

Small Groups Training #1

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This is the first of two presentations on healthy small groups. The first presentation explains what a healthy small group is. The second presentation explains how to effectively lead a small group.

1. Why have small groups?
 - A. Is it just something else to add to our busy schedules?
 - B. Has your pastor promoted small groups and you are wondering why?
 - C. Must true followers of Christ really be part of a small group?

2. Principle: Healthy small groups train us to develop God-like characters.
 - A. God was the first small group.
 - (1) In Deut. 6:4, "The Lord your God is one." Yet the word Elohim (plural form of God) is used in this verse. The Bible refers to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, three yet one. (Distinguishable, not divisible)
 - (2) In John 17, Jesus said (see vs. 21-23), "that they may be one just as We are One."
 - (3) Throughout the Bible, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are working together as one from creation onward.
 - (4) According to 1 John 3:2, every true Believer wants to be, and will be, more like God's character
 - B. Unfortunately, Satan disrupted heaven's perfect harmony. Instead of focusing upon others, he focused only upon himself.
 - (1) "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High." Isa. 14:13-14
 - (2) Our western culture is focused upon "what's in it for me?" (Frank Sinatra, "I did it my way.")
 - (3) This mentality has even affected God's followers. People attend church if they like the music, or the preacher, and are not confronted (too much).
 - C. Besides, so little of what we do today prepares us to live throughout eternity.
 - (1) Many of today's professions won't be needed in heaven. (For example, physicians, morticians, policemen, etc.)
 - (2) "I owe, I owe, so off to work I go..." (To the tune of a Mickey Mouse jingle) characterizes the thinking of most Americans. Heaven is not like this, see Rev. 22:17.

(3) What can we do today that will prepare us for eternity?

D. Many young couples focus upon the wedding and neglect the marriage. Too many Christians focus only upon the 2nd Coming and don't prepare to live in perfect peace with others throughout eternity. Small groups teach us how to do this!

E. Small groups help us to A. develop God-like characters, B. reverses the focus of sin, and C. prepares us to live peacefully throughout eternity!

3. EGW quotes on small groups. (7T:21-22 & SC:101)

4. Early SDA practiced small groups. In 1880 we had 15,570 members and held 10,000 small groups – using “Bible Readings for the Home Circle.”

5. Characteristics of healthy small groups

A. A gathering of a few people isn't necessarily a healthy small group.

B. Small groups aren't healthy if they are the source of gossip or develop into clichés.

6. Healthy small groups have four essential activities, which are

A. Supportive fellowship

B. Intercessory prayer

C. Relational Bible study

D. Service/outreach

7. Supportive fellowship where people genuinely care about each other.

A. God's true remnant church needs to function like the Apostolic Church.

B. Acts. 2:4 (continued steadfastly) Apostle's doctrine, **fellowship**, breaking bread, and prayer.

C. Old TV series called “Cheers” jingle, “Where everyone knows your name. Where everyone's glad you came.” Have taverns stolen the work of our church?

D. Modern paradox: so many forms of communication (cell phones, texting, social media, email, etc.), yet people have never been so lonely.

E. Why is supportive fellowship so important, especially for Christians? See these texts:

- A. John 13:34-35
- B. Gal. 6:2
- C. Phil 2:3-4
- D. Heb. 10:24-25
- E. True Believers must actively love and care for each other.
- F. In the next presentation, you will be given practical tips on how to do this within small groups.

8. Intercessory prayer – where people show their love by praying for each other within the group’s meeting and during the week.

- A. Intercessory prayer is fundamental for God’s people.
 - (1) Moses – Israel’s success depended upon it (Ex. 17:11)
 - (2) Job’s recovery results from praying for his “friends.” Job 42:10
 - (3) Jesus, as our High Priest intercedes for us. Heb. 7:25 (John 17)
 - (4) We, as royal priests (1 Pet. 2:9) are called to intercede for others
- B. EGW quotes on prayer. SC:94, SC:100
- C. After sharing (fellowship), praying about what was shared is a very natural response. Most Americans believe in prayer, so this is not hard for a small group to do.

9. Relational Bible study – helping others to relive a Bible story

- A. There are two distinct ways to study the Bible.
 - (1) To learn the facts, the doctrines, the truths of the Bible
 - (2) To learn and experience God through Bible reading.
- B. SDAs excel at learning Bible truths. Fewer SDAs know how to know and experience God through reading the Bible.
- C. Ellen White taught how we can know and experience God by this quote in TMB:1, as she wrote about Jesus’ sermon on the mount.
- D. “Let us in our imagination go back to that scene, and as we sit with the disciples on the mountainside, enter into the thoughts and feelings that filled their hearts. Understanding what the words of Jesus meant to those who heard them, we may discern in them a new vividness and beauty, and may also gather for ourselves their deeper lessons.”
- E. Even though I will give more practical tips in the second presentation, let me give a basic picture to explain relational Bible study.
- F. Practical steps
 - (1) First pray asking the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth. John 16:13
 - (2) Select one Bible story – we want depth, not distance.
 - (3) From the Gospels – by beholding we become changed (AH:330)
 - (4) Use your imagination to relive that Bible story – no wrong pictures

- (5) Encourage all to share their picture of this story (relational Bible study)
- (6) Conclude with two questions; what does this tell me about God, how does this apply to my life?

10. Service/outreach – helping to improve the quality of life within your community

- A. The problem with healthy small groups is they become too popular by those who experience them. (Genuine care, heart-felt prayer, stimulating Bible story). If only these three, eventually become unhealthy.
- B. Israel has two lakes; Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea – one is healthy and the other is dead – even though they are connected by the same river. Why? Water flows through one, but water is retained in the other. The same happens to small groups.
- C. There are many ways to serve, to do outreach.
 - A. Service projects: what needs to be done within your church or community, what can your group do to meet any of those needs?
 - B. “Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow Me." (Mingle, Minister, & Invite to small group)
 - C. Book clubs (examples) – (Mingle, minister, invite to small group)
 - D. Felt-need seminars (mental, physical health, money seminars, etc.) (Mingle, minister, & Invite to small group)
 - E. Use an empty chair within your group – ask who could benefit from our group – who will we invite to our next meeting?
 - F. Outreach – world view of Christians (1) judgmental, (2) anti-fun, (3) hate LGBTQ, (4) only wants money.
 - G. People today seek (1) genuine caring people, and (2) spirituality – a healthy small group is best prepared to reach out and bring people into our church.

11. Conclusion: HSG trains us to be more like God and prepares us to live in harmony throughout eternity. The next presentation will teach how to do these four activities, explains how to start a small group, and addresses challenges one can experience within a small group.