

Leading Small Groups With Purpose, Lesson #1
Book by Steve Gladen; This Study Guide by Josh Hunt
Good Questions Have Small Groups Talking
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There are more questions here than you likely need, and more answers than you will be able to use. The goal is to equip people to lead small groups, not to cover the material.

Chapters 1 - 2

OPEN

Let's each share your name and, what do you love about small groups?

DIG

1. **In the Forward, John Ortberg says, "When Jesus wanted to change the world, he did not start with a political movement, a media campaign, a powerful army, or a global network. He started with a small group." Why do you think this is?**

It all started by Jesus calling a few men to follow him. This revealed immediately the direction his evangelistic strategy would take. His concern was not with programs to reach the multitudes, but with men whom the multitudes would follow. Remarkable as it may seem, Jesus started to gather these men before he ever organized an evangelistic campaign or even preached a sermon in public. Men were to be his method of winning the world to God. The initial objective of Jesus' plan was to enlist men who could bear witness to his life and carry on his work after he returned to the Father.
— *Master Plan of Evangelism, The* by Robert E. Coleman

2. **Why do small groups matter to God?**

It's no accident that Jesus spent the bulk of his ministry training a small group of future leaders rather than an army of foot soldiers. No doubt he knew the future of the church, humanly speaking, depended upon the quality of its leadership. — Osborne, L. (1997). *Equipping The Saints To Lead. In M. Shelley (Ed.), Growing Your Church Through Training And Motivation: 30 Strategies To Transform Your Ministry* (Vol. 4, p. 97). Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.

3. **One more Ortberg quote. This from the end of the Forward: "Henry Cloud said once that people are God's Plan A for changing people. And there is no Plan B. Nothing shapes our lives like the women and men closest to us." Why are people so important in shaping our lives?**

I was waiting for God to give me his grace through supernatural zap-ping; he was giving it to me through his people. I was waiting for him to speak to me directly; he was speaking to me through his

people. I was waiting for him to give me direction in life; he was the strength behind the direction people were giving me. I was waiting for him to heal my depression; he sent special people to comfort me.

I could see that God himself was healing my depression through my friends Bill and Julie and others. I no longer felt as if I had gotten Plan B. I had received God himself and the healing he had always planned to give me through his people. I learned what Paul had experienced in his own depression when he said, “But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Cor. 7:6 NASB, italics added).

When I went to graduate school and studied theology, I discovered that this is the doctrine of the church. This doctrine holds that the church, with its indwelling Spirit, is the real physical presence of Christ on earth today. It is true that where two or more are gathered together, he is present (Matt. 18:20). It is true that he is inside each believer. It is true that the Body is the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16). In the Old Testament, God lived in the temple and in the Holy of Holies. Today he lives in temples of human flesh. He lives in us, and wherever we are, he is. What an incredible reality!

This discovery at that point in my life was intensely personal. It led to great thanksgiving and a real feeling of God’s looking out for me and being active in my life. But I had no idea of the significance it would play later in my professional life. — Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (2009). *How People Grow: What The Bible Reveals About Personal Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

4. How have people helped you grow in Christ?

Support and strengthening indicate that a group is doing the right things. When members become weak or discouraged, groups can help them become stronger and better able to handle life. Groups take our weakness and transform it into strength. People who can admit their weakness can also receive the strength the group offers, while those who must stay strong miss this blessing: “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

As people begin to open up in group—whether about faith, relationship struggle, or a personal battle—they bring up things they simply don’t have the strength or courage to tackle, handle, or even face. These are the substance of group work, as they require group intervention and strengthening. — Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (2010). *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs To Know*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

5. Why is it impossible to grow in Christ without relationships?

You’ve probably heard the expression “When someone’s ‘why’ is strong enough, they’ll figure out the ‘how’.” Well, one of the main reasons people do not join a small group is because they don’t have enough reasons “why” to overcome the fact that they may have to step out of their comfort zone. That’s why teaching on the power of groups from the stage or pulpit is crucially important. You have to give people a biblical basis for why they need to join a small group. Here are some reasons straight from the Bible:

- Since the start of the Christian church, Christians have gathered in large groups and in small groups for discipleship, fellowship, worship, evangelism and ministry (see Acts 2:46-47).
- God created us to be in relationships—with Him and with others (see Gen. 2:18).
- We need people because life is tough (see Eccles. 4:9-12).
- Jesus' presence is stronger when two or three are gathered in His name (Matt. 18:20).
- Fellowship with other believers is part of God's plan for discipleship (Acts 2:41-42).

— Searcy, N., & Thomas, K. (2010). *Activate: An Entirely New Approach To Small Groups*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.

6. 1 Corinthians 2.3 – 5. Can you relate to how Paul felt about serving God? Why or why not?

Imagine writing a comprehensive history of the church's last three centuries. Now imagine no one has ever written such a history before, so there's no single collection of key documents, no books profiling key figures, no chronology of major events, not even a fixed system of dates. When Eusebius, bishop of Caesarea, undertook such an effort, he felt trepidation: "I feel inadequate to do it justice as the first to venture on such an undertaking, a traveler on a lonely and untrodden path," he wrote in his introduction to the *The Church History* (or *Ecclesiastical History*). "But I pray that God may guide me and the power of the Lord assist me, for I have not found even the footprints of any predecessors on this path, only traces in which some have left various accounts of the times in which they lived."

For this ten-volume work, Eusebius is known as "the father of church history." But in his day, he was as much a maker of history as a recorder of it. — Galli, M., & Olsen, T. (2000). *Introduction. In 131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (p. 335). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

7. What should we do if we feel overwhelmed or totally inadequate in serving God?

Anytime you feel inadequate, go to God and say, "I feel inadequate. I'm trusting You to be my adequacy."

If you feel ignorant, trust God to be your source of wisdom.

If you feel weak or exhausted, trust God to be your strength.

If you feel yourself totally without adequate resources, trust God to provide what you need. — Stanley, C. F. (2004). *God's Way Day By Day* (p. 270). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

8. Let's look at the story of Moses in Exodus 3.11ff. How did Moses appear to feel about serving the Lord?

Numbers 12:3 notes, "The man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth." The adjective is derived from the Hebrew verb *'anah*, which suggests a state of

submission brought about by affliction and suffering. The proud young prince had been worn away, leaving an old man stripped of all pretensions as well as self-confidence—in short, leaving a man whom God could use.

But with Moses as with the rest of us, our greatest strength may also be our weakness. We see this in Moses' first encounter with God and in the extended dialogue which—because the conversation was *with God*—we may consider prayer (Ex. 3, 4). We know the story from Sunday school.

God spoke to Moses from within a burning bush, reviving Moses' dream. God announced that He had at last come down to deliver Israel, and said "Come now ... and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt"(Ex. 3:10).

Just as Moses had dreamed!

But now the dream was dead, and Moses was humbled. The interaction that followed shows how humble Moses had become. Again and again, Moses objected, insisting that he was inadequate for the task. And again and again, God reminded Moses that He, the Lord, was adequate.

Moses

God

"Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?" (3:11).

"I will certainly be with you" (3:12).

"When I come to the children of Israel ... of Israel, what shall I say to them?" (3:13).

"Say to the children 'I AM has sent me to you'" (3:14).

"But suppose they will not believe me?" (4:1)

[God gave to Moses miraculous signs.]

"Lord, I am not eloquent ... but I am slow of speech" (4:10).

"I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say" (4:12).

"O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send" (4:13).

[Angry (4:14)] God still gave Moses his brother Aaron to serve as spokesman, but insisted "I will be with your mouth ... and I will teach you what you shall do" (v. 15).

Richards, L. (1998). *Every Prayer In The Bible* (p. 106). Nashville: T. Nelson.

9. What is the difference between humility and a feeling of inadequacy?

While it is not uncommon to think "more highly" than we ought, it is equally possible for some people to look at themselves in such a defeated manner that they do not think of themselves as highly as they should. Paul himself illustrates this by his insistence on his apostolic office—something for which he takes no credit, because it was a gift, but at the same time something which he will not deny for the same reason, that it is God's gift! The reminder that all we have is ours

through the grace of God is most appropriate to those who have a tendency to arrogance. Reminder that they are sons of God, gifted for His purpose that they might be to His glory, is equally appropriate to those who grovel in their own inadequacy under a cloak of false humility.

I came across a most unusual illustration of realistic evaluation recently. A friend of mine was singularly successful in launching a special ministry in the church of Christ in such a way that it became extremely beneficial in a very brief period of time. After developing the ministry for five years, however, he resigned his position as president, stating that he knew that his gifts were such that he could take the ministry only so far, that it had grown to such a size that he was becoming a hindrance to its development, and that he felt his former deputy was the man to take over. His decision was made in response to his own convictions, confirmed by his friends and colleagues who loved him and the ministry, and who were unanimous in their desire to see the work of the Lord continue and to see him functioning in the setting for which he was most suited. He was thinking soberly as God had dealt to him the measure of faith. — Briscoe, D. S., & Ogilvie, L. J. (1982). *Romans* (Vol. 29, p. 217). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.

10. By the way, what is the difference between pride and confidence?

There is a major difference between pride and confidence:

PRIDE:

- Pride stops learning because of feelings of “I got it” “I’m better than this”
- “I’ve heard it before”
- Pride puts blame elsewhere vs. How can I get better
- Pride creates mediocrity
- Pride focuses on our needs vs. needs of others
- Pride is the enemy of true confidence, Pride = False Confidence

What is True Confidence?

- Belief that you can do something
- Strong in your identity--someone that really knows who they are
- Someone that is honest with themselves, they know their strengths and weaknesses
- Experience creates confidence--- a history of successes
- Confidence is real--there are true reasons supporting a person’s confidence
- Confidence is about understanding and mastering fundamentals

The more we humble ourselves the more He can lift us up.

<http://choosegrowth.blogspot.com/2007/06/pride-vs-confidence.html>

11. Let's look at a few verses about Jesus and think about them from the perspective of Jesus being a Small Group leader. What do we learn about small group leadership from Jesus' example in these verses: John 10.14, John 11.35, Luke 19.41, and Matthew 9.36?

In each small group the eternal heart of God was to be formed as the heart of the group.

Robert Slocum has said that it is in this intentional development of God's "heart" that Christians are to be able to do real ministry during an extensively and intensively cognitive and intellectual high-tech age. According to Slocum, while high-tech people may be empirical giants, in general they are spiritual and emotional pygmies. They have underdeveloped hearts. Instead, he feels the Christian laity is called to mutual and heartfelt ministry. Slocum believes that small groups are an ideal environment for this ministry to develop. However, even in a Bible-study group, cognitive skills are often more affirmed than affective skills. Slocum argues that the cognitive skills should be servant to the development of the whole person who has a healthy heart, which includes the mind of Christ. The small group is where the heart of God is knowable on earth. The will of God should be done "on earth as it is in heaven." This is the eschatological life of every group gathered "in the name of Jesus."

As the apostle Paul said, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts ... [and] your minds on things above.... When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col 3:1-2, 4). — Icenogle, G. W. (1993). *Biblical Foundations For Small Group Ministry: An Integrative Approach*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

12. Acts 2.42 – 47. What do we learn about the purpose of the church, and the purpose of your small group from this passage?

"Students," he said, "there was once a community of believers who were so totally devoted to God that their life together was charged with the Spirit's power.

"In that band of Christ-followers, believers loved each other with a radical kind of love. They took off their masks and shared their lives with one another. They laughed and cried and prayed and sang and served together in authentic Christian fellowship.

"Those who had more shared freely with those who had less until socioeconomic barriers melted away. People related together in ways that bridged gender and racial chasms, and celebrated cultural differences.

"Acts 2 tells us that this community of believers, this church, offered unbelievers a vision of life that was so beautiful it took their breath away. It was so bold, so creative, so dynamic that they couldn't resist it. Verse 47 tells us that 'the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.' "

Dr. Bilezikian's unscripted words were as much a lament as they were a dream, a sad longing for the restoration of the first century church. I had never imagined a more compelling vision. In fact, that day I didn't just see the vision; I was seized by it.

Suddenly, there were tears in my eyes and a responsive chord rising up in my soul.

Where, I wondered, had that beauty gone?

Why was that power not evident in the contemporary church?

Would the Christian community ever see that potential realized again?

— Hybels, B. (2009). *Courageous Leadership*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

13. Acts 2.42. What makes fellowship fellowship? What is the difference between Christian fellowship and friends just hanging out?

Membership in the body of Christ means we can identify with a family—God's family. They joined in the fellowship "and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:46). It has always interested me that right after Jesus was baptized and then tempted in the desert, one of the first things he did was get twelve guys and form a small group. Even Jesus saw the value of relational discipleship in a group context and the need for fellowship.

Are the members of your small groups getting along well? Do they have fun at the meetings? Is there usually lots of laughter and good food? If so, fellowship is happening, right? Not necessarily. Very often fellowship is nothing more than hanging out and having a good time. True fellowship, however, dives below the surface image that people present to the world. True fellowship not only connects members to each other but also connects them to Christ. — Gladen, S. M. (2011). *Small Groups With Purpose: How To Create Healthy Communities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

14. Acts 2.42 says they devoted themselves to that apostles' teaching. What makes teaching life-changing?

We desperately need an army of Effective Bible Teachers. What is an Effective Bible Teacher?

An Effective Bible Teacher teaches so that people live according to the Bible. Effective Bible Teachers create doers of the Word and not hearers only. Effective Bible Teachers make disciples.

Effective Bible Teachers result in classes that pray, people who serve, and individuals who read their Bibles and follow what it says.

Effective Bible Teachers create people who love the Lord God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Effective Bible Teachers lead people to know their spiritual gifts and serve according to their gifting. Effective Bible Teachers teach people to abide in Christ.

Effective Bible Teachers love the people in their group. They hang out with them. They serve them. They have them in their homes. They are with them.

Effective Bible Teachers lead people to love. They lead people to lay down their lives in service to others. They lead people to care.

Effective Bible Teachers lead people to love the Word as they love the Word. The Psalmist said it is sweeter than honey. In another place, “Oh how I love your law.” It was not mere duty and obligation. It was a delight.

Effective Bible Teachers make a difference. Their classes are different because of the way they teach. Their people are different because of their influence on the lives of individual members. Their corner of the world is different because it is infected by people who are salt and light. — Josh Hunt. (2013). *The Effective Bible Teacher*.

15. “Ministry” is a stained-glass word. What does it actually mean? What does it mean that we as a small group are to minister to each other? Can you give an example?

“They gave to anyone as he had a need” (Acts 2:45). That’s ministry: believer to believer. These groups became an outlet for support, ministry, benevolence, charity, and shared meals—all in a group context.

Small groups need to be more than just a meeting that happens every Thursday night; they should be engaged in ministry and meeting the needs of people within the body of Christ. Sometimes the ministry will take place right in your group as people walk through a crisis together. At other times a group member could use his or her unique gifts to help someone in the body. — Gladen, S. M. (2011). *Small Groups With Purpose: How To Create Healthy Communities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

16. Verse 47. How can we do evangelism as a small group? (By the way, we will be getting into all of these things in more detail in weeks to come.)

This was their mission: “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). If you only go fishing once a week—a weekend service—you are only going to catch fish then. If you go fishing throughout the week—small groups—the number of fish will increase dramatically. When all five biblical purposes are happening within your groups and in the lives of each group member, the natural by-product is evangelism. People are attracted to the kind of changes they see taking place in the lives of healthy Christians.

Every small group has a mission to the world, and while you want your groups to focus on that, you also don’t want them to forget the mission field they live in: the people in their neighborhood or circle of influence with whom they interface throughout the week. Small groups are a great place to prompt members to begin praying for their neighbors and friends and even planning activities designed for building bridges with those who are not followers of Christ. Evangelism can happen personally, locally, and globally. — Gladen, S. M. (2011). *Small Groups With Purpose: How To Create Healthy Communities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

17. Why is worship important to the church, to the small group, to the process of making disciples?

“They devoted themselves . . . to the breaking of bread and prayer. . . . [They were] praising God” (Acts 2:42, 47). In other words, these early Christians worshiped in their homes. And what was the result? “Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles” (v. 43). The bottom line is that God shows up when people make room for him.

We need to work at cultivating times of worship in our small groups during which we focus on God’s presence and express our love through song, prayer, praise, and other experiences. At the heart of worship is surrender, and small groups can help people live out being a living sacrifice. We are told in the book of Romans: “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship” (12:1). Group life encourages transparency among members as they receive the support they need to succeed in their Christian walk. This increased transparency provides the fertile ground for worship to happen. — Gladen, S. M. (2011). *Small Groups With Purpose: How To Create Healthy Communities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

18. Which of these five purposes does your small group do best? Which most needs to be improved?

Each of the five biblical purposes will be addressed in greater detail in subsequent chapters. For right now, however, begin to imagine the potential power that could be released in your church if every small group empowered every individual to live out the biblical purposes in their daily lives as it was in the New Testament. The five purposes should be balanced, but I do not mean balancing all of the purposes during each group meeting (e.g., fifteen to twenty minutes on each purpose each week). Instead, help your groups to self-evaluate on a semiannual basis. Realize that some of the purposes, such as ministry and evangelism, might take a little longer for your groups to embrace, and some of the purposes may need to be accomplished outside the regular group time. The key here is to begin thinking about how to balance the five biblical purposes over periods of six to twelve months. At Saddleback we use tools called the Personal Spiritual Health Plan and Group Health Plan to help groups begin the process and develop a plan to bring health and balance. Again, all of this will be expanded upon in subsequent chapters. For now though, begin to imagine the possibilities. — Gladen, S. M. (2011). *Small Groups With Purpose: How To Create Healthy Communities*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

19. What did you learn in our discussion about small groups? What do you want to remember?

20. How can we support one another in prayer this week?