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## T.I.M. TALKS

"Discipleship: Waking up to our Primary Calling"

"Location, Location, Location: Why Small Groups are Prime Spiritual Real Estate"

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Methlick Parish Church

## Introduction

### Theological Basis of Small Groups

- "The call [or pull] to human gathering in groups is a God-created (ontological) and God-directed (theological) ministry, birthed out of the very nature and purpose of God's being. God as Being exists in community. The natural and simple demonstration of God's communal image for humanity is the gathering of the small group."

Gareth, Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), p. 13.

- "God chose to embed in us a distinct kind of relational DNA. {He} created us all with a 'community gene,' an inborn, intentional, inescapable part of what it means to be human."

Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), p. 24.

- Genesis 1:26-27 (NRSV and *The Message*)

### Biblical Basis for Small Groups

- **Jesus' Ministry**

"Jesus invested 90% of his time with twelve Jewish men so that he could reach [the world]."  
– Eugene Peterson

"Let your home be a meeting place for the sages (that is wise teachers or rabbis as it was later understood) and cover yourself with the dust of their feet, and drink in their words with thirst." – Mishnah, *Abot* 1:4

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- **Jesus’ Ministry (Cont.)**

“May you follow [your Rabbi] so closely that the dust his feet kicks up is what cakes your clothing and lines your face” – Ray Vander Laan

- **The Early Church**

Acts 2:42-47 (NIV) – “42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Acts 5:42 (NIV) – “42 Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.”

## **Conclusion: Practical Tips for Small Groups**

1. Start here (personally)
2. Start where you are (size and location doesn’t matter)
3. Find a good curriculum, but context is even more important
4. Select and recruit good leaders to help lead small groups
5. Have fun!

## **Select Bibliography**

1. Donahue, Bill and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).
2. Gladen, Steve. *Small Groups with Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).
3. Icenogle, Gareth. *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994).

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Gareth Icenogle, “The Small Group Experience of the Twelve with Jesus,” in *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 192-193.

**Table Two**  
**The Small Group Experience of the Twelve with Jesus**

1. The group visited in the home of a group member (Mk 1:29).
2. Jesus healed a group member's relative (Mk 1:30-31).
3. The group searched for Jesus who wanted periods to be alone (Mk 1:35-37).
4. The group lived occasionally with Jesus in isolated places (Mk 1:45).
5. The group visited in the home of the socially unacceptable (Mk 2:15).
6. The group was questioned by officials about their activities and behavior (Mk 2:16).
7. The group lived under constant outside scrutiny and criticism (Mk 2:18).
8. The group was accused of breaking the Law (Mk 2:24).
9. The group was often pressed by large expecting crowds (Mk 3:7-10).
10. The group took up the message and ministry of Jesus (Mk 3:13-15).
11. The group often went hungry for lack of space or time to eat (Mk 3:20).
12. The group became the new family of Jesus (Mk 3:31-34).
13. The group was taught secrets that the crowd could not bear to hear (Mk 4:10).
14. The group often lived in danger and fear of the physical elements (Mk 4:37-38).
15. The group experienced the power of Jesus over the elements (Mk 4:39-41).
16. The group watched Jesus heal and exorcise evil spirits (Mk 5:1-13).
17. The group was asked to leave villages and regions (Mk 5:17).
18. The group shared in rigorous travel (Mk 5:21).
19. The group coped with Jesus' intense sense of reality (Mk 5:30-34).
20. The group saw Jesus rejected by his own home town and family (Mk 6:1-6).
21. Jesus sent the group out to heal and exorcise evil spirits (Mk 6:7-13).
22. The group reported back to Jesus about their ministry experiences (Mk 6:30).
23. The group was called away by Jesus to rest (Mk 6:31).
24. The group was asked to feed large crowds with few resources (Mk 6:37).
25. The group was sent out alone without Jesus (Mk 6:45).
26. The group was shocked by Jesus' surprising words and actions (Mk 6:49-50).
27. The group watched Jesus in conflict with religio-political leaders (Mk 7:5-12).
28. The group missed the point of Jesus' teaching (Mk 7:17-19).
29. The group served the crowd at the direction of Jesus (Mk 8:6-8).
30. The group entered into dialogue, discussion and questions with Jesus (Mk 8:16).
31. While the group traveled they discussed the identity and mission of Jesus (Mk 8:27).

32. The group was asked to keep the confidentiality of Jesus (Mk 8:30).
33. The group entered into conflict with Jesus, his purpose and direction (Mk 8:31-33).
34. The group sometimes failed to accomplish the ministry of Jesus (Mk 9:17-29).
35. The group asked Jesus for insight about how to do healing (Mk 9:28-29).
36. The group was often alone when taught by Jesus (Mk 9:30-31).
37. The group often misunderstood the teaching of Jesus (Mk 9:32).
38. The group argued about who was their best leader next to Jesus (Mk 9:33-34).
39. Jesus gave situational instruction to the group (Mk 9:35-37).
40. The group defended the ministry and mission of Jesus (Mk 9:38-41).
41. The group did theological reflection with Jesus (Mk 10:10).
42. Jesus and the group entered into conflict over their differing values (Mk 10:13-16).
43. The group often questioned the validity of Jesus' teaching (Mk 10:23-26).
44. The group was surprised with Jesus' direction (Mk 10:32).
45. The group entered into hostile jockeying for leadership positions (Mk 10:35-45).
46. Jesus directed group members to perform specific actions and words (Mk 11:1-6).
47. The group observed the power of Jesus' words to effect change (Mk 11:13-25).
48. The group participated in an observational learning process with Jesus (Mk 12:41-44).
49. The group practiced observation and reflection with Jesus (Mk 13:1-4).
50. One of the group plotted to undermine Jesus' leadership (Mk 14:10-11).
51. The group prepared for and participated in special celebrations (Mk 14:12-16).
52. The group regularly ate together (Mk 14:18).
53. Jesus confronted the group with the truth about themselves and the world (Mk 14:18-21).
54. Jesus led the group through the meaning of their experiences together (Mk 14:22-25).
55. The group sang together (Mk 14:26).
56. Jesus confronted the group with their lack of loyalty and faithfulness (Mk 14:27-31).
57. The group struggled with Jesus in the midst of his great sorrow (Mk 14:32-34).
58. The group fell asleep in the face of Jesus' most difficult emotional pain (Mk 14:35-41).
59. The group fought with governing authorities on Jesus' behalf (Mk 14:43-48).
60. The group deserted Jesus when he was arrested (Mk 14:50-72).
61. The dispersed group heard from women that Jesus had risen from the dead (Mk 16:7).
63. Jesus gave away authority and power to the group when he left them (Mk 16:15-20).
64. Jesus continued to be present with the group by the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8).

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Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 211.



## Appendix 1

# Willow Creek Small Group Facts at a Glance

Note: Our structure is patterned after the “Meta-Church” model as described in the book *Prepare Your Church for the Future* by Carl George (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).

<b>Size of Groups</b>	Approximately 4–10 people with an average of about 8 (groups that get bigger than ten eventually birth into two or more daughter groups)
<b>Leadership of Groups</b>	Trained lay leader and an apprentice leader (apprentice leaders are preparing to lead their own group someday)
<b>Frequency of Meetings</b>	Some monthly; most 2–3 times per month; many others (especially task groups) meet weekly
<b>Curriculum</b>	Leaders and members decide (some popular examples: The Serendipity Bible, the New Community series, Bible 101, the Walking with God series, the Interactions Series, and Tough Questions)
<b>Location</b>	Varies, although most meet in homes; some rotate, some remain in one home; members decide who will host the meeting(s)
<b>Duration</b>	Depends on purpose; many recovery groups last 9 weeks; kids groups last for the school year; adult groups last 3–5 years, depending on whether they birth a new group
<b>Attendees</b>	Most groups are “open” (that is, they have a core membership but encourage the use of the “open chair” to allow for newcomers)
<b>Types of Small Groups</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Age/stage-based (couples, singles, men’s, women’s, children, youth)</li> <li>▪ Task-based (groups that meet around the fulfillment of a task or volunteer ministry)</li> <li>▪ Interest-based (seeker groups designed for nonbelievers to investigate the faith, other interests)</li> <li>▪ Care-based (such as AA, ACOA, grief recovery, divorce recovery)</li> </ul>
<b>Oversight of Groups</b>	All group leaders have a lay “coach,” who oversees up to five groups; coaches are led by a staff “division leader,” who shepherds up to ten coaches
<b>Statistics</b>	2,700 groups, approximately 18,000 people in groups; approximately 3,500 leaders and coaches

(as of 31/05/01)