

Larry Tomczak: 10 Types of Peculiar People in Our Small Groups

Whether we call them small groups, kinship groups, community groups, home groups, fellowship groups or whatever, most Christians have been involved with a nucleus of fellow believers in the context of a local church.

They are biblical and provide needed encouragement, support and accountability in these challenging times. They also provide us an opportunity to look at ourselves and our companions through a lens to laugh at ourselves.

In a time where so many of us are bombarded by negativity and understandably feel discouragement by the very real downward spiral of our nation, it's healthy emotionally to step back, take a breather and laugh.

"A merry heart does good like a medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones" ().

"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven ... a time to weep, and a time to laugh" (Eccl. 3:1,4a).

God has a sense of humor. We do too, and it needs to be "greased" from time to time.

Elton Trueblood, in his delightful little book *The Humor of Christ*, poked fun at believers who go about taking life too seriously with faces looking like a cover for the book of Lamentations! He said that "Jesus reveals to us some of the absurdity of our own lives, where we need help to recognize it."

Jesus put a little child front and center saying we needed to

become like one to be in the company of the committed. For those who say Scripture never records Jesus laughing or smiling, do you really think children would've flocked to Him if His countenance was like Max von Sydow at the end of *The Greatest Story Ever Told* glumly saying go share the "good news" before slowly sliding into the stratosphere?

Francis of Assisi and his band of brothers were nicknamed "God's Gleemen!" Why don't we join them by poking fun at ourselves?

10 Types of Peculiar People

A friend of mine, Bob Cohen, once shared some observations about people present in small group settings. I'll add my own from my experiences over decades. See if you can identify, but don't tell anyone if you're one of them!

1. The Interpreter. This fascinating individual resembles a Conehead from the early *Saturday Night Live* comedy skits. He or she has a tendency to assess what people share from a deeply mystical perspective. If someone asks for prayer for an upset stomach, Oscar believes it may indicate a burden of the Lord in the person's bowels. The late arrival explaining backed up traffic is a picture of angelic forces being hindered by unconfessed sin, and thunderous rumblings overhead shows God's pleasure in our interaction.

2. The Dominator. The group's leader repeatedly receives subtle pokes from his spouse to do something about this loquacious lady or bloviating brother. The individual who shares this identity is like having halitosis (bad breath)—you don't know when you have it! Zelda never ceases to amaze the participants with her 15-minute responses to simple conversation starters. Or Stanley cranks up another surefire testimony from his 45-year history as an on-fire Christian ending with his usual "Oops, I didn't intend to go so long."

3. The Deflator. When Margie and Mikey share the good news of

their engagement, Debbie Downer is quick to bring a reality check that “It won’t be long ’til you starry eyed lovers discover the honeymoon’s over! Yuk. Yuk. Ain’t I right couples?” After a streak of bad weather, Mrs. McGillicutty encourages everyone that spring is around the corner but not so fast. ... Negative Ned is quick to insert that he heard there’s an arctic blast in the works, and there might be unseasonable flooding lasting for weeks.

4. The Incubator. In private, Sally is soft-spoken and shares timely words of encouragement, but once in the living room, she seemingly disappears into the woodwork. When the group leader attempts to draw her out to lead in prayer, it seems like an eternity before she finally sputters a few syllables as Alice’s husband regularly nods off.

Never fear of course, the Dominator is always ready to compensate for her reluctance and silence.

5. The Annihilator. Just when there seems to be a good flow in the evening’s dialogue, Arthur has a tendency to speak up providing the train wreck no one wanted. The unexpected whiplash comes when he abrasively corrects some of the people in their contributions that he believes were “in the flesh” instead of Spirit-led like his. Merciless Margie forgets what it was like when she was a new convert as she shares legalistically and unredemptively of how God’s judgment comes quickly and severely to those in sin, especially if it’s sexual. “Look how God struck Ananias and Sapphira dead! I knew a couple in the backseat who were struck with lightning and neither survived!”

6. The Hibernator. “What’s her name?” looks vaguely familiar, and you’re fairly certain she’s a member of the group. But it’s understandable to forget someone’s name when you don’t see her for a couple months at a time. Matilda isn’t normally present when it’s raining ... unseasonably hot (or cold) ... around the holidays ... she’s “under the weather” ... forgot today

was the meeting day “Sorry” ... heard the traffic was heavy ... felt somewhat depressed, again ... yet melancholic Matilda continually wonders, “Why doesn’t anyone care about me, and why don’t I have any friends?”

7. The Translator. When people attempt to respond to the group leader’s question, Wally is ever so helpful. Like the Energizer Bunny, he keeps going with the conversation by interjecting, “What Xavier is trying to say is ... right, Xavier?”

“Not really.”

“Well what you mean but it’s not coming out clearly is ... does that help you express what you mean but can’t get out? Ah, let me try again ...”

“Stop. Let me help you. I know you understand what you think you said but I don’t know if you realize that what you shared was not really what you meant. Does that enable you to feel better about what you were trying to say but weren’t sure if we understood it?”

Whaaaaaat?

8. The Instructor. Archibald has an uncanny ability to answer basic questions like, “How’s everyone doing?” by not sharing how he’s really doing but speaking almost nonstop faith declarations. “As for me, I’m doing better than I deserve. I’ve learned to ‘do all things without grumbling or complaining.’ I’m never under circumstances because I’m ‘seated with Him in heavenly places’ where ‘God is at work in me both to will and work for His good pleasure.’ Hey everybody don’t forget ‘God is working all things together for good to those who love Him’ and that ‘we live by faith and not by sight!’ We are ‘more than conquerors’ and ‘if God is for me who can be against me?’ Praise God! Can I get an amen?” Amen.

9. The Eliminator. Bruno means well but unfortunately people

tend to avoid him once they've encountered him. This guy is definitely not one you want on your greeters team or welcoming people at the guest services table. He's not aware of how obnoxious he can be, and his wife has long since given up trying to tamp down his effervescent personality. Prior to social distancing, he's the person with the vice-like grip and "squeeze the life out of you" greeting upon your arrival. My buddy Bob Cohen suggests periodically sending him out the back door on an errand as a useful task that has saved many a newcomer.

10. The Terminator. I'll let my humorist friend, Bob Cohen, conclude things with his description of this one. The group is experiencing the manifest presence of the Lord permeating the atmosphere of the room, gifts of the Spirit having been in operation and a peace that passes understanding fills everyone's hearts as they quietly wait on the Lord and offer Him thanks. Suddenly "Thelma the Terminator" abruptly stands up, slams her Bible closed and loudly announces to all: "I told my mother that I'd pick the kids up by 9:15, so I've only got 10 minutes to get there. I'll see y'all Sunday ... sorry for the interruption!" She scurries out the door slamming it behind her, and with that, the meeting is closed. Officially or not, it's over!

Here's the Deal: When Psalms 2:4a tells us, "He who sits in the heavens laughs," perhaps it encompasses enjoyment of His people when they come together in these "little platoons" (see my recent article to inspire you).

None of us have it all together, but together we have it all and can mature when we come as a participator in the love of God. {eoa}

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