8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders, Lesson #4
Good Questions Have Groups Talking
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Habits Fellowship and Grow

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 and one thing you have been able to apply from this study so far.

DIG
1. 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.


2. Today we will talk about groups having fellowships. What Bible verses can you think of that speak to this?

I am fascinated these days with how group time can be enhanced with people with smart phones and Internet connection. If your group is connected, you might have them see if they can find some verses that speak to the church fellowshipping together.

3. What is your group’s current plan as far as fellowships? How often do you have them? What kinds of things do you do?

At Christmastime last year, I did what I have done every year following Willow’s Christmas Eve service: I threw a Matthew Party. Despite wall-to-wall meetings, planning sessions, and run-throughs that week, my mind kept drifting to the Matthew Party that was only days away. I couldn’t wait!
I had invited about twenty people who were living extremely far from God, by their own admission. These men and women had never been to Willow before, had never been to my house before, and spiritually speaking would profess to be “going it alone.”

To that group, I added about twenty people who were in the Seeker Slow Lane — the remedial class of Christianity, you might say. On the rare occasion when I would badger them mercilessly, they’d agree to come to Willow. But it was sporadic attendance at best, usually involving a fair amount of kicking and screaming on their part. Most of them had been to my house previously to attend other parties, and all of them knew I was “working” on them, nudging them along the (very) slow path to God. Maybe they would step across the line of faith someday, but in my estimation, it was going to take some time. A lot of time.

In addition to the twenty or so people who were very far from God, and the twenty or so people who were in-progress types, I had sprinkled in a dozen or so very strong Christ-followers from Willow to mix it up a bit. The screening process for this group in particular had been intense! I knew I couldn’t afford any overzealous types showing up. No truth vigilantes. No bounty hunters. Just normal, mature, relationally intelligent, open-hearted, radically inclusive people who understood how high the stakes were that night — after all, I was going to put them in a room with friends of mine who, apart from a bona fide miracle, would spend eternity apart from God.

As with every other year, fifteen minutes before guests arrived, my heart started beating fast. I’m sure the tension I felt was completely natural — I had no way to control the outcome of the party, no way of knowing how the guests would interact, and no way to prepare for the exact conversations that would unfold and what God would choose to do as a result.

But I wouldn’t have traded that anxiety for anything in the world! As I greeted the first guests to arrive, I braced for the adventure to come as a final burst of adrenaline exploded. Here we go!

I wish you could have been there to watch what unfolded that night. In my house in Barrington, Illinois, in the twenty-first century, we enjoyed an approximation of Matthew’s first-century experience. It was incredible to witness so many God-moments in the making, not to mention it was just a heck of a party. The first time I glanced down at my watch, it was well past midnight, and guests ended up staying until two o’clock the next morning — and only left then because I kicked them out.

So what was it that gave it the buzz? What made it such a magical, edgy experience? I mulled over questions like those in the hours and days that followed. Want to know what I decided? The single greatest reason that the party was such a success was because the Christ-followers I’d invited from Willow did exactly what Christ wants all of his followers to do: they took a walk across the room.

When the Willow people had first arrived, they gathered in little Creeker circles, safely huddling together to talk about the weather, the Christmas Eve stage set, plans for the weekend, you name it. (They had to start somewhere, I guess.) But then, after about twenty minutes, it happened — and I was so proud of them when it did. One by one, they looked around the room and started excusing
themselves from each other’s company. “Well, I’m not going to stay in this circle all night,” they would murmur as their minds raced. I’m going to walk across the living room and stick out my hand and introduce myself to someone.

“Excuse me,” they would say, if with a complete lack of confidence. And then slowly they turned and walked. And how I related to the thoughts they had as they made those walks. I’d made hundreds of similar walks across rooms, and I knew how fast their hearts were beating, how dry their mouths were becoming, how curious they were about what would take place once they said, “Hi. My name is ...”

Every step of the way across my living room that night, each Christ-follower was thinking, I have no idea how this is going to turn out. I don’t know if this guy is going to want to talk to me. I don’t know if that woman will want to engage in conversation with me. But you know what? I’m going to give it a shot. I’m going to pray every step of the way as I walk across this room, I’m going to introduce myself, and then I’m going to step back and just see if God does anything more.

The discussions instantly began to light up. I was so grateful that the Spirit was opening doors! Everyone at the party had attended the Christmas Eve service together, and that shared experience provided the perfect conversational springboard. Some people talked about how they’d never been on the inside of a church before. (What an honor that Willow was their first experience!) Others admitted to just needing “more facts,” and still others had recently purchased Rick Warren’s book The Purpose Driven Life, intending to read it over the holidays.

As I meandered through the crowd that night, I thought about all of the requests I’d made of God in the days leading up to the party. “Oh, if this person and that person could get together and be in conversation with one another, that would be incredible!” Or “If only so-and-so and my other friend could chat, that would be so kinetic — they have so much in common.” Sure enough, while I wandered around my own home that night, refilling drinks and making sure people had enough to eat, I would catch a glimpse of those exact pairings occurring. “God is good!” I whispered quietly. “God is so good!”

Thankfully, no Pharisee types showed up at my house that night to throw water on the delicate sparks that were flickering. I remember walking back into the kitchen with a feeling of soul-level satisfaction. It took hours before that buzz wore off! Finally, after I had given everyone the boot, I halfheartedly picked up the remaining dishes, grabbed stray glasses, and headed back into the kitchen, dazed by the significance of all that had happened.

Sometime just before daybreak, my mind still racing from the mystical aspects of the party, I thought to myself, The whole thing comes down to nights just like this one. The future of the kingdom of God comes down to whether individual rank-and-file Christ-followers will do in their everyday lives what just happened in my home tonight!

It really is true: the spread of the gospel — at least in today’s reality — boils down to whether you and I will continue to seek creative ways to engage our friends, inviting them to explore the
abundance of the Christ-following life and helping them choose eternity with God instead of settling for a terrible fate when this life is all said and done. — Just Walk Across the Room: Simple Steps Pointing People to Faith (Bill Hybels)

4. **What benefits come to a group from having regular fellowships?**

The goal of each cell is to "kin" as many members of our oikos as possible. Cells penetrate society through the members' friends, family, and loved ones. Neighbour counsels people to find these web relationships at ". . . your work, your home, your recreational activities, . . . By cultivating a relationship which already existed, you were able to draw them."

On a practical level, those who know us will accept an invitation to attend a cell meeting more readily than strangers. Encourage cell members to love, pray for and invite friends, relatives, coworkers, classmates and neighbors.

David Yonggi Cho writes:

I have found the only definite way to increase church membership is through personal contact, and personal soul winning. If you know the person, it is better. Since you are personally touching your neighbors, through the cell system, it is far easier to win them to the church. — Comiskey, Joel. Home Cell Group Explosion: How Your Small Group Can Grow and Multiply [With Study Guide] (Kindle Locations 708-713). Kindle Edition.

5. **Can you think of a biblical example of someone throwing a party for the purpose of evangelism?**

The situation wasn’t much different in the first century, and that’s what made Matthew’s actions seem so outrageous. You can read about them in Luke 5:29. In short, Matthew threw a banquet and did the unheard-of. He invited both his religious and his irreligious buddies. It was an intentionally mixed crowd — a party with a purpose.

You've got to give him credit. Matthew had become a Christian while pursuing a career as a tax collector, which, in those days, was about one notch above being part of the mob. People in his profession were notorious for pilfering money from the poor. If you were a tax collector, you essentially had a license to extort.

But his encounter with Jesus radically transformed his heart. As a result, he had an immediate concern for his friends who were not yet committed to Christ. His natural desire was to help them find what he’d found. The only real question was, how? He hadn’t been through an evangelism seminar. He hadn’t graduated from a seminary. He lacked printed materials. All he had was a grace-filled heart and a determined spirit. He’d figure it out somehow.

One strategy would be to bring his tax-collecting colleagues to the temple to hear someone who was more articulate in explaining spiritual truth. But the only option there was a robed rabbi reading Old Testament law. It didn’t take Matthew long to realize that approach wouldn’t connect very well with these high-flying, risk-taking, card-carrying pagans.
He could have just given up. He might have wrung his hands and said, “Well, there are no good options. The robed rabbi plan is out, and Jesus’ teaching ministry is too spontaneous and unscheduled. Besides, they probably wouldn’t go out of their way to hear someone preaching on a hillside. And I’m certainly not qualified. I guess I’ll just have to let them fend for themselves.”

You know, there are a lot of Christians who wring their hands and insulate their hearts from the plight of their lost friends and family members. But Matthew wasn’t willing to do that. Instead, he persisted. I’m sure he must have thought hard about it, prayed for wisdom and direction, and perhaps asked his believing friends for their advice.

Then he had an idea: he’d throw a party. Of course! His buddies loved parties; big parties, and the more the merrier.

Now all he had to do was figure out a way to inject his primary purpose into this party. So he asked Jesus and the disciples if they’d be willing to come along to plant some spiritual seeds here and there in the hopes of something significant taking root in his friends’ hearts.

On the night of the event, only heaven knows what strategic conversations took place. We don’t have many details, except that the Pharisees got wind of it and didn’t like it. They apparently thought that Jesus and the disciples were doing evangelism the wrong way, so they pulled them aside and challenged them for socializing with such unsavory characters. Frankly, I think part of their problem was that they thought everyone was having too much fun.

During this exchange with the Pharisees, I can picture freshly converted Matthew listening in and wondering if he’d done the right thing. After all, this was his first evangelistic effort, and now Jesus was getting chewed out by the religious brass. I can imagine him thinking, “Maybe I should have just dragged my friends to the temple. Or perhaps I should have just walked away and not tried anything. Now everybody’s upset. Jesus is getting the third degree. I’d better not take any more risks like this one.” — Hybels, Bill (2008). Becoming a Contagious Christian (Kindle Locations 1983-1990). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

6. **What kinds of activities are fun for your group?**

   Look over the list in the book. Think of serving activities as well as fun activities. Think of guy things and gal things. Think of outdoor and indoor. Think of expensive and cheap. Think of long (retreat) or short (lunch on Sunday). Think of spontaneous things as well as planned things.

7. **Earley reminds of the one another commands. What are some examples?**

   If your people have smart phones, see if you can have them look up some examples. A paper study Bible with concordance could work.
8. Look at the list of one another commands. Which of these can be done if you are not in the same space?

You can pray for one another; it is a little more difficult to greet one another. Some things can be done by phone or email. Most things require you be in the same space.

9. We speak of having fellowships. What does the Greek word for fellowship actually mean?

For a church to be the kind of church Jesus promised to build, there has to be fellowship as well. If we had teaching without fellowship, the church would be a school—a place that simply dispenses information. The original term for fellowship is koinonia, which referred to close, mutual relationships where people share things in common and remain involved with one another. That doesn’t mean potluck suppers, dinners on the grounds, and Christmas concerts. Koinonia represents close relationships that involve sharing life with one another—the bad times as well as the good. Those in fellowship with one another cultivate an intimate harmony with others. In church, the Word of God is not only learned through teaching... it is lived through fellowship. — Swindoll, Charles R. (2010). The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal (p. 15). FaithWords. Kindle Edition.

10. How do fellowships contribute to the goal of disciple making?

For what purpose did Jesus choose the twelve apostles? “He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14). Jesus chose these men to be with Him. This was not a revolutionary idea in His day, for there are numerous instances in the Old Testament where men were trained for the work of God by association with other men of God. — Eims, LeRoy (2009). The Lost Art of Disciple Making (p. 30). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

11. Who do you have helping you in planning regular fellowships?

Groups that have a big team are more than twice as likely (115%) to be growing, compared with those who had a small team. A big team was defined as four or more people. A small team was the teacher and one other person. The more people you have helping you, the more likely it is that you’ll grow. The results are quite linear. The following chart shows the percentage of groups that are growing, in proportion to the number of people actively helping the group grow. The more people we have helping, the more likely the growth:
12. How would you define spiritual growth?

Here is mine: coming to experience more and more of the John 10.10 abundant Christian life. Experiencing a life that is a little more joyful, a little more loving, a little less worried, a little more fruit of the Spirit-lish. — Josh Hunt


13. How do we grow spiritually?

Andy Stanley teaches it is 5 things:

- Practical Teaching
- Providential Relationships
- Private Disciplines
- Personal Ministry
- Pivotal Circumstances

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRm-dgN0H9w&feature=related (This is a great series; you might send this link to your group and ask them to watch this during the week.)
14. Does church activity predict spiritual growth?

Church activities do not predict or drive long-term spiritual growth. More precisely, increasing church attendance and participation in organized ministry activities do not predict or drive spiritual growth for people who are in the more advanced stages of spiritual development. Church activities have the greatest influence in the early stages of spiritual growth, but things like personal spiritual practices, including prayer and Bible reading, have far more influence later in the spiritual journey. — Hawkins, Greg L. (2011). Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth (Kindle Locations 219-222). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

15. Willowcreek did a study of what predicts spiritual growth. Guess what they found did predict spiritual growth more than anything else.

Nothing has a greater impact on spiritual growth than reflection on Scripture. If churches could do only one thing to help people at all levels of spiritual maturity grow in their relationship with Christ, their choice is clear. They would inspire, encourage, and equip their people to read the Bible—specifically, to reflect on Scripture for meaning in their lives. The numbers say most churches are missing the mark—because only one out of five congregants reflects on Scripture every day. — Hawkins, Greg L. (2011). Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth (Kindle Locations 234-237). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

16. What is your plan these days for daily Bible reading and prayer? What are you reading? What do you like this plan? Is it time to start a new plan?

Sustainable spiritual growth happens when I actually want to do what I ought to do. This means I have to change how I think about what “counts” as spiritual, for what makes an activity spiritual is not the activity itself. It is whether or not I do it with and through the Spirit. It is the quality of the presence and interaction with the Spirit while I am doing the activity. — Ortberg, John (2009). The Me I Want to Be (p. 53). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

17. Is there more to spiritual growth than how many quiet times you have?

For many years I thought about this only in terms of a few special activities. If someone asked me how my spiritual life was going, my first thought would be how I was doing at having a quiet time—praying and reading the Bible each day. If I had prayed and read the Bible for several consecutive prior days, I was likely to say that my spiritual life was going well. If not, I was likely to feel guilty and downcast. So prayer and Bible study became the gauge of my spiritual condition. As long as I did those two things I could go through the day confident of God’s approval.

I often use a journal in these quiet times. But I discovered that sometimes when I was in a hurry and didn’t really want to take time to be with God, I would still get out my journal and scribble a few sentences simply so I had an entry in it for that day. (I’m not sure why I did this. Did I think I was going to have to hand it in?) I found myself measuring my spiritual life by the regularity of journal
entries. I even devised a strategy in case there was an embarrassingly long gap between entry dates: I could keep two journals and merely write in one: “See other journal.”

But God’s primary assessment of our lives is not going to be measured by the number of journal entries. I recently received a book of which the stated goal was to enable the reader to get up to “340 or 350 quiet times a year”—as if that were the point. — Ortberg, John (2008). The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People (p. 39). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

18. What do you love about having a quiet time?

Sometime ago I was giving a bath to our three children. I had a custom of bathing them together, more to save time than anything else. I knew that eventually I would have to stop the group bathing, but for the time being it seemed efficient.

Johnny was still in the tub, Laura was out and safely in her pajamas, and I was trying to get Mallory dried off. Mallory was out of the water, but was doing what has come to be known in our family as the Dee Dah Day dance. This consists of her running around and around in circles, singing over and over again, “Dee dah day, dee dah day.” It is a relatively simple dance expressing great joy. When she is too happy to hold it in any longer, when words are inadequate to give voice to her euphoria, she has to dance to release her joy. So she does the Dee Dah Day.

On this particular occasion, I was irritated. “Mallory, hurry!” I prodded. So she did—she began running in circles faster and faster and chanting “dee dah day” more rapidly. “No, Mallory, that’s not what I mean! Stop with the dee dah day stuff, and get over here so I can dry you off. Hurry!”

Then she asked a profound question:

“Why?” I had no answer. I had nowhere to go, nothing to do, no meetings to attend, no sermons to write. I was just so used to hurrying, so preoccupied with my own little agenda, so trapped in this rut of moving from one task to another, that here was life, here was joy, here was an invitation to the dance right in front of me—and I was missing it.

So I got up, and Mallory and I did the Dee Dah Day dance together. She said I was pretty good at it, too, for a man my age.

Reflecting on this afterward, I realized that I tend to divide my minutes into two categories: living, and waiting to live. Most of my life is spent in transit: trying to get somewhere, waiting to begin, driving someplace, standing in line, waiting for a meeting to end, trying to get a task completed, worrying about something bad that might happen, or being angry about something that did happen. These are all moments when I am not likely to be fully present, not to be aware of the voice and purpose of God. I am impatient. I am, almost literally, killing time. And that is just another way of saying I am killing myself. Drying off the kids was just something I was trying to get through.

Ironically, often the thing that keeps me from experiencing joy is my preoccupation with self. The very selfishness that keeps me from pouring myself out for the joy of others also keeps me from
noticing and delighting in the myriad small gifts God offers each day. This is why Walker Percy describes boredom as “the self stuffed with the self.” Most of life is spent in transit: trying to get somewhere, waiting to begin, standing in line.

Life is not that way for Mallory. Her self is unstuffed. She just lives. While she’s taking a bath, it’s a deep day moment. And when it is time to get dried, that’s another one. After she’s dry, it will be time for another. Life is a series of deep day moments. Not every moment of life is happy, of course. There are still occasions that call for tears—skinned knees and cranky towel-bearers. But each moment is pregnant with possibility. Mallory doesn’t miss many of them. She is teaching me about joy. — The Life You’ve Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People (John Ortberg)

19. Is Christian living easy or hard?

The Christian life is not simply difficult. It is not something that gets easier with time. It is not something you grow into. It’s impossible. You can’t live it. I can’t live it. God doesn’t expect us to live it. He knows it’s impossible. Jesus knew it was impossible. It is time that we come to grips with this liberating truth—it is impossible. — Charles F. Stanley. The Wonderful Spirit Filled Life (pp. 8-9). Kindle Edition.

20. What tends to hinder your spiritual growth?

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.

21. Review. What one thing you want to recall from this study?