

“Launching Our Small Groups”

Scripture: Acts 2:42-47; John 15:5-17

Graphic: footprints, discipleship, mirror, mask, scales, hugs, map

Key Verse:

Ask them to: Get real...commit to joining a small group and be transformed...one step at a time...

1) Introduction

- a) The theme for this whole sermon series has been:
Discipleship...Transforming Lives One Step at a Time.
- b) And today, you get to take your first big step...
- c) When we take our first steps as toddlers, we begin a lifetime of walking. Those first few steps are pretty scary because we aren't quite sure what to expect...we aren't quite ready...we don't know where our legs will take us...
- d) For our small groups, making a commitment to be in a small group is kind of scary at first, but this morning, you will become more comfortable with the idea and then be given the opportunity to put your commitment on paper to join a small group.
- e) Now, the goal of this time this morning is not to make you feel bad if you're not sure you want to take that first step. The goal is to challenge us to grow as Christians and give us the opportunity for a way to do that in the context of our small groups.
- f) You may have some questions about the logistics about how these groups will work, when and where they will meet, and how they will be structured. Hopefully, in the next 15 minutes, all of your questions will be answered and your decision to be committed to a small group will be up to you and God.
- g) Now, I know that some of you are involved in other Christian groups that function like small groups...whether it's the Emmaus community, or one of our other ministry teams...these groups are certainly groups that have Christian growth as their mission, and that's great.
- h) What we are asking you to do today is ask yourself whether those groups are growing you as a mature Christian, increasing your intimacy with God, are

filled with accountable and committed Christians, and are hoping to grow the number of disciples in the group and in the kingdom.

- i) Through our equipping of our small group leaders, we are trusting that those things will be happening in our small groups...
- j) This morning, through all the logistics, and all the chaos of committing to a small group, my hope and trust is that we will hear and feel the voice and will of God for this church, for the leaders, and for you sitting here today.

2) Logistics

- a) Before we take one final look at the Biblical basis for our small groups and then hear from the small group leaders, I would like to explain some of the logistics regarding our small groups...I want all of us to be on the same page with the same information.
- b) In your bulletin, you will find an insert that has some great information about the small groups. This insert will assist you in making your initial decisions about committing to a small group.
- c) You'll see that there are 4 couples that have answered the call to use their spiritual gifts for leadership, teaching, and shepherding for the good of the congregation and to serve God.
- d) Each group will meet in the homes of these servants.
- e) These leaders have spent eight hours in small group leadership training and have been in prayer for how God will be using them in this way. We have also been in prayer that this morning's commitment time would be fruitful and God would work out all the details.
- f) Each small group will set its own schedule, but will meet every other week starting at the end of November. The group may decide to meet twice a month, maybe. Once the groups have met, adjustments to the schedules will be at the discretion of the group members and leaders.
- g) These groups will be an on-going part of the ministry of the church. By that, I mean, they will be continuous. This will free me and some others to offer short-term seasonal studies at different times. The initial four small groups will be on-going, year round.

- h) We hope to expand these four small groups to six or eight in the first two years. That being said, new members are welcome to join small groups at any time during the year. We will publicize in the Pathfinder changes in curriculum or Bible studies as we go so others can join at a convenient time if they wish. However, once you make a commitment to be in a group, you'll remain faithful to the group unless other circumstances arise.
- i) Each group will develop a covenant that the members of the group will commit to follow as they meet. This covenant includes a promise to be present faithfully, to call if you cannot be present, to engage in the group's fellowship, nurture, worship, and witness. It will include a promise to start and end on time, what type of studies will be offered, a commitment to provide for child care, and other things.
- j) Each group will have some provision for child care based on the needs of the group members and the leaders.
- k) Each group will have food! I see some of you have just decided to make this commitment!
- l) Each group will be resourced and continually guided by Al Ormond and me. The group leaders will meet once per month to equip each other, help and pray for each other, and give Al and me feedback about how things are going.
- m) As you can see on your insert, the days that the groups will be meeting covers Monday to Thursday evenings. The groups will meet for 1½ to 2 hours based on the wishes of the group.
- n) Because I don't want anyone's questions to go unanswered, does anyone have any other questions that I did not cover...

3) Small Group Leaders Speak

- a) I would like to have our four small group leader teams come up and say a few words each about their perspective and hopes for their groups...

4) Biblical Basis

- a) Acts 2:42-47...the early church was unsure about its future...but it was sure of one thing: they were growing and they needed to encourage each other in order to spread this incredible message of hope in Jesus Christ. They were

experiencing miracles and wonderful things; they were spending time in worship, fellowship, nurture, and witnessing to others.

- b) And God continued to add to their numbers...it's not so much adding physical numbers to the church...it's about growing spiritually so that others will be attracted to the Savior who is transforming you...and then growth in numbers will continue to occur here...

5) Conclusion and Sign-ups

- a) In John 15:5-17, Jesus puts this whole effort into perspective for us, as is the case so often in our Lord's words...Read John 15:5-17
- b) We, my friends, are called to bear fruit...and when we are grafted onto Jesus the Living Vine, we can begin to bear fruit. The marks of being a true disciple of Jesus are bearing that fruit and loving one another.
- c) We are called to confess our sin, examine ourselves, hold each other accountable, learn how to follow Jesus, and love each other...
- d) I can't think of a better place to do that than in our small groups...
- e) Jesus said, 'You did not choose me, I chose you.' He has called you name...and appointed you to bear fruit...
- f) Make a commitment to be part of what God is doing here...and watch the fruits grow and grow...
- g) As we move into a time of prayer and commissioning these leaders, I would like to give us a few instructions on how I would like this to work this morning. As we pray, I will ask you to pull out the commitment card from your bulletin and prayerfully consider your first and second choice for small groups to join. During the next week or so, the leaders will meet to organize the groups by your wishes as much as possible.
- h) After you have had time to consider your decisions, we will sing. During that singing, we will have the ushers come forward to receive our tithes and offerings. After the ushers have passed by your row, I would ask that you stand and bring your commitment card forward and place it in this basket. You may also pass the peace during that time.
- i) Once we are done, we will sing our response song and continue worshipping with our pastoral prayer...