

Small Company and Group Bible Study Ministry

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Intro: Groups are important. The church itself is a group, and the assembly of it should never be neglected. The Bible in fact says, that we should assemble all the more, as believers, as we “see the day [of Christ’s coming] approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). Christians, like coals in the fire, will always burn hotter and brighter in their faith, when they are pushed and gathered together. Assembly therefore is vital, for worship, for encouragement, for spiritual growth, and for Christian and gospel fervor. God’s word instructs us this way (Hebrews 10:24-25; Ephesians 4:11-16). [*in person (richest), phone, net, etc.*]

Besides large assemblies, smaller groups are just as vital for Christian growth and the well-being of the church. Groups (even as small as two or three, and much greater too) should be formed in our churches for service, blessing members and non-members/non-Christians alike. In this lesson, we will explore various functions of groups, examples and ideas for groups and their purposes, as well as practical considerations and organization of effective groups and group ministry in the church. We’ll cover four major points: 1) The call for gospel groups, 2) Groups and house churches, 3) Blessings of regular spiritual meetings, and 4) Practical organization of group ministries. *Let’s begin with the call.*

1) THE CALL FOR GOSPEL GROUPS – A Prophetic Voice Shares the Following About Groups

- **We must organize our gospel forces into evangelistic, missionary groups.**
 - Time is short, and our forces must be organized to do a larger work.—Testimonies for the Church 9:27. {ChS 72.1}
 - **The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err.**—Testimonies for the Church 7:21, 22. {ChS 72.2}
 - **Groups for service.** In our churches let companies be formed for service. Let different ones unite in labor as fishers of men. Let them seek to gather souls from the corruption of the world into the saving purity of Christ’s love.—Testimonies for the Church 7:21. {ChS 72.5}
 - The church of Christ on earth was organized for missionary purposes, and the Lord desires to see the entire church devising ways and means whereby high and low, rich and poor, may hear the message of truth.—Testimonies for the Church 6:29. {ChS 72.6}
 - **Small or large – organize in service groups:** If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members, but for unbelievers. If in one place there are only two or three who know the truth, let them form themselves into a band of workers.—7T, p.22. {ChS 72.7}
- **Organized groups of missionaries needed in every church.** “Let there be in every church, well-organized companies of workers to labor in the vicinity of that church.”—The Review and Herald, September 29, 1891. {ChS 72.3}
- **Scores of organized workers needed.** “In every city there should be a corps of organized, well-disciplined workers; not merely one or two, but scores should be set to work.”—The General Conference Daily Bulletin, January 30, 1893, 37. {ChS 72.4}
- **Groups like the early disciples must be organized to do Health and Spiritual Evangelism.** “Christ sought the people where they were and placed before them the great truths in

regard to His kingdom. As He went from place to place, He blessed and comforted the suffering and healed the sick. This is our work. Small companies are to go forth to do the work to which Christ appointed His disciples. While laboring as evangelists they can visit the sick, praying with them and, if need be, treating them, not with medicines but with the remedies provided in nature. {CH 501.1}

- **Regular, Active Bible Study and Prayer Groups are Needed.**
 - “Let small companies assemble in the evening, at noon, or in the early morning to study the Bible. Let them have a season of prayer, that they may be strengthened, enlightened, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. This work Christ wants to have done in the heart of every worker. If you yourselves will open the door to receive it, a great blessing will come to you. Angels of God will be in your assembly. You will feed upon the leaves of the tree of life. ...” Testimonies for the Church 7:195.) {Pr 198.4}
- **Evangelistic Prayer and Action Groups Needed.**
 - “Why do not believers feel a deeper, more earnest concern for those who are out of Christ? **Why do not two or three meet together and plead with God for the salvation of some special one, and then for still another?** In our churches let companies be formed for service. Let different ones unite in labor as fishers of men. Let them seek to gather souls from the corruption of the world into the saving purity of Christ’s love. {7T 21.3}

2) GROUPS AND HOUSE-CHURCHES – NT House-Churches and the Modern House-Church Movement

- **In the NT, many believers operated churches from their houses (e.g. underground churches).** The purpose was having a practical, good, safe place to meet. Synagogues were out. Large or small these groups were all connected to the larger body of believers, and felt so connected.
 - **Rom_16:5** Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my wellbeloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.
 - **1Co_16:19** The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.
 - **Col_4:15** Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house.
 - **Phm_1:2** And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house:
- **Some in modern times, have opted for pushing a return to “house churches” and forsaking the larger, more formal church buildings and meetings.** However, such is not a biblical requirement or mandate. Jesus regularly attended church in an established building – a city synagogue, for his entire upbringing. He attended services there and participated in them.
 - **Luke 4:16** “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.”
- **NT believers often met in house churches because it was the most practical thing to do.** They were under persecution, and were expelled from the synagogues.
- **For us today, we should hold group Bible studies in homes, and only form house churches as practical needs may require.**
 - Groups may be formed for prayer, study, and evangelism, and house churches to expand territories when needed. (testimony, accountability, and support, too).

- If larger group meetings or church assemblies are banned by the state, smaller group meetings at home may be a safe and effective alternative. *Organized in troubled times.*
- *[During Covid-19 or any epidemic, remember that health, even in small groups is precious and should be guarded. Take proper precautions].*

3) BLESSINGS OF REGULAR SPIRITUAL MEETINGS – Don't Stay Home to Neglect such Group Assemblies

“Many seem to think the time lost that is devoted to seeking the Lord. But when He comes in to co-operate with human effort, and men and women co-operate with Him, a marked change will be seen in the work and in the results. Every heart that has been visited by the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness will reveal the working of the Spirit of God in voice, mind, and character. The machinery will move as if oiled and guided by a masterly hand. There will be less friction when the spirit of the worker receives the oil from the two olive branches. The holy influences will be imparted to others in words of kindness, tenderness, love, and encouragement. {7T 195.3}

See **Zechariah 4:3,5-6.** “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.”

Examples of Fellowship and Group Bible Study in the OT and NT Church.

- Reading to the group, the whole law, aloud. Planting the Seed of Truth in Hearts
 - Reading the law to the people (before and after the wandering). **Exod. 20; Deut. 5.**
 - Read entirely, aloud, every 7 years. **Deut. 31:9-13**
- God's OT commission to teach the truth diligently to all. **Deut. 6:6-9**
- God's NT commission to teach His truth diligently to all. **Mt. 28:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:15.**
- The Early Church diligently studied God's word in groups. **Acts 2:41-47.**
- *In all group Bible studies and ministries, we should incorporate and share God's word. We must never depart from it. Only then, can we truly prosper! **Joshua 1:8***

Internal Summary: What are Groups and Group Studies to be Used for?

- Prayer Groups, Bible Study, and Testimony Circles
- Planting the Seeds of God's Truth
- Spiritual Growth, Connecting with God's Spirit / Spiritual Transformation and Character Growth
- Ministry to Church Members and also to Unbelievers or Non-members
- Medical Missionary Work, Evangelism, and Modeling after Christ's Ministry
- Smaller Church Fellowship and Study when Needs so Require (normally never to replace larger assembly of the believers; Usually to supplement and extend the mission; In duress, to sustain)

4) PRACTICAL ORGANIZATION OF GROUP MINISTRIES / GROUP STUDIES

- **Plenty to Consider: When Organizing Groups**
 - Group Term lengths. Ongoing or limited? What is best?
 - Group Sizes and Growth Plans
 - Relationship to Church, Evangelism plans, Structure, Purpose, and Direction
 - Quality and qualified leadership and training new leaders
 - Subject matter for study, and approach to the group or study
 - Guidelines, controls/rules, centralization, or relaxed and grassroots (work together)
 - Promotion and group entry, plus membership agreements or guidelines, as needed

- *The Bible provides pertinent counsel, giving order and flexibility. Practical experiences also add to our understanding of these different areas.*
- **Milton Adams, Serendipity, and Growth Groups. (Adventist Minister, specialized in groups)**
 - Relational Bible study. Simple house churches. Developing leaders and growing. Creating safe places for people to connect and study. Usually shares deeper doctrinal studies outside of group study sessions, though at times will run a full Christ-centered doctrinal study course or prophecy seminar with a well-connected group. Training materials are at: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1hKUZM94vfw0r4bAwFtFpANWZ4AEatvgW> . Milton's newest focus is on simple home churches to reach the unchurched and "church-leery mind" in missional home churches: www.simplechurchathome.com
 - Growth Groups are basically Life Groups, though Milton seeks to operate his study groups within an Adventist mission framework.
 - Consider plusses and minuses to "Serendipity" content and approach. It is not an Adventist resource, but this approach adapts it. (See example of Bible)
- **Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Group Bible Studies**
 - Written by Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas
 - Recommended by Pastor Mark Finley, during course on Equipping Laity
 - A highly organized approach to Group Bible study, using three 12-week terms during the year, in which to run studies. Then resting and organizing during the interim.
- **Book Study Groups: Are they effective?** Book study groups can certainly have a place and build connections. The questions we should ask are: 1) How quality is the resource? 2) Is it really biblical and on-point theologically with our faith? 3) Is it the best use of our time? 4) Are we leading people deeper into Christ and His word? 5) Will the Holy Spirit bless it?
- **Organization Ideas:** We will explore some resources created from my studies of these groups, including an implementation plan and experience we had in our local church.
 - Resources will be included in the download section on our webpage.
 - We'll look at some materials, photos, and ideas for effectively organizing such a plan.
 - Exploring study topic options (see additional materials handout)
- **Wide-spread Idea:** Consider that many churches are doing evangelism this way – outside of Adventism. Keep this in mind. This is an approach which many are familiar with. But truly it can be very effective, and it is in keeping with biblical organization.
 - An example of a local church (non-SDA) which I witnessed as being organized this way.
- **Benefits and blessings:** Evangelism, connectedness/fellowship, prayer, study, and ministry to the soul. When done right, we connect with the Holy Spirit and God's blessings through various groups like these. Churches grow spiritually and numerically when connected in fervent study, prayer, and evangelism using teams and groups within the community of believers, always reaching out to non-believers as well.

Appeal: Are you willing to be part of a biblically-founded, prayerful, evangelistic group Bible study ministry? ____ *Let's apply God's wisdom and counsel, seeking to develop healthy group ministry as God has instructed us to be a part of such ministries in our faith community, and to reach the world for Christ.*