

Healthy Small Groups

Ideas compiled by Bob Young

Many churches have some kind of small group program. It is not enough to have a program. Does the small group dynamic create spiritual health? Does your church have healthy small groups? These questions matter because health comes before growth. Unhealthy groups will not grow. Unhealthy groups will struggle to maintain a spiritual dimension and dynamic. Unhealthy groups easily become fellowship groups or study groups.

In many churches, asking about the health of small groups is not normal. Churches measure success by looking at the number of small groups, the number of members signed up, and attendance. Less commonly, some churches may ask whether small groups are reaching out, adding members, or developing future leaders.

I share ten ideas that will help small group leaders develop healthy small groups. (You can add to the list.)

- Cultivate an atmosphere of mutuality, edification, and **spiritual** encouragement. Make sure that every group member is **included** in this dynamic.
- Model **transparency and vulnerability** as first steps in encouraging group members toward **accountability**.
- Encourage (insist on) the **involvement** and leadership of group members in devotionals, Bible study, sharing, and prayers. (Hint: the leader should not do everything!)
- Set the expectation that the leader leads by **listening, facilitating, and loving others**. Be careful that the leader does not do most of the talking. Learn to ask open questions, always demonstrating concern for every group member.
- Encourage group members to share stories and examples of their own **spiritual journey and growth**.
- Help group members find closer **spiritual relationships** with one another and a deepening relationship with God through Christ. Keep a close check on this: are group members experiencing personal growth?
- Involve all group members in the **learning** process, sharing life experiences, learning from one another.
- Cultivate a **welcoming** atmosphere, so visitors and new group members are assimilated and included easily.
- Help the group find ways to **serve**—one another, the church community, the world.
- Set these expectations in your group from the beginning with a discussion of group hopes and expectations and the goal of increased spiritual health for all members – **becoming a healthy small group**.