

# Consider the 5Ws and 1H of Men's Small Groups

**Who** should be in a men's small group? Men who are earnestly seeking to develop a closer walk with the Lord, and to discern His will for their lives. Small groups work best when several men have developed relationships and have begun to develop trust. The group may include men from outside the church.

**What** are the types of small groups? Small groups often fall into two categories.

- Open Groups: Attendance may not be mandatory or expected. This may be where a group will start. After the participants experience spiritual growth and personal bonding as a result of participation, the group may informally move to a closed format.
- Closed Groups: Attendance is expected. Attendance is restricted. No visitors. Groups may evolve into a closed format after a strong trust and bonding have developed and sharing is at an intimate level.

**What** happens during a men's small group? Consider the following format:

- Limit the meeting to no more than 90 minutes
- Informal fellowship while the group gathers
- Open with prayer
- Study/Discussion (30 minutes)
- Sharing time (30 minutes)
- Period of prayer (30 minutes)

**When and Where:** A key consideration in establishing a small group is when and where to meet. Given diverse work schedules and perhaps a wide area from which participants come, it may be difficult to find a time when men can meet. Groups can draw from a common residential or work area. Consider forming

groups based on affinity. Potential participants should strive for a common time: early weekday morning, evening, Saturday morning, etc.

**Why?** It is clear from the Gospels that Jesus spent a great deal of time mentoring and coaching His disciples. It is also clear that He had an especially close relationship with three of these men: Peter, James and John. These were men who led the early advance of the church.

A men's small group represents a group of men who come together regularly to focus on the Word, to be challenged to bring their lives into alignment with Biblical precepts, to encourage and exhort one another, and to pray for one another.

Just as Christ was the focus of the relationship between Peter, James and John, in today's small groups the Word is the focus. Just as there was dialog in that early first century small group, dialog about the Word and its application to our lives is key to understanding and integrating truth into our lives.

**How** many men make up a small group? Usually six to eight. The larger the group, the more time it takes to discuss the study material and share. Another consideration is travel schedules. It is difficult for a group to maintain momentum and effective communication when only two or three men can meet.

- **How should we start a group?** Consider starting a group with a short-term commitment of six to eight weeks. Consider using a video series. *Preparing to Win* (available from ) is an excellent resource for getting started.

**Prayer Time:** It is quite natural for the discussion and sharing to crowd into the prayer time. This will happen in the early stages of the development of the group. After a few weeks the group may need to scale back the discussion and sharing. Participants will need to be disciplined during the

sharing time. Do we need to know all the details?

Keep prayer requests to two or three. As the group bonds, prayer time will become special and the group will make sure there is sufficient time to uphold each other before the Lord.

Consider limiting prayer to needs within the group. Prayer for others in the church, the community, etc., is more appropriate for personal prayers or other groups.

**Leadership:** There are usually two alternatives here: an individual agrees to lead the group, or leadership is rotated on a weekly or monthly basis.

**Study/Discussion:** A study can take several forms: a straight reading and discussion of passages of Scripture, a passage or passages of Scripture on which a topical study is based, a topical Bible study such as the *Follow Me Manual* or a topical study by an author who brings Scripture to bear on an issue the men in the group face (see Small Group and Personal Discipleship Resources on the C&MA Men's website).

There is an abundance of Bible studies (book or topical) for men. Check out Man in the Mirror, Campus Crusade, NavPress, Intervarsity or men's ministry websites. Check with your local Christian bookstore.

The topic of study should be one to which all members of the group relate, e.g., a study on marriage and family would not be appropriate in a group where some members are single and not contemplating marriage in the near future.

**Holy Spirit-Led:** From the above guidelines, it is clear that there are no hard and fast rules for forming and conducting a men's small group. The key is the leadership of the Holy Spirit. It may take several months to gather men interested and available to form a group. Then it may take several months for the group to settle in after starting. These guidelines are intended to provide alternatives and challenges facing

small groups. The group needs to remain flexible in the formulation stage in order to respond to the direction of the Spirit.

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