

## Introduction to Small Groups

Many of us primarily think about engaging Scripture by ourselves during a “devotional” or “quiet time.” Spending time individually with God in His Word is critical to our spiritual growth, but the Bible is clear that we are part of God’s family, the church. As members of the Body of Christ, our spiritual growth is dependent on connecting with other parts of the Body - there should be no “solo” Christians. Engaging with Scripture with other believers is a key way to grow in our relationship with Christ.

Research done by the Canadian Bible Forum and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada reveals that Bible reading is largely a product of communities which value the Bible as a means by which God speaks to the individual. Their report states that having “conversations with others about the Bible” is one of three keys to spiritual formation. Similarly, research done by the Taylor University Center for Scripture Engagement finds that one of the key factors to having a Focus on the Bible (the Bible is central to who you are and what you do spiritually) is to talk about Bible passages with friends. The impact of Scripture on our lives is deeply enhanced as we engage with Scripture with others.

Small groups are one important means of engaging Scripture communally. Getting together in a small group reflects the discipleship methods Jesus used to lead his disciples. It also provides accountability between members in a direct and meaningful way, and ministries can employ small groups in such a way that all members are connected and cared for individually. Small groups are a wonderful way to teach people, by example, how to engage with Scripture. In regards to Scripture engagement practices, a few methods (e.g., storying, manuscript Bible study, and dramatizing), are naturally done in a small group setting. Other Scripture engagement practices, commonly done by individuals, can be retooled for small groups (e.g., handcopying, journaling, praying, memorizing).

Since Scripture engagement often leads to discovery, a small group can provide an outlet and sounding board for realizations new to the individual. When a person learns something new in the Scriptures these discoveries can be addressed in a small group setting where they can be 1) checked against the ideas and discoveries of other believers and 2) be nudged by the group toward application. Where a group member may struggle to connect the Bible to his or her life, other

group members can work together to provide guidance. In a small group each person can be encouraged by and benefit from the findings of others in areas of life where individuals might be blind. Since people have a tendency to read their own presumptions into the Biblical text, discussing Scripture in a group of people can help eliminate bias based on personal assumptions. It is humbling to have false assumption called into question by a fellow small group member, but a dose of humility is something all believers need from time to time.

Scripture engagement in a small group setting is about discipleship, which J.R. Briggs defines as “helping others get with Jesus more and resist Him less.” With God’s guidance, the blending of our “getting with Jesus more and resisting him less” will lead to spiritual formation - disciples more deeply in love with Jesus.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/scripture-engagement/main/small-group-introduction>

© Phil Collins, Ph.D., 2014. This material was created in partnership with the Taylor University Center for Scripture Engagement.