



Growth groups

**HOW TO LEAD
DISCIPLE-MAKING
SMALL GROUPS**

COLIN MARSHALL



Small groups for Bible study, pastoral care and prayer are an integral ministry of most evangelical churches—and their effectiveness depends largely on the quality of their leadership. In churches across Australia and the UK, *Growth Groups* has become the standard leadership training resource to meet this need.

Although it predates Colin Marshall's best-known book, *The Trellis and the Vine*, *Growth Groups* is based on the same core goal of growing disciple-making disciples.

Ideally *Growth Groups* is offered as a hands-on training course for small group leaders, taking them through the practicalities of teaching a Bible study, group dynamics, troubleshooting, and much more. But it is also useful as a manual that leaders can work through on their own.

"One of God's kind acts was to introduce me to the life and ministry of Colin Marshall. For almost thirty years, Col's wise counsel, godly example, original thinking and persistent pursuit of biblical, faithful, gospel-centred goals have been a major enrichment to me personally and to our church. I pray that those who read his words will gain something of the benefits that those of us who know him personally experience." – Phillip Jensen

To run *Growth Groups* as a hands-on training course, you will also need to download the *Growth Groups Trainer Notes*.



 **matthiasmedia**
your partner in making disciples

ISBN 978-1-875245-81-9



9 781875 245819

Growth groups

HOW TO LEAD
DISCIPLE-MAKING
SMALL GROUPS

COLIN MARSHALL

Growth Groups

© Matthias Media 1995

All rights reserved. Except as may be permitted by the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means without prior permission from the publisher.

Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

Email: info@matthiasmedia.com.au

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com.au

Please visit our website for current postal and telephone contact information.

Matthias Media (USA)

Email: sales@matthiasmedia.com

Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com

Please visit our website for current postal and telephone contact information.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®.

Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc. All rights reserved worldwide.

Used by permission.

ISBN 978 1 875245 81 9

Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
TRAINING TOPICS	11
1. The strategy of Growth Groups	11
2. Growth Group basics	19
3. Pitfalls for Growth Groups	25
4. Preparing a Bible study	31
5. Leading a Bible study	43
6. Answers about questions	53
7. The games people play	57
8. Praying in Growth Groups	63
9. Gospel growth through Growth Groups	69
10. Leading for growth	79
11. Growing the individuals	89
12. The healthy Growth Group	97
13. Starting a Growth Group	111
14. Selecting, training and shepherding leaders	119
15. Developing the Growth Group program	125
TRAINEE SESSIONS	133
Session 1	135
Session 2	137
Session 3	139
Session 4	143
Session 5	144

Session 6	148
Session 7	150
Session 8	154
Session 9	156
Session 10	161

APPENDICES 165

i. Other useful resources	165
ii. Using pre-packaged Bible studies	169
iii. Preparation sheet	172
iv. Sample Bible study preparation	175



Introduction

This course is all about how to lead a Growth Group. A Growth Group is a place where Christians can grow. It is also a catalyst for the growth of the gospel. If you want to lead fellow believers toward Christian maturity and together reach others for Christ, this training is for you.

In today's church there is a proliferation of small group ministries. It is a new barometer of success in church growth. Pastors are quizzed about how many small groups they have operating and what percentage of members are in them. Larger churches have full-time staff members coordinating the small group program.

All kinds of groups are running: friendship groups, discussion groups, prayer groups, special interest groups, mission groups, Bible study groups, evangelism groups, support groups, koinonia groups, covenant groups. Small groups are being promoted as the key to revitalizing the church. They are seen as the way to transform nominal adherents into active participants—dying churches into growing concerns.

In many ways, the church has just jumped onto the small groups bandwagon. Secular researchers have developed theories about groups—why they work and the methods to use in them. This has been applied in most spheres of human enterprise: business, government, education, health and so on.

Small groups with trained leaders have significant impact on individuals and organizations.

There is every reason for Christians to gain from this new area of social research and harness the power of small groups. In the general community, people are being transformed through small groups. Addictions are overcome; deep emotions are dealt with; skills are developed; personalities are moulded; the overweight are trimmed down. These groups are potent environments and Christians ought to be attracted to any strategy which changes people for the good.

But we need to answer some basic questions to ensure our small groups are an expression of gospel ministry and not just 'christianized' versions of humanistic techniques. Questions such as:

- What is gospel ministry?
- What are the distinctive elements of a Christian small group?
- What growth does God desire in people?
- How does God bring about his transformation of people?

In this course, we grapple with these questions as well as learning the skills of leadership. In the end, we will see that there is such a thing as a distinctive Christian group. We call it a Growth Group.

WHO WILL USE THIS COURSE?

Growth Groups is for any Christian or group of Christians committed to equipping leaders of God's people. It is designed to train leaders who can teach the Bible and pray with other Christians. It will prepare leaders to gather together fellow-believers in evangelistic enterprise. In short, it will equip leaders to grow Christians and grow the gospel. The course is for anyone who wants to pursue these ends.

WHAT IS IN THIS COURSE?

Despite appearances, this is not another book about small group ministry. *Growth Groups* is:

- A 10-week practical ‘hands-on’ training program to develop effective Growth Group leaders.
- A training program useful for all Christian ministry, not just Growth Groups, because it deals with the fundamentals of gospel work.
- A central idea—that as small groups flourish in our society generally, we are faced with the need to define what is distinctive about **Christian ministry** in small groups.

The *Growth Groups* training course consists of:

- 15 training topics (following this introduction)
- 10 training session outlines for trainees (found in the back of this *Growth Groups* manual)
- 10 training session outlines for trainers (available separately as *Growth Groups Trainer Notes*)
- appendices.

If you are doing this course as a **trainee**, you will need your own copy of this *Growth Groups* manual.

If you are doing this course as a **trainer**, you will also need to download the *Growth Groups Trainer Notes*.

HOW TO USE GROWTH GROUPS

Growth Groups is designed to be used in a training group. A trainer gathers together a small group of Christians into such a group. The trainer needs to have had some experience of ministry in small groups, but doesn’t have to be a world expert! The *Trainer Notes* provide plenty of tips for trainers, and the session outlines are easy to follow.

It would be best to limit the number of group members to around 10, to ensure everyone has opportunities to practise their skills. Your group could be as small as two people. The group meets for 10 one-hour sessions. An hour is the minimum time needed to get through each session. If you can meet for longer, the training will be more effective.

During the session, the group will engage in a number of different activities. As well as prayer and some Bible discussion, the training group will undertake three types of activities. These activities are represented by 'icons' on the training session outlines.



PRACTICE: In a practice exercise, group members practise leading a Bible discussion. Usually, a couple of group members will be asked to observe the rest of the group as one member leads the others in a practice Bible discussion. The group then analyses how the discussion went.



MIRROR: The mirror exercise gets the group to reflect upon how it has been operating, in order to learn something about small group dynamics. These exercises require the group to discuss how they went about an activity they have just completed.



TOPIC: The topic exercises involve the trainer leading the group in a discussion of the training topics set for that session. Sometimes questions are provided for the group to answer; sometimes the discussion will be more free-form. It is unlikely that there will be time to read through the relevant training topics for each session, so trainees must have read them **before** the group meets. Not every training topic is directly addressed in the training sessions. However, it is expected that trainees will read all of the topics over the duration of the course. They may bring to the group discussion questions or comments about these extra topics.

WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF THE COURSE?

The goals of the *Growth Groups* training course are two-pronged. There are **broad goals** which explain why it is worthwhile to train leaders to run small groups for Christians. These aim to impart the philosophy of small group ministry upon which this course has been built. And there are **specific goals** for the trainees concerning the skills and understanding they will need to acquire in order to be Growth Groups leaders. Both sets of goals are outlined below.

Broad goals of training

1. To equip leaders with the vision, attitudes, knowledge and skills to initiate and lead a Growth Group.
2. To train leaders as Bible teachers/pastors rather than small group facilitators.
3. To develop an understanding of small group ministry shaped by the Bible.
4. To impart a vision for the ministry of Growth Groups, teaching trainees to think through a long term, expansive strategy of how Growth Groups can contribute to winning the world for Christ.

Specific goals for trainees

At the end of the course, trainees should be able to:

1. Identify good and bad habits of interpreting the Bible
2. Prepare a Bible study
3. Lead a Bible study
4. Analyse what makes a discussion succeed or fail
5. Assist in a Bible study
6. Lead a prayer time
7. Get started in one-to-one ministry
8. Diagnose the symptoms of an unhealthy group
9. Start a Growth Group



The strategy of Growth Groups

Christians meet in many kinds of groups for a variety of purposes: church committees, property maintenance, choir, youth groups, ministry training, sharing and support groups. Some of these are task-oriented groups; some are for friendship; some are for teaching and input. Groups such as these tend to have a primary purpose, as well as secondary consequences, such as building closer relationships between the group members.

This diversity of groups and purposes is valid. However, there is such a thing as a distinctively Christian group with a distinctively Christian purpose. This type of group is the subject of this training course. We could quite properly call it the Christian group. Instead, in this course we call it a 'Growth Group'.

1.1 MINISTRY GOALS FROM COLOSSIANS

What are the goals of a Growth Group—its primary purpose, the reason for its existence? What is the ministry of a Christian group? To answer these questions, we need to consider the reasons Christians meet and the instructions given to groups of Christians in the New Testament. By doing this, we discover God's word and his agenda for Christian groups, which

usually are called churches.¹

Throughout our training we will study Colossians, so let's begin by formulating some goals for Growth Groups from this epistle. We could use any New Testament letter to the early churches or, more properly, study them all, since all are God's word to us. For practical reasons we will look at Colossians, asking this question: What are the essential aims for a Growth Group?

Possibly the topic sentence of Colossians is 2:6-7:

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

"Receiving" Christ in these verses is not referring to some sort of mystical encounter where Christ enters our hearts. It has to do with something that the Colossians were 'taught' (in v. 7). We don't usually think of 'receiving' a teaching or a piece of information, but that is the word that the New Testament often uses to describe the way that the gospel was passed on from person to person, and generation to generation (cf. 1 Cor 15:1ff). When the Colossians 'learned' the gospel (from Epaphras, 1:7), they received Christ.

Here, in chapter 2, the apostle is appealing to them to remain steadfast in their faith in this gospel, in the face of legalistic alternative gospels, and to continue to accept Christ's lordship over daily living.

We take our goals for Growth Groups from this instruction. We define our goals as:

- TO RECEIVE CHRIST AS LORD
- TO LIVE WITH CHRIST AS LORD

The goals of Growth Groups are Christ-centred, not group-centred. Let's look in some detail at what it means to receive Christ as Lord and to live with his Lordship.

1 One of the issues worth pondering during this course is the distinction between 'church' and 'small groups'. There may be logistical and structural differences between them, but are there any *theological* differences?

Receive Christ as Lord

When the Colossians received the gospel of Christ, and put their trust in it, they received Christ Jesus himself. They were once slaves in the dominion of darkness (1:13), but now they are “in Christ” (see 2:6, 7, 10, 11, etc.); now they have all the fullness of God that was in the Son. We cannot drive a wedge between Christ and the gospel of Christ—as if we become Christians through hearing the gospel but then get to know Christ personally later on. We only know Christ as he comes to us in the gospel, offering us redemption and reconciliation with God. This is why Paul can describe his whole ministry as proclaiming Christ: “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Col 1:28).

Thus, imparting right knowledge and understanding is central to Christian groups. Receiving Christ means being taught something; it is about learning and understanding and wisdom and knowledge. Salvation and godly living depend on these things, and they are only to be found in Christ. In our groups, we therefore aim to:

- understand God’s grace in all its truth (1:6)
- be filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding (1:9)
- have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that we may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:2-3).

The Scriptures teach us many things about Christ. As we learn these things, take them to heart, and put our trust in them, we grow in our personal knowledge of Christ. He reveals himself as he speaks through the Bible, and we get to know him as a person, as we learn and embrace **all that he is**, and **all that he has done for us**.

All that he is (1:13-20, 2:9-10):

- the image of God
- the creator
- the owner of creation

- the reason for creation
- before creation
- the sustainer of creation
- the head of his church
- the beginning
- the firstborn from among the dead
- the fullness of God
- supreme
- the head over every power and authority

All that he has done for us:

Throughout Colossians, the main verbs describing God’s saving work suggest the richness of his grace in Christ:

- qualified to share in the the inheritance of the saints (1:12)
- have redemption, the forgiveness of sins in the Son (1:14, 2:13)
- rescued from the dominion of darkness (1:13)
- transferred into the kingdom of the Son (1:13)
- presented holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation (1:22)
- made full in Christ (2:10)
- circumcised in Christ, putting off the sinful nature (2:11)
- buried with Christ in baptism (2:11)
- made alive with Christ (2:13)
- died with Christ to the basic principles of the world (2:20)
- raised with Christ through faith in the power of God who raised Jesus (2:12)
- will appear with Christ (3:1)
- will appear with him in glory (3:4)

In knowing Christ, we are rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into his kingdom of light. This is what faith is—it is personally knowing Christ; it is understanding who he is and what he has done for us in such a way that we put all our trust and reliance in him.

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

COLOSSIANS 1:22-23

Receiving Christ is never an academic or merely intellectual exercise. It is a relationship of personal knowledge; it is a relationship of trust based on what we have learnt. Our Growth Groups must stimulate people to receive Christ in this way, and to continue strong and steadfast in the face of many alternatives.

Live with Christ as Lord

The knowledge of Christ as Lord and Saviour entails living with Christ as Lord. This means:

Remaining faithful—rejecting other lords and their religions

In the salvation of Christ we are full and complete, needing no supplementary religious knowledge or duty. Our faith must be in Christ alone.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

COLOSSIANS 2:8-10

The prohibitions on religion are repeated throughout: we ought not be deceived by fine sounding arguments (2:4); we are not judged by what we eat and drink (2:16); we ought to avoid false humility and the worship of angels (2:18); we must not be puffed up, lest we lose connection with the Head (2:19).

In contrast, we are twice exhorted to continue: continue in our faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel (1:22-23); and continue to live in him (2:6). Epaphras' prayer is also our group prayer: "that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured" (4:12).

Submitting to Christ in every sphere of life

“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” (3:17). The source of this new life is not immediately apparent to the world, for it is a life “now hidden with Christ in God”. Christ is our life, but this will only be revealed when Christ appears (3:3-4).

Other verbs in Colossians highlight the totally transformed life of the Christian:

- live a life worthy of the Lord (1:10)
- please the Lord in every way (1:10)
- bearing fruit in every good work (1:10)
- strengthened with all power according to his glorious might (1:11) in the faith (2:7)
- have endurance and patience (1:11)
- giving thanks to the Father, joyfully (1:12) to God the Father through Christ (3:17)
- be thankful (3:15)
- overflowing with thankfulness (2:7)
- set your hearts on things above (3:1) your minds on things above, not on earthly things (3:2)
- put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature (3:5)
- rid yourself of all such things as these (3:8)
- put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (3:10) love (3:14)
- clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (3:12)
- bear with each other (3:13)
- forgive as the Lord forgave you (3:13)
- let the word of Christ dwell in you (3:16)
- submit to your husbands (3:18)
- love your wives (3:19)
- obey your parents (3:20)
- do not embitter your children (3:21)

- obey your earthly masters (3:22)
- provide your slaves with what is right and fair (4:1)
- devote yourselves to prayer being watchful and thankful (4:2)
- be wise in the way you act toward outsiders (4:5)

The sum of the Christian life is continuing to live in:

- faith in Christ Jesus (1:4, 2:5)
- love for all the saints (1:4)
- hope in what is stored up for us in heaven (1:5)

1.2 GROWTH GOALS

An image used repeatedly in Colossians is *growth*. This provides us with another way of expressing the purpose of Growth Groups—and a way of explaining their name.

Gospel growth

Paul rejoices in the growth and fruitfulness of the gospel (1:6). His commission is to proclaim Christ to everyone, including the Gentiles (1:24-29) and he can say that the gospel “has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven” (1:23). He calls for prayer for his world-wide mission and exhorts the Colossians to be wise in winning outsiders (4:2-6).

Christian groups are committed to the spread of the gospel. They are created by hearing the word of truth (1:5), so they naturally share in the gospel enterprise.² To evaluate our Growth Groups we should ask: Is the gospel reaching more people through our group?

Christian growth

The gospel grows and bears fruit by transforming people. We are to grow in the knowledge of God (1:10) and it is God who causes the body to grow, through connection with Christ the Head (2:19). Epaphras prays for growth towards maturity (4:12).

2 More on this in training topic 9: *Gospel growth through Growth Groups*.

Our goals for Christian growth can now be summarized:

- **to receive Christ as Lord**, which means personally knowing and trusting Christ:
 - all that he is, and
 - all that he has done.
- **to live with Christ as Lord**, which means:
 - remaining faithful—rejecting other lords and their religions, and
 - submitting to Christ in every sphere of life.

To evaluate our Growth Groups, we should ask:

- Are our group members receiving Christ as Lord?
- Are they living with Christ as Lord?