



Leaders' Training Manual



Hope Church, Corby

An Elim Pentecostal Church. Registered Charity no. 251549

Leaders' Training Manual Content

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Session 1:

‘Why Life Groups?’

Part A: The biblical basis for Life Groups

Q: What is the point of having Life Groups?

God created us for relationships

'Faith is always personal, but never private.' (Jim Wallis)

God is relational. Within the Godhead, we see the most perfect expression of community: Father, Son & Holy Spirit in perfect fellowship and constant, loving communion. He doesn't need anything or anybody to make Himself complete; He created humanity for His glory, not because He was lonely. Yet, it is clear throughout the Bible, as it records His dealings with those He created, that He delights in His children (Zeph 3:17; Psalm 147:11) and seeks to be in fellowship with them. The Gospel is all about how, through Jesus, our broken relationship with God has been restored (2 Cor 5:18-19). He took the initiative because He loves us and wants to be in relationship with us.

We are made in God's image so it is not surprising that we are also relational beings. In the beginning, God saw that Adam was on his own and said that it was, 'not good' for him to be alone (Gen 2:18), so made him a companion, Eve. Our desire to be in relationship with others is God-given and flows directly from the heart of God. Broken relationships, isolation and loneliness are the biggest cause of unhappiness and depression in our world today.

Old Testament small groups

God made a covenant with the Hebrew people and made the following promise: *'I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.'* (Exodus 6:7) These people were chosen to reflect God's glory to the world and be a model for Kingdom life here on earth. Although the Israelites didn't always do a good job of reflecting God's glory, we can still see principles that God put in place for how Kingdom community should work.

Nation, tribes, clans & families

The people of God were vast in number but were organised into smaller groups: the nation was divided into twelve tribes; the twelve tribes were sub-divided into clans (groupings of several families); and within each clan was the single family unit.

1000s, 100s, 50s & 10s

When Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, came to visit on one occasion, he saw that Moses was trying to provide direct leadership to the whole nation. This left many people feeling frustrated and most likely left Moses feeling burned-out! Jethro made the inspired suggestion that Moses should organise the nation into smaller grouping for accountability and place trustworthy leaders over groups of 1000s, 100s, 50s and 10s (Exodus 18:13). This is what happened and things changed for the better.

Jesus & the Disciples as a small group

Jesus took the most unlikely bunch of men – fishermen, political activists and a tax-collector (amongst others) – and shaped them into Kingdom-advancing, Spirit-filled, good news-sharing world-changers! Most people would have written them off but Jesus looked past the reputation and outward appearance and saw their God-given potential. How did He draw that potential out? He took a risk, brought them close and poured His life into them. They shared their lives together: Jesus laughed, cried, walked, talked and ate with them. He showed them what Kingdom ministry looked like as he preached the Gospel, healed the sick, cast out demons and raised the dead. He then gave them a go! Finally, He handed over the family business to them (Luke 22:29); before He returned to the Father He commissioned them to go to the ends of the earth. Filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, this unlikely bunch of misfits began to turn the world upside down in His name!

It all happened in community. Large crowds followed Jesus; of those who followed, some believed; of those who believed, He chose twelve to be with Him; of those twelve, He gave priority to three (Peter, James & John), who He allowed closer to share unique insights and experiences. This pattern of community living was adopted by the apostles as they brought around them significant people who they would also pour their lives into.

Small groups in the early Church

Acts 2 records the community life experienced by the early church. This was still a raw, immature church. They had no buildings, no sound system, no multimedia projector and no website. They had no official recognition by the State and had no political influence. They experienced all the problems you would expect when a diverse group of people share life together...yet the quality and simplicity of their life together is truly breath-taking (vs42-47):

'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions

to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.'

Big and small at the same time

Imagine the Holy Spirit being poured-out at Pentecost and 3000 being added to the church in Jerusalem that day. Allowing for the fact that some, who were visiting Jerusalem for the festival, would return home, there was still a logistical problem. How would these new believers grow in their new-found faith as part of the Jerusalem family of believers? The answer seems to be in v46. They met together in the temple courts (for large gatherings of the whole church) and also in each other's homes (smaller, more intimate gatherings of a few believers). They were a *big* church that expressed community in *small* gatherings in homes.

New Testament examples

These are some examples in the New Testament of small church gatherings in homes:

*'You know that I [Paul] have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and **from house to house.**' (Acts 20:20)*

*'After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, **they went to Lydia's house**, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.'* (Acts 16:40)

*'Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also **the church that meets at their house.**' (Romans 16:3-5 – see also 1 Corinthians 16:19)*

*'To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker— also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to **the church that meets in your home...**' (Philemon 1:1-2)*

The 'one-anothers' of the Bible

The Church is the Body of Christ here on earth and is called to be like Him, living out His will and purposes until He returns. As we love each other deeply and express the same kindness, grace and generosity to one-another that Jesus showed to us, it creates hunger in a love-starved world. There is no more powerful witness than genuine, self-giving love! A simple word study in the Bible of the phrase 'one-another'* shows the depth and quality of love that God wants to see amongst His children. It is hard to live this out in the context of large Sunday gatherings, where conversations are fleeting and there are so many people to see. It's only when we gather in smaller settings on a regular basis that we can more purposefully share our lives, build relationships of trust and act like family.

*(*See Appendix 1 for a list of the 'One Another' commands in the Bible)*

Small groups in Church history

In the Middle Ages, St Francis of Assisi gathered Christians together in small groups for prayer and study. Various sections of the Anabaptist movement in Europe formed dynamic small groups that met in houses. The Hutterites in Moravia, Southern Germany, lived out radical community life using a small group model. The Lutherans also used small groups for nurturing.

By far the best known example of small groups in recent Church history was in the movement founded by John Wesley. Wesley organised Christians into small groups called 'Bands' and hundreds of thousands of Christians were nurtured in this way. This method of discipleship became known as Methodism. Having seen their effective use by the Moravians, Wesley introduced small groups to provide an opportunity for mutual confession one to another (based on James 5:16), and to give encouragement and support in living wholeheartedly for Christ. John Wesley is often referred to as the Father of modern small groups.

Part B: The centrality of LGs in Hope Church

Q: Why do you think the 'One Another' commands are expressed most effectively in small groups?

The 'D' word...keeping the main thing, the main thing!

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) is global in its scope but personal in its outworking. Jesus told the disciples to go and 'make disciples' – that is still the heart of God's strategy for revealing his glory throughout the earth. A disciple is someone who follows, learns-from and increasingly becomes *like* their Rabbi [Jesus] over time. So our job in making disciples is to help people find faith and then to walk with them on their journey towards maturity in Christ – the journey from spiritual infancy to spiritual adulthood. In addition to laying doctrinal foundations, that involves setting an example and showing people how to bring God into every area of life: marriage, parenting, friendships, work, finances, ministry etc. We express it in Hope Church like this:

*'We want to see people moving **Towards Jesus**: passionate disciples in loving community, living missionally.'*

Towards Jesus



PASSIONATE DISCIPLES



IN LOVING COMMUNITY



LIVING MISSIONALLY

So the main thing is...**GROWING AS DISCIPLES!**

Life Groups provide an excellent environment where Christians can experience genuine biblical community and encourage one-another on their journey of faith. So we encourage everyone in the church to join a Life Group to help them grow as disciples of Jesus.



The **FIVE** AIMS of Life Groups

Our Life Groups are as diverse as the people in the church but they all share the same common aims around the goal of growing disciples of Jesus:

1. Growing in **COMMUNITY**

'They devoted themselves to...the fellowship' (Acts 2:42)

2. Growing in **PRAYER**

'They devoted themselves to...prayer' (Acts 2:42)

3. Growing in **THE WORD**

'They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching' (Acts 2:42)

4. Growing in **MINISTRY**

'Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles...they sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.' (Acts 2:43-45)

5. Growing in **MISSION**

'...and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.' (Acts 2:47)

The **FIVE** VALUES of Life Groups

We expect all group members to adopt five basic values:

1. **Commitment**

Groups are most effective when people attend. Group members should try to be at the group as regularly as possible and get in touch with the leaders when they're not able to make it.

2. **Contribution**

Each group member brings something valuable and unique to the group so everybody is encouraged to contribute. Contributions should always be valued and affirmed in the group.

3. **Consideration**

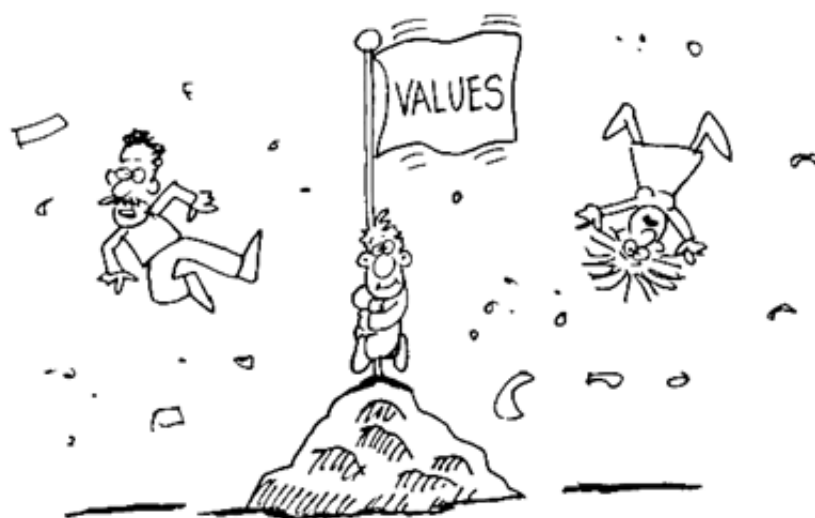
Nobody in the group should dominate. Nobody should speak or behave in a way that belittles or dishonours another person.

4. **Confidentiality**

Groups need to be safe places to share where people can be open, honest and accountable. So, in order to build trust to a level where that is able to happen, it is expected that what is disclosed in the group should stay in the group (unless there are legal implications).

5. **Care**

Groups are a great way to express 'family' together. They are the main place in Hope Church to give and receive pastoral care. Group members should look for opportunities to build relationships and care for one-another both inside and outside of group gatherings.



Session 2:

'Leadership'

Part A: The heart of a leader

Think of a successful leader past or present:

Q: What do you admire most about that person?

Q: What made them a successful leader?

Study the following passages and discuss what they teach about leaders and leadership. Then spend some time answering the questions below:

Mark 10:42-45 John 21:15-17 1 Peter 5:1-4

Q: What differences should there be between Christian leaders and leaders in the world?

What is leadership?

A person is a leader when others follow them...it's as simple as that! You don't need a title to be a leader – in fact, some people with the title 'leader' are *terrible* leaders! John Maxwell has famously defined leadership as '*one life influencing another.*' To him, the *essence* of leadership is **influence**. Using that definition, the *goal* of leadership must therefore be to influence others to achieve certain outcomes. This kind of influence can clearly be seen in great leaders such as Winston Churchill and Martin Luther King...but it can also be seen in people like Hitler and Mussolini! All were effective leaders in their own way.

So what marks out a *Christian* leader? My definition of Christian leadership is this:

'The exercise of godly influence to inspire and empower people to move onto God's agenda.'



It all starts in the heart

Self-leadership

By far the most important (and probably most difficult) part of leadership is **self-leadership**.

On an aeroplane, when the stewards give safety announcements, they always instruct you to use the oxygen mask *yourself* before giving oxygen to someone else. You first, then others...otherwise, you will pass out and be no help to anyone! Before a leader gives out to others on *behalf* of Jesus, they need to have spent time *with* Jesus. To use another analogy, it is possible to drive a car on petrol fumes for a while but eventually it will break down. We constantly need to be re-filled: spending time in prayer, studying God's Word, fellowshiping with the Holy Spirit and seeking out life-giving, accountable relationships.

Character over gifting

"Talent is a gift, but character is a choice." (John C. Maxwell)

When appointing leaders in the Church, Paul emphasised character over gifting every time (see 1 Timothy 3). Gifting is important, but who we are is *much* more important. God is more interested in what's in our hearts than our talent, competence or experience.

When appointing a king to replace Saul, God led the prophet Samuel to the family of Jesse in Bethlehem. When Jesse's sons were brought before Samuel, the prophet looked at the eldest and, seeing that he

looked the part, assumed that God would choose him. The Lord, however, was using different criteria for choosing His leader:

*‘When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.” But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. **People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.**”’ (1 Samuel 16:7)*

When it became clear that none of the sons that Jesse presented were God’s choice for king, Jesse confessed that he also had another son. David wasn’t a warrior, he was a shepherd; He was also the youngest and least noteworthy of the brothers...so who would have chosen *him*? Samuel had him brought in and anointed him as the next king of God’s people. **God saw what was in David’s heart and knew what kind of man he was...even when no-one else had spotted it!**

Christian leadership starts in the heart.

A leader...who me?

If you are stepping into leadership, you may be feeling a measure of uncertainty, insecurity and even fear. You may be saying things like, “I’m not sure I can do this!” and, “I’m not qualified to lead others!” Most Christian leaders have struggled with these kinds of feelings. So instead of letting them hold you back, let them drive you to God in dependence. This is the truth: **we can’t...but He can!**

We can’t! Jesus said: “...*apart from me you can do nothing.*” (John 15:5)

He can! Paul said: ‘*I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.*’ (Philippians 4:13)



When we realise that it is not *our* ability, *our* intelligence, *our* strength or *our* power that changes things; when we realise that it is ‘Christ in us’ (Col 1:27) that makes the difference, our approach to life and ministry is transformed. Our weakness suddenly becomes a sluice gate that opens, allowing God’s power to flow through:

‘We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.’ (2 Cor 4:7)

The Apostle Paul was privileged to glimpse into heaven and see what most people see. In order to keep him from becoming proud, God gave him a ‘thorn in the flesh’ (2 Cor 12:7). We don’t know what this ‘thorn’ was – it may have been a physical affliction or it may even have been a person who was persecuting him. Whatever it was, it was not nice. So Paul prayed that God would take it away:

‘Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.’ (2 Corinthians 12:8)

Did you see that? God’s power is made *perfect* in our *weakness*. When we feel that we haven’t got it in us...good! Because when we know we *can’t*, we turn to the God who can! Our limitations then become

the stimulus for calling on a God who has no limits; our weaknesses become the stimulus for calling on a God who is all-powerful! Paul stated it like this:

'That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.' (2 Corinthians 9-10)

Moses' journey to leadership

For the first forty years of his life, Moses lived in a place of strength. As a member of Pharaoh's household he had social prestige, wealth and youthful strength. When he became aware of his peoples' oppression, he used his strength to kill an Egyptian soldier who was mistreating the Hebrew slaves. That wasn't God's plan for deliverance. He had to flee for his life and ended up tending livestock in the quiet fields of Midian for his second forty years.

So his youth was spent in a plush palace and his middle age was spent in peaceful pastures. Then one day he stumbled on a burning bush, which turned out to be God's call for his later years:

'Behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.' (Exodus 3:9-10)

How would you have felt? Moses was terrified! So much so that he took up his case with God:

Objection 1: "I'm a nobody, God."

'Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"' (Exodus 3:11).

Objection overruled: God promised Moses, *"I will be with you."* (Exodus 3:12).

Objection 2: "They aren't going to believe me, God."

'Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, "The LORD did not appear to you?"' (Exodus 4:1).

Objection Overruled: God gave a taster of the miracles that would accompany Moses' obedience by turning his staff into a snake and healing his leprous hand (Exodus 4:2-8).

Objection 3: "I am not gifted to do this, God."

'Moses said to the LORD, "...I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.' (Exodus 4:10).

Objection Overruled: *"Who gave human beings their mouths...Is it not I, the LORD? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."* (Exodus 4:11-12).

Objection 4: "Don't make me do this, God."

'Moses said, "...Please send someone else.' (Exodus 4:13).

Objection Overruled: Since you have such little faith for this, I'll send Aaron to go with you and *"I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do"* (Exodus 4:15). Now get moving!

So do you still feel unqualified for leadership? Do you still feel out of your depth? If you do, you're in good company! Apart from Moses and his confidence problems, look at a few other flawed heroes in the Bible:

- **Noah had a drink problem**
- **Jacob was a deceiver**
- **Samson was a womaniser**
- **David was an adulterer and murderer**
- **Elijah felt suicidal**
- **Peter was a coward**
- **Thomas was full of doubts**
- **Timothy was timid**



Kingdom work is supernatural work. If it doesn't require real faith and dependence on God it is probably not worth doing. If you have been saying things like, "I don't feel I can do this!" and, "I'm not qualified to lead others!" remember Moses and the others. And remember that God's call is not about *you*; It's about *Him*. So are you willing for God to use *your* weaknesses to show *His* power?

A few last thoughts...

1. **Be yourself** – you're a one-off. There is not a single other person on the planet like you. You have unique gifts, experiences, perspectives and personality traits. God made you that way. So don't waste a moment comparing yourself to others or trying to be somebody that you're not. You don't have to live up to anyone else's expectations of who you should be. With God's help, just be the best version of YOU that you can be.
2. **Walk closely with Jesus** – some people think it doesn't affect others if we're not walking closely with Jesus. No-one else knows so it doesn't really matter. It does matter...it *really* matters! A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. There is a funny phenomenon in Christian leadership where those who are being led will, over time, become like their leader. So be on-fire for Jesus. Take up your cross and follow Him. Don't slip into compromise. Passion for Jesus is contagious; so is apathy and half-heartedness!
3. **Be a godly example** – discipleship is more than teaching doctrine and passing on information. What people will be most impacted by is your life! An obedient Christian life is something that is 'caught not taught'. If you are in leadership, people will be watching you, whether you realise it or not. By the choices you make, you are either inspiring people to greater levels of devotion or giving them permission to compromise. Paul told Timothy not to let people look down on him because of his age – instead, he told Timothy to set an example for the other believers to follow. Show them what it looks like to love Jesus with all of your heart!
4. **Be humble** – God won't share His glory with another. Our lives and our ministries are for His glory, not ours. Whenever you get something wrong, own it and say sorry. Whenever you get something right...give thanks to God. Don't pay too much attention to those who either pour out criticism or pour out praise – both can lead you to bad places. Instead, live for an audience of One and make it your goal to please Him. Be like a mirror that reflect His glory to others and deflects the glory back to Him.
5. **Get your hands dirty** – don't lead from afar. Christian leadership should be up-close-and-personal. Don't be afraid to get involved in people's lives. Make a special effort to serve those who are not like you and to love the unlovely. Go where Jesus would go and do what Jesus would do.

Part B: The role of a Life Group leader

Q: What would the ideal Life Group leader look like?

Expectations...

- Share the vision: know where you're going (and take people there)
- Facilitate Body ministry (everyone gets to play)
- Build away from yourself (equip & release others)
- Be enthusiastic (you set the tone)
- Prepare well and have a plan (don't wing it)
- Embed the 5 'aims' and the 5 'values'
- Be a pastor (and create a culture of care)
- Have the difficult conversations early
- Raise up Joshuas
- Plan to grow and reproduce (step out of your comfort zone)

Session 3: 'Practicalities'

(Some of the following ideas are borrowed from *Growth Groups* by Colin Marshall & *Walk* by James L. Nicodem)

Part A: The group gathering

Q: What do you think people most look forward to about coming to Life Group?

Create the right environment

Environment is a very important part of ministry. Where you meet and the conditions in which you meet play a much more important part than you might think. It is much easier to relax, enjoy and engage if you are in pleasant and comfortable surroundings. Think about how some of the following might be a distraction to people:

- The room being too cold or too hot
- The light being too bright or too dim
- The room being unclean or untidy
- The room being overcrowded

Delegate tasks

There are some things that *you* need to do and other things that you don't. Identifying the things that *others* could do and then delegating those responsibilities is an important part of leadership. For instance, if a group meets in your home you may feel responsible for putting out chairs, buying-in refreshments, serving teas & coffees and giving people lifts. But resist the temptation to do those things yourself. Delegate. Find others who can share the load.

Set boundaries

It is important to communicate expectations. If you don't communicate where your boundaries lines are drawn then people may cross the line without knowing. This could cause you and others unnecessary frustration. The following are some boundary line to consider. You may think of others:

Communicate the 5 Life Group values

These are boundary lines that need to be drawn clearly: **Commitment, Contribution, Consideration, Confidentiality & Care**. Communicating these values is important so that everyone knows what is expected of them and so that behaviour can be measured against them.

Starting and finishing on time

People may arrive late and still expect a coffee before the meeting starts. Don't delay the start of the meeting until everyone is there and had a drink. Start on time regardless and people will learn that they will miss out if they don't arrive on time.

Similarly, aim to finish at an agreed time. If you over-run occasionally, that's fine (but when you do, still give people the opportunity to leave on time because they may have an early start in the morning). Also, there are sometimes those who like to hang-around after everyone has gone. If this is something you are unhappy with, gently re-draw your boundary lines with them.



Managing group dynamics

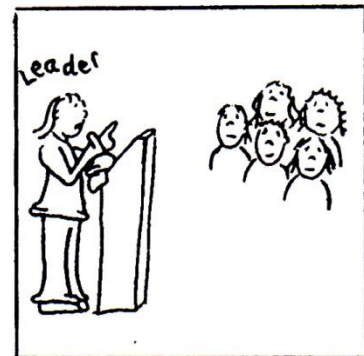
The leader's role

Leadership styles will vary from group-to-group but the role of Christian leadership is always to equip and release *others* to do ministry. Therefore, part of the Life Group leader's job is to facilitate the active involvement of other group members.

In order to do this, it is important to realise that...

...it is *not* a lecture

The leader uses the group gatherings as a personal ministry platform and the group as a captive audience. The group members listen and maybe ask a few questions.



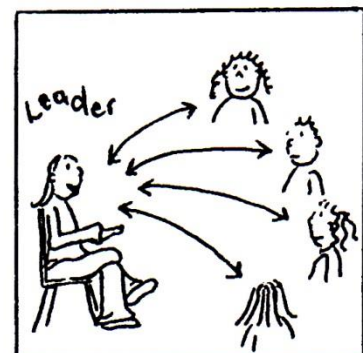
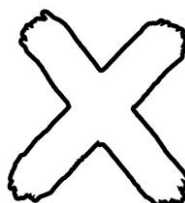
...it is *not* a long dialogue

The group leader has a long dialogue with one of the group members. The rest of the group listens-in for a while but will quickly lose interest.



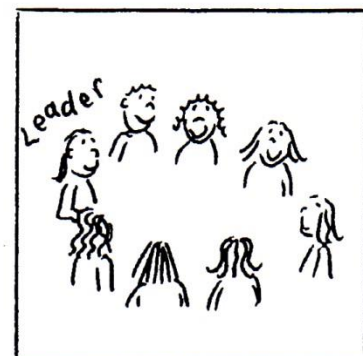
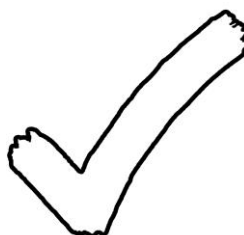
...it is *not* a series of dialogues

The group leader acts as the chairman and has several dialogues with some of the group members. The others are kept outside the discussion and have to wait their turn.



...it *is* group ministry

The group leader's role is, ideally, to facilitate group involvement. Each group member should feel free to play an active part...and be encouraged to do so. The leader steers the interaction between members, manages group dynamics and encourages everyone to participate. In this way, the group learns and grows *together* as every member contributes something.



Managing different personalities

Some personality types are constructive and need to be encouraged by the leader:

- **Peacemaker** (*likes to resolve conflict*)
- **Focuser** (*keeps people 'on track'*)
- **Encourager** (*looks for positives about others*)
- **Empathiser** (*draws out people's feelings*)
- **Initiator** (*gets the ball rolling*)
- **Summariser** (*draws together strands of the discussion*)

Some personality types, however, bring more of a challenge to group dynamics:



1. **Mr Argumentative** (*plays 'devil's advocate' and enjoys controversy*)
2. **Mr Joker** (*likes to make light of everything*)
3. **Miss Know-it-all** (*likes to share their expert knowledge*)
4. **Mr Monopoliser** (*likes the sound of their own voice*)
5. **Miss Onlooker** (*doesn't like to join in*)
6. **Mrs Prickly** (*can sometimes come across as a bit unfriendly*)
7. **Mr Thick-skinned** (*"Don't come too close!"*)
8. **Miss Head-in-the-clouds** (*can sometimes be a bit 'flaky'*)
9. **Mr Side-tracker** (*likes red-herrings*)

Q: Pick out three of the personality types from the previous list. What are the positive and negative effects of these people on group dynamics?

Q: What is the most effective way to manage the effect these people have on group dynamics?

Part B: Effective Bible studies

John Milton Gregory in *The Seven Laws of Teaching* (Baker, 1972) describes teaching and learning:

'Teaching is arousing and using the learner's mind to grasp the desired thought or to master the desired act.'

'Learning is thinking into one's own understanding a new idea or truth or working into a habit a new art or skill.'

Why is Bible Study important?

As a church we have a high view of Scripture. We believe the Bible is God's Word and is both inspired and inerrant (i.e. accurate and without error) as originally given. We believe the Bible contains timeless truth and is authoritative in matters of faith and conduct:

'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness' (2 Timothy 3:16)

In charismatic and Pentecostal churches, there is a healthy focus on the person and activity of the Holy Spirit. There are sometimes experiences and manifestations that accompany the work of the Holy Spirit – and these can certainly help us feel closer to God. But true faith 'comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God' (Romans 10:17). So it might be tempting, when we gather, to focus primarily on experiences and supernatural manifestations, but the way we grow in maturity as Christians is by feeding on the Word of God. Life Groups are a great way for people to engage with the Bible in such a way that applies biblical truth to situations in everyday life:

'Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.' (Psalm 119:105)

James says the Bible is like a mirror that shows us the true state of our lives. Just like a mirror reflects our face so that any unsightly blemishes can be seen and washed away, so the Bible exposes sinful attitudes and behaviours in our lives that can then be repented of:

'Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.' (James 1:22-25)

So James says that if we 'look intently into' (v25) – i.e. study and understand – God's Word, and do what it says, we will be blessed. Study of the Bible is an essential part of our growth as Christians.

More than just a facilitator

You are not *just* a discussion facilitator; you are a teacher. You are not *just* the person who encourages the group to share their views and ideas; you are the one who leads people to the Bible in order to help them discover biblical truth and apply it to their lives.

Your group Bible study will therefore most likely begin with a short time of teaching around a chosen passage or theme. The discussion will then follow...led skilfully by you. Questions should be used during the discussion to help people discover for themselves what the Bible teaches.

C.O.M.A. (a model for studying a passage of Scripture)

CONTEXT

What does this passage mean to its original audience? What was their context? Don't try to work out what God is saying to *you* until you know what God was saying to the original audience (a lot of this information can be found on the introductory page at the beginning of each book in your Bible):

- **Historical setting**

Who wrote the book? Who were they writing to? When did it happen? What was going on in the world at the time? What problem was the author addressing?

- **Literary setting**

Different rules should be applied for interpreting different kinds of literature in the Bible (laws, prophecies, historical narratives, wisdom literature, poetry etc.)

- **Theological setting**

Interpret the Bible using the Bible – don't take a verse out of context – what does the rest of the Bible say about this?

- **Immediate setting**

Where does this idea fit into the sentence, paragraph, chapter and book in which it's found?



OBSERVATIONS

Make as many observations about the passage as possible. What should we be looking for?

- **The theme**

If you had to summarise the passage in one word or phrase, what would it be? Sometimes the passage headings that have been added in your Bible give you a clue.

- **Repeating words or ideas**

If God puts repeated words or ideas into a chapter, it's a sure sign that He wants you to notice something.

- **Something striking**

Is there something that jumps out at you from the passage? Maybe it's something that God reminds you of or something that you see for the first time.

- **A truth about God**

Whatever passage you read, it is telling you something about God. It might be something about His attributes, His plans, His dealings with His creation.

MESSAGE

What is the basic message that God wants you to discover through the passage you are studying? To answer that question you must already have completed the first two steps of COMA (C & O focus on the *original* audience; M & A now puts the focus on *you*).

The message should naturally emerge out of your observations. If you have made multiple observations...just pick one of them. James L. Nicodem (in *Walk - How to Apply the Bible*, 2013) uses the following example:

'While reading a chapter in Second Samuel I was struck by the fact that David had a special group of followers called 'the thirty', and a subset within that group called 'the three'. That was my observation. What message might I draw from such an observation? Here's the one that occurred to me: "No leader can mentor everybody. So good leaders pour time and attention into a handful of followers.'

Your message should attempt to capture a timeless principle (i.e. a lesson that can be applied to everyone who has ever – and who will ever – read the text).

APPLICATION (or the 'so what?' question)

The application is where the rubber hits the road. This is the 'so what?' question. This is the most important part of a Bible study, the part where you go away with something you can put into practice. The application is always practical and can touch any area of a person's life: work, family, marriage, friendships, values, attitudes, finances, temperament etc. So in order to 'walk the Word' an application needs to be both *personal* and *specific*.

For example, using the above insights by James L. Nicodem, his application may have been: *'I am going to find three young leaders who I will intentionally mentor for a year.'*

Or perhaps you've just read a passage on prayer. Your message may be, *'Prayer is important.'* Great! So what are you going to do about it? You reply: *'I need to pray more.'* Wonderful! That's *personal*. But it's not *specific*. The question then is *how* are you going to pray more? Which is when you decide: *'I'm going to get up ten minutes earlier each day in order to spend more time in prayer before work.'* That's much better...it's both *personal* and *specific*.

If you are struggling to identify a specific application, put on your **SPECS**...do you see a:

Sin to confess?

Promise to believe?

Example to follow?

Command to obey?

Statement about God (*i.e. a truth about who he is or what He's done*)?



Asking good questions

After studying the passage, think of some questions that will enable people to dig deeper into what the passage teaches. You may like to start with a general question around the theme. So, going back to King David's 'thirty' and 'three', you may open with a question such as, *'Could you share a little about someone who has been a mentor to you?'*

Follow up this general question with questions that refer people to specific verses in the passage (e.g. *'Read verse 2...what does it mean to speak the truth in love?'*) You may find it useful to ask questions around each section of C.O.M.A.

There are certain types of questions that encourage open discussion and get people engaged in the Bible study. There are others that close down discussion and work against people digging deeper into God's Word. Asking good questions is a skill that you can develop – here are a few pointers:

Use OPEN-ENDED questions

Type of question	Example	Value
Leading	"You all agree, don't you, that Jesus died on the cross?"	Bad – suggests only one answer...your answer! Does not encourage people to grapple with the text.
Limiting	"Did Jesus die on the cross?"	Bad – it closes down discussion because it anticipates only a 'yes' or 'no' answer.
Open	"What does the passage say about why Jesus died on the cross?"	Good – this stimulates group discussion.
And then...wide open	"Great...what do <i>others</i> think about why Jesus died on the cross?"	Good – it stimulates maximum thought and discussion. Good for following an open question.

Use FACILITATING questions (to keep the discussion flowing)

Type of question	Example	Value
Inviting	"Mary, what do you think?"	Good – includes an individual in the discussion.
Returning	"That's a great question. What are your <i>own</i> thoughts on that?"	Good – puts the onus on group members to discover the answers themselves.
Widening	"What do <i>others</i> think about Paul's question?"	Good – brings others into the discussion.
Re-focussing	"Those are great thoughts. But how does the Bible answer Alan's question?"	Good – stops the discussion going off on a tangent and focusses people on the Bible.
Expanding	"Could you maybe unpack that a bit more Rachel?"	Good – allows the group to gain a better understanding of what has been said.
Clarifying	"I wonder if you could explain a bit more what you mean by that John?"	Good – ensures that group members fully understand what has been said.



Application questions that hit the target!

Make application questions PERSONAL

Effectiveness	Example	Value
Way off the mark	“What should people do about this?”	Bad – no personal application
Wide of the mark	“What should people in our society do about this?”	Bad – very little personal application
In the vicinity	“What should the Church do about this?”	Better – personal application, but only as part of a wider group
On target	“What should you do about this?”	Good – personal application but still excluding the person asking the question.
Bulls-eye	“What should we each do about this?”	Great – personal application for everybody present.

Make application questions SPECIFIC

Effectiveness	Example	Value
Wide of the mark	“What should be done about this?”	Bad – not specific at all
In the vicinity	“What could we do about this?”	Better – more specific but vague
On target	“What shall we do about this?”	Good – quite specific
Bulls-eye	“What shall we do about this now/today/during the next week? ”	Great – very specific

Recommended Reading:

Session 1:

What Every Small Group Leader Should Know by Larry Kreider, 2010

Simple Small Groups by Bill Search, 2008

Session 2:

Courageous Leadership by Bill Hybels, 2002

Next Generation Leadership by Andy Stanley, 2003

Session 3:

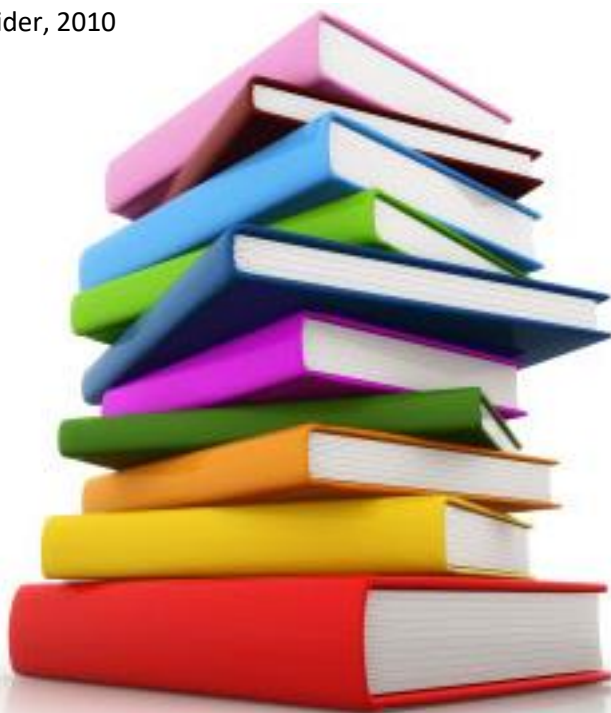
The *Bible Savvy Series* by James L. Nicodem, 2013:

Epic: The Storyline of the Bible

Foundation: The Trustworthiness of the Bible

Context: How to Understand the Bible

Walk: How to Apply the Bible



<http://christianitytoday.imirus.com/Mpowered/book/vsmgr11/i3/p36>

Appendices

Appendix 1:

The "One Anothers" of the Bible

Summary of the "One Anothers"

8	love
4	greet
3	encourage
2	live in harmony with
1	accept
1	admonish
1	agree with
1	bearing with
1	compassionate to
1	devoted to
1	do not slander
1	fellowship with
1	forgive
1	hospitality to
1	humility toward
1	instruct
1	kind to
1	serve
1	speak to
1	spur
1	stop passing judgment
1	submit to
1	teach
<hr/>	
36	"one others"

The “One Anothers” of the Bible

the "one another"	Reference Verse
accept	Romans 15:7 “ <i>Accept one another</i> , then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”
admonish	Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you <i>teach and admonish one another</i> with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”
agree with	1 Corinthians 1:10 “I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you <i>agree with one another</i> so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”
bearing with	Ephesians 4:2 “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, <i>bearing with one another</i> in love.”
compassionate to	Ephesians 4:32 “ <i>Be kind and compassionate to one another</i> , forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”
devoted to	Romans 12:10 “ <i>Be devoted to one another</i> in brotherly love. <i>Honor one another</i> above yourselves.”
do not slander	James 4:11 “Brothers, <i>do not slander one another</i> .”
encourage	1 Thessalonians 5:11 “Therefore <i>encourage one another</i> and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”
encourage	Hebrews 10:25 “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us <i>encourage one another</i> --and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”
encourage daily	Hebrews 3:13 “But <i>encourage one another daily</i> , as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.”
fellowship with	1 John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we <i>have fellowship with one another</i> , and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”

The “One Anothers” of the Bible

forgive	Colossians 3:13 “Bear with each other and <i>forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another</i> . Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”
greet	Romans 16:16 “ <i>Greet one another</i> with a holy kiss.”
greet	1 Corinthians 16:20 “ <i>Greet one another</i> with a holy kiss.”
greet	2 Corinthians 13:12 “ <i>Greet one another</i> with a holy kiss.”
greet	1 Peter 5:14 “ <i>Greet one another</i> with a kiss of love.”
hospitality to	1 Peter 4: 9 “ <i>Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.</i> ”
humility toward	1 Peter 5:5 “Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with <i>humility toward one another</i> , because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”
instruct	Romans 15:14 “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to <i>instruct one another.</i> ”
kind to	Ephesians 4:32 “ <i>Be kind and compassionate to one another</i> , forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”
live in harmony with	Romans 12:16 “ <i>Live in harmony with one another</i> . Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.”
live in harmony with	1 Peter 3:8 “Finally, all of you, <i>live in harmony with one another</i> ; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”
love	John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: <i>Love one another</i> . As I have loved you, so you must <i>love one another</i> . By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you <i>love one another.</i> ”
love	Romans 13:8 “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to <i>love one another</i> , for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.”
love	1 John 3:11 “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should <i>love one another.</i> ”

The “One Anothers” of the Bible

love	1 John 3:23 “And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to <i>love one another</i> as he commanded us.”
love	1 John 4:7 “Dear friends, let us <i>love one another</i> , for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.”
love	1 John 4:12 “No one has ever seen God; but if we <i>love one another</i> , God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”
love	2 John 1:5 “And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we <i>love one another</i> .”
love deeply	1 Peter 1:22 “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, <i>love one another deeply</i> , from the heart.”
serve	Galatians 5:13 “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, <i>serve one another</i> in love.”
speak to	Ephesians 5:19 “ <i>Speak to one another</i> with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
spur	Hebrews 10:24 “And let us consider how we may <i>spur one another on</i> toward love and good deeds.”
stop passing judgment	Romans 14:13 “Therefore let us <i>stop passing judgment on one another</i> . Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.”
submit to	Ephesians 5:21 “ <i>Submit to one another</i> out of reverence for Christ.”
teach	Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you <i>teach and admonish one another</i> with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

Appendix 2:

Life Group Development Plan

1. Growing in community

Q: What will relationships look like in your group?

Ideas for growth in this area:

- *We will have at least _____ social events together per year*
- *We will encourage people to spend time together socially outside of group meetings*
- *We will encourage people to care for one another pastorally and love one-another in practical ways outside of group meetings*

2. Growing in prayer

Q: How do you hope prayer will be encouraged and practiced in the group?

Ideas for growth in this area

- *We will plan to have at least _____ focused prayer sessions per year*
- *We will encourage people to pray for four people regularly and share testimonies*
- *We will regularly share testimonies of answered prayer*

3. Growing in the Word

Q: How will people learn-from and engage with Scripture in the group?

Ideas for growth in this area:

- *We will provide resources and encourage people to read the Bible privately*
- *We will give opportunity to those who seem gifted to lead Bible studies in the group*
- *We will memorise Scripture together*

4. Growing in ministry

Q: How will people discover, step-out in and use their gifts to serve others (both in the group and in the wider church)?

Ideas for growth in this area:

- *We will give everyone an opportunity to serve practically in the group*
- *We will give regularly give space to listen to God, share prophetic insights (words, pictures, scriptures, words of knowledge, words of wisdom, discernment) and pray for healing.*
- *We will encourage everyone to have a ministry in the wider church*

5. Growing in mission

Q: How will you encourage group members to *be* good news and *share* the good news with those outside the church (both individually and as a group)?

Ideas for growth in this area:

- *We will plan, as a group, to hold at least _____ outreach events per year*
- *We will look into running an Alpha Course as a group*
- *We will regularly share testimonies of evangelistic opportunities and encourage one-another to be bold in personal outreach*

Vision

The vision for my group is:

Maintaining contact

My goal for contacting group members is:

- I will contact _____ members per week
- A practical amount of time to spend contacting group members weekly is _____
- The best time(s) for me to contact group members is _____
- My primary means for contacting will be (phone, e-mail, texting, letter, etc.) _____
- I will pray for _____ of my group members each week

My Development as a Leader:

The following adjectives describe my strengths as a group leader:

One area I can improve in is:

Additional training I should plan to get:

Coaching/mentoring that I plan to seek out: