



leading a growth group

on a mission...

Jesus commanded his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” [Matthew 28:19-20]. This ‘Great Commission’ sets out two goals for a church: to REACH people for Christ; and to TEACH them to follow him. These are the two key important goals of ‘evangelism’ (proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers) and ‘edification’ (teaching believers to live the gospel). Many church mission statements capture these two key goals, for example, “know Christ and make him known” or “present Christ to everyone, present everyone mature in Christ”.

on a pathway...

Mission statements can be very useful in stating goals but on their own can be a bit *static*. The notion of a pathway that people step along can be a more *dynamic* way of thinking to fill out the picture. It’s worth considering the pathway that people generally take as they move from not knowing Christ to being a mature follower of Christ.

The three simple words ‘connect’, ‘grow’, ‘serve’ can be very helpful for this pathway way of thinking. People need to **connect** to God through trusting in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to connect to a Christ-focussed church family. A key way to **grow** is through a bible study growth group. A key way to **serve** is through a ministry team. There’s a lot more that can be said than that, of course, but it’s a useful summary of the pathway to maturity in Christ.

This ministry paper seeks to explain why these groups are so vital to growing as a Christian and why we are not simply just a church that *has* growth groups, but are rather, a church *OF* growth groups...

LEADERS:...before taking someone through this paper, review the two key introductory MINISTRY PAPERS: ‘the ministry training church’ and ‘meeting one to one’.

Connect. Grow. Serve. After **connecting** to God through trusting in Christ, a vital way we can **grow** is through a growth group and a vital way we can **serve** is through a ministry team.

This MINISTRY PAPER is designed to help your growth groups pastor/coach introduce you to what it means to lead one of our growth groups. As outlined in ‘**the ministry training church**’, growth group leaders play a crucial role in our church. This paper is longer than others and may need a couple of sessions. It starts with the material everyone looks at in ‘**joining a growth group**’, and then builds in extra material for leaders.



read **Acts 2:42-47**

1. What did the early church do when they met together?

2. How often did they meet?

3. *Why do you think meeting with other Christians was such a priority for the early church?*

4. *Was it just a priority for them, or should it be for us as well? Why/why not?*



read **Hebrews 10:24-25**

1. What are we to consider?

2. What should we not give up doing? why?

3. *Why do you think we are told to encourage each other?*

4. *In what ways might this encouragement be limited if we only see each other in larger once-a-week Sunday meetings?*



sunday church

Clearly, whatever we do in our large weekly meeting on Sunday, it is not the all-in-all of church life. It's important, but doesn't stand alone. Indeed, the idea of a church meeting just once a week isn't a biblical one. We don't stop being a church family when Monday comes! Rather, what we do in our large weekly meeting should help us live out our identity as a church on Monday, Tuesday ... right through the week. We need to see our Sunday meeting not as the sum total of church life, but as a kind of 'platform' for our ongoing life together as a church family.



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read **Ephesians 4:1-16**

1. What picture is given here of life as a church family?

2. What is the *reason* we are to be like this (verse 1)?

3. What is our *goal* as a church family (verse 13)?

4. What is the role of *pastors/teachers* (verse 11-12)?

5. What is the role of *everyone* (verse 12-16)?



6. *In what way does this passage help us to see the importance of Bible teaching in our church life?*

7. *This Bible teaching is to equip all God's people for 'works of service'. What does this mean for church life?*

who ministers?

There is an important lesson from Ephesians 4 for us to learn...

we are ALL ministers!

So, we need to be clear about the role of pastors/teachers in our church family. Their role is not to *replace* the ministry of the people of God, but to *enable* it. The role of full-time ministers is to bring out the ministry of everyone else. Through bible teaching, training and modeling, all God's people must be equipped to serve.

So, we also need to be clear about the role of all God's people in our church family. We all have 'works of service' to do. We all have 'truth in love' to speak. We all have a part to play. We all have a ministry. The Bible teaching we receive is not an end in itself, but is to equip us for service of others.

Unfortunately, an unbiblical idea emerged in the history of the church. It is the idea of 'clergy' and 'laity'. In this model of church there are clergy (who *do* ministry) and laity (who *receive* ministry). But it's not the model we see in Ephesians 4 is it?



which model of church?

which of the following models of church is most biblical? which should we follow?

model	mindset	role of minister(s)	role of congregation	impact
MAINTENANCE	'keep things going'	change nothing	receive ministry	things do change! (they decline)
MINISTRY	'we need to grow'	ministers to everyone they can	passive – watching ministry	sometimes some growth
MULTIPLICATION	"we have a mission together"	teaching, training, equipping, modelling	all involved in ministry	true growth (Eph 4:16)



a church of growth groups

If the Sunday meeting is the foundation of our life as a church family, our growth groups are the building blocks. The Sunday meeting plays an essential foundational role as we learn together from God's Word. But it provides limited opportunity for the kind of prayer, fellowship and sharing of meals together pictured in Acts 2. And in terms of what we've seen in Ephesians 4, something more is needed for us to all carry out our ministry of 'speaking the truth in love' together (verse 15). Let's look at Ephesians 4 again and think about how being a church of growth groups might answer its call...

how many people can you care for?...

Two people? Three? As many as five? Definitely not more than six!...

This Ephesians 4 picture of a church body is clear: everyone is to be supported. However, something else is also clear: while every part is to be supported, no single part can do this alone. There is a limit to how many people one person can truly care for.

What we are learning here are the principles of 'SPAN OF CARE' It's the idea that:

- everyone is cared for
- no-one cares for too many people

Of course, lots of care happens through relationships in our church family outside of growth groups. Indeed, as we learn to speak the truth in love in our groups, this kind of godly relating should 'spill over' into all sorts of relationships in the church.

A structure of growth groups, gives us great opportunities to develop these attitudes and skills. Not only that, without this structure, some people are inevitably 'lost' in the big group. This is especially true of newcomers and those who don't form relationships easily. Being a church of growth groups helps ensure meeting the 1st principle: everyone is cared for.

Being a church of growth groups also acknowledges the 2nd principle: that no one person can care for too many people. This means that groups must not grow too large (but seed new groups as they grow). It also means that group leaders must be supported/assisted in their role.

The back page discusses what it will mean to be a church of growth groups, a church where no-one stands alone.



look again at **Ephesians 4:11-16**

1. What danger is always around us (verse 14)?

2. How can we avoid this danger (verse 15)?

3. What positive things will then result instead (verses 15-16)?

4. *Doing bible studies together is only the beginning of group life. How can we build on this?*

5. *What will it mean for us to 'speak the truth in love' to each other in our group?*

6. *The whole body is built up in love 'as each part does its work'. What part do you (will you) play in your group?*



which model of growth group?

which is the biblical model for a growth group? why?

truth without love	Know the answers to the questions Be right Focus on information alone
love without truth	Know the answers to personal problems Be real Focus on feelings alone
truth in love	Know the truth about God and me Be honest with God and each other Focus on transformation – becoming like Christ

being a church of growth groups...



ideas for discussion

a church where no-one stands alone

There's a big difference between just being a church *with* growth groups and a church *of* growth groups. Being just a church *with* growth groups is an approach that says: 'growth groups are there if you want it – just for the keen ones'. Being a church *of* growth groups is an approach that says: 'everyone needs to be cared for, and everyone has a role to play in caring for others'. Being a church of growth groups is not always the easy way. Relationships are hard work. We are called to love each other, not because of how lovable we all are, but because of Christ's love shown to us in his death on the cross. But it's worth it! Being a church of growth groups benefits everyone. It's a great way to fulfil the biblical picture of a connected church family, speaking the truth in love, with every part supported.

newcomers... will be asked to a newcomers group but are also linked to a growth group after their first couple of visits. While we'll all want to welcome every newcomer, it's best if we each know who we're especially responsible for. And it means, hopefully, no-one is overlooked. Your growth group leader might encourage you to ask a newcomer over for a meal, etc. They may not actually attend your group for some time, or may end up in a different group, but the process helps ensure they're welcomed.

links... while attendance at Bible Study may not be possible for some, they're still 'linked' to a group so that they can be part of the care of the group. Without such linking, people who don't attend groups will be overlooked in the care of the church. The group prays for such 'links', seeks to encourage them, offers practical help such as meals, invites them to social activities... generally looks out for them.

growth group members... commit themselves to their group in a number of ways: being there each week; coming with the study prepared; being ready to share honestly; focusing on other's needs, not just our own; extending ministry to others in the group through the week in terms of prayer, hospitality & encouragement; supporting the leader in caring for the group, including 'links'.

group leaders... have overall responsibility for seeing that each member (including links) is being cared for. This does not mean *doing* all the care (which the whole group shares in) but *overseeing* that it happens. They should lead by example. They should also identify and train apprentice leaders. Leaders do much more than simply 'read out the questions'. They will always have in mind all the relationships in the table (below right). They will ensure the group has time not just to 'do the study' but share genuinely and pray about all these relationships. This ministry to the members of their group will obviously also extend beyond the meeting. There are a range of ministry papers (like this one) that they can draw on to equip group members for growing in all these relationships.

apprentice leaders... offer special assistance to the growth group leader in carrying out their role, and so also are at the same time being trained for leading a new group when needed. As groups multiply, there is always the need for more leaders.

coaches... support growth group leaders in their role (talking and praying about how the group is going; sharing how to develop as a leader; offering useful resources for the group, etc). It is vital that leaders are supported well in their important role – so each coach should support only 3 or 4 leaders.

ministers (the Pastor/Teacher kind!)...support growth group leaders through a special focus on coaches. e.g. rather than doing a poor job of trying to support 10 or 20 leaders, they aim to do a great job of supporting a few coaches who each support a few leaders. It all comes back to *span of care*: everyone is cared for; no-one tries to care for too many!



advantages of growth groups

thinking about the picture of church life from Acts 2 we started with, as well as what we've learnt from Eph 4, consider some of the important ways that growth groups can build on our weekly Sunday meeting...

bible study

more opportunity for asking questions, clarifying meaning, and sharing insights

prayer

more opportunity for sharing personal prayer points and praying meaningfully for others. Also provides opportunities for praying for ministries in our church, world mission, etc

accountability

greatly increased as you share struggles with each other and follow-up on these in an ongoing way

support

growth groups act as great support networks - helping each other through difficult times, and sharing each others joys

ministry

great opportunities to serve others - through prayer, encouragement, leadership, etc

training

developing patterns of godly relating. Apprentice leaders trained up.

evangelism

great opportunities for introducing non-Christian friends to a smaller group of people from church (not so much through the Bible study itself, but other activities)

social activities

groups can organise social activities together, providing opportunities for fellowship, relationship-building and evangelism.

through the ministry of our growth groups, all of our relationships can grow...

a growing relationship with **God**, especially through personal Bible reading and prayer

growing relationships with **other believers**, especially through the growth group

growing relationships with those in their **family/household**, as servants

growing relationships with **unbelievers**, especially through personal evangelism

growing relationships with the **whole church** in mission, serving in a ministry team



pastoring a growth

To be a church of growth groups, group leaders need to see themselves as growth group *pastors*, and be trained and supported by pastors/coaches as such.

knowing your sheep by name...

Jesus, the Chief Shepherd of the sheep, knows his sheep: "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (John 10:14). Of course, there are some ways in which we are not like Jesus. He is the one who says "I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15) and goes to the cross for the redemption of all who believe in him.

And yet, as 'under-shepherds' of the Chief Shepherd, we are very much to be like Jesus. We also should lay down our lives in service of those in our care. We also should know our sheep. We should get to know them, care for them, be able to account for every one of them.

At a practical level this means knowing who your sheep are. In a church that adopts the linking approach outlined on the opposite page, the 'list' of people in your care might change on a regular basis. This, of course, needs to be managed in a way that isn't disruptive to the group. The point for now, however, is that when changes happen, you need to be on top of it. It's essential to your care that you know who you're caring for!

You and your pastor/coach need to be clear what the process is when changes are made. How and when does this happen? Later in the paper we'll talk a bit more about getting a clear plan for regular communication with your pastor/coach. This is going to be essential if you're going to keep on track with who you're responsible for.

Make sure you carry the list of who's in your care along with contact details, prayer points, etc at all times. It's all part of being an around the clock pastor to your people, rather than just a 'study leader'.

Pastors know their sheep by name. They are shepherds of God's flock under their care.



read 1 Peter 5:1-4

1. What images does Peter give us for the leader and for those being led (verse 2)?

2. What are the right motives for leadership?

3. Who is the Chief Shepherd? Why does Peter remind us of this?



4. Peter seems to use the word 'elder' here in the general sense of leader (he refers to himself as an elder). How might the passage apply to growth group leaders?

5. Peter speaks of the people 'under your care'. How does this take our role as leaders beyond 'reading out the questions' at bible study?

6. The people in your group are ultimately under the care of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd. What difference should this make to how you go about your ministry?



leader or pastor?

The title doesn't matter but the role sure does. Discuss how the growth group leader role we're learning about here is different to some narrower notions of the 'bible study leader'.

staying on target

The table on the bottom corner of page 4 set out important goals for growth in every believer. Having looked at your role as a pastor in relation to those in your group, it's a good idea to come back and look at the goals again. Work through these goals (below) with your coach, one by one, brainstorming ideas. Think through how you can minister to those in your care, and how group life can be nurtured, so that all of these goals are addressed. Remember, through the ministry of our growth groups, we are aiming for all the important relationships in every believer's life to grow...



ideas for discussion

- a growing relationship with **God**, especially through personal Bible reading and prayer
- growing relationships with **other believers**, especially in the growth group
- growing relationships with those in their **family/ household**, as servants
- growing relationships with unbelievers, especially through **personal evangelism**
- growing relationships with the **whole church** in mission, serving in a ministry team



meeting one-to-one and ministry papers

A key part of extending your role from bible study leader to pastor is to aim to regularly meet one-to-one with those in your group. People tend to open up even more in the one-to-one context, and there's more opportunity to go deeper into things, and to pray specifically.

Time constraints, of course, may mean you will struggle to do this yourself with every member of your group. That's where assistant/ apprentice leaders can help. It might even be that you focus on meeting one-to-one with two or three people who are potential leaders, and they in turn meet with two or three people each. That way everyone has the opportunity to meet one-to-one, and future leaders are being developed in the process.

The 'meeting one-to-one' ministry paper will give you more ideas about this aspect of your ministry. In particular, it outlines the importance of ministering to the whole person—developing the three strands of theological reflection, personal godliness and ministry skills.

There are other ministry papers that can be a great help to you in trying to address the five goals for all believers discussed on this page

*RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD
daily time with God

*RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER BELIEVERS
joining a growth group
leading a growth group
hospitality

*RELATIONSHIP WITH FAMILY/
HOUSEHOLD
christian households
marriage preparation
raising kids to follow Jesus

*RELATIONSHIP WITH UNBELIEVERS
personal evangelism
personal apologetics

*RELATIONSHIP WITH CHURCH MISSION
joining a ministry team*



leading the study

So far we have placed great emphasis upon the need to go 'beyond the study' in terms of the life of a group. We have emphasized the need for leaders to go beyond 'reading out the questions', to see themselves as pastors of a small flock. With all that in mind, however, the actual weekly meeting of the group is obviously important. Just as Sunday church is a platform for the growth groups, the weekly meeting of the growth group is the platform for the relationships within the group. We hope group life will be more than once a week, but that's the foundation it's built upon.

stages of groups

It is important to understand the stages that a group goes through. There's a common pattern that many groups follow, going through these stages:

- forming
- storming
- norming
- performing

In the *forming* stage, people are politely getting to know each other and things generally go along pretty smoothly.

In the *storming* stage, people are feeling comfortable enough to express opinions more freely and there may be a degree of conflict.

In the *norming* stage, people are getting to know each other more deeply and so there are fewer surprises in people's reactions. A group's 'personality' is starting to emerge.

In the *performing* stage, the group has got to know each other well enough to be able to express views openly and honestly without fear of rejection.

Clearly a group needs nurturing to negotiate these stages of development. But it's encouraging for us as leaders to know that groups generally go through such stages. It means we shouldn't despair when the 'storming' is happening—it's really a necessary part of group development. Indeed, every time a new member is added, or someone leaves, this stage may be revisited (which also means we need to be careful about such changes when a group has only recently started to perform).



ideas for discussion

the leader as a model

always remember that one of the most important aspects of leadership is example. This applies to your whole life 'outside' of the group context, but also what happens in the group meeting. Your preparation (or lack of it) will be evident to the group and will set the pace for others. The way you use the Bible, listen, follow up on prayer points will all be important. Of course, all this will flow from a leader who truly has a heart to serve their group.

prepare well

we mentioned preparation above. There are many steps behind good preparation. Before the series starts read through the book of the Bible being studied. Take notes and write down questions. Allow God's Word to challenge/encourage you. Each week in the series, read the set passage and have a preliminary look at the study before the Bible Talk on Sunday to get the most out of it. Then work through the study in detail before the group meets. Pray that the study will be fruitful. Give thought to how you will adapt the study best to your group. Think through how the prayer time might unfold and any practical considerations.

generating discussion

often the set questions in a study need follow up questions to generate discussion. Remember to use open-ended questions (questions that can't be answered yes or no). This will be easier if you have prepared well. Try to avoid commenting after every contribution, as this sets up ping-pong back and forth to you as the leader. The goal is open discussion amongst members. On the other hand, however, there is a place for silence as people gather thoughts—don't feel you have to fill it.

back to the bible

one of the best things you can do for your group is to encourage them to look deeper at God's Word. Especially when in 'investigate' questions, ask people where they found their answer in the passage.

time considerations

it's best to have a set start and finish time for the meeting. It may be, for example that an evening group meets 7-9pm. Those who can stay on for a cuppa are welcome to, but those that need to go can get away. People who start work early, for example, may be discouraged from attending if they're concerned the night will run late. Be especially considerate if your group has crèche carers. Within your allocated meeting time, be sure to allow good time for prayer and sharing: have a set goal for when the study itself will be completed.



ideas for discussion

seeding new groups

Ideally as a group grows in membership there will come a time where an apprentice leader can take a couple of members and, along with a couple of newcomers start a new group. This is done best when a group owns this vision for multiplication and has a timeframe in mind when it might happen.

Have you talked and prayed about this with your group?

you need support

this paper has discussed extensively your role as leader/pastor. It has called you to love and support the members of your group. But who is going to do that for you? That's where pastors/coaches come into the picture. Use the space below to develop a plan with your coach...



how will you keep in touch?

when and how often will this happen?

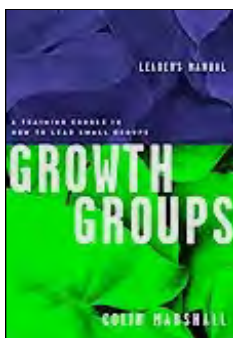
how can prayer be part of your time?

what resources can you look at together?

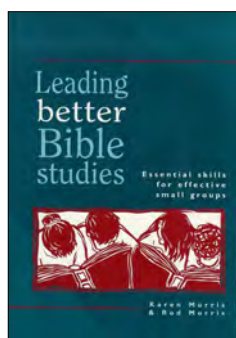
what other needs for support do you have?

useful resources

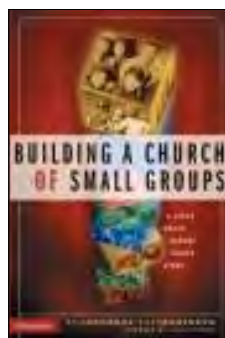
there are lots of books available on growth groups. A couple of the better ones are shown below. In addition to them, it's a good idea for growth group leaders to develop a basic library of general reference type books such as bible commentaries and dictionaries...



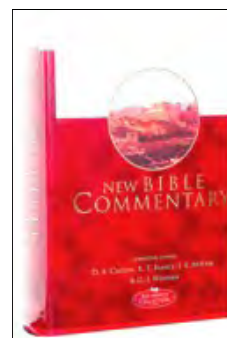
Growth Groups by Colin Marshall is an excellent introduction to the goals of growth groups with a strong emphasis upon the foundational role of God's Word in group life.



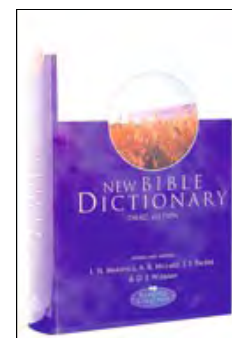
Leading Better Bible Studies by Rod & Karen Morris gives a comprehensive treatment of all aspects of group leadership. It is strong on the mechanics of group life and will stretch you as a leader.



Building a Church of Small Groups by Donahue & Robinson is worth a read for its treatment of the issues of 'span of care' and the need for everyone (including leaders) to be supported.



The New Bible Commentary is a one-volume commentary on the whole Bible. It provides intro material and is an easy point of reference whatever book you're studying.



The New Bible Dictionary is an accessible, comprehensive A - Z of Bible terms, place names, books, people and doctrines. It's a great resource for all leaders.