

## Disciple-Making Small Groups

Effective, disciple-making small groups marry mission and values.

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When Jesus commanded his followers to "make disciples," it was a call to mission as a lifestyle (Matthew 28:18-20). The way we are instructed to 'make' more followers & learners of Christ is by baptizing them and teaching them to obey everything Jesus has told us to do. The word "teach" in *The Great Commission* involves more than verbal instruction (v. 20a). It involves the whole person and the whole of life.

The teaching comes by living out the truth in community the way Jesus did with the Twelve. In other words, the natural outgrowth of effective evangelism IS discipleship and full-bodied discipleship *requires* community. This is exemplified throughout the New Testament in the Gospels and in the first years of the Church.

**Therefore, what Jesus meant by 'make disciples' (and what this looks like) requires a relationally-driven structure that helps bring the truth of the Gospel to the whole of one's life.** If a church's disciple-making plan is embodied in their core values then an obvious connection ought to be made with small groups.

Small groups provide a practical way for the people of your church to personally accept the core values of your church and appropriate them into their lives. Moreover, using your core values to construct the framework for small group life puts more focus on your church's mission. This will help believers better understand how small groups can be strategic in helping them fulfill their God-given purpose. When this happens, your church can be more effective in its unique calling to make Christ known to more people.

You can be successful at the application of your core values to your church's mission when you provide a practical strategy for the integration of your core values in the lives of people in your church. This is possible through smaller sized gatherings that can encourage relationship-building in a way larger gatherings cannot.

Small groups provide an ideal way to 'beat the drums' of your church's values since they are the basic building blocks of community life in the local church. They are also the most effective way to marry your church's core values (or purposes) to its mission. A simple way you can do this is to build your paradigm of small group life around your church's existing core values and then communicate that small groups are essential to HOW your church accomplishes its mission on a practical level.

Consider the following example and try this exercise with your leadership team:

1. Write out your core values across the top of a piece of paper (left-to-right).
2. Create columns under each value and realistically categorize facets of small group life (fellowship, bible study, outreach, etc.) under each of your church's core values.
3. On another sheet of paper, draw a circle and divide the circle into equal sized pieces, one for each core value as shown.
4. Insert the facets of small group life into each of these sections.
5. Consider viewing this as a model for small groups at your church as well as a practical strategy for fulfilling your church's mission together.

### GIVING

Use of spiritual gifts  
Mutual ministry  
Giving of time and talent

### GROWING

Bible study  
Worship  
Prayer

### GOING

Group outreach  
Inviting others to join  
Mission trips and Community service

### GATHERING

Welcoming  
Eating Together  
Fellowship

Small groups enable believers to put flesh on their church's calling and bring the truth and power of the Gospel to every part of their lives. They energize the "Body life" of the local church because they help people to develop meaningful connections with each other. They multiply ways for believers to grow together in God's Word, share meals with thanksgiving, worship, pray, and to invite those who have yet to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ!.

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**It is very important to 'cast' small groups the right way. It is fine that they are discussed as places for personal spiritual growth and experiencing community, but that stops far short of how the Lord could use them to infiltrate and impact your surrounding community. How you present small groups – especially initially – directs how people perceive them.**

For example, two people can say they are excited about reading Rick Warren's, Purpose Driven Life, and that they really want to live a life built on purpose, but they can mean two completely different things. For one, it means discovering and giving themselves to the purpose the Lord has for them driven by the desire to make the biggest impact possible for God and His Kingdom. Another may see it as a course for self-fulfillment or self-realization driven out of a desire to feel more purposeful. It can be the perfect anecdote or a pungent aphrodisiac to the consumeristic 'Me' culture of America. Different motivations drive different people. It all comes down to what is driving a person.

If you pair your ideal picture of small group life with the values of your church, you can speak more effectively to varying motivations and build ministry alignment! **It is critical for people to view small groups as having a grander purpose beyond meeting their individual needs [i].** This is essential for the long-term health of small groups. That way, people can envision the possibility of their needs being met *within* the process of working out the grander purpose of God's mission through the local church (Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:13-21).

Small groups encourage your church members to be active participants in your church's mission because they provide a way to develop biblical values and purposes in their lives. When your core values (and consequently your church's mission) inform the design and communication of small groups at your church, three things occur:

1. Integration of your church's core values / purposes to individuals and ministries
2. Effective engagement in your church's mission
3. Full-bodied discipleship that results in healthy church growth

**So when you talk about small groups in your church always tie them to your church's mission and values. Otherwise your church-wide small group ministry will be perceived as an optional program of your church. Best of all, your church's small group ministry will increasingly inspire believers in disciple-making as a lifestyle and influence unbelievers toward Christ (John 13:34-35, 17:22-23; Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35).**

*[i] - Oftentimes, small groups are talked about as ministry centers (e.g. discipleship groups), which is true. But a better way to talk about the potential and possibilities of small groups is to explain them as being initiating centers of mission. Small groups are effective as ministry centers when they are developed and deployed as platforms for mission (Luke 10:1-24).*