

How We Do Small Groups

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[0 : 00] This is a very special day in the calendar of this church. It's a day that we restart our small group ministry after a bit of a vacation during the summer.

! As a consequence, because of the significance of this day, last week Pastor opened his scriptures as to the why we do small groups.

Even before the exact dates of his vacation were planned, he had planned last week the why we do small group, and this week the how do we do small groups.

And as I was considering it and praying about it and what passage to ask you to turn to, I considered what do we mean by small groups. I remembered, I don't know why I thought of this, but I did, one of the significant budgetary changes that we made for small groups was the issue of training.

It is our desire that every one of our small group leaders attend biblical counseling training, and almost every one of them has done that.

[1 : 32] And we want to continue to have that happening. We've got a couple of, we have one couple that's going to be going three weekends here in the next month, this leader this month actually, and then we have already two couples that are planning to go over to Lafayette in Indiana next year.

You see, biblical counseling is simply one step that's used in helping a person grow spiritually. It's one step in the process.

And Josh is up here because I asked him to come up here. He's not just ready to remove me if I say something wrong. Josh has a purpose here, okay? And what I wanted to do was to give you a picture of what does it mean, what is biblical counseling?

What is it all about? What does it mean? So Josh is going to be my illustration here. And I've got my iPhone here. I'm going to just kind of lay right here, okay? And Josh starts out right over here, okay?

Josh starts out with salvation, all right? He starts right here, and he looks an awful lot like Josh, okay? The process, the program for Josh is for him to move across here until he gets over here.

[2 : 47] I'm not going to go over there because I don't belong there either. And he looks where he looks an awful lot like Jesus Christ, okay? That's discipleship. That's spiritual growth.

That's what's supposed to happen in every one of our lives. Unfortunately, sometimes Josh gets started, okay?

And he's going along, but see, he's gotten distracted. I've got to come along and say, Josh, it's okay. It's okay. Just keep moving. Just keep moving. Keep going, okay?

Sometimes that's what happens to us, right? Sometimes, sometimes Josh gets started off, and he's growing spiritually.

He's getting to be more like what happened. He got completely sidetracked. He's not even progressing to look like Jesus Christ anymore. He's stuck on the world.

[3 : 47] What are you doing with my phone? Okay? And what I need to do is stop him getting to put down my phone and say, come on, Josh, we've got to keep moving this way.

Sometimes the person gets started. They're walking along. They're looking more and more like Christ. It's like they're almost at the end. And it goes right back to the stuff that was distracting them before.

Thanks, Josh. So I thought about biblical counseling, what biblical counseling is and what it's meant to be.

I thought of a passage that is what we want to be the center of our small groups. Would you turn your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1?

I'm going to read verses 24 to 29, which is one long sentence. Okay? Apostle Paul liked long sentences. And then we're going to focus on the last half of the sentence in verses 28 and 29. [5 : 06] Colossians chapter 1 and verses 24. Now I rejoice in my suffering for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body.

That is, the church of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known. The mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now revealed to his saints.

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Him we proclaim, warning everyone, 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. This morning, as I said, we're going to concentrate on what I believe constitutes the summary of ministry.

[6 : 13] That's what we find in verses 28 and 29. This is how we do small group. I'm going to relate it in three ways. First of all, the focus. Second, the way they function.

And third, who is the true facilitator of small groups. First one is our function. I'm sorry, our focus. Verse 29 says, him we proclaim.

Proclaim, here's the general term. It's not restricted to formal preaching, but rather it indicates all of communication. Paul is saying here that all he talked about was Christ.

He was a one-topic person. You know any one-topic people? It's a person that no matter what question you ask them, they always want to talk about the same thing. It might be golf.

It might be football. It might be cooking. It might be anything. They're focused on one thing, and the only thing they talk about is that one thing. Paul was one of those people.

[7 : 14] But for Paul, it was Jesus. Every time he talked to someone, it didn't matter whether it was the highfalutin people or the common people, whether Paul was talking to King Agrippa, the military commander, a tradesperson like Lydia, a common prison guard like in Philippi, a soldier fastened to him in a Roman custody, the philosophers of Athens, or the religious leaders of Israel, Paul had one topic, Jesus.

Whether we're considering Paul's messages in the book of Acts or one of the many epistles, one thing is sure, you're going to get a full dose of Christ.

But, you know, despite all of his education and his training, Paul doesn't give us a whole lot of ivory tower, head-swelling information, theory that doesn't have any practice to it.

Rather, you're going to get a rich theology that presents the truth of Jesus Christ and then applies it step by step in the lives of people.

At the deepest level, the apostle conceived of his message not as a system, not as a collection of rules and regulations, but as a living and glorious person who is the fulfillment of the deepest hopes of mankind and the source of new life to his people.

[8 : 50] You find teaching that centers on a person and change lives. So what is the connection there to our small groups? Our small groups are not centered on social interaction, pragmatic attempts to increase the Sunday evening attendance, or meeting the felt needs of members, but to glorify our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

When we forget that, when we ignore it, or if we simply don't keep working at it, making that the focus, then we've lost the one thing that really matters.

And if you walk out of here today, and you can only remember one thing that I said, I would sure like it to be that. So let me say it again a little bit more simply.

Our small groups are centered on glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ. Period. So what does it mean to glorify Christ? In Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17, he begins with this concept of glorifying him. And in that, he covers ideas such as attention to his word, being sanctified, being unified with other believers, and having the love of Christ.

[10 : 12] So if I would summarize, it comes down to this. Two of the best ways to glorify Christ is to obey him and love others. This really comes out throughout Scripture, but especially here in the New Testament.

Remember when Jesus was asked to summarize the whole Testament. Break down the law for us, Jesus, and tell us what is the one most important thing. And what was his answer?

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself. How do I know that I love him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength?

Jesus answered that one too. He said, if you love me, keep my commandments. So let me connect it for you, very plainly, to ensure that Jesus Christ is the center of our small groups, we all need to grow in obeying Christ and loving one another.

That's what I was pointing out with Josh. Josh needed to keep moving, keep moving forward and growing to be more like Christ. And the purpose of small groups is what I was doing, where I came along beside him and I said, no, don't pay attention to that thing.

[11 : 26] Or pulling him back, and Josh made it easy for me, to show you that sometimes we need to be pulled back. Sometimes it's not enough to just say, well, you know, you really ought to follow Jesus.

So let's next look at the way our small groups function. Colossians 1.28 says, warning everyone, teaching everyone, with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

The first thing I want you to notice there, and I tried to highlight it for you, is that everyone appears three times. It appears after each verb in this verse. I think that's significant.

Spiritual growth in Christ's likeness is not restricted to the few. It's not only the pastors. It's not only the deacons.

It's not only the biggies of the church. It's not even only the adults. It is everyone. Everyone. Not everyone is capable of an advanced degree in mathematics.

[12 : 39] Not everyone is capable of running a sub-four-minute mile. Not everyone is capable of climbing the corporate ladder to the place where you're CEO of the multinational corporation.

But everyone, everyone is able to come to the maturity that Paul speaks about here. Each and every one of us.

Not only are we able, but we are expected. Every single Christian is capable of the maturity that Paul talks about. Two things.

Can I encourage you on the small groups? The first one is small groups need to make sure that everyone is involved, everyone is growing, everyone is serving.

What does that mean? What means this? That, of course, the activities must be age-appropriate.

I've worked with twos and threes off and on for years.

[13 : 42] I understand that a two-year-old cannot handle a 45-minute lecture. Okay? Okay? On the other hand, a three-year-old, a four-year-old, maybe, four-year-old who has come to Jesus can have a short Bible lesson and can pray for other people in a small group.

Small groups should not just be two hours where we send the kids off and give mommy and daddy a break. Small group ought to be for everybody.

Second thing. It should not just be one person teaching many, but many teaching one another.

There is a leader in the small group.

There should not be a lecturer in the small group. I have to fight this as much as anybody. I can obviously talk without anybody else talking for 45 minutes, and it's okay.

Okay? I understand some people can't. I can do that, but I should not do that. I want to get people involved because the way that someone in my small group like Kate or the way that Jeff or the way that Margie says something in my small group may be just the way that somebody else needed to hear it that I couldn't even think of it that way.

[15 : 07] We work together. We teach each other. So what are the things that we should be doing with everyone? The first one it says is warning.

Some translations use the word admonishing. Let me start out with a definition for you, and then I'm going to explain it just a little bit. Sorry, I'm getting distracted here. Okay.

It's this. Biblical warning or admonition is the process of applying the Scripture to the issues of our individual lives. Biblical warning or admonition is the process of applying the Scripture to the individual issues in people's lives.

It includes the idea of setting someone's mind straight with the idea that it's not quite straight right now. It has to do with will and emotions, and it connotes warning.

It can relate to non-Christians with the thought being that the apostle sought to awaken each one of them to their need for Christ, or it can focus on warning of Christians who might be tempted to stray.

[16:19] It could be simply the person who's distracted. It could be the person who's turned aside and not growing anymore. It could be the person who was on his way and backed up.

So let's see how this relates to small groups. Involvement in one another's lives using Scripture. Involvement in one another's lives during Scripture.

Not long ago, I had a very sad phone call, and I'm just going to be up front with you. I'm going to just lay it out. The person called me, and they said that they had this challenge that they were working on and that they had already asked all their friends.

The person was from this ministry. They'd already asked all their friends, and their friends gave them this advice. And I listened to the advice, and I was a little troubled.

So I said, so could you tell me what passage one of them used with that? And the person said, oh, nobody used a verse with me.

[17:26] My comment to them was, is that the advice you want? My brothers and sisters, that ought not to be.

The advice, the counsel, the direction that we give to one another ought to be poured out, ought to be dripping with the Word of God. And if it's not, it's not good advice.

Second thing, how do we make sure this warning takes place? The pastor mentioned this one in his training for small group leaders, and he asked me to repeat it for everybody.

And that was making sure that our prayer requests are appropriate. What do I mean by that? We want to be involved in one another's lives.

How can you be involved in one another's lives if you don't know what's going on? There needs to be a level of transparency or we can't be involved in one another's lives. On the other hand, every one of you has been in a situation where you're in some kind of a prayer group or going to pray for one another, and one person uses the prayer time for manipulation.

[18:42] I just want everyone to pray for my wife who's being very unsubmitive, and she just really needs to get right with God, and so I'm just going to, I just want you all to pray for her.

Well, what did I just do? She can't say anything now, right? Except I guess I need to be submissive. I beat her into submission by using her as a prayer example.

That's terrible. My prayer requests need to be appropriate, not used to manipulate other people, not used as a means of gossip.

Well, I really, I don't want anybody to gossip about this, but I did want to share it with you for prayer.

Well, if you shouldn't be gossiping about it, don't talk about it.

You can tell Jesus about it, and that's enough. Those are two ways that that warning is to come about. Admonishing is to be with all wisdom. We're going to talk about this in each one of the two sections, but the warning and warning everyone and teaching everyone are parallel phrases.

[19:51] So both of them are to be done with wisdom. Wisdom refers to the practical discernment, understanding the biblical principles for holy conduct.

The consistent pattern of God-honoring ministry is to link teaching and admonishment and bring them together in the context of the general doctrinal truths of the word.

Doctrinal teaching is invariably followed by practical admonitions, and that has to be the pattern for all of ministry. Next thing in it is teaching everyone.

Refers to teaching, and that refers to imparting positive Christian truth. The verb and its corresponding nouns of teacher and teaching are often used in the New Testament to denote authoritative communication of gospel truth, like preaching.

At the same time, this truth is reinforced as believers teach one another. So teaching is the positive sense in which Scripture is spoken to increase and improve our understanding of who Christ is and what his ways are.

[21:14] Teaching is to lay out those two things so that we grow in our understanding and our knowledge. It does have the aspect of more information, but it has the aspect also of that information applied to our lives.

It's the responsibility that's given to everyone. I want you to look at an illustration of that. You're in the book of Colossians. You just need to turn a page or two to Colossians chapter 3 and verse 16. Colossians chapter 3 verse 16. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thanksgiving or thankfulness in your hearts to God.

This verse is more about let's do another song. It points to everyone as Paul says because in this verse the you, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. the you there is plural. It's like y'all. Okay? It means everybody in here. Not just one person. Not just those people who are teachers.

[22 : 30] Not just those people who are spiritual giants. Not just those people who are small group leaders. It applies to everybody at the church in Colossae.

So first of all it applies to everyone. Secondly, it ties together the idea of in all wisdom with the word of Christ dwelling in you.

Those two things go together. So in both passages, this one here in Colossians chapter 3 and back in Colossians chapter 1, both passages then, with all wisdom seems to express the way that the admonishing and teaching were done.

That says it's not just about funny stories. That it has at its core and at its root the word of God and that's the thing that is being used to help one another by admonishing and teaching.

As people need wisdom to know how to live out the true knowledge of God so they need wisdom to know how to teach and admonish one another. And this wisdom comes only from the word of God.

[23 : 44] Third word there is presenting. The aim of Paul's proclaiming and admonishing and teaching was to present everyone perfect in Christ.

Present refers to the bringing them into God's presence at the return of Christ. The example that I used with Josh as I had him walking from the point of salvation to the point of Christ-likeness we recognize that that actually is vertical.

Right? That the only time any of us is going to be perfect in Christ and look just like him is when we see him as he is. Okay?

So that's going to be vertical. I tried to illustrate it horizontally because Josh wasn't prepared to fly. Okay? So I couldn't have him moving up. This issue of progressing growing to be more like Christ we recognize that we're not there.

None of us are. But said simply the goal of the ministry of small group is the maturity of the saints so that each one of us hears well done good and faithful servant when we stand before him in the last day.

[25 : 03] Shows up in this passage in Colossians chapter 1 all the way back in verse 22. I didn't start back there. I started in 24. But back in verse 22 it points to the fact that it was Christ's aim to present us perfect before him.

Here in 28 it says that it was Paul's aim to present people perfect before Christ. I'm here to tell you today that it's your leadership's goal aim function for small groups to present people perfect in Christ.

And I pray it's yours. The Greek word here that's translated mature is kind of challenging and so you see it different in different translations.

Some translations use the word mature. Some translations use the word perfect. perfect. The idea of perfect in the English speaks of absolute completeness.

Nothing missing whatsoever. Okay? It's perfect. Okay? And that's not the idea of the word in the Greek. So consequently some people have translated it mature just kind of saying well it's not really perfect.

[26 : 24] the trouble with using the word mature is that we have the idea that if we're older bigger stronger then we must be mature okay?

And it ain't necessarily so. And we don't want to have that idea of relativeness. I can have a teenager that's more mature in Christ than an older person.

The question is are they focused solely on Jesus Christ and is that the goal and the highlight of their life? Because that's the term.

One commentator put it pretty well I thought. He said it is the complete and undivided way in which a person with all of their positive and negative attributes is oriented towards God or towards Christ. I thought that was pretty good. I got an even better one for you. Turn in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 3 and verse 13 and 14 because I think Paul under the leading of the Holy Spirit put it even better.

[27 : 37] Philippians 3 13 and 14 Brothers I do not consider that I have made it my own but one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Finally let's think about the facilitator of our small group ministry. Colossians chapter 1 verse 29 For this I toil struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

The balance of Christian living. Paul says he gave the effort to serve and honor God with all of his might. Labor refers to working to the point of exhaustion.

Striving is where we get the English word to agonize. It refers to the effort required to compete in an athletic event.

Let's say it explicitly and simply and then I'll explain a little bit more. We're to put the same kind of effort into this, namely growing in our Christlikeness.

[29 : 00] We're to put the same kind of effort into this that we put into a career accomplishment or an athletic achievement. Time for a grandson story.

Yesterday I went over, we've been driving over pretty well once or twice a week to see our grandsons run cross country. So yesterday we drove over to Lafayette, well actually we drove over Friday night and then we came back yesterday.

Both of them did their best that they've done this year. But that's not what I want you to hear. What I want you to hear is this, that one of them he did just amazingly good.

He's coming to the end and he was really sprinting to the finish. He got done and he said, I thought I was going to puke right there at the finish line in front of everybody.

And I thought, that's it. That's it. we ought to feel like we're working so hard to get to the finish line that I'm going to puke right there, right in front of everybody.

[30 : 13] I hope you think about that. Being Christ-like should be the most important thing in your life. Being Christ-like ought to be the thing that drives you.

It's the thing that pushes you, keeps you going when you're tired, when you're wore out. And ministry, guess what, can wear you out. Paul doesn't go about his work half-heartedly hoping that, you know, God's good and I think I'm going to take a nap this afternoon and just, you know, God will take care of the lesson.

God will take care of my small group, I'm sure about it. He doesn't expect God's grace to fill in the gaps that he's too lazy to work at himself. Nor, however, does he think that it's all up to him.

So unless he burns himself out with restless, anxious toil, nothing is going to be achieved. Because he knows that it's Christ, it's God's desire to bring Christians to maturity.

And that while God has called him to have a share in that, it is God's job to do it. So he can work hard. You can work hard without any of the stressful motivation of either pride or fear.

[31 : 38] Pride that you can do it all or fear that you can't. He becomes, Paul becomes an example of the kind of maturity that he's trying to develop in these other people.

Paul can work himself to the point of exhaustion. Paul can work himself, if I had been writing this yesterday, I wrote, Paul can work himself to the point of puking and know that it's all of God and not of him.

Let's look at a similar passage, 1 Timothy chapter 4. I just suddenly got this feeling that all the children are going to remember, the only thing they're going to remember today is puking, especially the boys.

But anyway, 1 Timothy chapter 4. 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 10. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the savior of all people, especially to those who believe.

Why should each one of us work at small group? Because our hope is set on the living God, that's why. So what does it call us to do?

[33 : 05] It calls us to serve rather than show up. to serve, it means to serve one another by helping. It may be in hosting.

It may be in setup. It may be in cleanup. It may be in childcare. It may be in preparing for the meal. It may be in preparing your heart and your mind for the lesson that the small group is going to look at.

And the reason we do those things, unlike something that was on Facebook this week, or last week, is not because it's good for us. It is because we want to glorify our Lord Jesus Christ.

On the one side, we don't forget that the effect of striving or work with spiritual and eternal results is always being done by God, even if it's through you.

It is only his energy, his power, working through us that can accomplish anything of value to the kingdom. All our toil and hard work is absolutely useless apart from God's power in our lives.

[34 : 29] God gave Paul the strength to work hard at his ministry. ministry. And in fact, as we know, he gave his life for that. He worked hard at it.

And God can do the same thing in each one of us. Galatians 2.2, I'm sorry, 2.20, sums it up. These two components of human and divine action.

Paul says, I've been crucified with Christ. Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and delivered himself up for me.

So being centered on Christ, making God's word the means and the foundation of ministry. ministry. Working to the point where we're tired, but trusting that all accomplishments come from the Lord. This is how we do small groups. Come to think of it, Colossians 1.28 and 29 looks an awful lot like building relationships that build saints.

[35 : 58] The theme idea that we've used for, I forget how long it's been, eight years or something like that. And the question we ask ourselves is, are you involved or are you a bystander?

Do you show up or do you serve? Are you a participator or are you simply an observer?

The purposes of our small groups are to help each one of us grow to be more like Jesus Christ.

There may be someone here this morning and you say, well, I don't even know Jesus Christ.

Well, this would be a good day to change that. And then you can come to a small group and that small group will help you grow to be a little more like Christ.

You may be here and you're not really involved in small groups and in fact you're not really involved in growing. Maybe going back to the illustration with Josh, maybe it's because you just keep looking at the world and it has this drawl.

[37 : 25] Maybe you find you've actually gotten off the track and you're just standing over there involved with the world. Maybe you were on the track.

Maybe you were progressing and something happened and you just kind of turned aside. building relationships that build saints.

That's the purpose of our small groups. Let's pray. Our great God, our Savior, all to be like thee.

we need to be changed. There's not a single one of us in this auditorium that doesn't need change.

There's not a single one of us in the auditorium that has accomplished, that has gotten there, that's reached the goal. And yet, Lord, we are so quickly and so easily distracted that it's embarrassing.

[38 : 39] Even when we're going on the path, we're more often just jogging along. Father, I pray that you would bring conviction in all of our hearts.

Lord, that we might be drawn to the cross and drawn to act more like you, to want to be more like you. That our small groups would grow in their pointedness with one another.

Not harshness, but pointedness in the scriptures. That we would be more transparent with one another without ever using our prayer time or our small group time as simply a gossip session.

Or manipulation time. Father, help us to use our small groups first and foremost to bring glory to your son, Jesus Christ.

First in his name we pray. Amen. that we have the small groups that have the! Half