**How to Make The Best Men’s Small Group**

**[November 18, 2019](https://maninthemirror.org/2019/11/18/how-to-make-the-best-mens-small-group/)***in*[**Equipping Men Blog**](https://maninthemirror.org/category/equipping-men/)

Patrick Morley shared, “Few things have changed my life like the small groups I have been in over the last 30 years. The most intense learning, growth, sharing, encouragement, accountability, prayer, and fellowship I’ve experienced has taken place in small groups.”

However, the reality is that most men’s small groups stall out. Ironically, the same small group that can bring about great change is also fragile to sustain.

We want to show you how small groups can play a critical role in your mission to make [disciples](https://maninthemirror.org/2019/01/21/what-is-a-disciple/), as you’re [creating value](https://maninthemirror.org/2019/05/06/overcoming-spiritual-inertia/), [capturing momentum](https://maninthemirror.org/2019/07/08/the-next-step-mindset/), and [sustaining change](https://maninthemirror.org/2019/08/05/the-key-to-sustaining-momentum-in-the-long-term/) in your ministry.

**The Case: Why Small Groups?**

Jesus used a small group to create momentum. Think about it: **Jesus launched His divine plan to redeem mankind by making disciples out of a small group.** Amazing! The question, of course, is why would He do that? Why a small group?

Jesus knew that most meaningful change takes place in the context of small-group relationships—men sharpening men with truth, encouraging each other for the daily battle, and sticking with each other over the long haul.

Small groups date to the 17th century, when Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), the father of German Pietism, initiated a series of reforms. Central to his method was the collegia pietatis—”small groups” for Bible study, prayer, and intimacy—intended to renew a staid and arid church.

Even secularists understand the value of small groups. Anthropologist Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt the power of a small group of people to change the world. That’s about the only way it has ever happened in the past.”

Today, despite the “gospel saturation” in America, fewer than a tenth of men are involved in any kind of ongoing discipleship. The main method of Jesus has fallen into disuse—it has lost momentum.

That is tragic, because the top mission of Christian service is to make disciples. Often we are so busy treating symptoms—marital problems, wayward children, gossip, ethical failures, apathy, backbiting, etc.—that we never treat the root disease.

It’s like treating cancer with morphine. It takes away the pain for a moment, but does nothing to cure the patient. God wants to bring men to full maturity in Christ, and making small groups a core value of your ministry is one of the most effective tools at your disposal to accomplish this.

**Forming Your Group**

**1. First, make a list of men you might like to have in your group.** Figure you need to ask two men for every slot in your group. Pray over their names. Ask God to give you names you might not ordinarily think of, even outside of your church.

**2. Next, decide what kind of group you want to lead.** You *could* wait and make a group decision, but it will likely fall apart. Leaders lead—and men like that.

There are many different types of small groups (after each type I have offered a suggested size, but this is an art, not a science): *Bible Studies* (6 to 12 men—remember, 12 is a number that’s been successfully used before); *Discussion Groups* (4 to 8 men); *Support Groups*: specific issues like addictions (6 to 12 men); *Prayer Groups* (2 to 6 men); *Accountability Groups* (4 men); *Fellowship Groups* (2 to 8 men); *Mentoring Groups* (2 to 4 men); and *Mission Groups*: service projects (5 or more men).

**3. Decide when and where you want to meet.** There is no perfect day and time for a small-group meeting; it will largely depend on your men. For example, if you have a lot of businessmen who travel, Friday mornings are good because most men try to be back in town by then, and it’s often a catch-up day. If you are targeting younger men in their 20s, an evening usually works better than early morning. For men with young families, Saturdays are a challenge. Consider asking any men on your list who have already expressed interest what days and times work best for them, but be prepared to have one or two suggestions, rather than leaving it open ended.

For location, someone’s home or the church often works best due to minimal distractions. But a coffee shop or restaurant with outdoor seating can also work well for a smaller group.

**4. Next, invite the men to an informational meeting to discuss the small group.**Pick the time, place, and stick to one hour. As you invite them…

* DO explain to the men what you are trying to accomplish and why.
* DON’T ask for a long-term commitment right away.
* DO tell them you will initially meet for 4, 6, or 8 weeks (pick a number); then decide as a group where to go from there.
* DO graciously let men decline your offer.

**The First Meeting**

The first meeting is informational…

* Have refreshments available, such as coffee and donuts for a morning meeting or cokes and cookies for the evening. Plan to meet for at least one hour but no more than 1 1/2 hours.
* Start on time and open with a brief prayer.
* For 10 minutes: Mention (again) your purpose for wanting to start a small group. Give the men an opportunity to comment or ask questions about your stated purpose. They will appreciate being asked and feel a stronger sense of ownership.
* Next 40 minutes: Depending on how many men you have, ask each man to take 3 to 5 minutes to share briefly where he is on his spiritual journey today, and what he hopes to “give and get” from the group. (There are no wrong answers! Each man should feel welcome to come as-is.)
* 5 minutes: Inspire them with your vision for the group. Encourage the men. Don’t go too far too fast. Be sensitive that most men will not jump in until they have tested the waters for a few weeks (or months).
* Last 5 minutes: Pass out materials for the kick-off meeting.

**Selecting Material**

You should aim for heart-oriented resources that help men open up through discussion and get into the Word of God. Here are a few suggestions from our ministry!

**Bible Studies:** If you have the time, aptitude, and interest, you can develop your own curriculum. If not, try the weekly [Man in the Mirror Video Bible Study](http://www.mimbiblestudy.com/). You can get it for FREE online and choose from more than 45 different series on everything from marriage to the spiritual disciplines. Download and print the corresponding handout, watch or listen to the message, and then discuss the questions. [See a Table Leader Job Description, register as a Small Group Leader](https://mimbiblestudy.com/start-a-bible-study/), and more.

**Book Studies:** One of the most effective ways to start a small group is to study a book with open-ended discussion questions in each chapter. We offer [books by Patrick Morley](http://resourcesformen.org/our-books-on-amazon/) that are ideal for small-group use, such as [The Christian Man](https://maninthemirror.org/the-christian-man/). You can also find certain titles, like How God Makes Men and The Man in the Mirror, for less than $2 each in our [Books by the Box](http://booksbythebox.org/) program.

**Workbooks:** Man in the Mirror offers [six-week study workbooks](https://resourcesformen.org/product-category/small-group-curriculum/?orderby=popularity) for small groups, designed to be an easy “next step” for any man to take in his spiritual journey. Each workbook comes with discussion questions to make your job as easy as possible!

**Devotional App:** We publish daily devotionals for men on our*MIM Devotions for Men* smartphone app. You can [find more information and links to download it here](http://resourcesformen.org/mim-devotions-men-app/).

**Accountability Groups:** Order wallet-sized [Accountability Cards](https://resourcesformen.org/product/accountability-check-up-cards-100-copies/) (with free shipping) to help 2-4 men connect weekly about how they are doing in the various areas of their lives.

**Leading An Effective Discussion**

Here are some hard-learned lessons about leading an effective discussion…

* **Your goal as facilitator: Air time for every man every week.**
* You should draw out the quiet man without making him feel uncomfortable. Sense his pace. Privately ask the man who talks too much to help you draw out the other men.
* Don’t talk more than 25% of the time. If there is silence when you ask a question, don’t try to fill the space.
* Ask open-ended questions, not ones that can be answered, “Yes,” or “No.” Instead of asking, “Do you struggle with making good decisions?” ask “What kind of decisions do you find difficult, and why?”
* Stress the importance of confidentiality among the guys, and lead by example.
* Call or text your men each week (on the day before, to remind them of your meeting). **This is a make or break point.**
* After your group is established, host a couples’ social outing, as well as a fun activity for the men.
* Spend 3-5 hours per week on your personal ministry, including group time (phone calls, personal visits, counseling men, reviewing the material, etc.). Take each man to lunch once a year.
* **Let your credo be: Long term, low pressure.** A small group is many things, including a hospital for men with broken wings. Make yours a safe place for men. Do not put pressure on men to conform to certain behavior. Instead, [show men Christ](https://maninthemirror.org/2019/08/19/show-men-christ-dont-fix-their-behavior/).
* If you are a marketplace small group, encourage your men to be actively involved in a Bible-believing church.

**FREE RESOURCE FOR CHURCH LEADERS:**[Click here to download a PDF handout](https://maninthemirror.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2019/11/HANDOUT_Facilitating-a-Small-Group.pdf) to help equip your small-group leaders. This two-page handout should be printed on one page, two-sided, and distributed at a leader meeting.

**What Makes A Group Last?**

Value is what makes a group last. Every time a man shows up, he has decided not to do something else. Most men have many choices, so your small group has to meet  both their real and felt needs or it won’t last.

So what do men find valuable? Life can be brutal. Every day men must manage their lives against the Fall. Because life is so hard, men need to be encouraged. They need a hug from God. They need the human touch. And this, while wearing the skin of a loner.

The mega-answer? Care. Caring greases the create-capture-sustain engine of discipleship. **Men will come if they sense you really care about them.** If they don’t, they will eventually drift away—but rarely tell you why.

You will know you have succeeded when you hear men saying things like, “I really feel like my group cares about me personally,” “The leader makes sure I get a chance to air my thoughts,” and “I cannot believe how my life is changing.”

*(A version of this article written by Patrick Morley was first published 10 years ago and then re-posted in 2013. Since it is as relevant a topic as ever, we’re re-posting it here with minor edits.)*

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