

LIFE (SMALL) GROUP PRINCIPLES

I. THE BEGINNING OF COMMUNITY:

1. Humans are created for community (Rom 14:7; Gen 1:26-27; Gen 2:8)
2. Small groups exist to reproduce and multiply (Gen 1:28)
3. God has given us the Sabbath to nurture these relationships (Gen 2:2; Heb 4:3)

II. GOD'S ATTEMPT AT RESTORING COMMUNITY

4. Church is called to restore broken communities by creating relational communities (Gen 3:7-8; Gen 2:25)

III. THE FORMATION OF DESTRUCTIVE COMMUNITIES

5. All of us are responsible for looking out for one another (Gen 4:9)
6. People crave genuine caring relational communities (Gen 4:16-17; Gen 11:4, 7-9)

IV. DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT

7. Community is established only as leadership is diffused (Exo 2:12; Exo 19:5-6; 1 Peter 2:9)

V. THE JETHRO MODEL

8. In the Jethro model of leadership God's people are empowered for ministry (Exo 18:13-22)

VI. JESUS AND SMALL GROUPS

9. Jesus method of reaching the masses is through small groups (Matthew 18:20)

VII. PENTECOST ESTABLISHES RELATIONAL CHURCHES

10. The NT church is not a church with small groups, but a church that is small groups (Acts 2:42; 44-46)
11. The home church model continued for 300 years until the church became institutionalized at the time of Constantine.

VIII. PAUL PLANTS RELATIONAL CHURCHES EVERYWHERE

12. To be a Christian according to Paul, is to be in community with other Christians (Rom 12:4-5)
13. For Paul, church became a service not attended but a fellowship one entered (1 Cor 12:25-27)

IX. THE PURPOSE OF EVANGELISM

14. The reason for preaching the gospel is to bring people into community (1 John 1:1-4; 7)
15. Small groups will feed people into public evangelism and public evangelism will feed people into small groups

X. THE DEMISE OF THE SMALL GROUP

16. During the Middle Ages you see the demise of small groups with buildings and institutions replacing community
17. Rise of priest/pastor dependent churches which led to the removal of priesthood of all believer principle

XI. THE CHURCH REFORMED

18. The Early Methodist class meetings were focused not on doctrine and discipleship, but on accountability
19. Bible study was used only to enhance relationships - these were not cognitive but relational meetings

XII. ADVENTISM AND THE SOCIAL MEETING

20. Early Adventist pioneers took principles from the Methodist class meeting and merged them into prayer meetings
21. Social meetings usually occurred after the service and were relational in nature (little if any Bible study occurred)
22. Social meetings consisted of prayer, short testimonies, words of encouragement to others and singing (relational in nature)

"The formation of small companies (Small groups) as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers. If in one place there are only two or three who know the truth, let them form themselves into a band of workers. Let them keep their bond of union unbroken, pressing together in love and unity, encouraging one another to advance, each gaining courage and strength from the assistance of the others. Let them reveal Christlike forbearance and patience, speaking no hasty words, using the talent of speech to build one another up in the most holy faith. Let them labor in Christlike love for those outside the fold, forgetting self in their endeavor to help others. As they work and pray in Christ's name, their numbers will increase; for the Saviour says: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven." Matthew 18:19. 7T 21-22

"In the church there was a revival of the missionary spirit. An earnest desire to learn how to work for the Lord was shown. Small companies gathered for prayer and Bible study. All moved forward with harmonious action. Believers went to places where the people have no opportunity to hear the Word of God and gathered the children for Sabbath School. Efforts were made to help isolated families. Plans were laid for these families to meet with other families for Bible study. Thus the way was opened for the light to shine forth from the Word of God." The Indiana Reporter, 25 February 1903.

"Let small companies assemble in the evening, at noon, or in the early morning, to study the Bible. Let them have a season of prayer, that they may be strengthened, enlightened, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit . . . If you yourselves will open the door to receive it, a great blessing will come to you. Angels of God will be in your assembly. You will feed upon the leaves of the tree of life. What testimonies you may bear of the loving acquaintance made with your fellow-workers in these precious seasons when seeking the blessing of God. Let each tell his experience in simple words. This will bring more comfort and joy to the soul than all the pleasant instruments of music that could be brought into the churches. Christ will come into your hearts. It is by this means only that you can maintain your integrity." Testimonies Volume 7, p. 195

"A Christian is a Christlike man, a Christlike woman, who is active in God's service, who is present at the social meeting, whose presence will encourage others also. Religion does not consist in works, but religion works; it is not dormant." SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, 935.

"We meet together to edify one another by an interchange of thoughts and feelings, and to gather strength, and light, and courage by becoming acquainted with one another's hopes and aspirations; and by our earnest, heartfelt prayers, offered up in faith, we receive refreshment and vigour from the source of our strength . . . All who are pursuing the onward Christian course, would have, and will have, an experience that is living, that is new and interesting. A living experience is made up of daily trials, conflicts and temptations, strong efforts and victories, and great peace and joy gained through Jesus. A simple relation of such experiences gives light, strength and knowledge that will aid others in their advancement in the divine life." Testimonies Volume 2, p. 578, 579.

"Preach less, and educate more, by holding Bible readings, and by praying with families and little companies. To all who are working with Christ I would say, Wherever you can gain access to the people by the fireside, improve your opportunity. Take your bible, and open before them its great truths. Your success will not depend so much upon your knowledge and accomplishments, as upon your ability to find your way to the heart. By being social and coming close to the people, you may turn the current of their thoughts more readily than by the most able discourse. The presentation of Christ in the family, by the fireside, and in small gatherings in private houses is often more successful in winning souls to Jesus than are sermons delivered in the open air, to the moving throng, or even in halls or churches." Gospel Workers, p. 193.

"I saw the saints leaving the cities and villages, and associating together in companies, and living in the most solitary places. Angels provided them food and water, while the wicked were suffering from hunger and thirst." Early Writings, p. 282.

"God's work is to be done in his way and his Spirit. In various places small companies are to consecrate themselves to God, body, soul, and spirit, and laying hold of the throne of God by faith they are to work zealously, keeping their souls in the love of God. The vital current of his love will make itself felt, and will be recognized as from heaven in the good works of his people. Those little companies who know the truth, with one voice should bid their minister go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Each one should seek to do individual work for another. Not one who has tasted the goodness, the mercy, and the love of God, can be excused from working for the souls of others." Followers of Christ will be Missionaries, Advent Review and Sabbath Herald, 8 January, 1895.

"Although the social meeting is a new thing, yet they are learning in the school of Christ and are overcoming fear and trembling. We keep before them the fact that the social meeting (similar to small group meetings) will be the best meeting in which they may be trained and educated to be witnesses for Christ." Manuscript 32 1894.

"Why do not believers feel a deeper, more earnest concern for those who are out of Christ? Why do not two or three meet together and plead with God for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another? In our churches let companies be formed for service. Let different ones unite in labour as fishers of men. Let them seek to gather souls from the corruption of the world into the saving purity of Christ's love." Testimonies, Vol. 7, 21.

The Lord has promised that where two or three are met together in His name, there will He be in the midst. Those who meet together for prayer will receive an unction from the Holy One. There is great need of secret prayer, but there is also need that several Christians meet together, and unite with earnestness their petitions to God. In these small companies Jesus is present, the love of souls is deepened in the heart, and the Spirit puts forth its mighty energies, that human agents may be exercised in regard to saving those who are lost. LHU 358