

Small Talk

November 2009

Four Stories of Small Groups



A few months ago I was speaking with two couples in their thirties, who are now US citizens, but had been raised in foreign countries. One couple was from Brazil, and the other couple had grown up in Bulgaria. They became Christians in the years following

the fall of communism.

Both observed that in their countries of origin the church had been their life, and they often attended church meetings most days of the week. One of the women mentioned that because of her now busy American life, she found it difficult even to attend one small group meeting in the church.

The author, M. Scott Boren, in his upcoming book, *Missional Small Groups, Becoming a Community that Makes a Difference in the World*, explains why my friends are experiencing something different in the North American culture. He does this by describing four small group stories:

The first story is one of **personal improvement**. "In this story, individuals participate in group life because it is beneficial to them as persons." They enjoy the experience and what they are getting from the group while not much personal life change is required. They continue to participate as long as it fits their busy lives.

Lifestyle adjustment is the title for the second story. "In this story, the group is viewed as beneficial, and, therefore, the group members are willing to adjust their life schedules to prioritize attendance." While this is a significant shift, participants are not ready to go as far as "adjusting their lives to make room to work through relational issues within a group. As a result, they either quit attending or attend meetings but in a way that is disengaged, or they look for another group that meets their needs better."

Relational Re-vision - While the move from the first story to the second is easy, the move to the third 'story' is more difficult. This story describes the move from "me" to "we". "The fact is that habits of the average person in North America are so contrary to a life of mutual love and self-sacrifice that if a group does not choose to practice a distinctively Christian way of life, nothing radical or Kingdom-like will be experienced." In this story, participants deliberately begin to share life together.



Our gift to you. . . .

[A Christmas Lesson from the Old Testament](#)

By: Amy Brown and Diane Averill

Ways to Use the Christmas Bible Study

1. Put on some Christmas music, perhaps Handel's Messiah, and go through the lesson on your own.
2. Host a Christmas Bible Study for your neighbors and friends. Do the lesson during a Christmas Tea or cookie exchange.
3. If you have a relationship group that may be interested in the Bible, suggest that it tries a lesson on the "real" meaning of Christmas.
4. Use it as the last lesson before Christmas in your Coffee Break or small group.

Coming Soon....

You'll notice that the format of attached Christmas study is different from others we have used (in [Discover Your Bible](#) and [Discover Life](#) studies), and we hope you like it.

If you'd like to try a fresh, new format that we've developed with Faith Alive for the coming year, look for the new *Infuse* series, featuring a study of Esther and a study of Jonah (planned for early 2010). Another Infuse study, on the gospel book of Matthew, is planned for Fall 2010.

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www.crhm.org/smallgroups

Missional Re-Creation - In this story, groups not only "do life" but also do God's mission together. The "... group will explore new ways of creative existence. They will engage the neighborhood, determine needs, meet them, and, as a result, that experience will change how they exist as a group." Boren, M. Scott, *Missional Small Groups, Becoming a Community that Makes a Difference in the World*.

What is your story? When you imagine your small group or your church's small group ministry, do you think primarily of needs and wants? Or, are you dreaming of groups engaging in God's Kingdom purposes? Do you find it easy to resign from the group if there is a conflict in your schedule or plans? According to Boren, being a part of the third story, involves a type of "death" to ourselves and our desires. We begin to ask more difficult questions like how do I spend my time, talent and money. As we live into the "fourth story" we discover the joy and challenge of being who are called to be and partnering with God on His mission so that others might experience His love and presence.

What kind of story are you dreaming to be a part of? What might we do to help ourselves and others move into the fourth story? The truth is small groups, the church, and more so, the Christian life are not really something we "join"; rather, following Jesus is a lifestyle radically transformed by the Holy Spirit.



Leading Toward a New Story



Do you want to lead to a new story? Leading begins with a vision or imagination for what God can do through your group. Willow Creek has some great new small group training tools on their website at Church Communication Network. A presentation by Bill Donahue called "Developing Group Vision" would be especially helpful as you dream of leading to something new. It's free, and only a couple clicks away! Check it out!

<http://www.ccn.tv/programming/Groups-That-Grow-Videos.php>

Resources

[Word Alive Bible Studies](#): Abraham: Trusting the God Who Calls. The Abraham stories are at the root of our faith history. Find out how these ancient, inspired stories help us to understand our purpose in life and the God who calls us.

[Coming Home](#)

Now available! Just in time for Advent, this devotional beckons you to "come home"—to enter God's house, welcome our Savior, and look forward to his second coming.



Coffee Break Story

Jeanie Haggstrom was a gifted Story Hour teacher for several years at New Covenant CRC in Hampton, NH, so it was no surprise that when she and her husband moved away, they became involved in a full-time ministry to children.

Last fall, Jeanie contacted the regional Ministry Developer about beginning a Coffee Break with a group of women in the inner-city of Worcester, MA. She was a little apprehensive about teaching adults, but she knew God would help her.

After being trained over the phone and reviewing some material, Jeanie dove in. She began Coffee Break in her community and only two years later, three groups are meeting. They have also organized to meet the needs of the women involved. Transportation is provided for women who need it, lunch is served after the Bible study and clothing and other items are available for the women.

Jeanie recounts how women who have moved to other parts of Worcester now take a bus in order to continue coming. If they miss a lesson, they ask for the tear out sheet from the previous week.

Jeanie's ministry is also partnering with neighboring Christian Reformed Churches who help with staffing and providing food for this wonderful outreach ministry



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