

Personal Growth in Community

I. Biblical models of making disciples in different kinds of groups

What were the different kinds of groups that Jesus gathered and guided?

- Teaching to large crowds
- Community with medium-size groups:
 - Larger groups: groups of friends (Luke 8:1-3); 72 (Luke 10:1), 120 (Acts 1:15)
 - The 12
- Deep relationships with a few: the 3 (Peter, James, John)

How do we see the same pattern in the life and ministry of the apostle Paul?

- Crowds in synagogues, public places
- Congregations and co-workers (Rom. 16)
- Close friends: Timothy, Silas, Epaphroditus

II. Lessons from biblical models

- Spiritual growth requires multiple contexts and types of relationships.

What is unique about each context and level of relationships?

- **Whole congregation**
 - + Experience of the wholeness of the church, being part of something much bigger than ourselves
 - + Good for receiving biblical truth
- **Medium-size groups** (approx. 10-50), e.g., Sunday school classes, Bible studies, community groups, care groups (e.g., GriefShare)
 - + Experience a deeper connection to the church community in groups where members share snapshots of each other's stories, begin to develop friendships, and begin to share personally in each other's lives.
 - + Good for receiving and discussing biblical truth at moderate depth and making general applications
- **Deep friendship with a few** (2-4 people)
 - + Experience deeper spiritual friendship with greater personal disclosure, transparency, challenge, and support
 - + Good for receiving and discussing biblical truth at great depth and making specific, personal applications that the group knows and supports

- Spiritual growth requires the give-and-take of dialogue within personal relationships.
- Spiritual growth must be sufficiently flexible to address different personal circumstances and capacities.
- Shepherding spiritual growth must be both directive and responsive.
- The most personal contexts for spiritual growth must be sufficiently small to allow adequate time and trust.

III. Growth Groups: A Model to Put Jesus' Method into Action

What is a growth group?

- 3-4 men or 3-4 women
- commit for the long term (at least several years)

What do growth groups do?

- Meet frequently
- Communicate frequently
- Study together to form a vision for personal spiritual growth
 - Communion with God
 - Mind (knowledge)
 - Emotions/character
 - Physical health
 - Relationships
 - Service (including work)
 - Wealth
- Form a concrete plan for spiritual growth
 - Each member assesses their levels of health in the various dimensions of their life.
 - Each member creates a spiritual growth plan with concrete goals.
- Engage in specific practices as the means of personal spiritual growth
- Pray with and for each other
- Walk together in friendship to provide support and challenge for personal spiritual growth