

## **Small Group Values: (what are we aiming for?)**

### **God at the centre**

*...of our lives, of our groups, only God changes people.*

Putting God at the centre means fully engaging with:-

- The **Love** of a perfect father – and creativity of a creator God
- The **Example** of Jesus to shape all our actions
- The **Work** of forgiveness/ redemption through his death and resurrection
- The **Presence** of the Spirit – empowering us for Kingdom ministry.

### **Every member in community**

*Quality relationships of sacrificial love and honesty.*

- Developing long term, meaningful relationships marked by truth and love.
- Working together in the group to support and encourage one another.
- Creating environments where people feel valued and can belong.

### **Every member in ministry**

*Using our lives and gifts to serve one another and those in need.*

- Serving in the life of the church.
- Looking for opportunities to help one another in the group.
- Showing compassion and practical help to those in need.
- Using the power of God in prayer and witness.

### **Every member growing**

*Overcoming barriers to following Jesus within accountable relationships.*

- Everyone committed to becoming more like Jesus in every area of our lives.
- Creating an environment of truth and grace that encourages growth through support and accountability.

### **Every member making disciples**

*Everyone committed to reaching their friends and helping to multiply groups.*

- Everyone praying for & working towards the LIFE that's in our group impacting on those who are not part of the church..
- Praying for our unsaved friends and the friends of those in the group.
- Organising our lives to prioritise for time with these friends.
- Creating environments where these people can experience the life of God.

## **Five W's – a transparent, flexible internal structure**

The Five W's exist in order to ensure that the vision and values actually happen. They provide a transparent, internal group structure that is: -

- Easy to understand – you can explain as you go through the meeting.
- Easy to use – you can give away the different parts to others.
- Easy to model – you can begin by showing the group what it's about.
- Easy to evaluate – how is the group doing?

The five 'W's' don't have to be rigidly adhered to every week – they are not designed to be legalistic. They are a guide to the facilitator/leader, so that the group really supports and encourages the members as they live out the group values. The structure is a guide; it is not set in stone. In the life of the group, the amount of time spent on the various sections might change. All of us want to lead meetings that are controlled by the Holy Spirit. A framework, like the one outlined below, does not limit the Holy Spirit, it in fact creates space for God to move in.

The group structure also means you can train group leaders more easily because having a clear structure enables specific training to take place. Also a group overseer can help coach a group leader by visiting the group and seeing how it is working according to the values and structure.

### **The first 'W' is the Welcome**

One of the key values within the group principles is every member in ministry. A second key value is the church is a community marked by honesty. When the group meets, the first thing we want to do is to ask everyone an open question. We might ask a question such as "Where did you hide as a child?" Then follow this with, "Where do you now hide as an adult?" Another example is "What was your coldest physical experience?" You could follow this with, "What was your coldest emotional experience?"

What do these questions achieve? First everyone in that group has gone from being a spectator to being a participator the moment that each one speaks.

Second community has begun to form. One of the key ingredients that binds together any group of people is knowing that they have experiences that are common only to them and that they know things about one another that no one else knows.

### **The second 'W' is Worship**

Meeting with Jesus, experiencing Jesus and Jesus being at the centre of our lives is the major ingredient of group vision. As the group has focused on each other during the Welcome time, now they focus on God, inviting his presence among them. We do this because we recognise that Jesus is with us at the centre of the group. When 2 or 3 gather in his name this ushers in the presence of God by the Holy Spirit. Without the source of life there would be no life in the meetings.

It can be also be helpful during these times to focus on why we worship God and to discover what difficulties we are experiencing in worship. These can give helpful insights into our relationship with God.

There are many different ways of worshipping together. Singing with a guitar is only one! When it comes to worship within groups, we want to suggest some perhaps new and creative ways of doing this. You could thank God for something in turn, read a psalm, listen to a CD, etc, etc. This kind of worship often encourages more creativity and participation from people.

### **The third 'W' is the Word**

*In the traditional house-group there might have been a Bible study with one person sharing what they thought the Scriptures might be saying but we want everyone to encounter the Word and apply it to their lives.*

There are three aspects to the Word section. Firstly there is something to understand. This may be gleaned from what was taught on Sunday, or something prepared by a group member or leader and explored by the group. Secondly there is the teaching time. How does this apply to my life today? How does it impact my values and actions? How do I respond to God's Word? Thirdly, Who needs help in responding to God's Word or how do we respond to a physical need. At this point, people will be encouraged to respond with prayer and practical support.

### **The fourth 'W' is Witness / Works**

The group is here to empower its members into relationships with non-Christians. One goal in the groups is that each member will have three local, non-Christian friends and that during a one to two year period these friends will have an opportunity to meet Christ through friendship, prayer and the moving of God's Spirit.

As is the conviction of many who have been working in the group movement, this is going to be the most challenging for us. It is about empowering each group member to climb out of their Christian ghetto and into their local environments and neighbourhoods to make unchurched friends. These are genuine friendships, not just acquaintances for their converting potential. But obviously, as Christians love people, these people might hear, see and experience Jesus. So during the cycle of the group, the group will help each person make friends. They will then pray for those friends.

It might be the goal of the group for each group member to make 3 unchurched friends. If the group, over a period of time, has 30 unchurched friends, it is the hope and prayer of this group that over the 1-2 year cycle, 5 of them will come to Christ. This will be enough to multiply the group.

### **The fifth 'W' is Wait on God**

It is important to spend some time regularly waiting on God as part of a group. How you do this may depend on the rest of the evening's plans. It may be that after spending some time worshipping together, it is helpful to wait on God and see what he is particularly saying before sharing encouragements. It may be that as part of studying the word together, people need a few moments to reflect for themselves on what God might be challenging them about at this time. Alternatively, if you break into groups to pray for one another, while praying for someone's stated needs is always helpful, it might also be powerful to wait a minute or two more and see how God wants to speak into an individual's situation. This often has the powerful effect of raising faith and lifting everyone's eyes 'upwards' & beyond just the visible problem. Lastly, spending some time as a whole group listening for the Lord's voice – either for the 'now' of a ministry time or the 'future' of the group is a great way of helping people connect with vision and move forward together.

It is important to facilitate a time like this well so that people know essentially what kinds of things they are listening for. Times like this need not last more than 2 or 3 minutes, and it is important that

everyone is encouraged to share what they are feeling or hearing. It is important to remember that sometimes people find it easier to share in smaller groups, or even to write or draw what they sense rather than just speak straight into a big group. Lastly, do foster a sense of safety where people are allowed to grow in confidence, knowing that no-one will judge them for sharing something that might seem a bit 'off the wall'..

### **The Five W's summarised: (with suggestions for timing!)**

#### **Welcome (10 minutes)**

- To focus the group every time it meets.
- For everyone to contribute and develop confidence in contributing during the rest of the group.
- To help people feel relaxed, included, listened to and develop a sense of belonging.
- To learn something about each other.
- To help build horizontal relationships before we gather together to relate vertically to God.
- To develop honesty and quality relationships.
- Our answers can reveal areas that need ministry and gaps in our understanding.
- Everyone goes from being a spectator to being a participator.
- Questions can be light-hearted and humorous or turned deeper to facilitate more open sharing.

#### **Worship (15-20 minutes)**

- Focus on God, inviting his presence amongst us.
- We recognise that Jesus is the centre of the group, he is the source of life in the meeting.
- There are many different ways to worship. You can thank God, read a psalm, etc. Be creative, not just a guitar!

#### **Word (30-40 minutes)**

- To allow the Holy Spirit to come in power through the Word and the gifts in the group.
- The truth is then applied to individuals' lives in a way that is personal, specific and practical. This provides a context for ministry and growth.

#### **Witness / Works (15-20 minutes)**

- To work together to serve God's purpose for making disciples and to see the group multiply.
- Ask God for his heart of compassion for people.
- Ask God to identify people who we should build friendships with.
- Pray for your friendship networks each week.
- Pray for openness and opportunities and plan socials to get to know each other's friends.
- Balance time spent with believers and non-believers.
- Demonstrate God's love practically to group members, friends and those in need.

#### **Wait on God (5-10 minutes *including sharing time*)**

- To help individuals and the group learn how to better listen for God's voice
- To listen for & share encouraging prophetic words for others in the group
- To listen for God's creative ideas about outreach and growth
- To allow time for people to reflect on how God might be specifically speaking to them through the word
- To foster an environment of safety and trust where people can step out & grow in confidence