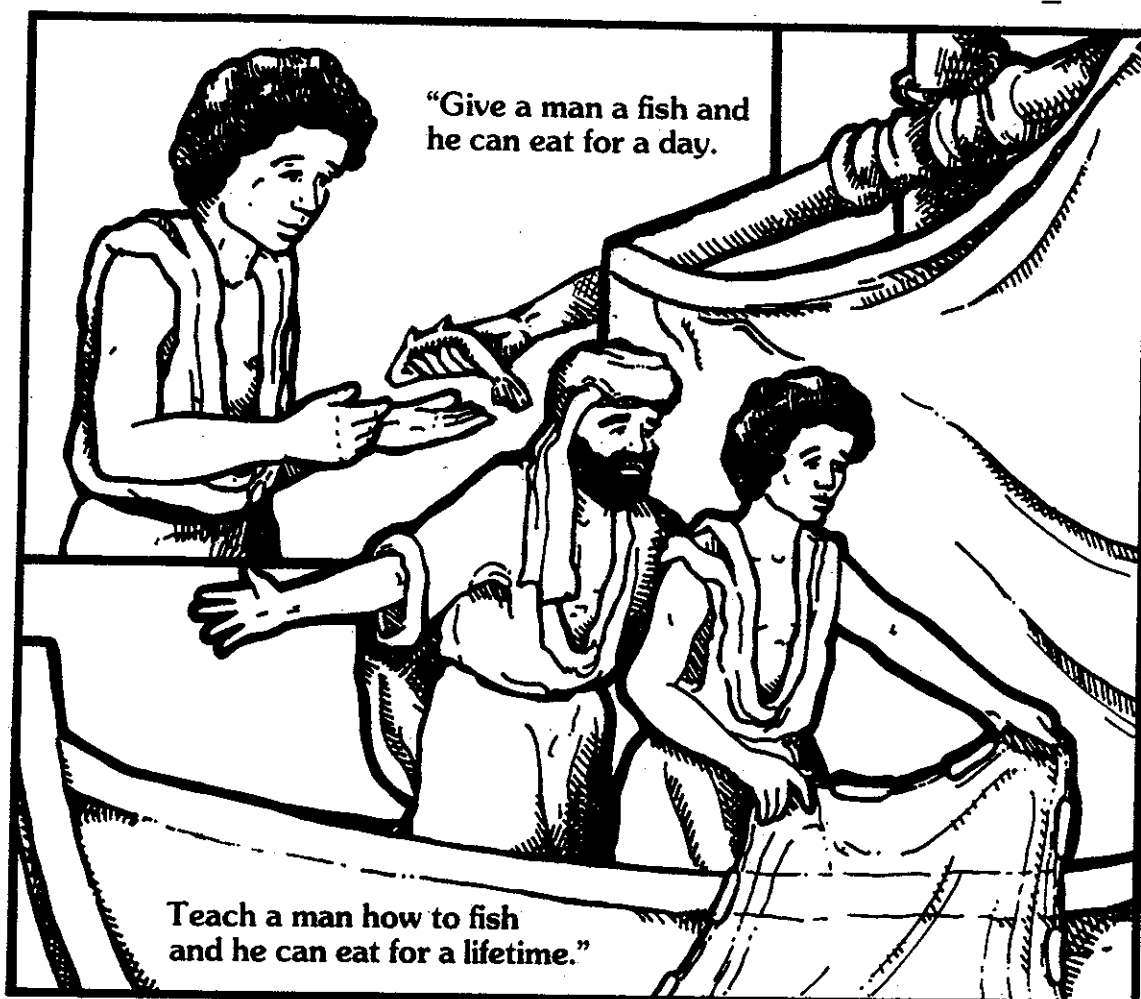


Small Group Bible Study



Your presence at this seminar indicates your interest in learning better how to fish for yourself... how to eat for a lifetime.

Small group Bible studies provide us a context to feed ourselves from Scripture and experience the joy of discovery in Christian community. During the seminar we will explore the significance of each key term:

Small Group

Bible

Study

To begin with...

*...plan on learning a lot about Bible study and small groups today.
At day's end we will give you the answers to the following questions.
You will amaze yourself at how much you have learned...!*

Directions: Place a **T** for true, an **F** for false and a **?** if you don't know next to each statement as it finishes the sentence:

"A good Bible study leader. . . . "

- ___ 1) does most of the talking.
- ___ 2) leads by asking questions.
- ___ 3) has more Bible knowledge than anyone else in the group.
- ___ 4) uses cross-references freely during the study.
- ___ 5) sits next to quiet people in order to encourage them to speak.
- ___ 6) always has an aim or purpose for each study.
- ___ 7) keeps the Bible study within the time limit even if the discussion is really going on something important.
- ___ 8) allows everyone to speak as much or as little as they like.
- ___ 9) stops the study to acknowledge the presence of a late-comer.
- ___ 10) sees tangents that raise important issues as led of the Spirit.
- ___ 11) usually goes through the passage verse by verse with questions like, "What does verse 3 mean?".
- ___ 12) answers his/her own question when the group is confused.
- ___ 13) does not let someone by with a superficial or vague answer.
- ___ 14) frequently paraphrases good answers given during the study.
- ___ 15) does not tell people they are wrong even if they are.
- ___ 16) is not satisfied with receiving only one response per question.
- ___ 17) plays the "devil's advocate" at times.
- ___ 18) engages more knowledgeable members in discussion most often so everyone benefits from the wisdom displayed.
- ___ 19) answers questions that a group member raises during study.
- ___ 20) avoids controversy.

Have you ever participated in a *bad* Bible study?

Have you ever led a *bad* Bible study?

If you haven't, you probably will!!!! What makes for a bad Bible study?

If you were putting together the absolute worst Bible study ever experienced in the history of the human race what would you include?

List everything you can think of including the physical environment, how the leader leads, how various group member interact, how it starts and ends, etc. Feel free to draw on first-hand experience!!!

My best version of the worst possible Bible study group:



The Bible

Most of us have participated in or even led poor Bible studies. Of course, many of us have also experienced great times in group Bible study. Lets try to put our past experiences aside for a moment and ask the big question.

Why study the Bible at all?

Consider what Paul told Timothy:

**"All Scripture is God-breathed
and
useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness
so that
the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)**

As we begin to wrestle with God's Word, we soon find ourselves wrestling with God himself.

But why study the Bible in a group?

Consider what Jesus told his disciples:

**"Where two or three are gathered in my name,
there am I in the midst of them."
(Matthew 18:20)**

As we begin to wrestle with God's Word with God's people, we find Jesus' power present in a special way.

Learning to read, understand and apply the Bible yourself is crucial. But meeting with a group of friends engaging Scripture together will enhance your learning process ten-fold. Within a caring small group, we profit from each other's insights and encouragement. And Jesus comes into our midst bringing God's presence and perspective.

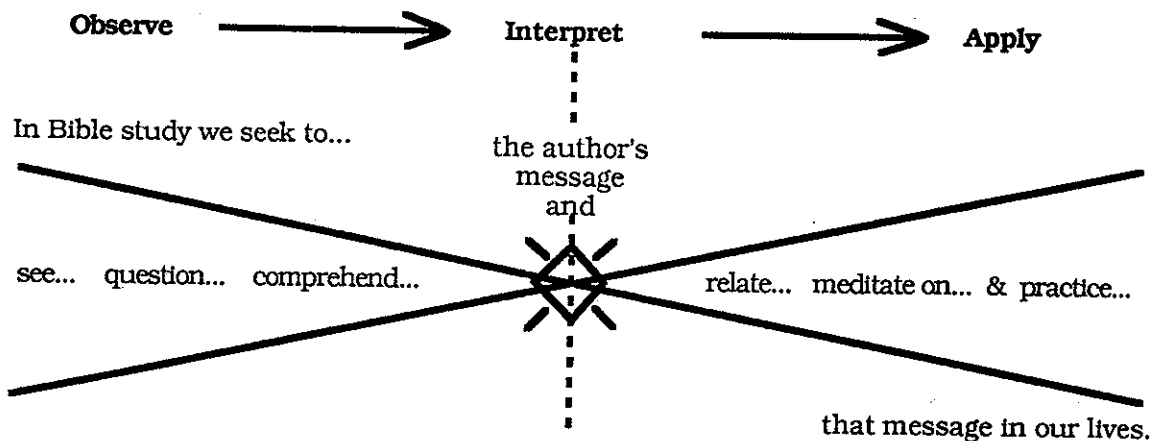
Personal & Sm. Group Study

Studying Scripture personally or in a group involves three important steps: 1) observation, 2) interpretation and 3) application.

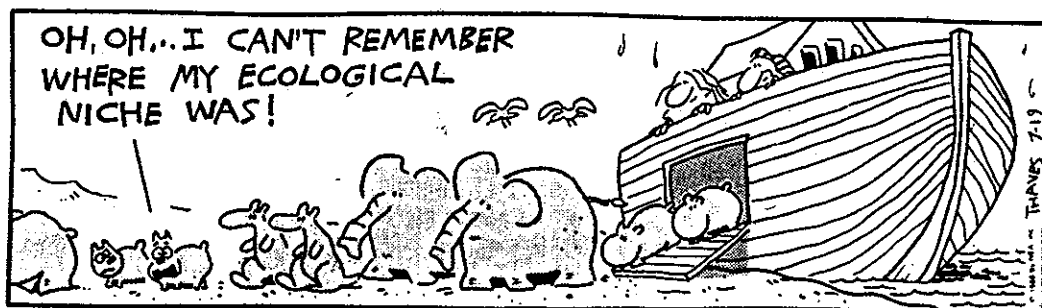
Observation explores what the author says (and doesn't say). We observe by finding the important facts in the passage.

Interpretation draws the facts together in order to understand the author's meaning. While observation is a process, interpretation is a destination. We arrive when we find the main point ("the diamond") the author seeks to communicate.

Application takes the meaning of the passage into the 20th century and explores how it applies to our lives.



Taking notes as we study Scripture helps shore up our memory and organize our thoughts. We will provide *OIA study sheets* (Observation, Interpretation, Application) for taking notes as you study. The front of the sheet is set up for observation and the back side for interpretation and application.



Studying the Bible personally and in groups is very similar in that both proceed by a process of questioning.

In personal study you silently ask yourself questions that help you discover a passage's meaning.

In group study you verbally ask the group questions that help them discover a passage's meaning.

??? Why use questions ???

Personal Study

Our aim is to "read the author's thoughts after him." We are not reading just for information but for understanding.

Normally we read on "automatic pilot" instead of with our minds fully engaged. Active reading (we'll call it "study") requires us to think -- an activity that is both difficult and rewarding.

Questions bring us out of automatic pilot and help us to mentally wrestle with what we are reading.

Someone has said, "I never think until I am confronted with a problem." To ask ourself a question is to give ourself a problem! To think through the answer to our question is to give ourself understanding!

The outlines on the following pages provide a helpful resource of questions in the OIA process for both individuals and groups. They are not meant to be followed rigidly but for a starting place of study.

Small Group Study

1. To facilitate the essential focus of a small group: DISCUSSION
We remember 90% of what we say but we forget 90% of what we are told. Questions get people talking and thus learning -- teaching themselves!
2. To lead people not just into a lively discussion but into an understanding and application of the passage you are studying. Questions encourage the DISCOVERY PROCESS.
3. To help people wrestle with Scripture in the context of Christian community. Questions build bonds of group OWNERSHIP and OPENNESS.



OBSERVATION

What does the author say?

Personal Study

- A. *Investigate the author's argument or sequence of events*
 - 1. WHO is involved?
 - 2. WHEN did the event occur?
 - 3. WHERE did the event take place?
 - 4. WHAT is happening?
WHAT is being taught?
 - 5. HOW did the event happen?
HOW is the idea presented?
(main point/reasons/conclusion)
- B. *Identify with the characters involved/original readers*
 - 1. Imagine the experience of the persons involved
 - 2. With whom do you most readily identify?

Small Group Study

- A. *Pray and introduce the study*
- B. *Start out by asking an approach question**
- C. *THE FOCUS: Ask questions that bring out what you have observed*
 - Some do's
 - 1. Begin with broad questions -- not focused on vs. 1 but on the entire passage
 - 2. Ask questions that help people feel a part of the event
 - Some don'ts
 - 1. Don't ask questions with a yes or no answer
 - 2. Don't play "guess what's on teacher's mind" by asking for a certain kind of response
 - 3. Don't ask questions that too are simplistic

**Approach questions* are discussion icebreakers asked before the Scripture passage is read. They are important for the following reasons.

--They help the group warm up to each other.

--They get people thinking along the lines of the topic of the study.

--They can reveal where our thoughts or feelings need to be transformed by Scripture.

INTERPRETATION

What does the author mean?

Personal Study

A. Raise interpretive questions

1. Question your initial "W question" observations.
2. Develop indepth questions:

WHY...? WHAT IS THE
SIGNIFICANCE OF...?
MEANING OF...?
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN...?
or any other question....?

B. Interpret the original meaning

1. Answer your interpretive questions.
2. Come up with a tentative conclusion as to the main point and look again at the passage with this in mind.
3. Identify the author's main point -- "the diamond."
4. Consider legitimate secondary points.

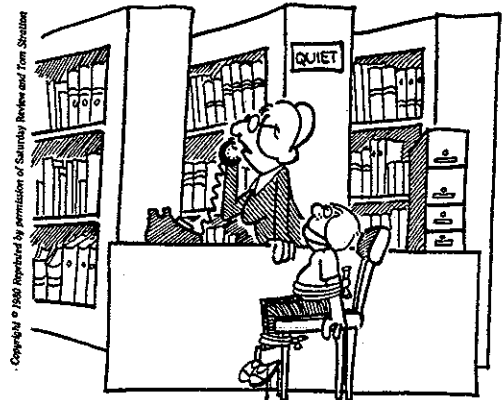
C. Relate implications for today

1. What in the passage relates only to its original readers?
2. What in the passage relates directly to its modern readers?
3. What (if anything) in the passage conveys an underlying principle to its modern readers?

Small Group Study

THE FOCUS: Ask questions that bring out your interpretations

1. Direct the group to the main idea of the passage under study. (Hint: You won't know what the main point is unless you've put in adequate study time yourself.)
2. Stick to the passage for the answers to your questions instead of looking to cross-references or "outside experts."
3. Help people use their imagination but avoid asking speculative questions like: "Wouldn't it have been interesting if...?"



STRAID
"I'm not kidding around anymore, Mrs. Whitman. You have our book.
We have your son."

APPLICATION

How does it apply to me?

Personal Study

A. Meditate on the passage

1. Reflect on the passage via the past, present and near future.
2. Reflect on new ways to THINK and BELIEVE (worldview):

What is the main thing I should know from this passage?

--Nature of God... Church...
Society... Christian life issues

3. Reflect on new things to DO (lifestyle):

What is the main thing I should consider doing from this?

--Priorities... Attitudes...
Relationships... Lifestyle
issues

B. Make an application plan

1. Establish a plan that is specific and measurable.
2. Remember the goals of an *application plan*:

Not new rules for the Christian life but *a renewed relationship with the Lord*.

Not an occasion to experience guilt but *a concrete means of responding to God's Word*.

Small Group Study

THE FOCUS: Ask questions based on your interpretations that give direction to application.

1. Allow plenty of time for application instead of tacking it on at the end of the study.
2. Press group members to be as specific and concrete as possible. Put the knife in and turn it. (Follow-up a vague application with: "Can you give a specific example of that?")
3. The more intimate the group is becoming the more you can expect of indepth application.
4. Look for ways to keep the group accountable to their applications on a week-to-week basis.

Summary Questions

1. Periodically summarize your group's findings with a summary question.
2. Don't ask all O then I then A questions. Spread them out. End with an A question.

The Approach Question:

Critique Each Question:

TYPE
(O/I/A/S)

Making Your Own Bible Study Guide

A Bible study guide is like a discussion road map. During a study you will ask many additional follow-up questions. At times you will even change course from the written questions. But written questions provide helpful, basic direction as you lead a discussion.

Writing Bible study questions is an art at which you can excel with practice. The "trick" comes in writing questions that are open ended but not too directive; that allow freedom of expression but are not too vague.

Look at your questions with these criteria in mind:*

1. Is each one clear? If not, try rewording it.
2. Is it brief enough to be grasped readily? If not, break it into parts.
3. Do the questions make the group search the text?
4. Are they suitable for people who have not studied in advance?
5. Do the O questions provide a solid basis on which to ask I and A?
6. Do they move the group through the passage in good sequence?
7. Is each question challenging?
8. Does each one contribute to a grasp of the passage's main point? (Asterisk questions which can be omitted if time runs out.)
9. Is the group led to find and state main points?
10. Is there provision for summarizing when necessary? at the close?
11. When all the questions have been answered, have people understood the passage's main teaching and encouraged to act on it?
12. Are there some creative touches to the questions?

Using a Bible Study Guide

There are some excellent series of Bible study guides available at Christian bookstores. Some emphasize Bible study, while others are more relationally oriented. If you are looking for one, we recommend InterVarsity's *LifeGuide Series* for its balanced approach.

The advantage of a quality Bible study guide is that the questions have been fine-tuned through an editing process. The disadvantage is that they are someone else's questions and may not follow the passage in the same way you did.

If you use a guide make the questions your own by adding, changing or subtracting as you see fit. To get a first-hand feel for the questions, we recommend that you always write them on a separate piece of paper even if you use the same ones written in a guide.

*Adapted from *Bible & Life II* material, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

A Christian Small Group is

...an intentional,
face-to-face gathering
of 3-12 people
on a regular time schedule
with a common purpose
of discovering and growing in the possibilities
of the abundant life in Christ.

-Roberta Hestenes-

intentional:

face-to-face:

3-12 people:

regular time schedule:

common purpose:

discovering the possibilities:

growing in the possibilities:

abundant life in Christ:

Developing a Group Covenant

You've got a problem. It's been a long day and now that you're home you would like to "veg out" in front of the TV. Unfortunately, however, tonight is the night your small group meets. You feel the pull in both directions. What do you do?

Sometimes it's good to have such decisions made in advance! Here is where a group covenant can help. A covenant lists bottom line commitments that small group members make to each other. They are not meant to be ideals but realistic expectations and thus should not be entered into lightly.

All groups have unwritten assumptions by which they operate. A covenant "codifies" these assumptions so that they are clear to all. The covenant is written -- but not in stone. From time-to-time all covenants should be reaccessed.

What follows are covenant principles written by Lou Evans that raise important areas for covenants to address.

Principles of Covenant Dynamics

- 1) *Affirmation*: "I will love you and affirm you no matter what you have said or done. I love you as you are and for what Christ wants to make of you."
- 2) *Availability*: "Anything I have, time, energy, wisdom, myself, finances, are all at your disposal. I give these to you and the covenant group in a unique way."
- 3) *Regularity*: "I covenant to give a regular part of my time to this group when it decides to meet. I consider that time to be of highest priority on my schedule."
- 4) *Prayer*: "I promise to pray for you, to uphold you, and to attempt to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit concerning your needs."
- 5) *Openness*: "I will show myself to you letting you know who I am as a person in feeling, history, hopes and hurts; in other words, I will need you!"
- 6) *Honesty*: "I will be honest in my mirroring back to you what I sense and feel coming from you."
- 7) *Confidentiality*: "What goes on in this group stays here. I will say nothing that may be traced back or that could be injurious or embarrassing to my covenant partners."
- 8) *Accountability*: "You have a right to expect growth from me so that I may give you the fullness of the gifts which God has bestowed upon me and fulfill my God-created designs. Therefore I will not languish in the process of growth."

Ground Rules For Small Groups

THE LEADER is a *facilitator* of discussion, guiding the group through questions rather than statements. He or she is responsible to prepare for, initiate and oversee the group process.

EACH GROUP MEMBER "owns the group" and is thus responsible as a *contributor* of comments and questions. Talkative members should learn to defer to others while quiet members speak out. Listening and learning from each other are to be encouraged.

GROUP FOCUS is controlled by its purpose. A Bible study group allows the *passage of Scripture under study* to govern its discussion rather than cross-references or commentaries. Tangents are to be avoided or at least "tabled" until after the group meeting is over.

PERSONAL GROWTH in group members' *relationship with Christ* is the ultimate goal of group life. Consequently members should see their group as more than just a Bible study, but as a Christian community where consistency, self-disclosure, empathy and accountability are important characteristics.



"At the count of three, I want everyone to face the person next to him and get rid of your hostilities and be happy human beings."

Eight Don'ts of Small Group Leadership

1. *Don't answer your own question.* Otherwise your group will begin to look to you as "the teacher" rather than "the facilitator." If necessary repeat or rephrase an unclear question.
2. *Don't be afraid of silence.* Silence means either:
 - People are thinking (this is true 90% of the time)
 - People are confused and need the question restated
 - People are asleep -- not a real healthy sign
3. *Don't be content with just one answer.* For every written question feel free to ask two or three follow-up questions like: "What does someone else think?" This allows a number of people to respond.
4. *Don't expect group members to respond to you with each answer.* They will be tempted to do this especially when the group is new. Instead, though, you want to see them talking to each other so you don't have to "broker" the entire discussion.
5. *Don't reject an answer as wrong.* Respond to questionable answers by asking: "How did you come to that conclusion?" or: "Does anyone have another way of looking at it?" Try to be affirming whenever possible.
6. *Don't be afraid of controversy.* Of course, your group won't profit that raises more heat than light. But differences of opinion can be a stimulus for learning.
7. *Don't allow the group to get in a rut.* As long as you stay in line with the passage the more creative you can be the merrier.
8. *Don't allow the group to end late.* If the discussion proves very fruitful, officially end the group on time with the opportunity for those who choose to stay and discuss the issue in more depth.

OK, here are your group members.

What do you do?!?

- A. *Sally Silent* - Never or rarely speaks
- B. *Mark Monopoly* -- Dominates the discussion
Andy Argue -- Often disagrees with something or everything
Randy Response -- Quick answers, insensitive
- C. *Tammy Tangent* -- Often brings up issues unrelated to passage
- D. *Virginia Vague* -- Gives general and superficial answers
- E. *Mary Maybe* -- Here one week, gone the next
- F. *Frank Fringe* -- Potentially interested in coming to the group
- G. *Others ??*



And, oh yes,
there is one other person interested in Bible study...

Sam Secular

What could you do with Sam?!?



Small Group Life

Acts 2:42-47 provides us a picture of the first century Church:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

In the Church described above what evidence do you see for the following characteristics of group life?

NURTURE:

WORSHIP:

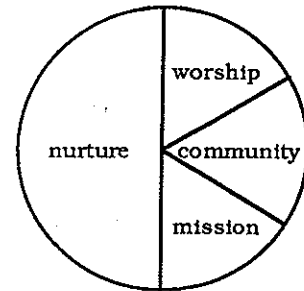
COMMUNITY:

MISSION:

When small groups of Christians gather, we reflect on a smaller scale the same characteristics -- nurture, worship, community and mission -- of the Church. Depending on the purpose of the small group, however, one or two of these characteristics may provide the focus of the group's life together. For example:*

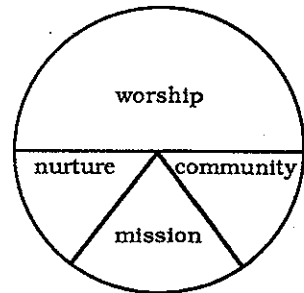
Some groups focus on **NURTURE** like:

- Sunday school classes
- Bible study groups
- Book discussion groups
- New member (new believer) classes
- Confirmation classes



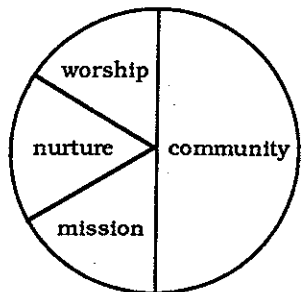
Some groups focus on **WORSHIP** like:

- Choirs and other musical groups
- Prayer groups
- Charismatic fellowships
- Renewal groups



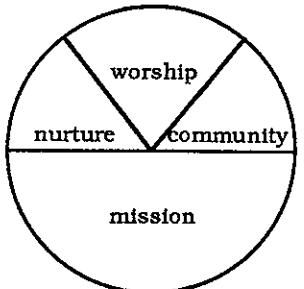
Some groups focus on **COMMUNITY** like:

- Support groups
- Men's fellowships
- Women's fellowships
- Young couples' groups
- Youth groups
- Care groups



Some groups focus on **MISSION** like:

- Gospel teams
- Evangelistic groups
- Social action committees
- Missions committees
- Visitation groups
- Board of elders or deacons
- Renewal teams
- Neighborhood Bible studies
- Service groups

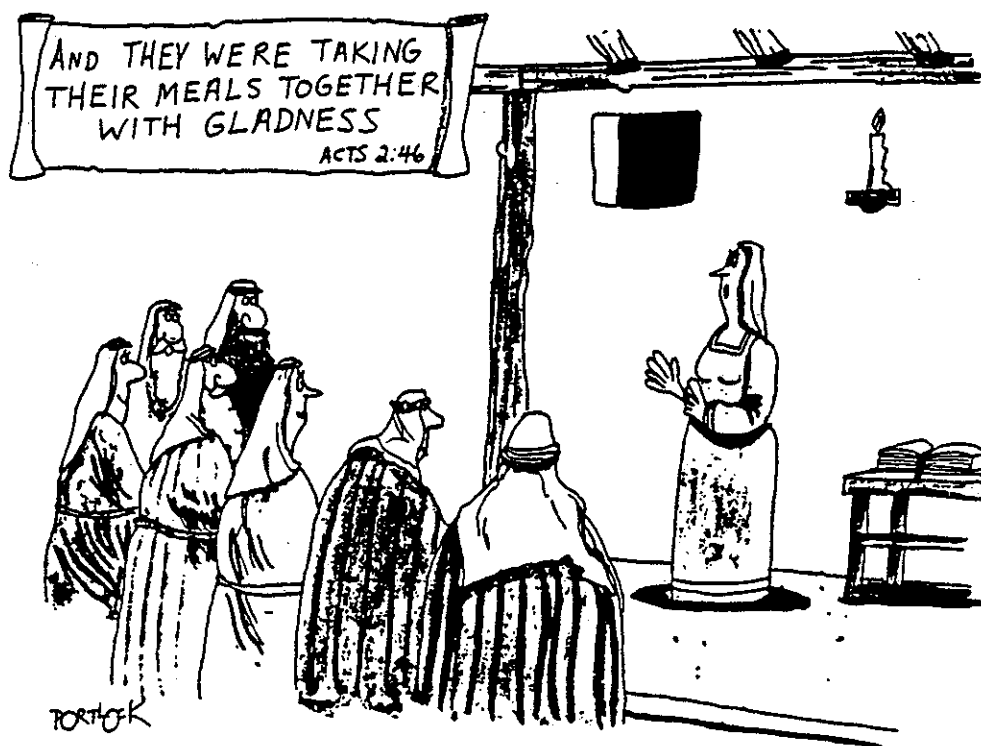
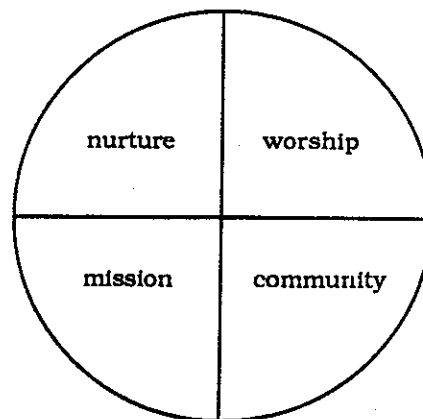


*Adapted from, Good Things Come In Small Groups by Ron Nicholas et.al., p. 28-29, ©1985, IVCF, used by permission of IVP, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL. 60515

A Fifth Alternative

The purpose of a small group determines its focus. Most include at least a small element of nurture, worship, community and mission while focusing on one or two. Some groups, though, seek to provide a balance between all four characteristics.

Maintaining this delicate balance within a group takes careful planning and oversight but can lead to a rich experience as group members discover the joy of life as a well-rounded Christian community -- an experience akin to the one described in Acts 2:40-47.



"O.K., we've decided that everyone whose last name begins with alpha to gamma will bring a main dish . . ."

Stages of Small Group Life

Like any organism, groups have a life. A group's life cycle may be compared to that of a person: birth, infancy and adolescence, adulthood and death. At each stage the needs and issues are different.

Exploration

As the group begins its life together, each member will have basic questions about how they fit in, who's in charge and what is the purpose of the group.

What questions did you have coming into your small group?

Transition

After the initial questions are answered, group members usually begin to feel at odds in some way with other people, the leader or the purpose of the group. The honeymoon (exploration period) is over. If dealt with responsibly, such conflict will help build crucial bonds of ownership among group members.

Did you sense any conflict in yourself or with your group? In what ways did you find yourself owning your group and its purposes?

Action

Once there is a sense of group ownership, group members have a vested interest in the group. They are now free to more openly share themselves and pursue the group's "mission."

Was there a point that you felt free to get fully involved? In what ways did you find yourself giving yourself to your group and its purposes?

Termination

Finally the group must come to an end. During a time of closure the group celebrates and commemorates how God has met them and what they've meant to each other. Such closure gives the group an opportunity to work through the emotions of saying good-by.

What are some things you've appreciated about your experience with this group? about each member in it?