

# Getting Your Emphasis on the Right Syllable

## Introduction

We are building our fellowship on the Great Commission and the Great Commandment - taking God's love to the world and to each other. Our primary means to accomplish this is through our small group ministry (SGM).

This booklet will help you understand the importance of the small group, and help you to understand your role as a small group leader. We hope that you will be better equipped to accomplish your ministry as a small group leader.

Your role as a small group leader is vital to accomplishing what God has set before us. The model below illustrates how THF is structured. Most churches are structured around their Worship Celebration. However, the New Testament church should look like the model below.



This paradigm of church places the emphasis of ministry, mentoring, and missions squarely on the body itself, not just on one particular member or part of the body.

Remember that at THF, we say that, "Every member is a minister!" If we truly believe this, then we need to allow the body to **be** the body. At no other point in our experience is the church more genuinely *the church* than in Small Groups.

# Purpose and Role of Small Groups at THF

Our primary ministry for accomplishing the Great Commission and the Great Commandment is small group ministry. We believe that it is through relationships that people are reached and discipled. Jesus modeled the ideal way to develop these type relationships when He called the twelve disciples to follow him. As Jesus traveled and performed his public ministry, he took the twelve with him, developing that intimate relationship that would be the fertile soil out of which Christianity would spring. Even inside this group, He had the three in whom He was really investing. As a result of his work with these twelve men, and the empowering of the Holy Spirit, Christianity spread all over the globe. The model is simple. He called them out of darkness into a relationship with Himself. Then, He instilled in them the values of Christianity as he went about cultural ministry. We recognize this in the church throughout history.

We also recognize that the message has always been best received when it is couched in the language of the contemporary culture. Your small group will be your *community* that translates the Gospel message for our culture. Our small groups are designed to put people in similar life situations into direct community with each other so that they may grow, learn, and reach out *together*.

## The Theology of Small Groups

We believe that the focus of New Testament ministry should be relationships. Jesus gives the church some direction in Matthew chapters 22 and 28. First, in Matthew 28, Jesus tells us that we should be going into all the world and making disciples. We see that this was primarily done by Jesus in the small group setting with His twelve disciples. But even in his encounters with the multitudes, we notice that Jesus managed to pull individuals out of the group setting to speak with them (Zaccheus, the woman at the well, Nicodemus, and the Rich Young ruler to name a few). That's not to say that Jesus never addressed the masses or crowds. But we do see that His most effective encounters were in small group/individual settings.

Second, in Matthew 22 (vv.37-38), Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God and love others. One can easily see the necessity of small group relationships to accomplish this directive. We even find John recording in the 13th chapter of his book that Jesus demonstrated the fullness of His love by washing His disciples' feet. He is expressing His love for God and his love for the disciples in the small group setting.

Paul advises Timothy in 2 Tim. 2:2 to find a few people who will be faithful with what he has taught them. Get to know your small group. As a result of your group's newness, morale and energy are high even though people do not know each other. Therefore, relationship building must be a priority.

## The 242 Principle

Central to the Small Group mindset at THF is the *242 principle*. SGMs are built around this Biblical principle. It comes from the New Testament book of Acts:



*And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

*(2:42 nas)*

The *242 Principle* means that every small group should be **Fellowship Focused, Study Centered, and Prayer and People Passioned.**

...the breaking of bread - That's Fellowship!

...the apostles' teaching - That's the Study of Scripture

...prayer - That's going to the throne of God on behalf of ourselves and those around us

THF Small Groups help people really get to know a close-knit group of Christ-followers. It is a safe-zone to share life experiences, to search for Biblical answers, and to pursue spiritual projects together. In a *Small Group*, a person will have a support group for times in life where they're hurting, lonely, or rejoicing.

## Growth and Expectation

Several years ago, the IBM corporation began a case study to define the best way to instruct the general public on the use of its new computers. After millions of dollars and extensive research, they found that the ideal group size for maximum effectiveness was twelve! I could have saved them all that money and pointed them to Jesus and the twelve! Unfortunately, the "bigger is better" mentality has infiltrated the church of today. We recognize the need to "readjust" our expectation of group size. It is quite acceptable and even preferable to have more groups of smaller size rather than just one larger group. The ideal small group size is 8 participants; 12 participants is about the maximum. With more than that, there isn't enough time for each participant to fully engage in the discussion or activities. Some people aren't heard, they begin to feel left out and often drift away. The most effective small groups ensure the full participation of each group member while honoring the differences between those who wish to limit their participation to just a few comments and those who participate more actively. To focus on big events means we sacrifice relationships for numbers.

Our expectation is that each small group will grow to 8—12 people and

then birth a new group and begin to grow again. This idea of multiplication fuels the spread of the message and multiplies the disciple making process.

As a small group leader, we desire you to be that connection and leader that will care for your 8—12 group members, and will keep the mission before them. Remember that your small group should be doing ministry together.

We desire for you to be a significant presence in their life, making deliberate contact with each member each week outside of your weekly gathering.

We desire for you to coordinate a weekly gathering of your small group for the purpose of fellowship, discipleship, and ministry.

We desire to be a resource for you, and to offer you the support, prayer, and resources you need to be a successful group leader.

## Small Group Structure

A body builder with terminal cancer is a much less productive human being than an average, healthy human being. The same is true with small groups. Small Groups are focused around the idea that group *health*, not group *size*, ultimately determines our usefulness and productivity in response to God's directives in the Great Commission and Great Commandment



To have a healthy small group, care must be taken to let the body be the body. In other words, a small group where the group leader does everything is unhealthy. The idea is to let the members of the small group discover and employ their grace gift and they genuinely minister to each other.

Here a few structural suggestions for ministries within a small group:

**Group Coordinator/Leader** - Helps to organize meeting times/places for SG activities. Lines up homes. Helps plan other activities. Works with host families to decide if there will (or will not) be a meal/refreshments etc. Works with inreach and outreach people to help them do their jobs.

**Teacher** - Helps prepare a lesson to meet around (Small Groups are designed to meet around biblical fellowship.) This person needs to be free to focus on the preparation necessary to create a weekly dynamic Bible Study. The church will provide curriculum ideas, but this person needs to be freed to prepare the curriculum or study the group is using.

**Inreach** - Helps contact and visit SG members who may be absent, line up assistance for their crisis times or times of need (i.e. births, deaths, moves, etc.) They target folks who are already "in" the small group, hence the name "inreach."

**Outreach** - This person is the liaison between the church and our many visitors, specific to a SG demographic. He or she needs to be able/willing to briefly contact (possibly visit) attenders and visitors and invite them to the small group, answer questions about the church etc. We would like to send them a list each week with the names of first time visitors from your demographic on it to contact and briefly thank them for coming and engage them as to needs, prayer requests, questions. This person will also contact new SG members who sign up on Sundays or sign up at Discovery and let them know when/where the SG meets.

**Communications** - Someone who has the time/ability to send all correspondence, especially e-mails, to the group and to make brief contacting phone calls as needed. They basically become a *switchboard operator* and facilitate the communication traffic among the group.

**Mission** - Helps to coordinate the groups "local" mission effort.

**Other** - Your SG may encounter needs and opportunities that require some creative adaptation to help the Small Group maintain health. It may cause new positions to be added. Our goal is to involve the people of the church (ministers) to do ministry.



## Developing a Group Covenant

*"A Covenant is a Road Map to Where We are Going"*

What is a covenant and why do we need one? A covenant is a contract between group members that defines the direction of the group and the commitment required to meet group goals.

### **Examples of Covenants in Scripture -**

God and Noah: Genesis 6 and 9

God and Abraham: Genesis 17

Jonathon and David: 1 Samuel 18

Christ and the Church:

*1 Corinthians 11:25*

*2 Corinthians 3:6*

### ***Benefits of a Covenant:***

- Vision and purpose for group is clear.
- Helps members understand what we're trying to accomplish.
- Responsibility of group members is stated.
- Conflict resolution is expected and planned.
- Birthing is an event to anticipate and celebrate.
- Helps build and strengthen community.
- Whatever you don't cover in your covenant will haunt you.

Covenants are developed by each small group to serve as a guide for their group life. Since groups develop their own covenant, each group has its own personality and can meet the needs of the people involved.

### ***Questions that can help your group form a covenant:***

How do we want this group to impact our lives? What commitments will it take from each of us to make that impact? Are we willing to make these commitments to each other?

### ***Essential elements to include in a covenant:***

**Confidentiality:** What we say in the group stays in the group unless it is determined that a person is in danger of hurting himself or someone else. In this case, the appropriate full-time small group staff will be notified to help. Nothing we say in the group should be discussed outside the group without the permission of those involved.

**Respect Others:** We do not advise, analyze or "fix" others. We are to support, encourage and admonish each other toward Christ-likeness and always in truth and love.

**Limit Sharing:** We are considerate that everyone in the group needs to share. We will be sensitive not to dominate the group discussion times and limit our discussions.

**Regular Attendance:** We will make a commitment to our group to show up at the appointed meeting times, be on time and end on time. When we cannot attend, we will call the host to let them know.

**Listen:** We want to be active listeners, since everyone needs a listening ear. When someone is talking, he has the floor. The rest of the group will respect and listen.

**Conflict Resolution:** Whenever relationships are involved, there will be conflict. We will handle the conflict Biblically according to the guidelines of Matthew 18.

**Avoid Offensive Statements and Jokes:** We are all on the same team. We should, therefore, guard against offending one another. If someone offends us, we commit to work it out directly with him or her.

**Birthing Plan:** We want to begin now to develop and state a birthing plan.

**Be Prepared:** We add to the group experience as we prepare ourselves within our personal walk with God. We want to come ready to fully participate in our group, including completing any homework.

**Scripture:** Scripture will be taught in such a way as to be applied to life and will be in line with The Heights Fellowship Statement of Faith.

**Socials and Service Projects:** We commit to building community and impacting our world. These activities are as important to attend as the study time.

**Use of Spiritual Gifts:** We will contribute to the life of the groups by identifying and using our spiritual gift within our group environment.

## Resources for the Small Group

We offer a myriad of resources for the small group. In an effort to stay focused on the mission of making disciples, we desire to make your small group as strong as possible. Some of the things we do to ensure that are:

**Fall SGL Retreat:** We offer a retreat each fall for all of our small group leaders. At this retreat, we will provide you with training and ministry that helps you be better equipped for the task God has called you to. This retreat is required for all small group leaders and will be video taped for those who have dire emergencies and can not attend.

**Spring Training Conference:** We offer a conference in the Spring for anyone interested in learning more about being a small group leader. This conference is open to anyone, but is required for anyone desiring to become a small group leader. This conference will provide a time of learning about our structure, mission, and purpose.

**Monthly SGL Luncheon:** each month, on the first Sunday, all of our small group leaders get together for lunch. The purpose of this lunch is to provide everyone with current info about upcoming events and body life.

**The Annual Small Group Event**—Each year we offer an event designed to strengthen your small group.



**Quarterly Fellowships**—every three months we will provide a “body life” event for all the small groups to come together for a time of fellowship and ministry.

**Weekly Celebration**—Every Sunday we will gather together as the Body of Christ and celebrate Him as an overflow of what He has shown us during the week. Small groups are encouraged to make this a connection time for their group, as well.

# Choosing curriculum

There are several things to consider when choosing a study for your group. Considering God.

*Pray about you group's next study, by yourself and as a group.*

*Ask your apprentice to join you in prayer and then set aside time to evaluate different options together.*

## **Considering the group**

- Where people in your group are in life? What issues are they struggling with?
- Background and knowledge of people in the group
- Spiritual maturity: Are they mature Christ followers, new believers or seekers?
- Age of group: How bonded is the group?
- Group members' interests in type and content of study?
- What focus did your group choose in their covenant that could help you in choosing a study?
- As your group matures, lead them toward deeper Bible study
- Commitment level of the group members

## **Considering the leader**

- Based on the leader's experience, should the leader develop the study or use a prepared study guide
- Own strengths, life experiences, interests
- Personality and gifts

## **Considering logistical constraints**

- Shorter studies with less homework work better as the group is forming and building relationships
- Number of weeks you want to spend on a study
- Time you want to spend each meeting in study
- Amount of homework group members will do

## **Guidelines for choosing a good study**

- Doctrinal purity
- Relational in nature
- Application oriented

### ***Different study options***

- A book of the Bible
- Character study
- Topical studies

### ***Additional advice about choosing curriculum***

*Be Inspirational* – Use this time to ask not “what do I want to study next” but “how does God want us as a group to grow? Are there areas that we need to grow together?”

*Be In Prayer* – As a group, spend time in prayer asking God to show you together what He thinks you need next.

*Be Introspective* – Use this time to evaluate your spiritual growth. “Where are we now and how do we take the next steps?”

*Be Invitational* – It’s an ideal time to invite new people in. Publicize the study. Let the small group ministry leader know so that he can let others know.

*Be Intentional* – Use the choice of a new curriculum to have the group renew commitment to Him and to each other. Read and re-affirm the group covenant.

As your group matures, make sure that they are growing in their ability to discover Biblical truths for themselves. Encourage your group members to choose to study a book of the Bible or do a topical study based on Scripture on their own.

Finally. Communicate your choice to your coach. Be prepared to pass your knowledge of the curriculum onto other groups.

# First Weeks as a Small Group Leader

“Biblically functioning communities are the best places for life-change to occur”

Small Group leaders should use the first few weeks of group formation to do casual one-on-one visits with group members (i.e, lunch or *dinner meeting*).

## ***The Initial Process***

### *First meeting – Group formation meeting*

Social time to connect and begin to get to know each other. Need to decide where group meets next week. Preferably someone will step up to host the group meetings.

### *Second meeting – Dinner and get to know each other*

Discuss with group what they want out of the group and do an informal ice-breaker. This is an ideal time to begin to share with the group the values that you want in the group. During this time, begin looking for a couple to mentor for future birthing. Lining up a couple to lead the new group, and training them is vital to their confidence and success!



### *Third meeting – Icebreaker and testimonies*

Participate in a teambuilding/icebreaker activity. Leader and group members share their testimony. Continue discussion of group values and introduce concept of a group covenant.

### *Fourth meeting – Develop a covenant*

Work as a group to communicate what is important (values) and what will bind you as a group. Contact SG coach or staff for samples of group covenants.

### *Fifth meeting – First time to do a study*

The group leader has had a few weeks to get to know the group both in group

settings and hopefully some one-on-ones as well. The leader should pick this study. As you choose the study, keep these things in mind:

- Do a short study – 6 weeks or less. Finishing a study is encouraging for the group and helps you adjust for the next study.
- Ask questions as part of the study that will help the group get to continue to know each other.
- Avoid controversial or heavy topics to begin with. Focus on knowing each other's testimonies and each other in the early phases of group life. Then you can move the group to a heavier study.

## **Birthing a New Small Group**

Multiplying small groups is inherent to the life of any church. We purpose to be intentional about building small group multiplication into the DNA of every small group.

Giving birth to a new group from your existing one is one of the most challenging things you'll undertake as a group leader.

First, it's a personal challenge because you've grown to love your members. Second, your group members may resist doing this. Third, it requires lots and lots of prayer, asking God for the right time and for new leaders to emerge.

### ***Some advice:***

- Start early — Build it into the group's DNA. Tell group members early in the formation of your group that there will come a time when you will give life to a new group and repeat this message every once in a while.
- Make birthing a new group a value in your group covenant. This will make it easier when you have to birth a new group. Group members may still object, but at least they are prepared for this ahead of time.
- When you share this vision with your group, you will need to put on your church leader's hat and share with them the importance of having enough groups so that no one in our church will have to stand alone.
- Build it into your ministry. As you staff the various ministries within your small group (see *Small Group Structure* pp.4-5) include an "apprentice" in each position. In other words, "when you recruit one, recruit two." This insures that leadership is in place when birthing time comes.
- Don't forget to visit with your small group coach before you start the process. There are many different options to consider when birthing a new group.
- Make this a celebration time in your group. Throw a party and pray over the new leaders.