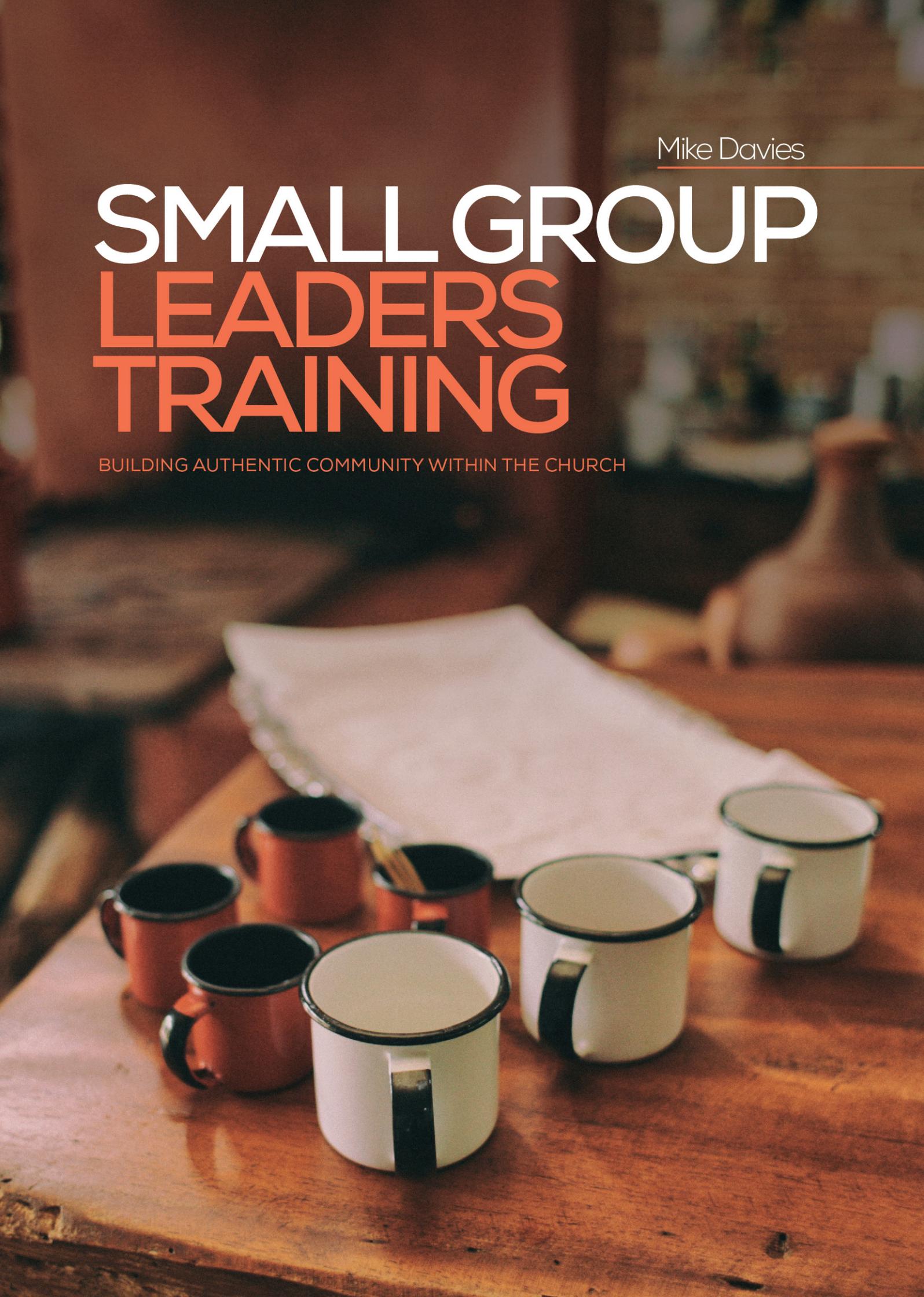


Mike Davies

# SMALL GROUP LEADERS TRAINING

BUILDING AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY WITHIN THE CHURCH





# **Small Group Leaders Training:**

by Mike Davies





# Small Group Leaders Training

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to write a manual on how to facilitate something as organic as community through Small Groups - and so that is not what we want this booklet to be.

Although this document does not represent the whole truth, the final authority or the complete treatment of the subject, it is guided by observations and hard won lessons from several years of living in and building church community. To make the most of this material, it is important that you not only understand what is being communicated but that you catch the heart behind it, applying it to your own life, living it out and seeking to be guided by the Holy Spirit as you work out your own leadership within the context of Community Groups.

The danger with committing such things to paper is that they can quickly take on the form of 'law', to be applied without thought toward the heart or the spirit behind them. As leaders, we must remember that people are individuals created by, and loved by, God, each unique and precious to Him. It is imperative therefore that we do not blindly follow rules but that we use Godly wisdom in applying Kingdom principles to each unique situation, enabling each person under our leadership to grow into maturity in Christ.

Finally, we would encourage you to 'aim high but stay low.' Expect great things in God, believe Him to supernaturally use you in amazing ways. But at the same time remain humble and teachable. Never stop learning. And remember that even the things you know now, or that you will learn as you go through this material, must be refreshed and reworked as you journey with God in discipling and leading his children.

## 2. WHY AM I HERE?

You have been asked to attend this training because your leaders have seen potential in you to be a leader in church, either in the context of leading Community Groups or another ministry such as kids, youth or worship. Reading this booklet, or attending a course, does not mean that you will automatically attain a leadership position within the church: this is simply an opportunity to train and equip yourself in Biblical truth surrounding the topic of leadership in a Small Group context.

When choosing leaders, we consider several factors, including:

**Character:** 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 show the qualifications of Elders and Deacons. Whilst we recognise that not all Community Group leaders are Deacons or Elders, there is a clear principle here that God considers the character of His leaders far more important than their gifting.

**Gifting:** Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4 all speak of the various gifts bestowed by God on His Church. These are grace gifts (i.e. they are undeserved) and do not in themselves prove that a man is fit to lead others. It is equally true, however, that no matter how wonderful a man's character, if he doesn't have the right gift make-up, he would struggle to lead a Community Group.

**Capacity:** We each have different capacities. Some are leaders of tens, others of hundreds, and some of thousands (Exodus 18:15).

**The prompting of the Holy Spirit:** Is God highlighting someone for a leadership position?

**Timing:** Often a person is qualified both by character and gifting but it is not the right time for them to step into the position. We must follow the timing of God.

**Need:** We should never be driven by need, or ruled by pragmatism, however we must be pragmatic. Where there is great need for leaders we may need to 'take a greater risk' in raising leaders than might be the case in other contexts.

New leaders need to be constantly raised up, even beyond the current need of the church, in preparation for the future. By training and equipping people to be future leaders we ready ourselves to effectively disciple new members. When God adds to us, he gives us a responsibility, a stewardship, over these new people. Only if we are faithful with what we have been given do we show that we can be entrusted with more. Churches that fail to proactively raise up new leaders are in grave danger of placing a ceiling upon their growth. For this reason, Community Group leaders should be consistently looking to identify, train and raise up new leaders within their groups.

Scripture is clear that we each have different gifts (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12). We also have different personalities, backgrounds, styles, cultures and capacities. We need to celebrate this diversity and recognize that God has made us to be individuals. Our aim is not to develop a production line of leaders, but to develop each individual into the fullness of who God has made them to be. So, while it is essential that each of our leaders is of one 'heart, mind and purpose', that we have the same 'spiritual DNA' and that we are constantly working to 'guard the unity of the faith', we recognize that each person here will lead in a unique way.

It is so easy to begin to compare ourselves to others. This never ends well as comparison either leads to conceit (I am better), insecurity and jealousy (he is better), rivalry (I'm determined to be better) or selfish ambition (I will make sure other people think I'm better).

Of course, it is healthy to learn from others by watching what they do well and imitating it where possible but each of us must remember that we are unique; we have our own personality, gifting, capacity etc. Some are married with children, others single. There are any number of things that make our own situation unique.

Each leader needs to settle that he or she must be obedient to do what Jesus has called them to do, and do it to the best of their ability without falling into the trap of comparison. Whose Community Group is biggest is unimportant, for example.

## It is important to remember:

Even if you never enter an official leadership role in the future this course will still prove beneficial to you for the following reasons:

- Every believer is called to be a leader of some sort.
- Knowing about the responsibilities of leadership will give you a better appreciation for those who do lead.
- It will help you become a better support for those who do lead.
- It will further strengthen your understanding of the 'DNA' of the church and the heart of your leaders.

### 3. WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME?

As Spiderman would say, “With great power comes great responsibility”. To be a leader within the Kingdom of God is a huge privilege but it carries with it responsibilities. We need to realize that as leaders we are being entrusted with the things that are most precious to the Lord: the souls of men and women. He therefore has expectations of His leaders. Please realize that while your Elders may communicate expectations to you, they have been chosen by Christ to represent Him. In Ezekiel, we read sobering words delivered to unfaithful shepherds:

*“The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them.*

*“Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, declares the Lord God, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.” (Ezekiel 34:1-10)*

*It imperative then that God’s leaders be faithful and reliable people (2 Timothy 2:2) who are eager to please Jesus and persist in doing their best to meet the expectations of their Lord. The following verses may have been written to Elders but the principle applies to all leaders in God’s house:*

*“So I exhort the Elders among you, as a fellow Elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight,[a] not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you;[b] not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1-3)*

In light of this, your leaders, representing Jesus, would have the following expectations of you:

**Personal Health:** You lead a healthy life, physically (as far as possible) and spiritually. You are above reproach and lead in transparency, repentance and humility.

**Your Example:** Those you lead are inspired by both your private life and your public behavior. You model to other believers what it means to be a passionate follower of Jesus.

Your relationships, church attendance, manner of worship, giving, etc. sets an example for those in your care.

*“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of Elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Timothy 4:12-16)*

*“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.” (Philippians 3:17)*

**Time:** Leading a Community Group requires a commitment of one’s time. You can’t arrive at meetings unprepared or wait until there is a crisis before getting involved in a person’s life. A Community Group leader must be prepared to invest time and energy into people, into prayer and preparation for the group, and in being trained and equipped.

We recognize that most people today lead very busy lives, trying to juggle church, family, work, exercise and more. We need to be wise in striking the right balance, not neglecting anything that Jesus has called us to do well, and not burning ourselves out. When seeking to achieve this balance it is important to remember that neglect of family for the sake of ministry disqualifies a person from leadership (1 Timothy 3:4-5)!

Having said all this, it would seem wise to consider the cost of leadership before agreeing to taking up a leadership role. It is unhelpful and unsettling for sheep if the shepherd quits because the job asks more of them than they are able or willing to give.

*“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’” (Luke 14:27-30)*

**Perseverance:** A Community Group leader must persevere in fulfilling what Jesus has called them to do, even when circumstances bring difficulties. Sometimes a leader will need to step back for a season however often we will be required to push through difficult, busy or pressured times for the sake of the group and for our own personal growth.

**Preparation:** The leader must provide direction and be well prepared to lead discussion, providing time for worship, fellowship and prayer. As mentioned earlier, true community needs to be organic rather than organisational, Spirit-led rather than liturgical and spontaneous rather than structured. While we are organic we need to be organized. To be Spirit-led means to spend time hearing what He has to say and ‘practicing the presence’ beforehand, to be spontaneous and effective requires much previous preparation.

Also remember that depending on your gifting and personality, you will be effective with different approaches. You must find an approach that works for you and that brings life. But whichever approach you take, you must prepare; prepare yourself, the venue, the message, the worship, etc. If you want to see the life of Jesus in your times together then you should be as prepared as if you were expecting Him to physically walk through your door as a member of your group.

**Faithful and dedicated:** Paul knew that the key to a healthy church was multiplication. That for the church to grow, both in maturity and numbers, he would need to invest in faithful (or reliable) men and women who could replicate what he had shown and taught (2 Timothy 2:2). Leaders therefore need to be reliable; those who do what they are asked to do and who, at times, anticipate what is needed and do it without being asked. Leaders who are self-starters, proactive and self-motivated, are a pleasure to work with! A horse that needs to be reined in is more pleasurable to ride than a donkey who refuses to move!

Faithfulness extends to attendance, personal spiritual disciplines and practical outworking in administration (communicating notices, providing feedback, setting up a venue when required, updating Community Group lists, etc.). Even those things that could be considered small and unimportant need to be executed faithfully and well, for only if we are faithful in the small will we be faithful in the large (Matthew 25:21).

**Able to give an account for each member:** Ultimately it is Elders who will give an account before God for how well they have led the sheep (Hebrews 13:17) but if you lead a Community Group there has been a certain amount of responsibility delegated to you. You will need to know how the people in your group are doing spiritually and emotionally, relationally and materially. If they miss a meeting do you notice and follow up (not to 'check up on them' or 'control them' but to properly care for them)? Are you prepared to spend time with them, to speak into their lives, to 'correct, rebuke and exhort' when and where necessary?

**Team Player:** You need to be willing and able to play in team together with members of your Community Group (using the various gifts and talents there), with other Community Group leaders and perhaps most importantly with the Elders.

We will deal with this relationship with Elders in more detail in a separate section, but each Community Group leader needs to work closely with the Elders, communicating with them regularly and submitting to them on matters concerning the group: remember they are not 'your' people and it is not 'your' group.

**Present sound doctrine:** The Elders are responsible for setting doctrine in the life of the church. You should never be preaching anything that is contrary to that which the Elders have approved. Community Group is not the place to correct perceived imbalances, to pursue a pet doctrine or to push the teachings of a favourite author or preacher.

Likewise, in all our teaching and counseling we must present what is biblically sound and Spirit-filled. Remember that the letter kills but the Spirit brings life. We cannot go beyond Scripture but we must be balanced and can never be black and white where Scripture is grey.

## 4. A TRUE SHEPHERD VS A HIRED HAND

Shepherding requires you to lay down our lives for the sheep God has entrusted us with. This is not a very easy thing for our flesh as we many times tempted to think of our own comfort. We regularly need to line ourselves back to the example of the Good Shepherd and make sure we do not lead God's precious people as a Hired Hand.

*To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. (John 10:3-4, ESV)*

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. (John 10:11-16, ESV)*

The Hired Hand is someone who does not take responsibility for the trust given to him. He purely does the job description without any genuine sense of ownership and commitment.

**Available to members in their time of need.** The Hired hand easily abandons the sheep. As a Community Leader, you should be available to the people you lead during their time of needs as a pose to abandoning or being unavailable to them at the sign of any trouble or difficulty like the Hired Hand. Pray with them, cry with them and wage war with them.

**Genuinely Care for the Sheep.** The Hired hand is selfishly in it for his "paycheck," so only cares and is motivated by personal benefit. Make sure you don't see community as a stepping stone to a possible promotion or a place to be in control. The motivation should always be a love for God and His people. "What can I get out of this," is the wrong question to ask. The Hired hand cared nothing for the sheep. As shepherds must be like Timothy, who took genuine interest in people (Phil 2:20), God has entrusted us with. The Shepherd knew his/her sheep by name. Make time to get to know the people that has been entrusted to you.

*I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare. (Phil 2:20 NLT)*

**Being willing to sacrifice.** The Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. We need to be sober minded and know that there is a cost involved in leading God's people, but God provides the love and grace needed for the task.

They know the Shepherd's voice. Your community members must hear and 'know' your voice apart from the weekly meeting. Many time's someone needs encouragement or perspective on a day that you community does not meet up. A random phone call during the week just to encourage goes a long way. Use the social media tools available to us be involved in their lives by being a voice of encouragement, warning and truth.

**Heart for Growth.** The shepherd wants to bring other sheep, thus having a heart for growth. The Hired Hand would only want to do his job and won't care about growth because that would require more work. Throughout this manual you will see that a passion for the lost, to see the community grow is crucial component to community group leadership.

## Defining Shepherding

True shepherding is loving God's people into maturity in Christ. In 1 John 3:16, we see that when we are willing to lay down our lives like the shepherd in John 10 we know that we truly love.

The question however, is "what is love?" 1 Cor 13 describes what love does, but doesn't define it. Love is not a feeling or emotion, but rather a decision we choose to make. One cannot command an emotion, you can tell your child to eat his vegetables, but you can't instruct him to enjoy it. God commands us to love and therefore we can conclude that it is something we can choose to do, even when we don't feel like it, in times we get disillusioned or discouraged. Josh McDowell uses the scripture in Eph 5:29 to define love.

*For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, (Eph 5:29 ESV)*

The word "nourish," refers to **providing** what is needed to bring something to maturity. The word cherish refers to caring in such a way as to **protect**.

To love therefore is to protect and provide. As community leaders, we need to protect our members from false teachings, their sin and character "blindspots" and deception, so that they can grow in maturity in Christ. In the same way provide sound truth, a good example to follow, encouragement and correction in such a way to it would cause them to grow in Christ.

## 5. THE PURPOSE OF SMALL GROUPS

*“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe[a] came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. **And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.**” (Acts 2:42-47)*

The verse in Acts 2:46 shows us a church that would meet both in the temple courts and in the people’s homes. This shows that they had both large gatherings of believers and small gatherings of believers. Each has value, and if you neglect either the church suffers.

Below are some of the types of gatherings you as a church might have:

**Corporate/Global Gatherings:** If you are part of a multi-site church, you might all come together for larger global gatherings or for special conferences. These are key times when we see the ‘bigness’ of what God is doing across the city, the nation and the world. It is an important time of Apostolic input, vision sharing and family moments (e.g. setting Elders and Deacons in place, welcoming new members etc.). It is also when we can experience the privilege of worshipping together with many other believers.

**Sunday Meetings:** These are key, weekly meetings that we wish people to attend as regularly as possible.

**Communities/mid-week Small Group meetings:** Community Groups are a space where everybody should be known by name. It is a place where practical needs can be met, where giftings can be more easily exercised and where people can experience the warmth and intimacy of family. Smaller groups help to ensure that each individual is being properly disciplined and that they feel that they matter. From these groups, organic, authentic, daily Christianity begins to flow.

**Organic (Spontaneous) meetings:** Ideally, as a community you will be sharing meals, birthday parties and other celebrations, or grabbing coffee or a run or hike in the week. Sunday meetings, and even global gatherings, should just be an overflow from the real community happening each day in our midst.

**Specific meetings called by Elders:** There will also be specific meetings called by the Elders as they see a need (e.g. Deacon’s meetings, leader’s meetings etc.).

## 6. WHAT DOES A HEALTHY COMMUNITY GROUP LOOK LIKE?

In Acts 2:42-47 we see the signs of a healthy church. The church being made up of many Community Groups, it stands to reason that these things should be seen within each healthy Community Group:

**They devoted themselves:** Each believer is personally devoted to the Lord Jesus and His ways. That is lived out as devotion to the following things.

**To the apostles' teaching:** Community Groups should not become teaching centers and it is not desirable that they follow a predictable format every week. It is desirable, however, that Community Groups become places that help people grow in their understanding of the Word of God and furthermore to help them apply it to the way they live. Such teaching does not have to be done by the Community Group leader, nor does it have to be done in the traditional teaching method of one person speaking to the rest.

It is essential that Community Group leaders, especially those with a teaching gift, do not allow the group to become a platform for their own views, pet doctrines or frustrations. It is the responsibility of the Elders to set doctrine within the church and any teaching done within the Community Group must be done to support, strengthen, complement and reinforce that which has already been set forth by the Eldership team.

**To fellowship:** True fellowship doesn't just happen, we must be intentional about creating it. Sometimes it will be a higher priority to just 'hang out' than to teach the Word, and sometimes we need to put aside our own agendas to reach out to lonely people or to build relationship with those around us.

**To the breaking of bread:** Regular Communion/breaking of bread/partaking of the Lord's Supper is an important part of church life. One of Jesus' very last instructions to us was to remember Him in this way. Communion is a wonderful way to focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus and to remember that by entering into covenant with Him we have entered into covenant with one another. It is possible to do this in a Small Group in ways that large groups make impossible. Be creative and flexible.

Another aspect to this is simply sharing a meal together. In the Biblical cultures, eating together was a deeply significant event; it created a strong bond between individuals. Members of your Community Group should be regularly sharing meals, either as a big group or in smaller groups. And this should be happening outside of your mid-week meeting.

**To pray:** Prayer needs to be a regular and central part of your times together. We need to train and encourage people to pray corporately and privately.

**And awe came upon every soul:** Are people in awe of who God is? Is there a sense of reverence and wonder and worship?

**And many wonders and signs were being done:** Do you pray for, and expect to see, signs and wonders happening among you and through the members of your Community Group?

**And all who believed were together and had all things in common:** There needs to be a real sense of community (common unity) in which there is a covenantal understanding of our relationship to each other and our responsibility toward each other.

**And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need:** Providing for the needs of those within our Community Group needs to be real and, at times, sacrificial. We need to teach people to be generous with their time, talents and treasures.

**And day by day, attending the temple together:** As committed as your Community Group needs to be to gathering together mid-week, they need to be as committed to our corporate meetings, especially those meeting the Elders communicate as being important.

**And breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts:** Again we see the concept of love, hospitality, and breaking bread. Community cannot be limited to a mid-week evening. Wednesdays (or whichever day you choose to meet regularly together) are simply intended to be a springboard from which to spend time with each other on an informal basis, around the person of Jesus.

**Praising God:** We need to be a worshipping people. Not just in our meetings but in our private times and when we meet informally.

**And having favor with all the people:** We are called to be salt and light to the world. We need to be influencing the world around us. For Community Groups that may mean doing something to influence or serve the local neighborhood or to attend an outreach together in another part of your country or the world.

**And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved:** We need to trust God for the lost. If your Community Group does not see any salvations over an extended period then you should focus on this, teach around it and pray about it, until there is breakthrough. Healthy things reproduce. If there are no salvations it is usually a sign of ill health in some area.

Although the above are important (and biblical) indicators of a healthy Community Group and Church, it should be remembered that these are not our objective! Our objective is that each believer has a genuine, living relationship with Jesus. This list is simply a barometer, a measure of health - for if Jesus is present then there will be fruit.

The one overriding element that needs to be present to draw people, save people, keep people and bring people to maturity is the Life and Person of Jesus. In **everything** we do, from notices to worship, to teaching, to fellowship, we must be constantly asking, "How can I use this to bring the Life and Presence of Jesus and lead people into a greater relationship with and deeper dependence on Him?"

Other things to consider when evaluating the health and effectiveness of your Community Group are as follows:

**Leaders:** Am I actively looking for and discipling leaders to help me lead and to ultimately plant out or lead their own Community Group sometime in the future?

**Discipleship:** Is every member of my group being cared for and discipled by somebody?

**Venue:** Is the group able to meet at a consistent, appropriate location, hosted by people that are gifted in hospitality? Is the venue welcoming?

**Group Identity:** As a group is our identity found in Christ, as members of one body, participating in fellowship, loving and serving one another as active members of the Church? Is our Community Group an integral part of a larger congregation, and the larger Church?

**Transparency:** Is time together marked by discussions that expose the heart, not just topical conversation? Are people willing to tell their story and allow others to speak? Is there genuine accountability between members? In turn this should lead to moments of confession of sin and idolatry, with people turning away from them in repentance, and not just in worldly sorrow.

**Visitor Friendly:** Do new visitors to the group feel welcomed, safe and comfortable? This is not to say that we are 'seeker sensitive' but that we are hospitable and love as Jesus loved.

**Holy Spirit:** Are your times together led by the Spirit and marked by encounters with Him? Are there salvations, Spirit baptisms, deliverance, signs and wonders, prophesy and words of knowledge, etc.?

**Priesthood of Believers:** Is there contribution and use of spiritual gifts from every member? Is there a genuine recognition of there being one body with many parts?

**Passionate Worship:** Do people worship together in a manner pleasing to the Lord? Does this happen spontaneously outside of planned worship times?

## Dealing with need

Community leaders need to be supportive of those in need amongst you and work hand in hand with the Elders in meeting their legitimate needs. Your Elders will be able to talk you through the correct process for this. It should always flow out of relationship and the Community Group should be the first port of call in meeting the need of their members, where possible.

## Healthy Leader Healthy Group

Although it's a privilege to lead God's people, there will be pain involved (you will be abused, misused, not appreciated, misunderstood, people will desert you etc.) It can get tiring and demand a lot from you.

For a group to be healthy the leader needs to be healthy. Be sure to set some boundaries. If you have a family, be sure to take at least two nights off to spend with your family every week! If you are single, it is important to set aside time to rest or to spend time on your own with the Lord.

- Take a weekend off once every six weeks or so. Please communicate to Elders when you are planning to go away, preferably two weeks in advance.
- When you are OFF please put your PHONE OFF!
- Develop good time management. Make the most of the time you do have: be intentional and strategic, e.g. have supper with more than one couple at a time.
- Be accountable to other leaders. Try to set aside time every 2nd week or so to connect with other Elders/Deacons/Community Leaders to build into each other's lives, receive advice, encouragement or counsel. Be honest about how you are doing!
- You are more important than your function as a leader.

## 7. PLAYING IN TEAM & SUPPORTING YOUR ELDERS

It is important to remember that you are not leading your group in isolation, but as part of a larger team. Be sure to lead as part of a team – drawing on other leaders' giftings, experience and strengths.

Have accountable relationships with other leaders. Not only will this protect your group, but it will protect you.

Spend time with Elders: Catch the heart of the Elders who oversee you and get to know them. Honour the Elders in how you speak about them in the group and make sure that you are 'speaking with one voice' and not bringing disunity.

Be sure to create unity in how you communicate, not a 'us and them' culture by using phrases like "the Elders say..."

Although you have delegated authority, the Elders are ultimately responsible for the people in your care.

### How to show support to your Elders

- Let them know you are with them, support them, and are praying for them.
- Work with them and not against them. Be teachable.
- Advise them of new and upcoming leaders with regards to gift and anointing.
- Bear the burden with them.
- Protect them. Be the first to oppose gossip, slander or accusations against them.
- You yourself must keep short accounts with them.
- Help them to protect the church from those who would like to bring disunity or harm those in your care.
- Help administer growth.
- Submit to their authority (Hebrews 13:17).

## 8. DISCIPLESHIP

Jesus called us not to make converts but to make disciples:

*“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:18-20)*

We should be using every tool at our disposal to help bring every believer to maturity and to the fullness of the purpose for which they have been called. This includes Community Group meetings, Sundays, Global Gatherings, training courses, books and DVD's etc. but most importantly it involves connecting personally and developing a relationship where we naturally speak about things of the Kingdom. People need to feel like people who are loved, not projects. We need to eat together, do coffee together, spend time getting to know each other and building 'a bridge of trust' that can carry the weight of what we may need to say in correction, exhortation or encouragement.

*“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” (2 Timothy 4:1-2)”*

Or as the CEV puts it:

*“When Christ Jesus comes as king, he will be the judge of everyone, whether they are living or dead. So with God and Christ as witnesses, I command you to preach God's message. Do it willingly, even if it isn't the popular thing to do. You must correct people and point out their sins. But also cheer them up, and when you instruct them, always be patient.”*

In addition, we need to know that each person is unique. While there are certain biblical principles that can never be compromised, there is no 'one size fits all' solution to people's problems. We need to find the key to help each individual find freedom.

At the same time, it is not our job to function as amateur psychologists, nor as substitute Messiahs. Whilst counseling is valid, all counseling should point people to Jesus, encouraging them to obey Him, serve Him and glorify Him. We cannot fix people, only Jesus can, through the power of His Spirit. In addition, we need to recognize that our role is not to train people to fit into our church or Christian culture (especially by means of mere outward adjustments) nor to use the Bible as a book of rules and regulations, but to connect with the Head, that is Christ, hear His voice and obey Him.

We deal with real people not puppets. They won't always do what we would like them to do or the way we would want them to do it, but pray for them. Remember God has entrusted us to co-labour with Him. We must spend time with Him and be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as to how to deal with specific people. We must find the key to each person's heart. We need to view them as God sees them: their potential and the grace on their lives, not focus on their weaknesses and failings.

Paul wrote to the Galatians:

*“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. **Bear one another’s burdens**, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. **For each will have to bear his own load.**” (Galatians 6:1-5; emphasis added)*

We can see then, that whilst we help to carry those who are weak and gently restore the broken, we need to encourage people to take personal responsibility for their lives, to seek Jesus for themselves, to hear God for themselves and to become obedient because they fear Him not their leaders.

I usually ask someone who approaches me for help with the question, “What has God said?” We need to train people to go to God first and then seek leaders for perspective on what they think they have heard.

We also need to recognize that as followers of Jesus we must take up our cross daily. Looking at Galatians 2:20 we need to acknowledge that each believer must to be ‘crucified’, to die to self. We cannot be so mercy-hearted that we take them off the cross and bandage the wounds, delaying a necessary process. Our job is to support and encourage people in the process.

Our aim in leading a Community Group should be to create a culture that is an expression of the Kingdom of God. We should be leading people into more of God not just managing the status quo, and putting out fires. We should be helping people to see sin and weakness in their lives and trust God to help them grow and change. It’s a proactive role rather than a reactive one; helping develop mature believers who have an authentic, vibrant relationship with their Saviour.

When discipling a believer it is helpful to keep in mind the four areas that make up a disciple’s life, as identified by Mark Driscoll . They are as follows:

- **Identity**

*A disciple of Jesus finds their identity in Jesus and His work on our behalf. All of the Christian life flows out of who we are. Finding our identity in His story changes everything.*

- **Worship:**

*A disciple of Jesus worships God with their whole life. All of life is worship. We either worship God or idols, but we never stop worshipping. Idolatry is the root of all our sin.*

- **Community:**

*A disciple of Jesus lives in community just as God lives in community, as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

- **Mission:**

*A disciple of Jesus is sent on mission to see people transformed by the Gospel just as Jesus was sent by the Father.*

By discipleship, we do not simply mean the training of new believers in the foundations of the faith. All believers are called to be disciples and all need to be discipled. As we look at the questions which follow, bear in mind that they are questions you should be asking yourself as well as those in your care.

These 'conversations' should happen regularly with those in your care. The following have been taken from, or inspired by, Mars Hill documentation on discipleship in Small Groups.

## Conversation One: Our testimony

Ask questions like:

- When and how did you become a Christian?
- What did God save you from?
- What do you want Him to do in your life and where do you need to grow?
- Can you share your salvation story (testimony)?

As they share their stories, help them to communicate it clearly, including the following elements:

- We are created for God and by God.
- We fall short and sin.
- We need forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Jesus is God and forgives sin through His death on the cross.
- We need to repent of sin and trust in Jesus through faith.
- Jesus gives new life with new desires.
- When you think about who you are, what pops in your head? (Point the new believer to their identity in Christ)
- What is the most exciting part about being a Christian to you right now?
- Have you shared your testimony with any friends or family yet?
- Do you have any fears about giving your testimony?
- Have you been baptised in water? What does that mean to you?
- Have you experienced a baptism of the Holy Spirit? Are you continually being filled?

It is important to remember that people are not 'born healthy'. Some people who consider themselves Christians, even those who regularly attend church, have not been born again. If they are not born again we need to bring them to that place so that the Spirit of God can work in them to transform them into the image of Jesus:

*"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18)*

It has also been said that 'what we are saved into is more important than what we have been saved out of'. This being so, we need to establish some basic principles in people's lives. Without these principles, we are merely trying to build a tall building on faulty foundations.

## Conversation Two: The Bible

First, make sure that the person you are discipling has a good Bible. We highly recommend the English Standard Version (ESV) or New International Version (NIV). A good Study Bible is a great gift to someone starting to read the Bible.

Second, pick out one of the Gospels. Begin to read through it together and meet to discuss it. Reading and discussing the Bible should be a fluid part of walking together not simply a program to be followed: follow the Spirit as he leads you.

Recommend good books and other resources that will communicate at an appropriate level to the person's needs.

Of course, to do this, and to answer the inevitable questions, means you as a leader should be 'grounded in the Word'.

Ask the following questions:

- How are you doing believing the Bible is God's word?
- What questions about the Bible can I try and help you with?
- What is God saying to you through the Bible?
- How is the Bible helping you in your life?

## Conversation Three: Worship

Worship is more than music and singing. Worship is a lifestyle. So, the following questions are relevant:

- How does the idea that we never stop worshipping change the way you view your life?
- What does idolatry look like in your life? What things in your life are more important than they should be?
- What things are you passionate about?
- How do you deal with your sin / idolatry?
- We should also talk about what we would traditionally call worship:
  - How does God want to be worshipped?
  - How do you worship when you are on your own?
  - When do you worship outside of Sunday and Community Group meeting?
  - How can you naturally incorporate worship into your life and relationships?

## Conversation Four: Prayer

Be sure to pray with the person you are discipling on a regular basis. Opening and closing your times together in prayer is something to consider.

Teach about prayer (you can use Matthew 6:5 - 15; John 14:13 - 14; James 1:5 etc.)

Model prayer by being a person of prayer.

Questions to ask:

- What does prayer look like in your life?
- Do you listen as well as speak?
- Do you know about Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication (ACTS) in prayer?
- Do you find it hard to pray? If so why do you think that is?
- How can I pray for you this week?

## Conversation Five: Community/Fellowship

Questions to ask:

- What does it look like for you to be in community?
- Do you feel loved and accepted?
- Do you feel that you are an important part of the body, with a role to play?
- What do you contribute to Community Group and what do you get out of it?
- Who do you connect with outside of Sunday and Community Group meeting and how?
- Do you feel that you are being disciplined into what God has called you?
- Can I help you get into a Community Group? (If they aren't in one already).

## Conversation Six: Walking in the light

*"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)*

Questions to ask:

- How are you doing with believing that God forgives you?
- What do you do after you are convicted of sin?
- What does it look like for you to walk in the light in Community Group?
- Are there things you don't feel able to bring to the light? Why?
- Are you accountable to anyone in church? Who?

(Be sure to give examples and answers from your life. How confessing sin to others helped bring freedom and cleansing. Walking in the light yourself is the best way to teach this concept).

## Conversation Seven: Evangelism

Share examples of how you have shared your faith with friends and family.

Explain that successful evangelism is taking the initiative to share the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaving the results up to God.

Questions to ask:

- Do you have friends or family that don't know Jesus yet?
- What do you think it will look like to talk to them about what He has done in your life?
- Why do you believe it is important to share your faith?
- What are some of your fears about sharing your faith?

Help the person become more effective in sharing their faith effectively with a faith filled expectation that people will be saved.

Having these conversations regularly, and helping each person strengthen what is weak, will be invaluable in effective discipleship. We must not simply assume that people are engaged in spiritual disciplines, we must help them grow into them.

It is also important to remind ourselves that although we need to lead by example, we are making disciples of Jesus not of ourselves.

## 9. ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is a much used and much misunderstood word in the Church today. This probably stems from the discipleship movement of the 1970's and 1980's when there was much teaching on the subject, some of it extreme and harmful. What started with a group of leaders who wanted to implement some wise principles into their own relationships with each other to help keep each other from falling, was taken by others to a place where it became abusive and controlling.

Many people have been hurt by such teachings, and by leaders who have stepped beyond the scope of Scripture. Still others have been hurt by leaders who have been either selfish, manipulative or even just plain clumsy. The answer to this is not to reject the whole concept but to find the valid, biblical expression of mutual accountability.

Accountability is a cornerstone of fellowship (1 John 1:7) and fellowship is something we should be devoted to (Acts 2:42). For this reason, we will look at this issue in some depth.

### What is accountability and what is it not?

Being accountable provides us with a network of friends and family that help us to make wise choices and help prevent us making stupid mistakes or falling into sin.

We need to be open and vulnerable with each other, not just presenting our best side (keeping things hidden) out of fear of rejection or being judged. John the apostle was quite clear that true fellowship only really occurs when we walk in the light with each other (being open, confessing our weaknesses and sins).

We need to recognize our interdependence, for this is how we have been created by God to live. When we do so we will actively seek people to speak to us, give us counsel and advice, disciple us, help us in our areas of weakness. This involves inviting people into our lives, at least one of which you allow to ask any question, at any time, about anything.

It is **not** simply asking someone "can I be accountable to you?" and then waiting for that person to chase you. It is us being proactive. It is **not** absolving ourselves of responsibility for making decisions or for the consequences of our actions (Phil 2:12; Gal 6:1-5). It is not going to various or specific people simply to "hear what our itching ears want to hear" (2 Tim 4:3). It is quite easy to keep asking for advice until we get the advice we were looking for all along. It is very common in such instances to be selective with the information given to illicit a particular response. Do not expect the right counsel unless you have provided all the relevant facts.

It is **not** each man doing what he considers right in his own heart. It is very common today to hear that no man has a right to judge another, that each must simply follow his own conscience. If I am sinning I need someone to point this out to me for my own heart may be deceiving me (Jer 17:9). I often need an outside perspective to keep me from making bad choices.

It is most certainly **not** a vehicle or excuse for gossip. If there is a problem or sin issue with a someone the answer is not to speak to others about it but, in the first instance, to go to that person and deal with it directly (Matt 18:15). It is easy for believers to use religious terminology to disguise gossip and slander (for example, "please pray for X I am worried about....", or "I need some advice on how to deal with X" ... etc.). Neither is it an excuse to

pry into other's affairs. Accountability is always about seeking the good of the other, not about getting the low down.

It is **not** a system, a set of rules or a system of regulations; it is a heart attitude. Only if I have the right heart attitude will it benefit me (Proverbs 15:22).

It is **not** a means of control. The leadership do not want to control you, they do not want to take the place of Jesus in your life. A wise leader will listen, prompt, guide and advise but will do so by consistently pointing to Christ and urging you to find Christ and His ways for yourself. This is not about getting 'permission' to buy a car, move to a new house, change jobs, get married, etc. It is a means by which, in God, we can make such choices wisely.

## When must I be accountable?

All the time, especially when struggling with addictions or unhealthy behavior patterns. We are in a constant battle and this is part of our armour. *"The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light"* (Rom 13:12). The nature of our struggle may suggest that we put systems in place to help us. For example, a person battling with drugs may ask a brother or sister to regularly administer drug tests. A person battling with pornography may install software on their computer (e.g. Covenant Eyes) which will alert friends if there are any unsuitable downloads.

We know that a newborn baby needs to be looked after carefully and this is true of new spiritual births too. Yet we never grow out of the need to be accountable. In fact, the more responsibility we have the more we need to be accountable. Elders and Deacons need to be above reproach and need to live lives of accountability for their own sake and the sake of those that they lead.

## Why must I be accountable?

The heart is deceitful above all things (Jer 17:9). We are very good at self-justification: persuading ourselves that our actions and motivations are good, even when they are not. Also, many of us have 'blind spots' in our lives. We don't want to live a sinful life but we do not realize that something we are doing is wrong or we may not even realize we are doing it. We need loving family to point out these things and set us on the right path. For these reasons, we can't trust ourselves to be self-reliant in our decision making.

Plans fail for lack of counsel (Prov 11:14, Prov 15:22). Getting perspective from somebody who is wiser, more mature or simply an expert in a given area could save us many problems and a lot of heartache.

We can't rely on our own strength, willpower etc. to overcome problems. *"It does not therefore, depend on man's desire or effort but on God's mercy"* (Rom 9:16). We should have people around us that can pray for us and encourage us. They cannot do this effectively if they do not know what is really happening in our lives.

It is spiritual warfare (Rom 13:12). We need to recognize spiritual forces at work in our lives and live in such a way as to walk in freedom.

God will make it known sooner or later anyway, in this world or the next.

*“Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops” (Luke 12:2-3).*

It glorifies God. Shows that He is indeed working in us and is a testimony to his mercy.

*“But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.” (John 3:21).*

It keeps us from stumbling.

*“Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.” (John 11:9-10)*

It brings us into closer fellowship (1 John 1:5-7; 1 John 2:9-10).

It is a way to forgiveness (1 John 1:5-7).

It is wise.

*“The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise”. (Prov 15:31).*

## Who should I be accountable to?

We are not speaking of a hierarchy whereby each person is simply ‘accountable’ to a leader who is over them (a sheep to a Deacon, a Deacon to an Elder, an Elder to the lead Elder and the lead Elder to an apostolic figure). We are speaking more of an interdependence on each other and an accountability from the leaders to those in their care. We do, however, need, to be accountable to the following:

- **God** (Ps 139:23)

We read in Luke 16 of a manager who is called to give an account for his actions to his master. What we have, and who we are, are not ours but God's. We, like that manager, will give an account to the owner. Likewise, Elders will give an account for how they have led and teachers will give an account for what they have taught (Heb 13:17; Jam 3:1).

- **Leaders**

- o Elders and Deacons (Heb 13:7 & 17): *“A wise son heeds his father's instruction”*

(Prov 13:1). We need to see our leaders not as those who seek to control us but as fathers who seek to protect us. Sheep without a shepherd scatter and are easy prey for wolves.

- **Friends**

The closer the friend the more accountable we should be. Likewise, the more accountable we are the closer we become. *“Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.” (Prov 27:6).*

- **Each other**

*“Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ”* (Eph 5:21). Anytime anybody speaks to us, no matter who they are, how long they have been saved or their age, social status, etc. we need to ask God if He speaking to us through them. God spoke though a donkey to Balaam and often speaks to us through the most unlikely sources, even the unsaved.

## How do I go about it?

Like Nike say: Just do it!

- Make it part of your lifestyle.
- Open up your life regularly to people.
- Give permission to certain people to be able to ask anything, anytime.
- Be totally transparent
- Listen and respond!

## How many people should I be accountable to?

In some ways you should only be accountable to a few but in other ways to everybody. There is no formula but as a guideline: seek advice from a few, but listen to advice from all! (Though of course you do not necessarily **accept** everybody’s advice. Sift it prayerfully and consider the source: An Elder’s advice should carry more weight than that of a young believer).

It is also advisable to seek advice from certain people for certain decisions. For example, before buying a car speak to someone who knows a great deal about cars and finance or when thinking of buying a house to someone who is knowledgeable about property.

## How open must I be?

Most of us are frightened of opening up our whole lives because there are things we are embarrassed about or ashamed of. We fear rejection if people know the truth or fear they may hurt us with such information (e.g. by gossiping). These things may happen but in general the more open we are the more accepted we are. Ultimately, we need to trust God, by living His way, and being open, we are, in effect, saying that we trust God to help us through whatever the consequences. We cannot allow fear to prevent us from living God’s way. Whatever happens God will work things for our good (Rom 8:28) and God will bless us for doing the right thing even if we suffer for it (1 Peter 3:14).

Our attitude should be one of complete openness and accountability, with wisdom being our guide as to what to share, when and with whom. Sometimes it is wise not to share certain things in certain contexts, not due to self-preservation but for the sake of our listeners: some people may simply not be able to deal with what they hear, other things may be inappropriate for a certain audience. We should reach a point, though, where there are certain people from whom we have no secrets. This is in fact a very safe and secure place.

## How do I respond if I disagree with a person's perspective?

- Check what was said against the Word and Holy Spirit, not your own emotions. Do not simply react. We cannot listen only to things we agree with; the most offensive things are often those that are true.
- Pray sincerely about it and ask God to show you what you cannot see (Ps 139:23).
- Obey those put over you unless their advice is clearly contrary to the Word or is clearly a sin.
- If necessary get an HONEST second opinion (don't simply keep getting advice until you hear what you want).
- Remember God always rewards obedience.
- Be especially cautious of reacting if somebody 'attacks' one of your 'sacred cows' (e.g. your spouse, your children, the way you drive, etc.).
- Do not rely on 'having peace' about something in judging its truth. We sometimes can 'lose our peace' (temporarily) because God tells us something that we do not want to hear and this rattles our emotions.

## How do I speak to somebody else about an issue?

- Ask yourself if what you have seen is a real issue. Often we can become upset or irritated with another person because of something in us.
- Ask yourself "will it help that person to hear what I have to say?" We should only speak for the other person's benefit, not to make life easier for ourselves.
- Pray first. We have no right to address a person until we have prayed for them.
- Go in humility, especially if that person is a leader or is older (1 Tim 5:1).
- Find an appropriate time and place for the conversation.
- Speak first to that person alone (only if they refuse to repent of a sin issue should you ever discuss it with somebody else).
- Speak the truth in love.
- Be specific, be truthful, be encouraging and redemptive. The aim of such a conversation should be to help the person become more like Christ not to make them feel guilty or ashamed.

## How Do I lead my Group into a Culture of Accountability?

Be real, transparent and engaged with those you lead. Let them into your personal space! We shouldn't think too highly of ourselves and only be accountable with people we deem spiritually superior. If leaders are not open and transparent with the people they lead it creates the misconception that our leaders are perfect and when they fall this shakes the people under them. It also means that people look at you and think they need to be perfect and will then be unlikely to share honestly about the things they are struggling with. We need to lead people into a lifestyle of accountability and transparency by modelling this lifestyle ourselves.

Ask yourself:

- Am I walking in all God has for me?
- Am I struggling with sin/addiction/character issues that I wish to be free from?
- Who am I truly open with / accountable to?
- What am I going to do about it?
- How will I adjust?
- Where will I be tomorrow, next week, next year, if I do not adjust to this?

## 10. DEVELOPING A LEADER

To grow as a healthy church, we need to constantly raise up new leaders. Many of those you disciple will have the potential to become leaders in the household of God. Here are some steps you can take to help them develop their leadership gifting:

### Identify a potential leader

We shouldn't simply rely on observation but need to trust God for revelation and discernment when it comes to identifying new leaders. We need to pray and ask the Lord (who is the one who builds His church) to show us people through His eyes.

### Look for the evidence of God's grace on people's lives

look for what they can become not just what they are.

While there is no absolute formula for identifying a future leader, there are several characteristics to look for:

- Loves Jesus (John 14:15).
- Loves the church (John 15:12). Are they only work focused or are they available to serve the church?
- Loves the lost (John 17:18). Are they actively seeking to reach the lost?
- Is a person of faith.
- Understands the DNA of community in the church.
- Can draw others.
- Has a leadership gifting. Do they exercise their talents?
- Listens to others, includes others in conversation (James 1:19; Romans 15:1)
- Knows, understands and correctly uses Scripture (Dt. 8:3; 2 Tim. 3:16).
- Is open about sin and repentance and is accountable (James 5:16; Mark 1:15, Mt. 3:8)
- Is eager to serve the needs of others (Rom. 12:1-13).
- Is Humble (James 4:6).
- Is in submission to leaders (Hebrews 13:17).
- Is a faithful steward of time, treasures, and talents. Are they generous? Are they open about their finances?
- Prays privately and corporately.

And of course, is eager to meet the requirements of 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9 and Acts 6.

Some words on character: No man other than Christ is perfect. As Mark Driscoll writes

*“Recognition of sin in a Christian is, of course, to be expected, as we know that our sanctification is not complete. Rather than perfection, a Christian’s character should be marked primarily by a humble spirit that welcomes correction, is quick to repent, and seeks to keep short accounts of sin. Serious character flaws should be exposed as sin, and should be an occasion to minister to a brother in his blindness, rather than seen as a “growth opportunity.” Sanctification is wholly the work of the Spirit.”*

We are not looking for perfection in our leaders. The list of qualifications is to help us see serious flaws rather than an odd failing. For example, there is a difference between a someone who occasionally struggles against the temptation of materialism and somebody who is a lover of money.

We should exercise humility when seeking to identify new leaders, and guard against thinking of ourselves too highly or of others too lowly. We need to see people as Jesus sees them and ask ourselves if they are qualified in His eyes.

We have already discussed characteristics that should be present in a potential leader’s life. Here is a list of areas in their life that you should consider:

- **Faith:** Do they exercise faith and live by conviction rather than convenience or preference?
- **Hearing God:** Are they spending time in the word, prayer and times of renewal?
- **Marriage:** A marriage is a great barometer for a leader’s understanding of the gospel and, for the man, their ability to lead. It often also reveals flaws in character.
- **Family:** Leaders must manage their household well. Are husband’s leading their family well?
- **Job:** Are they hard workers who are a blessing to their employers and a credit to the Lord?
- **Health:** Are they healthy physically and emotionally? How do they respond to stress?
- **Purity/Character:** It is important to address sexual sin and temptation. You should never assume that people are without sin in these areas.
- **Giving:** Community Group Leaders should show understanding of giving as an act of worship. If our leaders are not faithful we cannot expect people under them to be. Make sure you have an open dialogue around giving. We certainly should not be apologetic when talking on this subject seeing as Jesus Himself spoke often and strongly on the subject (15% of the recorded words of Jesus concern money and possessions).

Be careful not to confuse **character** (the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual), **charismata** (spiritual gifts) and **charisma** (compelling attractiveness or charm). It can be easy to mistake charisma for character or gifting.

Do not simply look for people who are like you, or who like you. Remember that some of the most difficult people to lead may be difficult because they are leaders themselves! They may also have an innate wish to lead even if they are not yet in a leadership position. Your role is not to crush or sideline such people but to find the right, God given strategy to raise them up into being Godly leaders.

**Speak to an Elder about the person/people you have seen:** Hopefully the Elders have also noticed this person’s potential; however, you are likely in the privileged position of knowing the people in your group much better than the Elders do.

**Continually assess, disciple and develop this leader:** Correct, rebuke and encourage them as necessary. Help them to see and overcome any weaknesses, sin or personality traits that would hinder God's purposes in their life. Help them to see a 'preferable future', that is both attainable and inspiring to the person.

**Entrust to them that which has been taught and modelled to you when appropriate:** Let them watch you; then do it together; then watch them; then when they are ready, leave them to do it alone.

**Watch for your own insecurities:** An insecure leader does not allow others to grow for fear that they will be surpassed. Like Saul they will persecute and try to destroy a David. Remember that the success of any leader is measured by how many of his 'followers' surpass him.

Look at who comes alongside and supports you, who you can rely on, who is dependable.

**\*\*A Word of Caution:** We need to encourage people and 'point them to a preferable future', by helping them see what they can become and helping them get there. BUT we must not overpromise in terms of 'promotion' etc. Do not point a person to something they likely will never. Also realize that it is the Elders who set people into leadership in the church so make sure you don't make promises on their behalf that they can't or won't keep.

## 11. PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A Community Group should be organic not organizational. However, that doesn't mean you shouldn't be organised. Below are some practical considerations to leading a group as well as some tips and ideas:

**Administration:** The Elders will need to know how the people in your Community Group are doing. Communicate well, keep details updated. Let them know of people leaving, struggling, etc. If they request an updated Community Group List please send it to promptly. Communicate administrative stuff to your Community Group (like notices) that the Elders ask you to communicate. If you're not good at admin, then get someone within your Community Group to be responsible for this.

Good administration will also mean considering things like what time your group should start and end, what venue you will use and what to do if people in the group have kids.

**Communicate well:** Communicating well with the Elder who oversees you as already been mentioned. Communicating well with the people in your group is also very important. Let people know what you have planned for the mid-week meeting giving them time to plan or prepare. You should also ensure that each member has an updated list of contact details which facilitates communication/connection with one another.

**Pastoral follow up:** Go through your Community Group list and phone people to see how they are doing. Visit them in their lunch hour if possible. At least twice a month go through your Community Group List and ask the question, who's connecting with who? Ask potential leaders in the group to follow up on others, give them opportunities to teach or run a whole Community Group evening, first when you are there to observe and, when you feel you can trust them, when you not there.

**How do I grow my group?** Where there is life people will come. Spend time as a group loving Jesus, loving each other, and loving the people around you and this will attract other people. You will also at times need to focus specifically on evangelism, either through a teaching or arranging an outreach in your neighbourhood. Hosting social evenings is also a great, non-threatening way to invite new people.

**How Big Should it Be?** Don't be scared to grow your group out of insecurity or lack of ability. God has appointed you and anointed you for the work He has called you to do. Utilise those in your group who show potential and trust them to help carry the load. Let people exercise their giftings. You may be brilliant at evangelism but weak at pastoring. There may be those in your group who are more capable than you in certain areas.

When your group becomes too big these potential leaders you have trusted and invested in will be ready to start a new group when you multiply. It's not a good idea to stay as a big group for too long as small intimate groups are generally less threatening for a non-believer and you will also be able to disciple a smaller group better.

**Leading as a single individual:** As a single individual, you are not disqualified from leading God's people as a Community Group leader. Paul encourages that it's a good thing to be single as one would have more capacity and time available to serve God. There are however challenges that you would face as single person, here's a list of practical steps to address them:

- Get a strong couple or person of the opposite gender support you in your leadership and when meeting up with other couples or person of the opposite gender - You are still responsible for those of the opposite gender.
- Ensure you are above reproach in your conduct with those of the opposite gender.
- Find creative ways to disciple other single people in smaller groups.
- Speak to an elder/pastor regularly for perspective and support

**Organise events:** You should plan events outside of your mid-week meeting. You don't need to organize these events yourself – but facilitate them by encouraging members of the group to do so.

**Ideas for socials and other 'hang out' times:** Integrate new people. Jesus said when you have a banquet don't invite only those you are comfortable with! Watch DVDs or sport together, have a picnic or BBQ, share meals, go surfing, hiking or mountain climbing, and you could even arrange a weekend away together. Try an include spontaneous prayer or worship whenever is possible, in as natural a way as you can, so people can experience and meet Jesus.

**Wider Community:** Join other Communities from time to time to meet different people and have opportunities to minister and fellowship within the wider Body of Believers;

**Sundays:** If you are not involved in administrating/setting up a Sunday meeting then your heart should be to connect with new people. Use discernment to pick up if they are saved or not and then sow accordingly. Get their telephone numbers and Invite them into the family/community. The Bible says, "God sets the lonely in families" (Psalm 68:6 NIV).

Don't be scared to ask specific people in your Community Group to connect with Visitors on a Sunday.

It can be quite intimidating for some of us to approach new people. Here are some questions that you can use to help you out.

- Is this the first time you are here?
- Do you know anyone in this church?
- What do you do? What are your interests? (This can help you build a relationship bridge and you can either chat about that or think of someone else who also has the same interest and connect them).
- Have you checked out any of our Community Groups yet?
- Have you ever been to a church like ours before? (You can then prepare them for what to expect etc.)
- Do you have family, kids?

**Team work:** Don't create hierarchy but lead strong. God has chosen you in this season to lead. That doesn't mean that you must do everything. Be sure to draw in every member of the group and encourage them to use their giftings to serve and bless the others in the group.

- We have already mentioned how you can include those with leadership or administration giftings, here are some other ideas:
- Meet in homes of those with hospitality gift and let them host a meal or dessert evening from time to time.

- Encourage prophetic guys to move in gifts and lead times of prayer and prophetic impartation.
- For those who love prayer, ask the Elder who is overseeing you about getting them to start a prayer group for the church or at work.
- Let the evangelists lead an outreach event.
- Encourage teachers to prepare a short bible study for the group.
- Learn to delegate and build away from yourself!

**Caring for each other:** Encourage people to care for each other and their families.

- Create space for married parents with children to get a break by having non-parents in the group babysit.
- If someone is sick or struggling get your Community Group to assist with making meals and helping with other practical things like lifts or shopping.
- If someone is in financial need talk to the Elder overseeing you about collecting money to help them out.
- Mow someone's lawn or wash their car.
- Help people who are moving house.

## 12. CONCLUSION

Community Groups are thriving, living, life giving organisms, integral to the expansion of the Kingdom of God in the earth. May what you have learnt bring forth much seed as you partner with the Holy Spirit in bringing about the fullest conceivable expression of Kingdom Life into that part of the earth that He has placed you.

Community leaders are vital to the health of the church and its members. If you lead a Community Group you have been entrusted with what is most precious to God: His people.

Do not feel daunted by the size of the task. Jesus, the head of the Church in the marketplace, home, church and in Community Groups, often withdrew to lonely places and prayed and received instructions from his Father on what to do, where to go and how to do it. As you seek God He will give you strength and capacity to lead His people.

Be secure in your calling, faithful, servant hearted, bold and an example to all who follow you and you will see the Kingdom of God grow through you!