

Leading Small Groups With Purpose, Lesson #2
Book by Steve Gladen; This Study Guide by Josh Hunt
Good Questions Have Small Groups Talking
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Chapters 3 - 4

OPEN

Let's each share your name and, how did you start attending a small group?

DIG

1. Let's start with the question Steve starts with in chapter 3— what does spiritual health look like?

Measuring spiritual growth is not something the REVEAL team set out to do. But in analyzing the results of our first survey in 2004, a framework emerged—based on how people describe their relationship with Jesus Christ—that predicts spiritual growth (defined by increasing love of God and increasing love of others—Matthew 22:37 – 40). — Hawkins, G. L., & Parkinson, C. (2011). *Move: what 1,000 churches reveal about spiritual growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

2. How would you evaluate your own spiritual health?

“How is your spiritual life going?”

I used to answer this question by looking at the state of my devotional activities: Did I pray and read the Bible enough today? The problem is that by this measure the Pharisees always win. People can be very disciplined, but remain proud and spiteful. How do we measure spiritual growth so that the Pharisees don't win?

I asked a wise man, “How do you assess the well-being of your soul?”

He immediately said, “I ask myself two questions”:

- Am I growing more easily discouraged these days?
- Am I growing more easily irritated these days?

At the core of a flourishing soul are the love of God and the peace of God. If peace is growing in me, I am less easily discouraged. If love is growing, I am less easily irritated. It was a brilliantly helpful diagnostic to assess the health of my soul. — Ortberg, J. (2010). *The Me I Want To Be*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

3. What is the Spiritual Health Assessment Plan and how would it help an individual and a group?

To help group members evaluate their lives in light of the five biblical purposes, we have developed a Spiritual Health Assessment. Like our physical health, our spiritual health needs to be assessed and managed. The Spiritual Health Assessment will help group members rate themselves through a series of statements designed to get at the heart issues behind each of the purposes.

It is important for your group members to understand that this assessment is simply a starting point and is not intended to cover every area of their life and faith. It does, however, provide a way for them to begin thinking about how they can bring health and balance to their lives. — Gladen, S. (2012). *Leading small groups with purpose: everything you need to lead a healthy group*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

4. Let's evaluate our groups using some of the guidelines back in chapter 2—page 47ff. The first one is, "Don't do all the talking." How much talking should the leader do, in your opinion? How much talking do you do? What problems arise when the leader talks too much or too little?

Bible study is not about pooled ignorance. Have you been to those classes? "Well, I think it means this." "No. I think it means that." "Well, I like to believe in a God who is nicer than that." "Yeah, I like to believe in God that doesn't get angry."

God is who He is and us believing or not certain things about Him doesn't change who He is. These words mean what they mean. We can't just declare that we see it another way and suddenly make it so.

So, you might be thinking, "Why don't I just tell them, since I know what the words mean?" Sometimes, you might want to do that. But, it is inherently more interesting to let the group share. And, if you are teaching adults who have been studying the Bible for a time, they will often have good answers. It is more interesting to ask them than to share all the answers yourself. A rule of thumb is, the teacher in a small group should not talk more than half the time. — Josh Hunt. (2008). *Good Questions Have Groups Talking*.

5. Gladen talks about being comfortable with silence. How much is too much silence? What bad things happen if we don't allow for enough silence?

The key to making questions work is just the right amount of silence. Too much and it feels awkward and weird. Too little and people don't have enough time to think. It is in that quiet moment, when people are thinking that life change is actually taking place. Effective Bible Teachers have a feel for what is just the right amount of silence. Rule of thumb: it is likely a little more than you think. Most teachers, it seems to me, are afraid of silence. Sometimes I will say to a group, "Don't be afraid of the silence. Just think for a moment." — Josh Hunt. (2013). *The Effective Bible Teacher*.

6. James 1.19. What makes a good listener good?

Have someone who knows you well use the following questions to evaluate your listening skills according to the nine qualities of good listening discussed in this chapter. Ask him or her to explain any no answers. And don't interrupt or defend yourself as you receive the explanation.

1. Do I usually look at the speaker while he or she is talking?
2. Do I wait for the speaker to finish talking before I respond?
3. Do I make understanding my goal?
4. Am I usually sensitive to the speaker's immediate need?
5. Do I make it a practice to check my emotions?
6. Do I regularly suspend my judgment until I get the whole story?
7. Am I in the practice of summing up what the speaker says at major intervals?
8. Do I ask questions for clarity when needed?
9. Do I communicate to others that listening is a priority?

Maxwell, J. C., & Dornan, J. (1997). *Becoming a Person of Influence* (p. 96). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

7. What is meant by open-ended question? Why is it important to use lots of open-ended questions?

Asking open-ended questions often furthers the process:

- "What are some of your responses to the passage we just read?"
- "What is going on with some of you this week?"
- "Can you tell us more about that?"
- "Does anyone have anything they would like to share or to add?"
- "What does this bring up for you?"
- "Where do you have difficulty applying what we just read or talked about?"
- "How would some of you fill in these blanks about the passage? I think _____ about it. I feel _____ about it. I have a problem with _____ about it."

Avoid questions that do not further discovery or process, such as questions with yes or no or factual answers. Process is not a geometry class where there is a right answer. It is a walk in the park.

"What stands out for you?" and "What do you see?" are questions that don't have a right or wrong

answer. — Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (2010). Making small groups work: what every small group leader needs to know. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

8. Why is it important that we start and end on time? Does your group start and end on time? Why or why not?

Start on time.

That may sound trivial, or persnickety, or overly formal for a group. Whatever. Start on time.

“But, if we were to do that, half our group isn’t there and they would miss it.” Start on time. One of the reasons people show up late to church events is the leadership is in the habit of starting late. We reward the people who are late by accommodating their lateness. We punish the people who are on time by not starting on time.

I would not have thought this was any big deal if it were not for my wife. She does training with me. She trains children and preschool workers, while I train adult workers. She has a talk called K.I.D.T.E.A.C.H. The “A” in this acrostic “Arrive early.” When she first told me that I thought it was a little trivial. But, based on the feedback she has gotten from church leaders across the country, I have come to see the importance of bringing this up. She has told me story after story after story of people who have come up to her after conferences and thanked her for bringing the time issue up. “It is a real problem around here. Teachers don’t show up on time.”

All of the things we talked about in the last chapter can only happen if we are there on time—early in fact. Often visitors are nervous about being able to find their way so they show up early. It is pretty bad if they show up before the people who are in charge. Show up early. Start on time. — Josh Hunt. (2008). Good Questions Have Groups Talking.

9. How well would you say the people in your group understand the purpose of your group?

In order to have a vision for community, we need to understand the purpose of community. In my experience with community group ministry, I have heard many purposes for joining community groups, including but not limited to: belonging, making big church feel small, learning the Bible, pastoral care, fellowship, friends, closing the back door of the church, evangelism, and so on. Each of these purposes has merit and can be argued as essential to the church. I would suggest, however, that these “purposes” are in fact the product of community rather than its ultimate goal.

Why is this significant? Let me give you an example. When I was playing basketball in junior high, I went into the game off the bench as we were inbounding the ball. As I came off a screen, I found myself wide open under the basket. My teammate passed me the ball and I made an easy layup. The only problem: we were lined up under our opponent’s basket. The point: it is increasingly difficult to score points for your team when you are aiming at the wrong basket. In the case of the church, our goal is to produce disciples of Jesus who worship him and exalt his name. If we aim at a product such as belonging as the purpose of community, we can achieve that goal without pointing to Jesus.

— House, B., & Driscoll, M. (2011). *Community (Foreword By Mark Driscoll): Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

10. How does understanding our purpose affect our day-to-day lives? Be very practical.

Some years ago a new staff member of our church asked me how I had the gall to ask people who are already busy at work or in the home to get involved as volunteers at church.

“I mean, don’t you feel a little guilty doing this?” he asked. “Isn’t it hard to heap such a burden on people?”

He had a point. But I knew of a bigger point:

“During the next few months you’re going to meet people who stand at drill presses, ten hours a day, five or six days a week. When they go home at night, few of them sense the pleasure, meaning, and purpose of life they’ve heard advertised in commercials for beer or computer systems. They’re godly, conscientious people, and they feel thankful for their jobs. But they don’t find satisfaction for their souls at the drill press.

“And you’re going to meet fine, hardworking people in real estate who show thirty homes a week. If they’re lucky, one buyer will make an offer, but they’re not lucky every week. Many are extroverts who love showing property and helping families find the right home, but even then they probably don’t arrive home at night filled with deep inner joy because of their latest showing.

“You’ll meet insurance salespeople who have been selling policies for twenty years. While they feel grateful that the insurance business puts food on their table and sends their kids to college, the thought of selling one more policy likely doesn’t float their emotional boat.

“You’re going to meet car dealers and stockbrokers and bricklayers and police officers and plumbers who, despite their commitment to their careers and jobs, are honest enough to admit that their secular vocation does not offer enough meaning to satisfy the deeper needs that stir in their souls.

“Some of them love their jobs; they feel stimulated and energized by their work. Some of them even leave their workplace each day knowing that they have honored God by their work and their love for people. But few of them would say: This is what life is all about.”

I looked directly into the eyes of my young friend. “You and I get to invite these people to be used by God in ways they never imagined. We have the opportunity to empower them to develop gifts they didn’t know they had. We can cheer them on as they courageously assume new levels of Kingdom responsibility that fill their hearts to overflowing. And we get to see the look on their faces when they realize God has used them to touch another human being.

“No,” I said, “I never really feel guilty inviting people to become volunteers in our church. Never.” — Hybels, B. (2009). *The volunteer revolution: unleashing the power of everybody*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

11. How do we involve everyone when some people don't want to participate? How do you draw out the uninvolved?

Good meetings involve everyone in the discussion. The point isn't to come up with just the right answer. It's to get people sharing what they really think—not to get them to share what they think we want to hear. One Sunday morning, the teacher asked her class of third graders, "What's brown, stores nuts for the winter, and scurries up trees?" Maggie lifted her hand and bashfully answered, "It sounds like a squirrel, but I'm going to guess, 'Jesus'?" We've all been in meetings like that. We sense that the leader doesn't want to hear our opinions or host an enthralling discussion. She's fishing for just the right answer.

My friend Garry Poole, founder of the Seeker small groups movement, is an expert at leading discussion. Even though he knows more about leading small groups than most people will ever know, when he's seated at a table he's the one who talks the least. He has a brilliant theological mind, but his style is to get others talking about what interests them. To Garry it boils down to asking good questions and then listening. Mostly it's about listening. If people in the group believe that it's safe to share their thoughts, the discussion will be lively and engaging. Don't be afraid of silence, since most groups will take a while to trust that you really want to hear their thoughts. Since that so rarely happens, it will take a while to get that started. — Search, B. (2008). *Simple Small Groups: A User-Friendly Guide For Small Group Leaders*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

12. The purpose of the group is not to cover the material. What is the purpose of the group?

Make disciples.

13. Chapter 4 discusses inviting outsiders to join your group. Suppose a friend asked, "Why should I attend your small group?" How would you answer?

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:

1. 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).
2. God created us to be in relationships—with Him and with others (see Gen. 2:18).
3. We need people because life is tough (see Eccles. 4:9-12).
4. Jesus' presence is stronger when two or three are gathered in His name (Matt. 18:20).
5. Fellowship with other believers is part of God's plan for discipleship (Acts 2:41-42).

We could go on and on with the biblical substantiation. The bottom line is that this kind of teaching must be delivered from the stage in a church that is serious about small groups. That's why, as we said earlier, you must generate full staff support if you are going to have the most effective small groups system possible. — Searcy, N., & Thomas, K. (2010). *Activate: An Entirely New Approach To Small Groups*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.

14. Why do you think people don't attend church, or don't attend a small group?

We discovered four common complaints about churches from our survey in the Saddleback Valley.

“Church is boring, especially the sermons. The messages don't relate to my life.” This is the complaint I heard the most. It is amazing how churches are able to take the most exciting book in the world and bore people to tears with it. Miraculously they are able to turn bread into stones!

The problem with boring preachers is that it causes people to think God is boring. From this complaint, I determined to learn how to communicate God's Word in a practical, interesting way. A sermon does not have to be boring to be biblical, and it doesn't have to be dry to be doctrinal. The unchurched aren't asking for watered-down messages, just practical ones. They want to hear something on Sunday that they can apply on Monday.

“Church members are unfriendly to visitors. If I go to church I want to feel welcomed without being embarrassed.” Many unchurched people told me that they felt like the church was a clique. When they didn't know the “inside” terminology, songs, or rituals, they felt foolish and felt the members were watching them in judgment. The greatest emotion the unchurched feel when they visit a service is fear. As a result, we determined that at Saddleback we would do whatever it took to make visitors feel welcomed and wanted without feeling watched.

“The church is more interested in my money than in me.” Due to the highly visible fund-raising efforts of televangelists and other Christian organizations, the unchurched are incredibly sensitive to appeals for money. Bill Hybels found this to be the greatest complaint in his area when he took a similar survey. Many believe that pastors are “in it just for the money,” and opulent church buildings have only added fuel to the fire. We decided to counteract this complaint by giving a disclaimer when we take an offering. We explain that the offering is only for those who are a part of our church family. Visitors are not expected to give.

“We worry about the quality of the church's child care.” The Saddleback Valley is filled with young couples, so we were not surprised to discover this complaint. The church must earn the trust of parents. Saddleback has adopted and published a set of stringent guidelines for our children's ministry to insure safety and quality. If you want to reach young couples, you must have an excellent program for their children.

Jesus told the disciples to be strategic in their evangelism. “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matt. 10:16). In football, successful teams know how to “read the defense.” When the offensive team lines up for each play,

the quarterback looks out at the opposing team to see how they are lined up. He tries to figure out in advance how the defense will respond and what barriers might prevent the execution of the play. If the quarterback doesn't do this, he usually gets sacked!

In evangelism, "reading the defense" means understanding and anticipating the objections unbelievers will have before they voice them. It means learning to think like an unbeliever.

What seemed most interesting to me about our survey was that none of the complaints from the unchurched in our area were theological. I didn't meet a single person who said, "I don't go to church because I don't believe in God." However I did meet a lot of people who said, "I believe in God, but I don't feel church has anything I need." Most of the unchurched aren't atheists: They are misinformed, turned off, or too busy. — Warren, R. (2007). *The purpose driven church: growth without compromising your message and mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

15. How likely would you guess unchurched are to attend church if invited?

Useful Statistics:

- "Eighty-two percent of the unchurched are at least somewhat likely to attend church if invited."
—Dr. Thom Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door*
- "Only two percent of church members invite an unchurched person to church. Ninety-eight percent of church-goers never extend an invitation in a given year." —Dr Thom Rainer, *The Unchurched Next Door*
- "A study including more than 15,000 adults revealed that about two-thirds are willing to receive information about a local church from a family member and 56 percent from a friend or neighbor. The message is clear that the unchurched are open to conversations about church." — Philip Nation, LifeWay Research
- "Four percent of formerly churched adults are actively looking for a church to attend regularly (other than their previous church). Six percent would prefer to resume attending regularly in the same church they had attended. The largest group, 62 percent, is not actively looking but is open to the idea of attending church regularly again."—Scott McConnell, LifeWay Research
- "Clearly we can encourage Christians to pray that the unchurched would sense God calling them back, but God works through His people." "The survey showed that many would respond to an invitation from a friend or acquaintance (41 percent), their children (25 percent) or an adult family member (25 percent)." —Scott McConnell, LifeWay Research
- "The issue of affinity also surfaced in the responses. Thirty-five percent indicated that they would be inspired to attend church 'if I knew there were people like me there.'" —Scott McConnell, LifeWay Research

- “Much to the surprise of the ‘Chicken Little’ crowd, people are still going to church. And more people would attend if given one simple thing—an invitation.” – Philip Nation, LifeWay Research

- See more at: <http://backtochurch.com/participate/resources/statistics#sthash.4ADcrmh.dpuf>

16. When was the last time you invited someone to church? What keeps us from inviting people?

The next obvious question is: Are Christians inviting nonChristians to church? The heartbreaking answer is no. Only 21 percent of active churchgoers invite anyone to church in the course of a year. But only 2 percent of church members invite an unchurched person to church. Perhaps the evangelistic apathy so evident in many of our churches can be explained by a simple laziness on the part of church members in inviting others to church. — Rainer, T. (2009). *The unchurched next door: understanding faith stages as keys to sharing your faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

17. Is it important to God that we grow numerically, or is our own spiritual growth a good enough goal?

Occasionally I’m asked, “Does God really care about numbers?” Rather than giving a theological answer, let’s allow the data to speak for itself. Growing groups tend to be better groups in every way. For example, growing groups are 59% more likely to report high levels of spiritual vibrancy. I’ll define spiritual vibrancy in more detail in Chapter 6, but for now, what it means is: Groups who love living the Christian life grow. And why wouldn’t they?

Another question I’m sometimes asked is, “These growing groups—are they really reaching non-Christians, or are they just reaching the already convinced?” We now have the data. Growing groups reported being 65% more likely to have seen at least one person come to faith in Christ in the past year.

Do you need more workers in your church? Growing groups can help you there as well. Growing groups were nearly twice (88%) as likely to have sent out at least one worker.

One more. You’d like your people to feel loved, wouldn’t you? That’s more likely to happen in a growing group, too. In fact, members of non-growing groups were 333% more likely to report feeling unloved, when compared to members of growing groups.

In every way that I could find, growing groups are not only growing numerically. Growing groups almost always are better groups. I couldn’t find an exception. I couldn’t find one desirable behavior or characteristic that was more common with non-growing groups. If you want better groups, you also want growing groups. — Josh Hunt. (2010). *Make Your Group Grow*.

18. Besides inviting people, what else can we do to grow our groups?

Groups that have nine or more parties a year are more than twice as likely (104%) to be growing than a low-fellowship group—those with four or less gatherings a year. The group that parties together grows together. — Josh Hunt. (2010). *Make Your Group Grow*.

19. Why would people want to attend our group? What is the benefit to them?

I'm currently working with Ed Stetzer on a new book, Transformational Groups. In the book we will share some significant lessons learned from a massive research project conducted on small groups. Ed and I recently sat down with Micah Fries, the Director of Ministry Development at LifeWay, to discuss some of the insights we're gleaning from the research. You can catch the videos as they air on Ed's weekly webshow The Exchange every Tuesday at 3PM Eastern (2PM Central). Over the next few days, I will share a few takeaways from the research.

Church leaders have rightly believed that it's critical to move people to a group (class, adult Bible fellowship, etc) so that the person receives nurture and care through a community of Christ followers. The research validated this belief and also revealed that those believers who are plugged into a small group are much more active in sharing their faith with non-believers. From a research vantage point we can say, "there is a significant relationship between a believer engaged in personal evangelism and a believer engaged in a small group." The people in your church who are plugged into a group are much more likely to be articulating the gospel this week.

Why is this? There are several likely reasons:

Those in a small group learn to discuss spiritual truth.

Those believers in a church who only attend a weekend worship service or large gatherings where they listen to a primary teacher are never in environments where they speak. They only listen. Thus they don't grow more and more comfortable discussing their faith. Those connected to a small group are in an environment where they share, they verbalize, and they speak about spiritual matters. Thus they are much more comfortable telling the guy in the next cubicle about Jesus and His gracious work.

Those in a small group understand growth happens in relationships.

Those who are plugged into a group have likely seen the Lord supernaturally mature people over time in the context of community. They have learned that the Lord uses relationships grounded in grace to transform people. Thus they are likely to see their relationships at work, school, and in their neighborhoods as holy opportunities to invest in people who don't yet know the Lord.

Those in a small group have moved beyond "Sunday only" Christianity.

Those believers plugged into a small group are not merely showing up for a worship service each week. Thus they are more likely to see how their faith impacts the totality of their lives, including the regular encounters with unbelievers. <http://ericgeiger.com/2013/01/group-life-and-personal-evangelism/#.Uo0Ve8SshfQ>

20. What do you want to recall from today's discussion?

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