



Group Leader

TRAINING AND REFERENCE MANUAL

Index:

- GROUPS IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR CHURCH 2
- CONVERSATION 5
 - MAIN SERVICE 6
 - MID-WEEK STRATEGY MEETING 7
- APPLICATION 9
 - EVENT DAY 9
 - DEBRIEF 10
- TRUTH
 - GOSPEL AS NARRATIVE 12
 - GOSPEL AS DOCTRINES 14



Groups in the Context of our Church

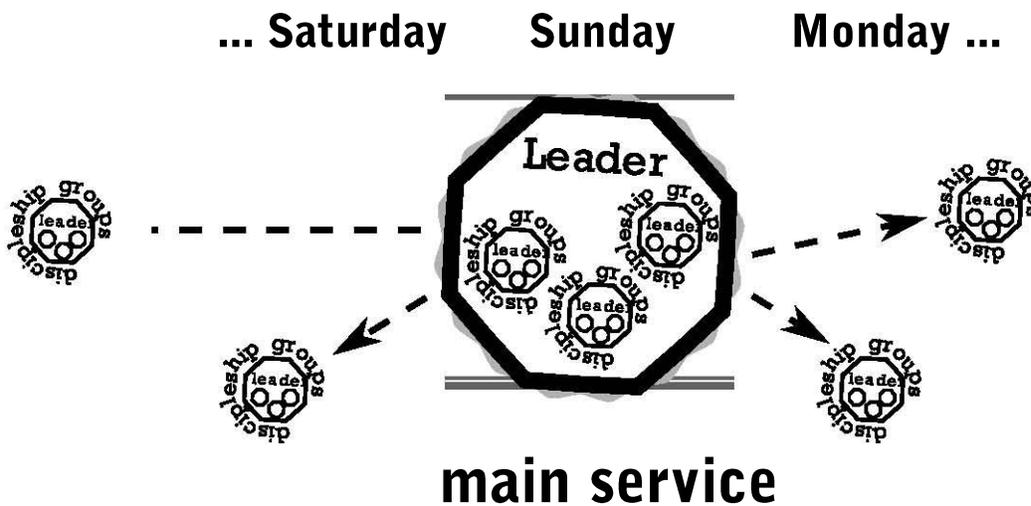
main service



The Big Picture:

Approach

Discipleship happens best in small groups, like a body composed of cells. The cells are an integral part of the whole but also independent units themselves. Our goal is to use the main service as an incubator to create healthy cells that will eventually move from the service into weekly meeting groups with a ministry orientation. Like cellular reproduction, new cells first form within a healthy, functioning cell and don't break off from it until they are fully formed themselves. The main service, then, functions as the first cell from which the others come and take their initial identity. By forming the groups within the service, this allows pastoral oversight to their initial formation ensuring our core values are passed successfully into each weekly group that later forms.



Rather than growing a new Sunday congregation out of several small groups, we hope to grow several small groups out of a new Sunday congregation. Groups wouldn't leave the Sunday gathering but would develop substantial life and ministry beyond the main gathering. This way there would be both a large corporate and small cellular aspect to the body.

Time Frames:

Like natural human development, growth happens in stages.

Phase 1 – incubation

Initially, we are just one group: the main service. This season is needed for the groups forming inside the service to develop and be guided by pastoral leadership.

Phase 2 – first steps

After the groups have had a season of development within the main group, they will be encouraged to have occasional, one-off, weekday gatherings centered around ministry ideas formed in the main service discussion times. This way their initial weekday meetings are still the direct product of what is happening in the main gathering giving a practical connectedness to the whole and allowing for pastoral oversight to be present but transitioning from direct to indirect. These initial gatherings will allow for a measure of shared life and practical application not possible in the main service alone.

Phase 3 – maturity

Once groups have successfully run individual, weekday gatherings for ministry projects, they will form a core group that meets on a regular schedule and can engage in shared life to a fuller degree. Groups may continue to have a ministry focus, but will also take on elements of fellowship, worship and study as normal parts of group function. This represents the full process for cellular development. From here it is possible that a cell would grow and multiply itself through the same process as it was formed.

Phase 4 – grandchildren

Sometime after the initial groups have reached maturity, they will likely come to a point where their size requires them to form groups within themselves. This is the beginning of a second wave of multiplication. This phase is possible, but not required. It will occur naturally as a response to growth. The timing of this phase is not as important as ensuring that second degree growth only comes from mature cells so that the ministry's values are able to be communicated to the new cell intact. Premature multiplication would be viewed as a break in the body where the connection between the new forming cell and the original main service gathering is too weak to be effective.

Main Service:

Since worship is responding to God, the service will be viewed as one prayer conversation with Him, rather than merely including prayer. For this reason the service will open and close with a corporate prayer as we collectively engage the Father. In keeping with this idea of responding to God, we will also open each service with a call to worship that is in principle revelatory. That is, it will either be a scripture passage or possibly statement of belief (creed, doctrine, etc.) that magnifies God's attributes. All of this should be done in a manner that has the church participating, not merely observing. Worship is our response, so we all must engage. Typical call to worship readings will be done responsively with the use of projectors or handouts to allow full congregational participation.

In keeping with the family emphasis of our body, the call to worship will either be done by family heads or group leaders (biological or ecclesiastical family leaders). Additionally, the teaching segment will include breaking out into groups (with designated leaders) to discuss the application of the day's passage. This allows both a family dynamic in our teaching as well as a degree of informality in how we engage the truth.

Discussion groups will be charged with taking the passage that was shared and coming to personal and group applications. This is to support our goals in discipleship and being experiential. Group goals in particular are encouraged, not merely for discussion sake but as something the group leader could facilitate them doing that very week. Our goal should always be to find an immediate hands-on application for the truth of God's Word. In our view this is where worship, discipleship and experience come together. The pastor will include a question and answer segment at the end of their exegesis in order for the groups to make sure they understand everything sufficiently before they engage in crafting their applications.

Further worship in song will conclude the group times. This has a dual purpose of allowing a corporate response to our time in the Word as well as to build scheduled flexibility into the service for groups that need more time in discussion, for whatever reason. Groups can continue their discussions while others sing without the service ending on them. A fellowship time or meal after the service would further allow this kind of flexibility if resources and facilities allow.

Notes on Section:



Coaching Small Group Discussions for Growth

General Pointers:

Questions

Avoid “yes” and “no” questions when possible or pair them with explanatory follow-up questions. One word answers don't lead to conversations, nor do questions with only one or two possible answers. Start with questions using the words “how”, “when” and “what.” These questions are open and usually lead to story form answers that will draw others into the conversation. For example, “How could you do this in your daily routines this week?” is relevant to almost any Bible topic and has a different answer possible for every member of the group. Other samples: “When is it hardest for you to apply this passage?”, “What is one way you could put this passage/goal/idea into practice this week?”, “Can you think of a time when you saw someone do this?”, “How could this group practice this idea together?”

Motivation – “VPO”

Motivation is an emotion that drives behavior. This emotion comes from several factors including a person's perception of the following things: the value/benefit of the thing being worked on, the likelihood of it getting done and their personal ownership of the idea or plan. For summary, think of these as “*Value, Possibility and Ownership.*” Keep these in mind and affirm them when relevant as a strong sense of these factors will increase the degree to which the person is actually motivated to get things done. Phrases like “If you accomplish that, it would be a significant step” or “That idea has potential to really make a difference” help affirm value, whereas using their own words wherever possible affirms ownership. Possibility can be gauged through questions like “How likely do you think you are to be able to do that?” or “How do you feel about that step?” Try to be mindful of the person's motivation level throughout the process, but especially at the end so that they leave ready to get busy.

Main Service:

Goals – Spark Generator

The main service conversations have two goals:

1. Spark personal application
2. Generate ideas for the group to do together later in the month

The trick is balancing your time so that as many group members as possible share how they might personally apply the week's sermon, while still getting some time to talk about how the message can be applied through community action. Personal applications are good, but you rarely get to observe them and give feedback, so they aren't the ideal way to accomplish discipleship. When we can do something together, there is a chance to learn together.

Take Aways

In respect to our two main service goals, there are two different "take aways" that should happen. For personal applications, the "take away" is a concrete action they will do that week. We want to pair this action with a form of accountability, either by reporting back to the group in the future or pairing up with another group member to follow up on it. For the community actions, the "take away" will always be a follow up meeting to flesh out the details. You'll want to either set a date for this or assign a person to coordinate it.

Main Service Conversations - "What-How-What"

Conversation is more than one-off questions. Begin with concrete questions that engage real events, experiences or relationships. For example, "What are some areas you've struggled with this?", "When have you done anything similar?", "What were some times that you should have put this into practice?". Ask follow-up questions of "why" and "how" that engage the answerer's motives, emotions or rational (e.g. "Why would you do that?", "Why is that hard?" or "How does that make you feel?"). Then resolve the discussion into concrete applications with "what" oriented questions like "What is the next thing we need to do to make this happen?", "So, what will you do this week?" or "What is an observable way you can put this into practice?".

Note Taking

The main service should generate lots of ideas that could be done together as a group. The group leader needs to keep track of these ideas, to bring them back up down the road so that the group never runs out of ministry options. Not every idea needs to be recorded. You'll filter them in light of their relevance to the Gospel (see final section of this manual). The more closely related to the Gospel an idea is, the higher priority it should be given in bringing back up.

Mid-week Strategy Meeting:

I. Phases:

- a. Listen
- b. Explore
- c. Plan

II. Listen – Ask check-up/informational questions about life:

- a. Relationally “How are things at home?” “How are you getting along with ___?”
- b. Emotionally “How have you been feeling lately?” “What has been heaviest on your mind lately?” “What have you been excited about lately?”
- c. Spiritually “How are things at church/youth group/etc?” “How has your walk with God been lately?” “What has God been teaching you?” “What are some things you’ve heard from God’s Word since we last talked?”

III. Explore – Evaluate where they are on a particular goal:

- a. Assess
 - i. Past
“What have you done so far?” “What have you tried in the past?” “What other experiences have you had in this area?”
 - ii. Progress
“How has it gone?” “What are you learning?” “What have you done so far?”
“What has improved?”
 - iii. Pitfalls
“Where have you felt stuck?” “What didn’t work?” “What isn’t getting done?”
“What’s keeping you from finishing?”
- b. Resources
 - i. People – “Who” questions like “Who are some people that might be able to help you?” “Who else is involved in this?” “Can you think of anyone that might have experience in this area? Who?” “Is there anyone we should think about talking to about this? Who?”
 - ii. Group Experiences
“Does anyone have any similar experiences? What worked for you?”
“What are some things others in this group have tried that helped them?”
 - iii. Other – “Is there anything else that you could be using to work on this?” “What resources do you or people you know have that might help on this project?”

IV. Plan

- a. Recap what they have told you and allow them to agree or modify your summary – “So tell me if this sounds about right: you’ve made some good progress on ____, ____, and ____ but ____ hasn’t really gone well because of ____, ____ and _____. You’ve got some resources we can think about in these areas: ____, ____ and _____. Does that sound right? Did I miss anything? Would you change anything?”
- b. Strategize
 - i. Put it all together “What can you do with the resources you have given me, to take another step forward on your goal?” “Of the things you told me about, which do you think will be most effective at helping you with your goal?”



hands-on Complete Learning Cycles

Faith with Works:

Event Day

One of the best ways to learn is through immersion. This is how we learn our first language and how to function in our home culture. When it comes to the faith, we want to allow the things that we learn in lecture and conversation in our main gatherings to be fleshed out through immersion when our groups venture out together in ministry. In planning and running an event day, here are the basic elements to be mindful of:

Everything is Spiritual

It's easy to get lost in the details of administrating an event. While the details matter, ultimately we need to be mindful of union with Christ through the event. We have an opportunity to meet Him afresh every time we step out together in service. To that end, in planning the event, here are some elements that should always be present:

Prayer – as what opens, closes and permeates our ministry. We do not labor on our own, but in constant communion with the One in whose work we are partners.

Petition – while prayer is to be the norm, specifically inviting Christ's revelation and empowerment should be a planned part of our time. Petition helps sensitize us to God's heart before we venture into His work.

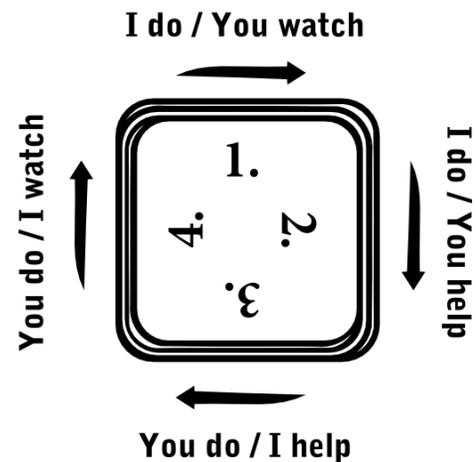
Praise – "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above," (Jas. 1:17a). Just as we invite God's active involvement in our events, we also give Him the glory due Him afterwards. Praise trains our eyes to see God in our midst.

Everything is Theological

The best way to know what you believe is to see and practice it in life. Helping our members connect what they confess and what we do is an essential component of discipleship. For example, when we serve the poor or help restore run-down property, we are demonstrating our belief in redemption. It is the practical side of what is meant in confessing that Jesus Christ died to redeem us from the corruption that is in the world through sin. Additionally, it demonstrates the Christian definition of love as a gracious commitment to sacrifice of ourselves for another's benefit according to the example of Christ. In the course of any outreach event, part of the leader's responsibility is to draw out these theological connections so that your group experiences their faith in action.

Phases in Discipleship

In the course of any event, you have the opportunity to disciple the group members into greater roles of responsibility and maturity within the group. This is not merely skill development, but a means to invest in their character in concrete, observable ways. The illustration to the right gives the four stages of discipleship. With any given task you can have members at different stages and those you are discipling, in time, should have group members going through the same cycles with them as well. It is important to remember that as they watch, help and slowly take over a given role, you are being given opportunities to speak into their lives. A key to this process is for the leader to be transparent about the struggles, temptations and motivations associated with the role being passed on. Whether you are at the first stage (being watched) or the final stage (watching), thought should be given toward accomplishing roles in a manner that is explanatory rather than merely efficient. Embracing discipleship means embracing a manner of doing things, not an additional task on your event to-do list.



**Adapted from "Creating a Discipleship Culture"
by Mike Breen**

Debrief

After an event is over, there needs to be some method in place for you to lead the group in a time of reflection. This is important, in order to allow the learning opportunities that presented themselves during the event to be reinforced and examined. Ideally, debrief should be part of the event day, but in cases where time is limited or the event is late in the evening, it can be done another time, though long passages of time between the event and the debrief can be very detrimental to the learning benefits of the day.

In leading a debrief time, focus on those things that will help the group improve or learn more about their faith. Avoid side discussions that have no future value or faith content. Ideally, a healthy debrief time will include both positive and negative assessments as well as silly and serious reports. To neglect any one (all serious, all positive, etc.) will produce a lopsided discipleship and an unhealthy group culture. We want our groups to learn how to rejoice and mourn together; to accept correction and to give encouragement.



The Gospel as our Anchor

Two Lenses:

The Gospel as Narrative

While lots of things may come to your mind when you hear the word “Gospel”, we want to be careful to hear it in its proper context: scripture itself. Depending on their background, when the typical, American Christian is asked, “What is the Gospel?” they are likely to share some variant of a topical recitation on sin, repentance and faith culminating in a recommendation to pray a short formulaic prayer known as “the sinner’s prayer.” Technically speaking, this is not the Gospel, nor is it representative of how the Gospel was shared in the New Testament. This modern Gospel presentation is definitely inspired by the Gospel and is not a bad thing, but we need to make sure that we have a biblical foundation for our evangelism or this manner of presentation can sometimes run awry and end up misrepresenting the actual Gospel.

The word “Gospel”, when translated literally, means “good news”. The problem with the topical presentation is that it reads out more like a manual or a self-help column, which have their place, but are not what can be classified as “news”. When the Apostles and Evangelists of the New Testament shared the Gospel, they always responded with a narrative answer. The Gospel, to them, was the exciting part of an unfolding story. As the biblical scholar NT Wright has pointed out more than once, the key difference to understand is the difference between “news” and “advice”. If the Gospel is just topical points or abstract ideas that lead to a suggestion for the hearer (however urgent), then the Gospel is merely good advice. Understanding the Gospel as “news” means understanding it as an announcement and the hearer’s response as just that – a response to the information about what has happened. It is much more akin to running into a room and informing the inhabitants that the floor beneath has caught fire – this is news. It is the kind of news that does have implications for what they should do next in order to not incur the negative consequences of this turn of events. By contrast, the Gospel is not bad news, like the fire, but good. It is like the announcement that Windows 10 has been released as a free upgrade for all Windows 7 and 8 users for the next year. It is good news, and yet this good news, if you are a user of the specified operating system, will compel you to do something if you believe the news and want to benefit. You are (at the time of this writing) sitting in a window of time between the announcement and the next stage where the good news of the free update will no longer be good news. That’s how the New Testament authors saw the Gospel. If we’re going to be Gospel tellers in our community, we’ve got to learn how to tell news and consequently a little bit of history too.

There are several places in scripture where we can read examples of the early Christians sharing the Gospel. It would serve our group leaders well to begin to familiarize themselves with these accounts and note what they have in common. For the sake of this resource, we will set one of them out in the following text and recommend that group leaders make this account one that they strive to commit to memory. In the passage below, taken from 1 Corinthians, Paul tells the Gospel and references that this is the same message that was delivered to him and that he wants them to make sure is still being passed on. That seems like a good enough reason to make this the account we use as central for our church.

The Gospel Story of Paul and Corinth

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

“For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.”

~ 1 Corinthians 15:1–11 (ESV)

In this section you just read, note that the Gospel was primarily an account of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection with reference to its fulfilment of scriptural prophecy and its relevance to sin and the responses of those who hear of or witness the events. This would be the “bare bones” Gospel. In other places in scripture more or less back story is given, but this would simply represent context – reminding the audience of the larger story so that the new part makes sense. This may include bits on God and creation, overviews of the history of Israel and often accounts of the Old Testament prophecies that are fulfilled in Christ. The earlier accounts that were given to largely Jewish audiences majored on the history of Israel as context. Later, as the Gospel was shared in less Jewish environments, the emphasis tended to shift to God and creation, putting the Gospel in the context of the larger story of the world, rather than the local story of Israel. In both cases, the Gospel was the good news that climaxes the history being shared with the resurrection of Jesus.

Assignments

In order to get comfortable sharing the Gospel, we’re recommending group leaders memorize 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, and write out how they personally responded to the message of the Gospel (your personal version of what Paul shared in verses 8 through 11).

For further study, here are some other narrative accounts that may be helpful to read and reflect on:

- Acts 3:11-23, Gospel message by Peter
- Acts 7, Gospel message by Stephen
- The Apostles' Creed (representing an early Christian way of sharing the essential message we have discussed): "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell, the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the one holy church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

The Gospel as Doctrines

When we talk about the Gospel, while the biblical concept is best expressed in the form of a narrative and the pinnacle of the story being Christ's life, death and resurrection (i.e. the "Good News" part), it is nearly impossible to tell that story without contextualizing it into topics of doctrine that we take directly from the narrative. When you ask the average evangelical "what is the Gospel?", they are more apt to answer with these topical definitions than to tell the Gospel story. Strictly speaking, they are wrong, but in a more general sense, they are right. How can the story be good news if we don't know the meaning of it? To tell you that Mom has returned from the store is neither good nor bad news in itself, but if the context was one of anticipating her purchase of candy, then the news becomes good. It is good given the context of your love of candy. In the same sense, the Gospel is the Gospel precisely because we understand it to mean some things. These things are a certain set of doctrines. Helping our congregation "connect the dots" between these Gospel-core doctrines and what we do in ministry is indeed helping them to see their service in a Gospel-centered way. To that end, a group leader ought to familiarize themselves with the doctrines that explain the Gospel.

Glory of God

First and foremost, we hold that God is good and His works and creations are good – even glorious. To understand all our other beliefs, we need first to have an ideal to measure against. When the rich young ruler in Matthew chapter 19 came to Jesus and called Him "Good master", Jesus replied with "why do you call me good? There is none good but God." God is our ultimate standard and we express this quality in our concept of His being glorious. In God and in His intentions, there is a perfection that is truly satisfying, inspiring and defining. This is why we give Him praise when we glimpse beauty, design or providence. We confess with James that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights with whom is no variation nor shadow due to change." (Jas. 1:17)

Fall of Man

While God's glory is still visible in our world, it is muted and often defaced. In confessing God's glory we must necessarily explain the current contrasts that we see to this truth, namely, that there is a fallenness that has come to God's creation. This is what we understand in the idea that man has sinned – that we have "fallen short of the glory of God" (Ro. 3:23) and that all creation suffers a manner of futility because of our state (Ro. 8:20). We would express this in an understanding that we are broken, corrupted and guilty in our current state apart from God's grace. The current sinfulness of man is universal in its reach (all are sinners) and in its impact (all of creation is affected by it).

Grace

The remedy to man's fall is a gift given to us by God, out of His own good pleasure, not by any merit of our own. Grace, in reference to salvation, is this understanding that God saves us freely and without condition. Knowing we are saved from our fallen state by the grace of God frames our understanding of the Christian life as one of gratitude and love rather than obligation and pride.

Love

Christianity defines love by the example of Christ's sacrificial death (1 John 3:16, 4:10-11). Christian Love, then, is a commitment (in contrast to merely a feeling) to give of ourselves sacrificially to another for their benefit. We would understand this in harmony with the other doctrines mentioned to imply that what truly benefits another person would also glorify God. True love takes the hard road to help another draw closer to God.

Salvation/Redemption

While all humanity has sinned and thus merits destruction and condemnation, we believe that God, in His great love and mercy, chooses rather to redeem and save many (Eph. 2:4). This means a Christian value is restoration – even in cases where giving up seems justified. We hold that God is justified in His judgement of any man because all have sinned. This justified judgment is part of what makes His choice to save and redeem us back to Himself and to a right manner of living such a gracious and merciful thing.

Hope

Our belief in the Fall of Man means we are honest in our assessment of the world around us – that it is broken and incapable of righting itself because the brokenness is at such a fundamental level. This does not, however, mean that we are hopeless. Christianity teaches that fallen man can be restored through faith in the Gospel of Jesus. We believe that in the Gospel we see God breaking into our world and overcoming the power of sin in the triumph of the resurrection over death. If God has already begun to enact His power to fix our world, then there is always hope and this hope is not rooted in our current circumstances but in the historical reality that Christ was raised from the dead.

Notes on Section:
