

What the Bible Actually Teaches About Small Groups

Do you know where you can see the greatest model of unlimited, spontaneous expansion of a local congregation?

Just read the book of Acts! The church of Jerusalem gives us the greatest model ever on the explosive growth of the church. In fact, the church's growth described in Acts is nothing short of a miracle.

At the beginning of Acts 1, there are 120 believers. By the time we get to Acts 4, the number of believers grew to 5,000 men. Most scholars believe that if you add women and children, the church was at least 15,000 strong by this point.

By the time we get to Acts 21:20, we learn that there are tens of thousands of believers in the early church. Most scholars believe there are between 50,000 and 100,000 people in the church at this time.

So, in just 25 years, the church grew from 120 to at least 50,000 people.

My first question when I realized this was, "Where in the world did they hold all of these people?"

The Bible tells us in Acts 5:42 (CEV), "Every day they spent time in the temple and in one home after another. They never stopped teaching and telling the good news that Jesus is the Messiah." They met in large groups for worship and small groups for fellowship. This biblical strategy still works today.

If your church is going to be healthy, it must be growing larger and smaller at the same time. What does this mean? Larger through celebration services and worship, and smaller

through your small groups.

What did these first small groups do? Think about all of that explosive growth. Whatever they did, we should do, too!

The Bible gives us the answers in Acts 2:42-47.

They grew spiritually.

Verse 42a (NIV) says, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." It appears the apostles were teaching in the temple courts on Sunday, and the people were studying their teachings in greater depth in their homes. As they did so, the people grew in spiritual maturity.

They spent time in fellowship.

The Bible says, "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (Acts 2:46b). The early church gathered together in homes to eat and develop relationships with one another.

They worshipped.

They devoted themselves "to the breaking of bread and to prayer" and they were "praising God" (Acts 2:42, 47). These early small groups participated in communion and worshipped together.

They ministered to one another.

The Bible says, "They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need" (Acts 2:45). Home groups became an outlet for support—they helped one another in practical ways by meeting needs.

They evangelized the lost.

Acts 2:47b says, "The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." If people were coming to faith in Christ daily, that means the church saw at least 365

conversions a year! That only happens if these groups are engaging in their God-given mission sharing the Good News.

These small groups in Acts were a microcosm of the greater church. They were fulfilling the five purposes of the church: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and evangelism. They were purpose-driven small groups!

Typically, small groups today only fulfill one or two of the purposes. If your small groups are going to be healthy, you need to build the DNA of the church—the five biblical purposes—into them.

A healthy church has healthy groups!

CLICK HERE for more tips on building health into your small groups! {eoa}

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