

How A Men's Small Group Can Help When You Feel Overwhelmed

The fallen world is a never-sleeping juggernaut that relentlessly crushes everything in its path without pity—our dreams, our plans and our relationships. We fight back, but eventually the accumulation of thousands of unfair and unjust criticisms, insults, accusations, rejections, slights, innuendos, disrespect, gossip, offenses, bullying, getting overlooked, feeling kicked to the curb, being denied access, getting ambushed, being undervalued and getting thrown under the bus take a toll.

We tire of the snarky, lusty, rude, crude, coarse, envious, jealous, arrogant and pretentious comments people make. The disgraceful, greedy, unethical and illegal behavior of others staggers our sensibilities. The endless onslaught of trials, temptations, sins, errors in judgment and failure wear us down. We're dulled by the wicked thoughts of our own felonious hearts. We are riddled by shame and guilt for all the ways we have let others down.

It adds up. At a point, without some outside help, it all just gets to be too much. We despair over the evil we see that people are capable of inflicting on each other. Our faith in humanity is gutted. We become fragile, prickly, easily offended and lose our resilience. Hope fades away.

Bitterness crushes what little happiness our hearts were holding on to. Our wills get broken. We are prone to withdraw, even if we keep up our daily routines. Despair sets in. We isolate ourselves from friends.

Because I work with men as a vocation, I often meet men when this despair and isolation have taken over. As I wrote in *Man*

Alive, when men try to express their inner aches and pains—what’s really bothering them—they invariably mention one or more of seven troubling symptoms:

–I just feel like I’m in this all alone.

–I don’t feel like God cares about me *personally*—not really.

–I don’t feel like my life has a purpose. It seems random.

–I have a lot of destructive behaviors that keep dragging me down.

–My soul feels dry.

–My most important relationships are not working.

–I don’t feel like I’m doing anything that will make a difference and leave the world a better place.

I often receive an email or phone call from men at just this point. After listening, the first thing I always ask is, “Do you have a best friend, or are you part of a small group?”

In 100% of the cases, the answer is, “No, why do you ask?” Often men will add, “I used to meet with a guy, but we stopped,” or “I used to be part of a small group, but I haven’t been going for a while.”

Usually I can help men with the issue at hand, but then I urge them—and this is the big idea—“What’s really going to help you long term is to find a friend or two, or join a small group, and live life together with a few brothers with whom you can process what comes your way.”

For reflection: What’s your experience with small groups? When you have troubles, do you tend to move toward relationships or withdraw? If you are not currently doing life together with a few brothers, can you think of any reason not to start praying and working to get into (or start) a group? {eoa}

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