



Small Groups or Sunday School



What makes the difference?

1. **Relationships** – how close/deep are the relationships in your group? There is a direct and inverse relationship to the size of your group and the depth of the relationships in the group. The larger the group, the more shallow the relationships tend to be. Are we assisting our classes/groups with the task of developing transparent/authentic relationships?
2. **Discovery Learning** – how well are people able to *discover for themselves* as opposed to simply sitting and listening? Is there room for and do the group dynamics support **individual discovery of truth**? Or do individuals have a tendency to sit back and watch or listen as discussion goes on around them? Again, the inverse relationship seems to hold true. The larger the group, the more likely individuals are to remain silent. The goal of the group leader is not to study & learn and then regurgitate it all during group time. Rather, the group leader's job is to help the members discover that God's Word is a gold mine and give them the tools and training to be exceptional gold miners. Leaders can do this by asking questions and giving members time and tools to seek answers within God's Word during group meetings. Rather than just "*discussion*", where we throw around unsupported opinion, often shaped by unchristian worldviews, leaders should ensure that our discussions are informed and shaped by relevant scripture and a Christian worldview. Do the members of our classes/groups know how to find answers for real-life issues/challenges within the pages of their bible? Do they believe that their bible addresses today's issues with relevant answers? What a life-changing discovery *that* would be.
3. **Living out the faith** – in addition to discussion about application, what is your group doing about actually *being on mission*? Are they encouraging one another to live out their faith in mission projects on a regular basis? Do we seek to make our groups/classes accountable to do a minimum number of mission projects per year? Do we give them the tools/resources to do so?
4. **Accountability** – How well are smaller groups *within* your groups holding each other accountable, for spiritual growth, for discipline, etc? Does your group *support* the development of small 2-3 person accountability groups?
5. **Starting new groups** – when a group grows, (*Remember, all healthy living things grow...*), do they understand that there is a healthy point at which they *must* begin a new unit, or do your groups hoard members and resist the starting of new units? Does each group have a goal for starting a new unit?
6. **"Fishing" for new believers** – how well are your group members actively *seeking out unbelievers* to bring them into the group? If your group never has non-believers join the group, are we really accomplishing our stated goals for Sunday School &/or Small Groups? (Sunday School is supposed to be the evangelistic arm of the church, right? And the first task of the SS is to reach people for Christ and church membership. Small Groups are designed to make disciples. *See Mt 4:19 for a definition of disciples.*) Now, in reality, for most newcomers to your SS or small groups, this will not be their entry point. Almost all of them, at least in the *American* culture, will have come to a worship service or a special service such as a musical presentation, perhaps at the invitation of a friend, *and may have been attending for quite some time*. Their attendance at SS or a Small Group is typically only after they have finally decided to "*take the plunge*" and try it out. (See Ch. 18 of Larry Osborne's "*Sticky Church*" - *Why Cho's Model Didn't Work in Your Church.*)
7. **Raising up new leaders** – as part of all of the above, *every class or small group should be discovering and discipling new potential leaders*. To assist in organizational growth, but also to "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph 4:12, NIV says, "*to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...*"), we must constantly be about the task of looking for people's spiritual gifts and giving them opportunities to develop and exercise those gifts. Consider asking every leader to enlist and utilize an apprentice, to begin preparing that potential leader for service; a "*leader in training*". (However, avoid "*splitting*" groups or classes to start new ones. People *hate* it, it still doesn't *work*, and you'll end up with a *riot* on your hands. You *CAN*, however, raise up leaders and utilize *THEM* to begin *new* units. See chap. 15 in Osborne – "*Why Dividing Groups is a Dumb Idea*"). *For a great process for developing new leaders, see Ch. 4 in "Real Life Discipleship Training Manual", by Avery Willis, Jr., & Jim Putman – 3 Keys to making disciples – 1. An intentional leader 2. A relational environment, and 3. A reproducible process.*

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