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Small Groups = BIG Priority

By Dave Earley

Everyone in our small group leaders training session had been instructed to introduce themselves to five people before they sat down. Tony sheepishly extended his hand to me and with some embarrassment said, "My name is Tony. I am just a small group leader here."

I looked him in the eye as I shook his hand. I smiled and replied, "There is no such thing as *just* a small group leader. In God's eyes, small groups are a *big* priority and so are small group leaders."

We Need Each Other

The heart cry of every human and the lifestyle of every follower of Jesus Christ is an overwhelming need for community. Christian community is essential to us because we were created to work together. The Apostle Paul's favorite term for the church was "the body of Christ." He emphasized that no single part could survive on its own. Every part relied on the others. In 1 Corinthians 12:21, he wrote, "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'"

Living a life of isolation has damaging results. Loneliness has been called the most devastating illness of our day. Phil Zambaro, a Stanford University professor writes,

"I know of no more potent killer than isolation. There is no more destructive influence on the physical and mental health than isolation of you from me and us from them. It has been known to be the central agent in the etiology of depression, paranoid schizophrenia, rape, suicide, mass murder, and a wide variety of diseases."¹

Our Relational DNA

Our hunger for relationships is an identifying mark of our humanity. Small group experts Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson write, "God chose to embed in us a distinct kind of DNA. God created us all with a 'communal gene,' an inborn, intentional, inescapable part of what it means to be human." They continue,

This relational DNA or "community gene" helps explain why churches need small groups. People don't come to church simply to satisfy spiritual needs. They come internally wired with a desire for connection ... their hunger for togetherness is an inescapable mark of humanity."²

What better way to scratch this human itch and fill this gaping need for community than through an effective small group? Learning to lead a small group where people move from isolation to connection and from loneliness to love is one of the greatest ministries on the planet!

Make no mistake about it. Your small group is a big priority. It has the power to create community and connectedness. It can foster real fellowship. Biblical fellowship involves participating in life with others to the point of knowing

them, feeling their hurts, sharing their joys, and encouraging their hearts. Chuck Swindoll describes what happens when real fellowship occurs. “Fences come down. Masks come off. Welcome signs are hung outside the door. Keys to the doors of our lives are duplicated and distributed. Joys and sorrows are shared.” 3

First things first

The first thing every small group leader should know is that their small group is a BIG priority. It is vitally important. Being asked to lead a small group is one of the greatest privileges on the planet. Don’t take it lightly or think yourself lowly like the young man I met at that training event. Value the opportunity and prioritize it in your schedule.

Remember: Your small group is a very big priority to God.

Notes:

1. Charles Swindoll *Dropping Your Guard*, Waco TX, WORD, Incorporated, 1983, 22
 - 2, Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups*, Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 2001, 24
 3. Swindoll, *Dropping Your Guard*, 22
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Dr. Dave Earley is an experienced pastor, small group leader, church planter and coach. He serves as the Director of the Liberty Center for Church Planting at Liberty University. He is also Chairman of the Department of Pastoral Leadership and Church Planting for Liberty Theological Seminary. He has authored ten books on subjects such as small groups, leadership, prayer, and the Christian life. www.daveearley.com This article is an excerpt from his new book (w/ Rod Dempsey) *The Pocket Guide to Leading a Small Group: 52 Ways to Help You and Your Small Group Grow*.