

Small Group Leader Training Manual

Greetings! I am glad you are interested in taking part in training for Small Group leaders. You may be doing this online, reading it on your own, or participating in person in one of our training sessions. Thank you!

If you are participating in our online training videos, I hope you find them beneficial. Each video is about 7 minutes long, with more content that you can read through in the training manual and attached resources. Use this training manual to follow along with the videos and take notes. It's important to watch the Introductory Video first, after which you can watch each of the videos on the six challenges in any order.

We also have a book for you! Growth Groups, by Colin Marshall, is an excellent resource to gain more training for leading a small group. I will refer to it often in this manual. You can request a copy from Leeora (leeorawindingland@bethelcf.com), our Adult Disciple-making Administrative Assistant.

Here is an outline of the online video training sessions. The themes are taken from Walking the Small Group Tightrope, by Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson. These themes provide a good structure for thinking about the different aspects of a small group:

Introductory Video: What is a small group? What is a disciple and what is disciple-making?

Session 1: THE RELATIONAL CHALLENGE – Developing Authentic Relationships

Session 2: THE LEARNING CHALLENGE – Promoting Spiritual Transformation

Session 3: THE IMPACT CHALLENGE – Promoting Service Together

Session 4: THE RECONCILIATION CHALLENGE – Addressing Relational Friction

Session 5: THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE – Promoting Intentional Shepherding

Session 6: THE CONNECTION CHALLENGE – Building Open Community

Concluding Video: What now? What next?

Thank you, again, for participating! May God be glorified as we together make disciples!

Craig Johnson

Introductory Video

What is a small group?

Small groups are one way we make disciples at Bethel. They are part of our disciple-making ministry. In order to understand small groups, we first need to understand disciple-making. What is a disciple? What is disciple-making?

Discipleship.org has set up a standard definition to answer each of these two questions.

What is a disciple?

Our definition of a disciple comes directly from the Bible.

“Follow Me,” He told them, “and I will make you fish for people!” (Matthew 4:19 HCSB)

A disciple is one who is

- **following** Jesus,
- **being changed** by Jesus and
- **committed** to the mission of Jesus.

The first people who were called disciples were the 12. Each of us who follows Jesus, is being changed by Jesus, and is committed to the mission of Jesus is a disciple.

Just as a side note, Bethel’s mission is Love God passionately, Love Others Intentionally, and Serve the World Sacrificially. Our specific mission helps us to understand the mission of Jesus for us. (We will look at our mission in Session 5: The Development Challenge)

What is disciple-making?

We get our definition of disciple-making from Matt. 28:19.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19 ESV)

*Disciple-making is entering into relationships to help people to **trust** and **follow** Jesus.*

We call this Relational Disciple-making because disciple-making occurs in relationships. Jesus appointed twelve so that he might be with them (Mark 3:14). This helps us understand that Jesus was doing more than teaching. He didn’t merely have a traveling classroom lecture. The disciples lived and went about together. He poured into them, practicing relational disciple-making. It was life on life.

A major part of our small group ministry is relational disciple-making. Small groups are not content-driven or teaching-driven. We certainly want to have good content, and we want our leaders to be growing into maturity as disciples. Content is not the primary focus of this ministry. Core Classes at Bethel, for example, are content-driven. Relationships can be built, but the primary focus in a Core Class is on content.

The primary focus in small groups is relationships and relational disciple-making. This influences the size of groups. Around 12 people or more is a good size. When you get to be more than 20 you lose the relational intimacy.

With all that being said, we define the mission of small groups at Bethel as this:
We desire our Small Groups be a place where people meet to grow in trusting and following Jesus through transformational relationships.

Everyone can make disciples. Everyone is called to make disciples. Small groups are a great place to make disciples. I encourage to continue through these training videos and talk with me about your interest in leading a small group. Thanks for watching!

Session 1: THE RELATIONAL CHALLENGE

Developing Authentic Relationships

Friendship -----Accountability

1. Icebreaker (see attached ideas for small group ice breakers)
 - a. What is it?
 - b. Why is it important?
2. Too much “friendliness” vs. too much “intense accountability.”
3. How do we develop healthy, authentic, God-honoring relationships? Begins with God, continues with others.

There are five gateways that every Small Group passes through in order to produce authentic relationships:

- *Self-disclosure.* If vulnerability doesn't emerge with increasing frequency, you can't love, serve, admonish, or celebrate one another in community. Self-disclosure earns us the right to speak truth into each other's lives.
 - *Acceptance and belief.* Acceptance communicates faithfulness to relationship in spite of failure. And belief communicates an enduring hope for change and growth in one another.
 - *Mutual support.* When members in the small group experience crisis, the group begins to anticipate needs and seeks to help in tangible ways.
 - *Truth telling.* Admonition is to correct or rebuke and is used in a relationship to point out destructive behaviors or attitudes. To both correct and encourage, admonition must be shared with grace, tact, and emotional intelligence.
 - *Affirmation.* The group is aware and celebrates growth and maturity in one another.
4. How do we create an environment for Authentic Relationships?
 - a. Emphasis on the gospel – fellowship (*see pp. 26-28 in Growth Groups, by Colin Marshall*)
 - b. Application of study to life
 - c. Group covenant – (*see attached explanation of group covenant with examples*)
 - d. Developing fellowship and friendships – ideas?

Reasons for a Small Group Covenant

What is a small group covenant? Small group covenants are valuable in helping to make what really already exists in a group, evident to everyone. Any group of people who come together will form a covenant even if it is unspoken. Example: Even folks waiting for an elevator really establish an unspoken, simple covenant, i.e. who should get on first, who will push the buttons for those in the back, expectations for how folks make way when other need to get off, personal space, what will be said/not said, how long they will be together, etc....

When a group of people agree to go deeper in their relationship (e.g. a Christian small group community vs. an "elevator group": o), the need to be more intentional about this and make this more evident. This is important for at least three reasons:

1. To help avoid having your group "get sick" - most unhealthy conflict arises from incorrect assumptions and mistrust of other's intentions. An official covenant HELPS reduce (but unfortunately doesn't eliminate) this type of conflict by having everyone involved know and consciously commit before others to what their assumptions are and to what their intentions are (e.g. "All things spoken here will be kept in confidence and not shared outside the group unless the individual specifically gives permission to allow this for reasons of helping to address the issue.")

2. To help your group see what a healthy group looks like - People need to see healthy Christian community clearly laid out for them so they can see what it really is/can be: Commitment, care, confidentiality, trust, patience, sacrifice, etc.... This will be hard for some to "sign up for" and exciting for others who "finally are seeing what they've always longed for". At either end of the spectrum, a covenant helps provide a practical way for people joining a Christian community to really see both the challenging aspects (e.g. "make a commitment") as well as they benefit (e.g. "Wow! People who really care about ME!") that come from being in community.

3. To keep your group healthy - a group needs to consistently revisit who they are, why they are together, and where they are going. By having a "baseline covenant" you can always come back to it to ask questions like, "Are we being who we set out to be?", "Where are we seeing things work well?", "Where could we let God do more in our group?", etc... This builds an automatic "check-up" into your group's lifecycle, e.g. "It's September and as you recall we committed to always do a check-up on how our group is doing at this time each year."

The Process of Creating a Covenant

This should be a fantastic time of discovery and group sharing. Before you launch into drawing up your Covenant, I encourage you to share a little background to the Covenant concept: *God, who is the pursuer of our hearts has covenanted with us. He has made a pact to love His children faithfully and tenaciously. He has given us instructions (His Son, His Word and the Church) so that we might best experience life in relationship with Him, in His love.*

The purpose of your Small Group Covenant is to lay out how your group will best experience relationship with each other and with God during your journey.

- 1) What are the Values of Your Group? Talk about Communication Values, Conflict Values, Relational Values and Spiritual Values.
- 2) What does your group desire to grow in and/or change in their relationship with God? (This topic is relevant for those who are believers in Christ and those who are yet to believe.)
- 3) Talk about where you plan to begin on your journey. You may want to rotate between Scripture Study/Book Study, Service and Social Times.
- 4) Discuss logistics. What time does your group want to begin and end? Will your group meet at the same home or do you want to share locations?

(See example)

Small Group Covenant (example)

Purpose of a Small Group:

We desire our Small Groups be a place where people meet to grow in trusting and following Jesus through transformational relationships.

The logistics of our group:

- Our group will meet: every other Sunday.
- At this location: 12345 Billy Street
- At this time (we will start and end on time): 4:15-5:30 PM, followed by dinner fellowship.
- For those with childcare needs we agree to: _____
- Concerning dinner, we agree to: bring an item to share.

We agree to the following disciplines as a group:

- Attendance: To give priority to the group meeting (call/text 123-4567 when absent or late).
- Trustworthiness: To help create an environment of trust as we allow others to share from their heart.
- Confidentiality: To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential.
- Accountability: To give permission to group members to hold you accountable to goals you set for yourself.
- Assimilation: To keep the doors open to inviting others.
- Responsibility: To share in the roles and responsibilities that are agreed upon for the group.

Session 2: THE LEARNING CHALLENGE *Promoting Spiritual Transformation*

Truth -----Life

* The balance is between teaching biblical content and dealing with life issues.

- Should we focus on content, the right understanding of the Scripture text, gaining the right information, and not address personal issues?
- Or should we spend more time helping members with personal issues, asking them to look closely at their lives and being real about their needs and problems, without a focus on Scripture?

What would an emphasis on Truth without Life look like?

- Pharisee: strain a gnat and swallow a camel.

What would an emphasis on Life without Truth look like?

- Relativist: a life that's not informed by truth will make you a relativist "blown here and there by every wind of teaching" (Eph. 4:14).
- Rooted in experience rather than truth: SGs that emphasize life are rooted in experience rather than in an outside source of objective reality. But an excessive absorption in each other's lives leads to an aversion to allowing truth to shape life. These groups might have meaningful prayer, activities, and community but lack a scriptural center that functions as a compass to inform decisions and ward off error.

THE BALANCE: *Spiritual Transformation, when truth meets life*

The learning challenge is about truth that engages life and produces spiritual growth in the community of Christ followers.

Small Group leaders can create an interactive, dynamic environment for truth-life encounters by:

1. ***Connecting Scripture with story.*** Groups grow when Scripture and story collide with member's lives, demanding that they shape their ongoing story in conformity with God's story, becoming more like Christ in the process. Bring study to Christ and

then to personal application, to show how our story connects with his. (Follow the COMA method)

2. ***Turning questions into discussions.*** The purpose of a question in a SG is to create a discussion. Open-ended questions invite insights, opinions, and personal reflection. Make questions focused and personal. For truth to meet life, the SG has to move from general content to more personal questions. (see chap. 6 - Asking good questions)
3. ***Varying learning styles.*** Some people are readers, some are listeners, some doers, and some are watchers - Visual, auditory, or tactual/kinesthetic learners.
4. ***Practicing active listening.*** When we really listen – with our ears and with our eyes – we can seize holy moments by recognizing that God is at work and the Holy Spirit has just grabbed the agenda. Be alert to situations that may signal a change of heart, conviction of sin, or a comfort-zone disruption such as: a change in the mood of the group; body language and facial expressions; tone of voice; or change in habits or behaviors.
5. ***Design a well-thought-out study.*** (Work through Hook-Book-Look-Took or GRAB GRASP GRAPPLE GRAFT)

As you carefully walk the truth-life tightrope you will develop a spiritual transformation-focused group, in which members diligently seek to know the truth, not just about themselves, but about God as well. The focus is on how the truth about God connects with the truth about each life in the circle, as members strive together to promote growth and change.

If you're weak on the truth end of the continuum, try selecting a new curriculum that has a life-changing focus, one that would engage people in wrestling with biblical truth.

If your group is weak on the life end of the continuum, you'll want to increase their awareness of the Holy Spirit and be sensitive to what God is doing among the members.

Designing lessons with Hook, Book, Look, Took

PURPOSE	SUGGESTED HOW TO'S	EXAMPLES
<p>HOOK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To get attention. - To set a goal for discussion. - To act as a transition to the Bible discussion. - See attached "Hook Ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should appeal to discussion. • Should be focused on the group's needs and/or interests. • Shouldn't necessarily be Biblical in nature but set the stage for it. • Should not be answerable with a Yes or No. • Should be simple and direct. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ What makes people happy? ✓ How do you get rich? ✓ What are you living for? ✓ What makes a good friend?
<p>BOOK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To lead the learner to discover Biblical truths. - To aid the learner in understanding the truths discovered. - Make observations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should relate to the Hook portion of your discussion. • Should help in the discovery of the facts, usually by beginning with, Who?, What?, How?, Why? • Should clarify and define the truths discovered. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ What in the book of Philippians brings Paul joy or causes him to rejoice? ✓ Who is talking to whom in this verse(s)? ✓ Where did this take place? ✓ Why do you think the passage(s) or verse(s) is here?
<p>LOOK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To guide the learner to formulate the truths into principles to which he can respond. - Sets the stage for application. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should summarize the facts discovered and draw out the principles or truths. • Should help clarify and formulate the truth(s) so application can be made. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Why is Paul joyful even amidst adverse circumstances? ✓ What can we learn from Paul about a joyful attitude? ✓ How can you tell when a person is joyful?
<p>TOOK</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To make personal, specific application of the Biblical truths discovered. - Desire specific, changed behavior. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should bring the discovered truth to a level of practical, personal application. • Should help the individual see how the truth can be specifically applied to his life. • Should not be general and vague. Have group members write out their planned application and share it with the group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ How do you plan to demonstrate joy this week (Be Specific)? ✓ In what specific situation do you plan to display joy this week? ✓ Think of a situation at _____(Home, School, Work, etc.), where you have not been joyful but will trust the Lord to make you joyful.

ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

A good teacher/leader excites the self-activities of the learner. An excellent way to accomplish that is asking good questions. This is a skill that anyone can learn, but it is especially important for the leader.

Let's think about the four parts of a study and the types of questions you might ask in each part. Then we will look at a passage of Scripture and write our own questions.

GRAB- GRASP- GRAPPLE- GRAFT! There are four elements of a life-changing lesson. The first and last elements should be brief, perhaps very brief. The middle two elements will require a majority of the group time and must be balanced!

1. The *Hook*, a brief introduction designed to “**GRAB**” the learners’ attention. It takes people from life issues to biblical lessons. Briefly, the hook helps people to focus and excite their own learning process.
2. The *Book*, an explanation of the text that guides the learner to “**GRASP**” with the truth of scripture. Read well, provide for interaction by thinking about good questions. Focus on the big idea. The majority of your time should be spent here.
3. The *Look* or application time is to guide the group to “**GRAPPLE**” with a how the passage applies to their daily lives. This is ministry of encouragement to live out God’s word. What is the next step for me. Head, Heart, Hands.
4. The *Took*, a brief invitation that invites the learner to personally “**GRAFT**” the lesson into their life during the coming week. A brief challenge, either for the group or for people individually, should occur before you conclude.

Bible study on (Philippians 1:12–26 ESV)

“I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.”

For the sake of discussion, let’s say that the heart and theme of the passage is verse 21, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

1. The *Hook*, “**GRAB**” the learners’ attention.
 - a. *What is something you enjoy doing a great deal? get to know the person, and you start the thinking process about what we each live for*
 - b. *Write down one question that might help to grab the learners’ attention.*
2. The *Book*, “**GRASP**” the truth of Scripture.
 - a. *How does Paul explain this statement in the following verses? Asking people to dig into the statement a little more.*
3. The *Look*, “**GRAPPLE**” with a how the passage applies to their daily lives.
 - a. *In your life, what competes with your devotion to living for Jesus?*
 - b. Head, Heart, Hands.
4. The *Took*, personally “**GRAFT**” the lesson into their life.
 - a. A brief challenge, either for the group or for people individually, should occur before you conclude.
 - b. *What heart attitude will you work on as a result of this study?*

Session 3: THE IMPACT CHALLENGE

Promoting Service Together

Task -----People

This tension lies between two concerns:

- “How do we get people in our Growth Group to get out and serve somewhere?” and
- “We get so caught up with serving and getting the task done, that there’s no time for building community.”

SERVICE/Task-----COMMUNITY/People

In groups in which you have participated, what have you done to serve others outside of your group?

How regularly did you participate in activities like these?

Let’s take a look at our disciple-making strategy (see next page).

What might serving together look like in group life? (See chap. 9 in Growth Groups)

- Maximizing the “be with” factor. To “be with” people along the way means catching moments of community with one another while they serve together.
- Be prayerful. Prayer is a great way to build relationships because it is the context in which they share their lives and witness God’s work through his answers. Pray before or after the task; pray along the way; pray between meetings; pray over the phone.
- Be intentional.
- Plan a regular “Family Meal.”
- Target a specific group or ministry.

Disciple-making Strategy

Scripture teaches us a number of truths related to the goal of our instruction.

1. Scripture tell us to teach all that God has in his Word: “for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” (Acts 20:27)
2. Jesus gives us the example of well-rounded growth as a Christian: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” (Luke 2:52)
3. Jesus also instructs us on our goal: ““Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”” (Matthew 22:36–40)
4. Paul tells us that our goal is maturity in Christ: “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.” (Colossians 1:28–29)
5. Finally, the way we are to live issues from our heart, hands, and our head: “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” (1 Timothy 1:5)

Putting these truths together, I believe a full-orbed disciple-making strategy should include a balance of these three aspects in each area of ministry and in all of our instruction:

<u>HEAD:</u> <u>CONVICTION</u>	<u>HEART:</u> <u>CHARACTER</u>	<u>HANDS:</u> <u>COMPETENCY</u>
<i>Knowing God with your Mind</i>	<i>Knowing God with your Heart</i>	<i>Knowing God by what you Do</i>
Teaching the Whole Counsel of God	Shepherding, Character and Relational Care	Actions, Tasks, Skills
<i>Biblical thinking, knowledge of God and understanding of the Bible</i>	<i>The godly character and life that accords with sound doctrine</i>	<i>The ability to live out your faith in word and in deed, in order to tell and demonstrate the gospel</i>

Session 4: THE RECONCILIATION CHALLENGE *Addressing Relational Friction*

Kindness -----Confrontation

What does excessive kindness without confrontation look like?

What does excessive confrontation without kindness look like?

Our question is: How do we address and have healthy conflict, and how do we help people to respond to conflict biblically?

What is conflict?

“a difference in opinion or purpose that frustrates someone’s goals or desires.” Ken Sande **Peacemaker Ministries**, (<http://peacemaker.net/>)

I encourage you to read this excellent article (at this link) that will help anyone trying to deal with conflict in a God-honoring way - <https://rw360.org/getting-to-the-heart-of-conflict/>

Where does conflict come from?

- Stages of a group
- Relational unawareness
- Extra Care Required people (see roles in chap. 7)

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”
(James 4:1–3 ESV)

How can you help group members to address conflict biblically?

Difficult People and Destructive Roles

THE ONLOOKER

WHY? Their own personality or more aggressive members in the group.

- draw them out directly
- acknowledge and affirm
- ask their advice or use their expertise
- **What a small group leader can do:** Most hidiers feel afraid of speaking in front of groups, so help them break the ice by sharing in pairs.
- Mix the pairs up so the hidiers have a chance to get to know everyone in the group.
- Remind the group often that it needs everyone's contribution to grow.

THE MONOPOLISER

WHY? They dominate, but are often insecure, or they are born rambler.

- reaffirm group covenant and desire to involve everyone in the group
- sit next to them – no eye contact
- ask specifically for others to speak

What a small group leader can do: The secret to dealing with dominators is to remember that the group is usually desperate for the facilitator to do something. You should begin by working to draw others out. Look for a quick breath, no matter how short, to jump in and allow others to contribute. Dominators aren't the enemy. In fact, dominators will bring profound points to the conversation. Turn dominators into allies by talking to them after the get-together. Compliment the dominator's quick thinking and openness, explain the goals for drawing everyone into the discussion, and ask the dominator to help draw out everyone during future discussions.

THE SIDETRACKER

WHY? they can't focus or have a desire to bring up things not pertinent or relevant

- simply let some comments pass
- let them know the question can be addressed later, after group meeting
- sometimes it is a good question worth pursuing
- talk to them outside of the group meeting

THE CLOWN

WHY? Their nature, but it might be distracting

- don't acknowledge
- don't laugh

THE FIGHTER

WHY? want to have an argument or win an argument

- win some arguments with them

- affirm that there are some things we will not argue about (friendship evangelism)
- avoid being drawn into heated debate
- privately point out the negative effect on the group

SCOFFER: What a small group leader can do: Humor is a great tool for reaching scoffers because it diffuses the power of their complaints. For example, if a scoffer complains that he or she is sick of pair shares, a skilled facilitator might say something like, “We’re doing it anyway, so get ready. For an extra treat, you can be my partner.” With consistent care and nudging, a scoffer can actually become an excited and motivated group participant. If the scoffing is extreme, have an honest conversation with the scoffer away from the group that helps him or her see the effects of the negative comments and how they interrupt your efforts for the group.

The Chatterer

REVEALER: What a small group leader can do: The secret to facilitating with revealers is to help them find the proper context for the things they’d like to share. You could respond to a revealer’s disclosure by saying something like, “That must have been very painful for you. That’s the kind of thing we should discuss one-on-one. Let’s talk after the get-together so I can pray for you.” Known for being needy, revealers work best with facilitators who are very direct and very gentle at the same time.

<https://www.ocfusa.org/2009/09/small-group-detours/>

PROBLEM SOLVER - What a small group leader can do: If a problem solver gives a pat answer that’s received as judgmental or insensitive by a group member, don’t panic. Quickly respond by showing empathy for the person with the problem or question. You might say, “I’m sorry you’re going through that. Keep sharing and struggling forward. We’ll do our best to support you along the way.” If a problem solver doesn’t seem to catch your hints and redirection, talk to him or her after a get-together. Tell the problem solver that you appreciate his or her wisdom. Then remind the problem solver that you want everyone to have the freedom to talk, discover, and even struggle through things.

General Advice

- ground rules and group covenant
- direct talk

Less Handling, More Helping Them Grow

Those are just a few, but in each case connecting on a personal level where you're being present, encouraging, and engaging on an authentic level definitely takes more time of yourself. It can be exhausting. It's much easier to handle. However, helping them find their gift to engage in ministry is actually helping them move past their difficulties. Handling them might make it easier for a minute, but it will only allow the problem to continue indefinitely. <http://orangeblogs.org/orangeleaders/2017/09/14/how-to-work-with-difficult-people/>

Less Deflecting more Direct talk

Similarly, it's easier to deflect than have direct conversations with difficult people. Glancing over awkward comments or moving quickly past barbs sometimes feels healthier. Certainly, it's less confrontational. However, direct talk sometimes is the best way to move past getting stuck in these situations in the future.

Less Being Bullied, more Boundaries

One thing that many difficult people have in common is their tenacity. I find, especially in ministry, that there's an expectation that I'm both perpetually available and unable to say no. Sometimes difficult people are difficult simply because they've never been told no or encountered a boundary. It's absolutely essential if you are to survive as a leader to have firm, consistent, fair boundaries. All three of these things are very important. Without firmness, boundaries are just suggestions and will often be ignored. Without consistency, boundaries have no meaning. Without fairness, boundaries are just arbitrary obstacles. Without these things, your boundaries will lack credibility and effectiveness.

Examples of these boundaries include times you will and won't engage in talks about work. Topics you will and won't talk about at all. In other words, things that are off-limits. Things that are expected or are prerequisites to filling a role. Also, the types of expectations and lines you have around the authority that you hold. It's important to establish consistency in the way you carry yourself in terms of your positional authority. This will help prevent misunderstandings and missteps from others.

A Commitment to Biblical Conflict Resolution

As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict.¹ We also believe that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people, and grow to be like Christ.² Therefore, in response to God's love and in reliance on his grace, we commit ourselves to respond to conflict according to the following principles:

Glorify God — Instead of focusing on our own desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will rejoice in the Lord and bring him praise by depending on his forgiveness, wisdom, power, and love, as we seek to faithfully obey his commands and maintain a loving, merciful, and forgiving attitude.³

Get the Log out of Your Eye — Instead of blaming others for a conflict or resisting correction, we will trust in God's mercy and take responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts—confessing our sins to those we have wronged, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict, and seeking to repair any harm we have caused.⁴

Gently Restore — Instead of pretending that conflict doesn't exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will overlook minor offenses or we will talk personally and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook, seeking to restore them rather than condemn them. When a conflict with a Christian brother or sister cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner.⁵

Go and be reconciled — Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation—forgiving others as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences.⁶

By God's grace, we will apply these principles as a matter of stewardship, realizing that conflict is an assignment, not an accident. We will remember that success in God's eyes is not a matter of specific results, but of faithful, dependent obedience. And we will pray that our service as peacemakers will bring praise to our Lord and lead others to know His infinite love.⁷

¹ Matt. 5:9; Luke 6:27-36; Gal. 5:19-26. ² Rom. 8:28-29; 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1; James 1:2-4. ³ Ps. 37:1-6; Mark 11:25; John 14:15; Rom. 12:17-21; 1 Cor. 10:31; Phil. 4:2-9; Col. 3:1-4; James 3:17-18; 4:1-3; 1 Peter 2:12. ⁴ Prov. 28:13; Matt. 7:3-5; Luke 19:8; Col. 3:5-14; 1 John 1:8-9. ⁵ Prov. 19:11; Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 6:1-8; Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:29; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; James 5:9. ⁶ Matt. 5:23-24; 6:12; 7:12; Eph. 4:1-3, 32; Phil. 2:3-4. ⁷ Matt. 25:14-21; John 13:34-35; Rom. 12:18; 1 Peter 2:19; 4:19.

Session 5: THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

Promoting Intentional Shepherding

Care -----Spiritual Disciplines

- Small Groups that focus on only spiritual disciplines (you must be working hard!) tend to attract the strong and prepare soldiers for battle.
- Small Groups that spend an inordinate amount of energy on caregiving tend to focus on the needs of the weak and hurting, providing a strong sense of family for them, but don't shepherd or lead the entire group.
- When a leader creates an environment that is both caring and developmental he/she is practicing "*intentional shepherding.*"

The term "intentional shepherding" is somewhat redundant, since the Bible is clear that good shepherds are intentional. But we use the two-word phrase because most people think of shepherding as reactive ministry, in which leaders respond to the needs of the sheep as they arise. In contrast, intentional shepherding is very proactive.

As we think about how we lead and what we consider important in a small group, we all have biases, as do the people in our groups. We all begin in the lower left quadrant, connecting with one another. But as we move forward, some tend toward teaching and instruction, giving little sermons in your small group. Others will move toward the bottom right quadrant, focusing on the importance of care.

Both these areas are important, but in shepherding we can combine the two.

TEACH	SHEPHERD
CONNECT	NURTURE

This chart will help us move forward in Christ-likeness as a leader, as a group, and as individual members.

A good baseline for assessing intentional shepherding and growth would be a focus on the mission, vision, and values of Bethel Church.

Bethel Church Mission/Vision/Values

Mission (who we are and what we do)

Love God Passionately – Love Others Intentionally – Serve the World Sacrificially

Vision (our preferred future)

To be a grace-filled community **known** for making disciples who love God passionately, love others intentionally, and serve the world sacrificially.

Values (what we stand for)

Love God Passionately

1. **We love God as a gathered and scattered community** - ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” – Colossians 3:16-17
2. **We love God through word-driven disciple-making** - ²³ Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. – Luke 9:23

Love Others Intentionally

1. **We love others in authentic relationships** - ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” – John 13:35
2. **We love others by embracing diversity** - ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. – Galatians 3:28

Serve the World Sacrificially

1. **We serve the world with a gospel-centered focus** - ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20
2. **We serve the world through grace-filled living** - ¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. ¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. – John 13:12-15

How does prayer fit into your idea of a small group? (see chapter 8)

An intentional shepherding process will involve four steps: building relationships, assessing needs, developing a plan, and monitoring progress. Let’s look at chapter 11 for ideas and insights. Also, remember the focus of Head, Hearts, Hands for well-rounded development of the whole person in Conviction, Character, and Competence.

Session 6: THE CONNECTION CHALLENGE

Building Open Community

Openness -----Intimacy

- Unless Small Groups maintain a willingness to welcome new members many people in the church will not have the opportunity to connect with Christian community.
- However, meaningful relationships require intimacy. You cannot have intimacy without confidentiality and trust. And it seems difficult to build trust when the group is open.
- *When intimacy and openness collide, intimacy usually wins. How can we connect well, building open community that grows relationships?*

There are five dynamics that keep groups from extending the hand of community to outsiders:

1. *Hoarding.* We naturally tend to build walls around community to protect it. Often this tendency relates to the busyness of life. We have little extra time to build relationships with more people.
2. *Stagnation.* Every group drifts toward becoming ingrown. They miss what new members offer – fresh vision, other spiritual gifts, innovative perspectives, and new talents and abilities. Closed groups tend to get self-centered and lose vision.
3. *Mobility.* People in our culture are on the move to new jobs and geographic locations. But there will always be mobility because people connect at different places in different eras of their spiritual growth and changes in how they serve all through their Christian lives.
4. *Natural relationship.* Small groups should grow through the natural development of relationships in networks at work, in the neighborhood, and in the family. The best growth occurs in the ordinary course of relational rhythms.
5. *Legacy.* Consider how many lives may be impacted by adding just one person to a group.

How can asking good questions help foster a welcoming, intimate community? See chap. 6 and attached article.

How do we know if our group is healthy? Take a look at chapter 12.

Asking Better Questions, by Melissa Kruger

There's a lot to be concerned about when leading a Bible study or small group. The group may be inconsistent in attendance. They may be slow to open up to one another. They might ask questions about the Bible that you don't know the answer to. But there's one thing most leaders dread more than anything else.

Silence.

After reading a passage of Scripture, you ask a question. And, then there's nothing. Nada. No one says anything. You awkwardly take a sip of your coffee while everyone looks down at their Bible, shifting uncomfortably in their seats. You wonder to yourself, "What went wrong?"

I've been in many such settings (sometimes as the one leading) and usually, someone jumps in and mercifully answers the question, bringing palpable relief to the leader.

The good news is we can grow in our ability to ask better questions. ([See this post from last week for some types of questions *not* to ask.](#)) Here are four types of questions that can hopefully help stir up discussion in your small group Bible study:

Warm-Up Questions

In addition to an icebreaker type question (which can be a simple way to get to know one another), I like to begin with a "warm-up question" to transition the group before we dive into the passage. It sets the stage for the topic you'll be studying and gives a moment for everyone to shift their focus.

Warm-up questions are broad, but with direct point. Everyone in the group doesn't need to answer, but they're the type of question that everyone should be able to answer, even if they haven't read the passage.

For instance, if the general theme of a passage was about our need for God's mercy a warm up question might be, "Can anyone remember a time in childhood when you got caught doing something wrong? How did you feel or respond when you were discovered?" There are multiple ways people respond to being caught—shame, confession, guilt, hiding, lying, blaming others—so the warm up discussion sets the stage for discussing our need for mercy (and the ways we sometimes act as though we don't need it).

Since I like to keep things on theme, the icebreaker I'd ask (just for fun) before the warm up question would be something like this, "If you were caught with your cookie in the cookie jar, what kind of cookie would you be hoping to pull out?" Relating the icebreaker and warm-up question to the overall theme helps the group focus as they begin to study the passage.

Google Map Guidance

One thing I appreciate about Google Maps is that when I ask for directions, they provide multiple ways to get to my desired location. When attempting to craft good questions, consider asking questions your group can answer in multiple ways.

For instance, the question, "What Bible stories in either the OT and NT illustrate God's mercy?" will most likely invite a variety of answers from multiple people. Take a moment and answer that question right now in your own mind. Hopefully, you could answer with multiple stories from Scripture that highlight God's mercy. If *you* can think of multiple answers to your own question, then most likely your group will be able to as well.

In contrast, the question "How do we know God is a merciful God?" might produce a more limited response. Most of the answers will focus on Jesus's death for our sin (which is clearly the prime example of God's mercy). It's not that the second question is a particularly bad question, it just probably won't produce the same level of group participation and connection throughout all of Scripture.

One important key to this type of question—not only do you need to have multiple routes, you need to know where you're taking your Bible study group. Facilitating a small group discussion doesn't mean the direction of the study is up for grabs. Knowing where you're heading as you're studying will help you ask questions that keep your group moving forward in their understanding.

Houston, We Have a Problem

In some passages of Scripture, a lack of clarity may cause either confusion or misapplication. It's important to anticipate these potential problems. For instance, [1 John 2:3](#) states, "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments." A misapplication of this text would be: "The only people who are believers are those who no longer sin."

One way to address misunderstandings is to allow the group to chew on and discuss the potential problem together: "If someone were to say to you that this verse means that believers never sin, how would you answer them in light of other passages in the Bible? What verses help bring clarity to our interpretation of this verse?" By inviting them into the potential problem, the group learns how to discuss and debate God's Word in a healthy manner that fosters engagement with the text and one another.

Achilles' Heel

Sometimes when preparing to teach a passage of Scripture, you may say to yourself, "Well, I hope no one asks me about_____."

That's probably the *exact* question it's most important to research and consider. Call your pastor or ministry leader and ask for help, or find a good commentary. And, then, once you've done your homework, ask your "Achilles' Heel" question to the group.

And, when someone asks a question you didn't think about (and have no idea how to answer), I find it helpful to say something like, "Wow, that's a great question I hadn't considered. Let's discuss it as a group. How would you all answer Anne's question?" After talking it through together, it can serve as a good homework assignment: "Let's all research this question and we'll look at it again next time we meet."

Sometimes it's in our wrestling with the toughest questions we learn how much we have to learn. That's a good thing—it helps promote our growth and understanding. It also keeps us curious as we read and study Scripture.

I've learned so much from others as teachers and leaders wisely ask good questions. It may take a little more prep time, but the earlier efforts pay off during the Bible study. Most people won't even notice the work you've done. But, they'll know Scripture better as you ask questions that engage the heart and mind. And, that's the ultimate goal.

<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/melissakruger/2017/09/19/asking-better-questions-in-small-group-discussions/>