



# Introducing Small Groups



## Why we need to do something different

### The individual need'

It has become clear that some in the church are unfulfilled and feel that the church should be providing something for them that it is not.

This has been articulated in a number of I want statements.

- I want people to pray with
- I want people to socialise with
- I want people to care about me
- I want people to help me
- I want people to learn with
- I want a place to bring my husband/ friend



### The call of the 'Post Christian Era Church'

In a post christian era, where the structures and practices of 'church' are challenged by the world, there is a significant challenge in the church to move from attending church to being church. This can be seen as a return to making disciples:

We need to shift from just reaching people to making disciples.

We need to shift from merely informing disciples to equipping disciple-makers.

We need to shift from calling people to attend programs and events to leading people to truly attach to God and others.

We need to shift from unhealthy striving to thriving as Spirit-empowered disciples and emotionally healthy leaders.

And finally, we need to shift from merely accumulating people into our buildings and programmes to deploying disciple-making disciples to the ends of the earth."

### Our Mission

As individuals and as a church family is to advance God's Kingdom among people of all ages; within our communities; Impacting wider culture and beyond.



### Our Vision

To be a Spirit led, loving community, where everyone is welcomed to gather; to be transformed through their deepening relationship with God; to experience the fullness of God's kingdom; to fulfil their God-given purpose; and to actively carry His kingdom to all peoples.

### Our Values

In all we do we will exhibit the following values:

- A Passion for Jesus
- A heart for the Least and the Lost
- Authenticity
- Abundance
- Faith Building
- Life Impacting

## Why Small groups"

Small groups are really where church happens but they are not a replacement for church.

To equate small groups with church is to miss Scripture's emphasis on elder-led (1 Tim. 1:5)

Word and sacrament (Rom. 10:14; 1 Cor. 11:17-34), and corporate worship practiced by a distinct congregation (Heb. 10:25).

Small groups are not a replacement for the church but provide a setting where the church begins to experience the kind of closeness that will characterise the life of the redeemed in the age to come.

### A small groups can be

The primary place of belonging, discipleship

A community, not just a meeting

Uniquely shaped by community and place, as well as by people's gifting and calling.

### Small groups can be the place where individuals

grow together through mutual discipleship

regularly eat and pray together

connect with other small groups

connect to the wider church



Each small group will be different

## A small group's emphasis is...

... characterised by five practices inspired by the church described in Acts 2: 42-47:

Doing life together (κοινωνία koinonia) - Greek for 'fellowship', not just weekly meetings.

Gathering regularly around the Word and communion.

Devotion to prayer and worship.

Sharing generously what we have with others.

A focus beyond ourselves in making disciples and seeing the wider community transformed.

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. 44 Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. 45 They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved

- Act 2 42-47 CSB



## Ten Roles of a small group

**1 Discipleship.** Small groups provide opportunities for believers to learn from each other as they apply the gospel within the intimacy of relationships (Titus 2:1–8). “Who is Jesus?” (cf. Matt. 16:15) is critical to hear in church. But we also need friends to help us wrestle through that question face to face. We need people who are willing to get to know us so they can help us walk with Christ more faithfully (Acts 18:24–26).

**2 Study.** There could be an opportunity to meet to discuss and apply Scripture. This may be independent of the ‘Sunday’ message’ or may expand on teaching within the church. We have a range of materials that you may access. By discussing and applying Scripture together, members can learn to understand not only the Bible, but also each other, so that each will know better how to love the other.

**3 Curiosity.** The group should cultivate an environment of openness and trust, all in the group are encouraged to ask questions they might not ask elsewhere. “I heard the pastor use the word ‘justification’ before. Now I just heard it again. What does it mean?”

**4 Accountability.** When we think about church accountability, we are right to think about elders (Titus 1:5–9). But elders should first equip God’s people to work out their problems together. Every member should encourage and gently urge their brothers and sisters to better follow the Lord (Matt. 18:15–20; Gal. 6:1–2). This has to be in the context of relationship, trust, confidentiality and being non judgemental.

**5 Shepherding.** Small groups can help believers assist each other, they can also help church leaders in their pastoral care. Paul “lived among” the believers at Asia (Acts 20:18) so that he knew how to proclaim what was helpful from house to house (v. 20). Small groups can help close the gap where people feel that they are not known well enough by the church to help them through the tears and trials of life.

***10 Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honouring one another.***  
***11 Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord.***  
***12 Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer.***  
***13 Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality***

**Romans 12:10-13 CSB**



## Ten Roles of a small group (continued)

**6 Mission.** Small groups can be an important stepping stone to church worship. Likewise, many people might find it easier to invite friends who are unready to come to church to a small group. More importantly small groups are the missional presence in a location, or social group.

**7 Hospitality.** Many believers feel drawn to practice the biblical imperative of loving those to whom they have no natural bond (Heb. 13:2, Rom. 12:13, etc.), but they don’t always know how to begin. The very thought of hosting non-family members can intimidate. But as believers gather in homes for food and spiritual conversation, those present can witness hospitality blossoming from theory to practice. Just don’t forget to invite others

**8 Commitment.** Many churches have a number of guests or occasional visitors “orbiting” the church; they are considering landing but not sure if or how they can. Small groups can provide a way for those who are trying—or considering whether they would like to try—to break into the life of the church.

**9 Prayer.** In the New Testament believers prayed together “with one accord” (Acts 4:24). Believers pray in private and in their family networks. In corporate worship, they pray heartily while the church leader voices the words for the community. But in small groups, children and parents, neighbours and friends, mature believers and new converts help each other come to the throne of grace, articulating their praise and petitions in personalised words and accents. In such settings, we can all learn to pray.

**10 Socialising.** Fellowship is not a spiritually-neutral activity. As we catch up with friends and make new ones, we practice our calling to understand and love each other. As we share and listen to stories, we learn how others are attempting to intersect the common life and the sacred life.



Small groups can help us develop a greater sense of christian community in a disconnected age. They can facilitate the formation of deeper christian friendships, encourage greater spiritual accountability among church members, and become a natural opportunity for inviting unbelieving and unchurched (or under-churched) neighbours to interact with a covenant community.

# Practicalities

*Each group may be different in size, emphasis, meeting time, meeting location and meeting pattern. However each group should meet regularly and should have the same heart for the church and the people*

*Each time a group meets it may focus on different aspects. Prayer may be a focus one week, or taking communion, or having coffee and cake with the neighbours, or study. In the fullness of time each group should exhibit the five characteristics of the church in Acts and should have a healthy balance across the ten roles of a small group and possibly a few things beside. None of this can be forced. The speed a group moves towards this has to be lead by the context of the group, the people within it and the Holy Spirit.*

*There are only two steps to starting a small group.*

**1. Pray lots**

**2. Meet together**

*A great starting point would be to ask a few people to meet on the week's between our mid-week teaching to discuss that. Then why not just meet up for coffee one day.*

*Perhaps you are all free (or some of your group) are free to pray for half an hour one morning (or every morning).*

*Maybe, one of your group needs a hand to do something practical - one or two or even the whole group could help.*

*The basis of starting a group and making that group flourish is to meet as a group. There doesn't need to be a teaching focus or an activity in order to meet. The identifying factor of a successful small group is the participants desire to be together even when there is no curriculum or agenda*

## ***It's a group but it's not a small group.***

*Groups that are short term, or have a specific focus are valuable and encouraged. Examples may be - Weigh and Pray, or Going Deeper Prayer or a bible study on Acts All of these are great activities and can co-exist with small groups but they are not a small group A small group should be a blend of people and should be growing towards the five practices of the church of Acts.*



Thomas didn't invite anyone to his Bible study, misunderstanding the definition of a small group.

# Frequently asked Questions

**Q:** But what is a small group?

**A:** A small group is a tight-knit group of people intentionally seeking to live out the community of fellowship, study, provision, worship, prayer and mission.

**Q:** Can groups meet with each other?

**A:** Yes, that is a wonderful idea, however, each group should also meet independently. Small groups foster an intimacy and trust that larger groups do not.

**Q:** Can you invite people from outside the church?

**A:** Absolutely, a small group is a great place to both be social and be missional

**Q:** How often should we meet?

**A:** In many ways that is up to the group. I would encourage you to meet at least every two weeks initially, more if you wish.

**Q:** Do we always have to meet at the same time?

**A:** Initially it may be helpful, but no you can meet as is appropriate. Your small group may choose to meet on a set time, or simply set a time and date each meeting. Remember though the more dynamic your meeting style the better your communication has to be.

**Q:** Where should small groups meet?

**A:** Wherever is appropriate. Often this will be someones home, but could be a cafe, or event venue. There is nothing wrong with different people hosting the group but remember not everyone can, or will be comfortable doing so.

**Q:** What do we do at the groups?

**A:** I would point you back to the five expressions of Church on page 3 and

the roles of a small group on page 5 to give a outline of the things you could do.

For specific things though we are here to support. The church has a range of resources already and we can explore purchasing other resources where necessary.

You may want to explore what your group would value - but don't be afraid to gently expand things - you are making disciples and being missional.

Perhaps use the following questions to help you determine what you will cover during your small group meetings:

1. What strengths do individuals have? Where do we need growth? What do people not understand?
2. What principles or topics would benefit us most at this stage in our Christian walks?
3. What are our most important needs?

Do each of us comprehend the foundations off faith (e.g., salvation, forgiveness, the Spirit-filled life and how to study God's Word)? Are we sharing our faith?

What about practical or emotional needs?

4. Who else can the group encourage, inform, befriend or serve?

**Q:** How long will a small group meeting be?

**A:** That depends on what you are doing? It may be a 20 minute early morning prayer, or a two hour relaxed lunch with families. As a rule of thumb 90 minutes is the maximum length for a study session and it is better to have a meeting that is too short, than one that is too long.

**Q:** Are these just prayer groups?



**A:** Absolutely not but it should include prayer and sometimes be focused on prayer. Please pray for each other.

**Q:** How many people can you have in a group?

**A:** There is no upper limit but as a group grows there should be consideration of how the group may split to grow and multiply.

**Q:** Who sets up the groups?

**A:** Initially we will invite people to join a group, but expect some shuffling over the first few weeks as the practicalities and relationships work out.

**Q:** Does everyone have to join a small group?

**A:** No, but we would encourage everyone to.

**Q:** Does this mean we won't have midweek meetings as a whole church?

**A:** We plan to meet periodically for teaching, worship, corporate prayer or just for fellowship.

**Q:** Can someone go to more than one small group?

**A:** There is nothing to stop them and for people with complicated schedules it may be necessary, however, most people gain more by committing to a single group and the group benefits more from that commitment too.

**Q:** Are we going to keep calling them small groups?

**A:** I have deliberately stayed away from cell group, life group, study group etc as people may have preconceived ideas of what those things are from other churches they have attended. Ultimately we probably will need to call them something but for now small group describes them. I am keen to hear your thoughts.

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Extract from *ONEIGHTY DISCIPLE* from *exponential.org*

<sup>ii</sup> Adapted from *Small Boats and Harbours*. Atkins, P ; Lucas, B; Belcher, S; Daubney, A.

**The Vine Community Church serves the villages of Cherry Willingham, Reephram, Fiskerton and the surrounding areas of Lincoln and Lincolnshire.**

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