8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders, Lesson #1
Good Questions Have Groups Talking

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Habits 1 & 2: Dream and Pray

ACCOUNTABILITY
What three fellowships do we have scheduled for the next three months? Who will invite every member? Who will help invite every prospect? Who will help plan the party?

OPEN
Let’s each share your name one thing you find yourself praying about these days.

DIG
1. Dave starts the introduction with this question: Why do some groups grow and multiply while others do not? Based on your experience, how would you answer that question?

   There is no single key to church health and church growth; there are many keys. The church is not called to do one thing; it is called to do many things. That’s why balance is so important. I tell my staff that the ninth Beatitude is “Blessed are the balanced; for they shall outlast everyone else.” — Warren, Rick (2004). The Purpose Driven- Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission (Kindle Locations 1562-1564). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

2. Overview. How many of the 8 habits can you recall?

   1. Dream of leading a healthy, growing, multiplying group.
   2. Pray for group members daily.
   3. Invite new people to visit the group weekly.
   4. Contact group members regularly.
   5. Prepare for the group meeting.
   7. Plan group fellowship activities.
   8. Be committed to personal growth.


3. Imagine your group were to multiply every year. How many would you reach in 10 years?

   If a small group leader multiplies his group into just one other multiplying group every year for ten years, the results are incredible. After the first year, 1 has become 2. At the end of the second year, 2 has become 4. After the third year, 4 has become 8. Then 8 groups become 16, 16 become 32 groups, and 32 become 64 groups after the sixth year! Then if multiplication continues annually, 64
groups give birth to 128, 128 groups to 256, 256 groups to 512, and 512 groups become 1028 groups by the end of the tenth year. Over 1,000 groups in ten years! Such is the possible result of a single small group! — Dave Earley. The 8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders (Kindle Location 110). Kindle Edition.

4. **If you were to explain this to your group, how do you think they would feel about the vision of multiplying?**

I had a man come up to me after a conference in the Houston area with this testimony: “I bought your book [You Can Double Your Class in Two Years or Less], read it, and put it into practice. Our group grew. I presented the idea of multiplying. They hated it! They hated me! They hated you, Josh! But we did it anyway. Attendance actually dropped for a while. But, we rocked along. We kept doing the things that had caused us to grow—having parties and inviting every member and every potential member. We had the group well-organized and lots of people involved. A year went by. I looked up and noticed we had as many as we had had before we divided. The other group was doing just about as well. I realized we would have never gotten that many to come to our small group. So, we divided again. People were grumpy, but not as badly as before because they had seen some positive results. We grew again, and recently divided again. I’m starting to think I can do this!”

Most people catch vision after they see results. It’s much the same way in other areas of life. You don’t have to be excited about grilled chicken, broccoli, and exercise to lose weight; you just have to eat broccoli and grilled chicken—and, of course, exercise.

Lesson: Don’t wait for your group to embrace the vision of growing and multiplying; just work the plan. — Josh Hunt, Make Your Group Grow

5. **Early says he started with one group and multiplied to 2000 people. Are you familiar with other churches that grew using the multiplication of groups model?**

I like to describe Full Gospel Central Church as the smallest church in the world as well as the biggest church in the world. It is the biggest because, as of the writing of this book, our congregation numbers more than 150,000 people. But it is also the smallest church in the world—because every member is part of a home cell group consisting of fifteen families or fewer. — Yonggi Cho, Dr. David (1988). Successful Home Cell Groups (Kindle Locations 540-543). Bridge-Logos Publishers. Kindle Edition. Note: this book is quite old. They have grown much more sense then.

6. **What is the fastest growing church you have ever been personally connected with? Who has a story?**

People can if they think they can. If they think they can grow a group, they can grow a group. If they don’t think they can, they can’t. Jesus said it will be done for you according to your faith. Many groups don’t believe their group can grow because they have not seen a group grow.
7. **What if you have never been a part of a fast-growing church? How do you dream when you have never seen?**

From the beginning, when Saddleback Church was just a dream in the heart of twenty-six-year-old Rick Warren, bold faith has always taken precedence over cautious planning. “Very little of Saddleback’s ministry was preplanned,” Rick writes in his book The Purpose Driven Church.[2] Instead, Rick followed the leading of the Holy Spirit and quickly responded to circumstances surrounding him. In fact, when he moved his wife, Kay, and their four-month-old baby to Orange County, California, they did not know a single person in the area. He writes that they were full of hope, “but we also arrived with no money, no church building, no members, and no home.”[3] Did that make sense? No, not so much. But Rick had faith and was willing to follow the leading of God, even if it did not seem to make sense at the time.

In March of 1980 he stood in a high school gymnasium before the very first congregation of sixty people (most of them unbelievers). Confidently, and almost flat broke, he announced that someday they would be a church of over 20,000 members and they would build a facility on at least fifty acres of land in Orange County, California (some of the most expensive real estate in the United States). He finished by adding, “I stand before you today and state in confident assurance that these dreams will become reality. Why? Because they are inspired by God!”[4]

Today, Saddleback Valley Community Church has an average weekly attendance of over 20,000 people and sits on 120 acres of prime Orange County real estate. Christmas and Easter services average well over 40,000 in attendance. Rick would be the first to tell you the success of Saddleback has been more about faith in following the leading of the Holy Spirit than the careful and strategic planning of a single man.

This bold faith is the kind of faith that enabled David to confront Goliath with a sling and five stones gathered from a stream. It is the kind of faith that gave Abraham the strength to place Isaac on the altar as a sacrifice. This kind of faith now leads Rick Warren to take on the five global giants (spiritual emptiness, corrupt leadership, extreme poverty, pandemic disease, and rampant illiteracy) through the P.E.A.C.E. Plan (Promote reconciliation, Equip servant leaders, Assist the poor, Care for the sick, and Educate the next generation). This bold faith is foundational to Saddleback and to all we do. If we believe God is leading, the dream is never too big—never impossible. — Gladen, Steve M. (2011). Small Groups with Purpose (Kindle Locations 306-325). Baker Books. Kindle Edition.

8. **Why is dreaming the first step? Why is it important that we dream?**

I have spoken more than five thousand times in fifty-four countries before audiences of as many as twenty-five thousand people. My seminars and talks have varied in length from five minutes to five days. In every case, I have focused on sharing the best ideas I could find on the particular subject with that audience at that moment. After countless talks on various themes, if I was given only five minutes to speak to you and I could convey only one thought that would help you to be more successful, I would tell you this: “Write down your goals, make plans to achieve them, and work on your plans every single day.”
This advice, if you followed it, would be of more help to you than almost anything else you could ever learn. Many university graduates have told me that this simple concept has been more valuable to them than four years of study. This idea has changed my life and the lives of millions of other people. It will change yours as well. — TRACY, Brian (2010). Goals! (p. 2). Berrett-Koehler. Kindle Edition.

9. **How would you put into words your dream for your group?**

First, if your vision is going to stick in people’s minds, it must be memorable. I’ve talked to dozens of leaders who had an idea of what they wanted their organization to become, but it took them three paragraphs to explain it. They had a vision, but it wasn’t one they could communicate effectively. People don’t remember or embrace paragraphs. They remember and embrace sentences. As theologian Howard Hendricks said, “If it’s a mist in the pulpit, it’s a fog in the pew.” If your vision is unclear to you, it will never be clear to the people in your organization. For your vision to stick, you may need to clarify or simplify it.

When we launched North Point Community Church, our vision was “to create a church that unchurched people would love to attend.” For the theologically astute, a statement like that raises lots of questions. Admittedly, it is void of theological content. There’s nothing there about life change or salvation. The statement is incomplete. But if you wanted to know what we were about, that was it. We were committed to creating a church for the unchurched or, to use a phrase Bill Hybels coined, “irreligious people.” We were clear from the beginning that we were going after a different market than the average church. When people complained about what we did and didn’t do compared to the other churches they had attended, we simply shared our vision. That answered most of the questions. And our vision statement galvanized our leadership around what was distinctive about our organization.

As you evaluate your vision statement, remember this: It is better to have a vision statement that is incomplete and memorable than to have one that is complete and forgettable. As a leader, you have endless opportunities to define terms and expand on concepts for the people who are intrigued enough to ask questions and gather more information. But you have limited opportunities to cast your vision to the drive-by audience, the people who may never give you their undivided attention, much less a second chance. For that group you need a statement that will stick. —Stanley, Andy (2009). Making Vision Stick (Kindle Locations 116-122). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

10. **Earley suggests three dreams for every group. Do you remember what they are?**


11. **Suppose someone said they wanted the group to be healthy, but didn’t care about numbers. How would you respond?**

Some churches excuse their lack of growth by insisting that the smaller a church is, the more quality it can maintain. This reasoning is faulty. If quality is inherent in smallness, then, logically, the highest
quality churches would consist of only one person! On the contrary, having spent much of my life prior to Saddleback in small churches, I have observed that one reason many churches remain small is because there is little quality in the life and ministry of those churches. There is no correlation between the size and the quality of a ministry.

What if your parents had applied the quality versus quantity myth to having children? What if, after their first child, they had said, “One kid is enough. Let’s focus on making this child a quality kid. Let’s not worry about quantity.” Most of us wouldn’t be here if our parents had thought that!

A church that has no interest at all in increasing its number of converts is, in essence, saying to the rest of the world, “You all can go to hell.” If my three kids were lost on a wilderness trip, my wife and I would be consumed with finding them. We’d spare no expense to seek and save our lost children. And when we found one child, we wouldn’t think of calling off the search and just focusing on the one “quality” kid we had left. We’d keep looking as long as any child was still lost.

In the church’s case, as long as there are lost people in the world we must care about quantity as well as quality. At Saddleback, we count people because people count. Those numbers represent people Jesus died for. Anytime someone says, “You can’t measure success by numbers,” my response is, “It all depends on what you’re counting!” If you’re counting marriages saved, lives transformed, broken people healed, unbelievers becoming worshipers of Jesus, and members being mobilized for ministry and missions, numbers are extremely important. They have eternal significance. — Warren, Rick (2004). The Purpose Driven- Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission (Kindle Locations 637-645). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

12. Look over some of the barriers on page 24ff. Which barriers do you think might be the biggest issue for you?


13. Habit #2: prayer. How would you explain the importance of prayer to a new group leader?

The greatest thing anyone can do for God and for man is to pray. It is not the only thing. But it is the chief thing. A correct balancing of the possible powers one may exert puts it first. For if a man is to pray right, he must first be right in his motives and life. And if a man be right, and put the practice of praying in its right place, then his serving and giving and speaking will be fairly fragrant with the presence of God.

The great people of the earth to-day are the people who pray. I do not mean those who talk about prayer; nor those who say they believe in prayer; nor yet those who can explain about prayer; but I mean these people who take time and pray. They have not time. It must be taken from something else. This something else is important. Very important, and pressing than prayer. There are people that put prayer first, and group the other items in life’s schedule around and after prayer.
These are the people to-day who are doing the most for God; in winning souls; in solving problems; in awakening churches; in supplying both men and money for mission posts; in keeping fresh and strong these lives far off in sacrificial service on the foreign field where the thickest fighting is going on; in keeping the old earth sweet awhile longer. — Gordon, S. D. (Samuel Dickey) (2011). Quiet Talks on Prayer (Kindle Locations 47-56). Kindle Edition.

14. Do you think God ever blesses a group where the leader does not consistently pray for the members?

What the Church needs to-day is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use -- men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men -- men of prayer. — Power Through Prayer.

15. Can you actually quantify the relationship between time spent in prayer and whether a group grows? What do you recall about that?

Factors that do affect multiplication:

- The cell leader's devotional time. Those who spend 90 minutes or more in devotions per day multiply their groups twice as much as those who spend less than 30 minutes.

- The cell leader's intercession for the cell members. Those who pray daily for cell members are most likely to multiply groups.

- The leader spending time with God to prepare for a cell meeting. Spending time with God preparing the heart for a cell meeting is more important than preparing the lesson. — Comiskey, Joel. Home Cell Group Explosion: How Your Small Group Can Grow and Multiply [With Study Guide] (Kindle Locations 174-177). Kindle Edition.

16. How do we find time to pray when we are too busy to pray?

Luther once said: "I am so busy now that I find if I do not spend two or three hours each day in prayer, I cannot get through the day. If I should neglect prayer but a single day, I should lose a great deal of the fire of faith." —Link and Visitor / Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations: Signs of the Times.

17. What are some benefits of a robust prayer life? What do you love about prayer?

There's a little fable about a Mr. Jones who dies and goes to heaven. Peter is waiting at the gates to give him a tour. Amid the splendor of golden streets, beautiful mansions, and choirs of angels that Peter shows him, Mr. Jones notices an odd-looking building. He thinks it looks like an enormous warehouse—it has no windows and only one door. But when he asks to see inside, Peter hesitates. "You really don’t want to see what’s in there," he tells the new arrival.
Why would there be any secrets in heaven? Jones wonders. What incredible surprise could be waiting for me in there? When the official tour is over he’s still wondering, so he asks again to see inside the structure.

Finally Peter relents. When the apostle opens the door, Mr. Jones almost knocks him over in his haste to enter. It turns out that the enormous building is filled with row after row of shelves, floor to ceiling, each stacked neatly with white boxes tied in red ribbons.

“These boxes all have names on them,” Mr. Jones muses aloud. Then turning to Peter he asks, “Do I have one?”

“Yes, you do.” Peter tries to guide Mr. Jones back outside. “Frankly,” Peter says, “if I were you…. But Mr. Jones is already dashing toward the “J” aisle to find his box.

Peter follows, shaking his head. He catches up with Mr. Jones just as he is slipping the red ribbon off his box and popping the lid. Looking inside, Jones has a moment of instant recognition, and he lets out a deep sigh like the ones Peter has heard so many times before. Because there in Mr. Jones’s white box are all the blessings that God wanted to give to him while he was on earth…but Mr. Jones had never asked.

“Ask,” promised Jesus, “and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7). “You do not have because you do not ask,” said James (James 4:2). Even though there is no limit to God’s goodness, if you didn’t ask Him for a blessing yesterday, you didn’t get all that you were supposed to have.

That’s the catch—if you don’t ask for His blessing, you forfeit those that come to you only when you ask. In the same way that a father is honored to have a child beg for his blessing, your Father is delighted to respond generously when His blessing is what you covet most. — Wilkinson, Bruce (2010). The Prayer of Jabez: Breaking Through to the Blessed Life (p. 27). Multnomah Books. Kindle Edition.

18. What keeps you from praying?

We today yearn for prayer and hide from prayer. We are attracted to it and repelled by it. We believe prayer is something we should do, even something we want to do, but it seems like a chasm stands between us and actually praying. We experience the agony of prayerlessness.

We are not quite sure what holds us back. Of course we are busy with work and family obligations, but that is only a smoke screen. Our busyness seldom keeps us from eating or sleeping or making love. No, there is something deeper, more profound keeping us in check. In reality, there are any number of “somethings” preventing us, all of which we will explore in due time. But for now there is one “something” that needs immediate attention. It is the notion—almost universal among us modern high achievers—that we have to have everything “just right” in order to pray. That is, before we can really pray, our lives need some fine tuning, or we need to know more about how to pray, or we need to study the philosophical questions surrounding prayer, or we need to have a better grasp of the great traditions of prayer. And on it goes. It isn’t that these are wrong concerns or that there
is never a time to deal with them. But we are starting from the wrong end of things—putting the cart before the horse. Our problem is that we assume prayer is something to master the way we master algebra or auto mechanics. That puts us in the “on-top” position, where we are competent and in control. But when praying, we come “underneath,” where we calmly and deliberately surrender control and become incompetent. “To pray,” writes Emilie Griffin, “means to be willing to be naive.” — Foster, Richard J. (2004). Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home (pp. 7-8). HarperCollins e-books. Kindle Edition.

19. How would you evaluate your prayer life these days?

If you can't remember a time when your relationship with God was real, personal, and practical, you need to evaluate your walk with Him. Go before the Lord in prayer, and ask Him to reveal the true nature of your relationship. Ask Him to bring you into genuine intimacy with Him. — Blackaby, Richard (2008). Experiencing God (Kindle Locations 1837-1839). B&H Publishing. Kindle Edition.

20. What advice would you have for a young Christian wishing to establish a time alone with God in prayer?

Set a time, a place, a plan. Let habit work for you. Expect that you will occasionally get off tract, and when you do, get back on again.

21. Let’s take some time to pray for the members of our group. Let’s pray out loud, each one mentioning one or two people in your group.

I would manage the time you have in your group to allow ample time for this. You might even push it into the middle of the session. Instead of talking about prayer; pray!

22. What do you wish to remember and apply from today’s discussion?

Note: If you enjoyed this lesson format, I would invite you to try Good Questions Have Groups Talking. I write 4 new lessons each week that correspond with Lifeway’s lessons, as well as the International Standard Series. They can be used supplementally or stand-alone. Each lesson is similar that this one, with 20 or so ready-to-use questions and answers from leading experts on the subject. Good Questions are available on a sliding scale basis that is affordable for any size church. See www.joshhunt.com for more information.