and spontaneously meet those needs.
4. *Ministry of Compassion:* The will and the skill of members work to meet the practical needs of the unchurched in an effort to love others as God loves and build a context in which to communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
5. *Potential for Growth:* Leaders are identified and mentored for establishing new small groups (populated by a few existing group members and neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family not yet involved in church).
6. *Scope of Impact:* As members prayerfully and intentionally socialize their small group experiences within their neighborhoods and workplaces, awareness of and demand for more small groups will increase resulting in the Small Group Ministry celebrating the fulfillment of its ministry objectives as stated above.