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JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Resetting Foundations. Congregational Training for the Small Group Ministry: An Action
Research to Correct Intent, Cultivate Community, and Grow Spiritually**

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in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Small group ministry is crucial for the health and well-being of the church. The problem this DMIN action research sought to address was that Valley Gate Church did not grasp the purpose of small group ministry due to not implementing small groups with well-defined intent. Valley Gate Church is a church plant that launched in 2016. This DMIN action research aimed to create and implement a six-week congregational training to develop small group leaders and members at Valley Gate Church. Twenty-two participants were involved in the entire six-week training. All participants took a pre- and post-training assessment consisting of surveys, questionnaires, and open-ended questions. This researcher also interviewed six participants. The goal was to assess participants' outlook on small group ministry and see how this foundational training would build upon that knowledge to lay a clear intent regarding small group ministry. The research methods employed were content analysis and thematic analysis. In the end, there was a positive correlation with post-training participants reporting being highly motivated to be active participants in future small groups, and the majority strongly agreed that they now understood the overall intent behind small groups. The training proved successful in participants' understanding that the two overarching themes of small groups are cultivating community and spiritual growth, and this DMIN action research is needed in the ministry field to help any congregation reset and build the necessary foundations for this vital ministry.

Keywords: small group, community, spiritual growth, discipleship, foundations, healthy groups, life groups

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
IRB	<i>Institutional Review Board</i>
P#	<i>Participant Number</i>
Q#	<i>Question Number</i>
VGC	<i>Valley Gate Church</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Church plants have all kinds of hurdles to endure—finances, volunteers, securing a building, and establishing ministries are just a few barriers. Churches that plant and build upon faulty foundations or never set the intent for specific ministries will establish flawed norms. Once routines are established, then damaged foundations become the standard. Hence, pastors must launch every ministry with proper intent. The target ministry addressed in this research is the small group ministry. Small groups create an environment where a believer's faith and the lives of other Christians collide. As a result of these small groups, two primary byproducts emerge—*community* and *spiritual growth*. Themes of discipleship, accountability, sanctification, and unity are lived out consistently. Community and spiritual growth do not occur by attending a Sunday service, hearing a sermon, and leaving the church building. Thus, the problem addressed in this DMIN action research is that Valley Gate Church does not grasp the purpose of small group ministry due to not implementing small groups with well-defined intent.

Valley Gate Church is in Tempe, Arizona's bustling, transient city. The ministry context will investigate the population of Tempe, its religious makeup, and the city's culture. Challenges occur when one recognizes that 60.8% of the Phoenix population claim no affiliation to any religious conviction as these individuals are atheist, agnostic, or claim no religion.¹ The ministry context will also explore this researcher's link with Valley Gate Church. Current small groups at Valley Gate Church are lacking; to some, fellowshiping outside of a Sunday service in the form of a small group is foreign. Through this DMIN action research, this researcher seeks to create

¹ Dwellics, "Tempe, Arizona," accessed February 12, 2023, <https://dwellics.com/arizona/moving-to-tempe>

and implement a six-week congregational training to develop small group leaders and members at Valley Gate Church.

Specifically, the six-week congregational training will help the church's small groups have a clear direction, cultivate a strong community, and grow spiritually. Repeatedly, Acts 2:42-47 frequently references why churches carry out small groups. Some basic assumptions and definitions will be needed to define the terms of the project, which will also include this researcher's presuppositions that govern the inquiry. The DMIN action research limitations and delimitations will highlight the boundaries and researcher-driven constraints. Finally, the literature review will work as a tapestry to establish how each cited work supports this researcher's thesis and seeks to develop the theme of *correcting intent*, building a *strong community*, and establishing *spiritual growth*. Small groups are a vital aspect of a healthy church. The following section will provide a snapshot of the ministry environment of Valley Gate Church.

Ministry Context

Valley Gate Church had its humble beginnings in 2016 when it officially launched. The senior pastor at Valley Gate Church, Pastor Darryl Morrison, is a native of Phoenix, Arizona, and he and his wife had been away from Arizona for more than 20 years. Darryl and JoAnn sowed into a calling from God to return to Arizona. That became a reality in the fall of 2015. The call to plant uprooted Pastor Darryl, JoAnn, their five children, and a small team of 20 people from their sending church in Washington, DC, called Grace Covenant Church, and they all headed to Arizona. Pastor Darryl is still spiritually supported by the senior pastor at Grace Covenant Church in Washington, DC. Both Valley Gate Church and Grace Covenant Church belong to a global family of churches called Every Nation Ministries. Pastors from the Every

Nation Ministries churches in DC, Virginia, and other states have come to support, and guest speak at Valley Gate Church.

Every Nation Ministries is a non-denominational, evangelical ministry focusing on world missions, church planting, and campus ministry. At the time of this research, Every Nation Ministries has established 466 churches globally, 119 active church plants, and 1,076 university campus ministries.² The local ministry context from which this DMIN action research project will commence is with the congregation of Valley Gate Church. This researcher is a small group leader, usher, and team champion within the church. In the fall of 2021, the church rebranded its mission statement, and in the fall of 2022, Pastor Darryl had the church revisit the mission of Valley Gate Church in a recent sermon series. The mission of Valley Gate Church is to “Love God, Live for Him, and Lead people to Christ.” This ministry context section will spend time developing a framework for the church by examining the region’s demographics and the church, crafting a snapshot of the religious landscape, and diving into the church’s ministries.

Demographics

Valley Gate Church is located in Tempe, Arizona, but very closely borders the larger city of Phoenix, Arizona. Tempe is a suburb of Phoenix and shares borders with other cities in Arizona, such as Mesa, Chandler, Guadalupe, and Scottsdale. Valley Gate Church is precisely one mile away from the Phoenix border. According to the July 2021 population data from the US Census Bureau, Tempe has 184,118 people.³ The racial makeup of Tempe is 64.1% White, 7.4% Black, 8.7% Asian, 9.4% two or more races, 7.6% other races, 2.4% Native American, and 0.4%

² Every Nation, “Every Nation Homepage,” accessed February 7, 2023, <https://www.everynation.org/>

³ US Census Bureau, “Quickfacts Tempe City Arizona,” accessed February 12, 2023, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/tempecityarizona>

Pacific Islander.⁴ This demographic of Tempe similarly mirrors the demographic makeup of the larger bordering city of Phoenix. Of the Tempe population, 23.1% claim to be Hispanic, while 76.9% declare non-Hispanic.⁵ The age spread of those that reside in Tempe, beginning with the youngest to the eldest, are 18-24 years old (22.2%), 25-44 years old (34.1%), 46-64 years old (18.4%), and >65 years old (10.8%).⁶ Interestingly, Tempe's racial demographics differ from Valley Gate Church's.

Since its inception in 2016, Valley Gate Church has grown from a team of 20 to a membership of 150 congregants. The average Sunday attendance is around 230 persons. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the average Sunday attendance was nearing 300 people. Undoubtedly, the pandemic deterred much of the church's momentum as social interactions collapsed and isolation protocols were in place.⁷ Fortunately, in the summer of 2021, the church resumed its face-to-face services, and in the fall of 2021, Valley Gate Church officially re-launched its small group platform. Later in this ministry context section, this researcher will dive into various ministries held at the church, including its small groups. Valley Gate Church's racial makeup is about 63% Black, 17% Native American, 11% White, 5% Hispanic, and 4% Asian/Pacific Islanders. The racial makeup differs from Tempe's, yet the church strives to be multiethnic. In a study of several churches from 1998 to 2019 in the US, data was pulled from the National Congregations Study during that same period, and it was shown that the racial diversity among

⁴ US Census Bureau, "Quickfacts Tempe City Arizona."

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Dwellics, "Tempe, Arizona."

⁷ Gershwin F. Grant, "Understanding an Urban Black Worldview: A Phenomenological Examination of 2020," (DMin diss., Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity, 2023), 35-37.

US congregations has increased across those two decades.⁸ Specifically, Evangelical Protestants, Pentecostal Protestants, Catholics, and Mainline Protestants have all increased in having multiracial congregations where no more than 80% of one racial group makes up the congregation.⁹

There are more African American attendees, and this researcher has heard this is one reason people attend VGC because of its slant towards being predominately African American. In a fascinating article about architecture, Christopher Hunter traced the beginnings of the African American church from the time African-Americans began organizing their congregations and claimed that a driving force behind the construction of these churches was the fact that people of color were able to create a sacred space with the ability to control and self-determine themselves.¹⁰ Church members and attendees find solace in a multiethnic church where the senior pastor and most of the congregation are African American. The church's demographic reflects a different majority demographic from the surrounding city. Yet, Every Nation churches across the globe strive to be multiethnic and multi-generational. Although Valley Gate Church is predominately African American, in a landscape that is predominantly Caucasian, the church has more ethnic diversity than the surrounding city of Tempe.

Church members come to Valley Gate Church from surrounding cities like Gilbert, Mesa, Guadalupe, and Phoenix. Yet, some who live in Peoria, Glendale, or Queen Creek may make 40-50 minute commutes on a typical Sunday. What is likely drawing these individuals to the church, aside from a great pastor, genuine people, an active children's ministry, and upbeat worship, is

⁸ Michael Emerson, Kevin D. Dougherty, and Mark Chavez, "Racial Diversity in U.S. Congregations, 1998-2019," *Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion* 59, no. 4 (October 16, 2020): 655-658.

⁹ Ibid., 656.

¹⁰ Christopher Hunter, "The African American Church House: A Phenomenological Inquiry of an Afrocentric Sacred Space," *Religions* 13, no. 246 (2022): 1-2.

attributed to the racial makeup of Valley Gate Church leaning towards being predominately African American. The senior pastor indicated that there is a draw for African American people to naturally find community in a backdrop that is predominantly Caucasian. The church's small group pastor, Pastor Vincent Dinh, is of Vietnamese descent, and the senior pastor, Pastor Darryl Morrison, is African American. One article examining black church leaders claims they must be politically savvy, understand how to operate a church, manage staff, and handle the members' and community's physical and emotional needs.¹¹ Having gone to seminary, one who is involved in the community, and as a native of Arizona, Pastor Darryl does well to embody those traits.

As of February 2023, an average of 230 individuals attends Sunday's in-person service, while typically, 10 individuals attend Sunday's online service. The online service is offered simultaneously with the in-person service. As of April 2023, two church services are offered on a Sunday morning. The secondary church service was established to make room in the sanctuary for growth as consistent numbers tipping over 230 individuals made the sanctuary feel too crowded. The age spread of Valley Gate Church closely reflects Tempe, as the church has a healthy mix of young children, older youth, college-age attendees, professional-aged adults, and those above 65 years old. Discussing the demographics of Tempe and Valley Gate Church is important, but painting a picture of the Tempe religious environment would also be essential to understanding the ministry context.

¹¹ Traci L. Hodges, Michael L. Rowland, and E. Paulette Isaac-Savage, "Black Males in Black Churches," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2016, no. 150 (June 2016): 53.

Religious Landscape

According to an analytics data collection company called Dwellics, about one-third of the religious composition of the adults in Tempe claim to be Christian, or 37.3%, to be precise.¹² Of this 37.3% Christian demographic, 16.9% are evangelical Protestant, 13.6% are Catholic, 6.4% are Mormons, and 0.4% are Orthodox.¹³ Although 37.3% claim to be Christian, it is reported that 0.4% are Jewish, 0.2% are Muslim, 0.3% are Buddhist, 0.8% are Hindu, and 0.2% are other/non-Christian.¹⁴ Hence the remaining 60.8% of Tempe's population either denies affiliation to any religion or does not know what to believe. As was stated at the beginning of this ministry context section, Valley Gate Church falls under the umbrella of the ministry organization called Every Nation Ministries. Every Nation is a charismatic, non-denominational movement. Among all the churches in the world, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches are the fastest growing.¹⁵ Thus, as evidenced by the religious landscape data of Tempe given above, the city is mainly unchurched, meaning that the harvest is ripe. While Valley Gate Church is technically non-denominational, it would be wise to look at the religious makeup of Valley Gate Church congregants.

The church is a melting pot of people who come from various backgrounds. Some of the church came from a Pentecostal denomination called Church of God in Christ, a charismatic denomination primarily consisting of African-American members. However, some congregants from other evangelical faiths, such as Baptists, have found their home at Valley Gate Church. Two predominant African American churches in South Phoenix underwent new pastoral

¹² Dwellics, "Tempe, Arizona."

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Teresa Chai, "Pentecostalism in Mission and Evangelism Today," *International review of mission*. 107, no. 1 (2018): 129.

leadership, causing those members to look for new homes. The First Institutional Baptist Church and the Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church have been sources of their members finding their homes at Valley Gate Church. Although the congregants who came from these other churches are dominant, many Valley Gate Church congregants did not have a religious affiliation and came to know God in their adult years of life. This is what is most interesting about Valley Gate Church. Pastor Darryl says that many of those who come to Valley Gate Church do not have an extensive idea of what church is or what church community looks like, and even the small group concept is foreign to some.

Valley Gate Church has a unique makeup of people who have grown up with the senior pastor and people who love sports. At least six families have grown up with Pastor Darryl since childhood; two are his biological family. In addition to these childhood dynamics, at least three families have ties to professional sports. The senior pastor used to play professional football in the National Football League. There are two other professional football retirees in the congregation as well. In 2022, Pastor Darryl became the Arizona Cardinals' team chaplain. This new chaplain role has not impacted the church's growth or small group ministry, as only a handful of the team's members have visited the church. It is thought that this may open doors to also reach and disciple professional athletes.

Valley Gate Church has been dealing with a melting pot of individuals from different evangelical faiths finding their homes at Valley Gate Church. It is not to say that Valley Gate Church does not adhere to a statement of faith; it does. Valley Gate Church and all 466 global Every Nation Ministry churches adhere to the same statement of faith as recorded in the World Evangelical Alliance Statement of Faith.¹⁶ The organizational structure consists of leadership

¹⁶ Every Nation, "Statement of Faith," accessed February 12, 2023. <https://www.everynation.org/statement-of-faith/>

from the senior pastor and his wife, who provide the majority of the ministry direction, followed by a staff of five which includes an associate pastor and his wife. There are then various ministry team champions over different ministries at the church—the church’s lay leaders. Team champions are over ministries such as ushers, hospitality, worship, prayer, children’s ministry, cash/count, media, and sound.

Church Ministries

An effective way to be an active church body with sustainable spiritual growth is to assemble church members in small groups.¹⁷ In the spring of 2023, Valley Gate Church celebrated its seventh anniversary. Three weekly ministries meet at the church—the youth, Celebrate Recovery, and the young adults. The men’s ministry, women’s ministry, marriage, and most small groups are seasonal. Having seasonal small groups means they meet from February to May in the spring and from August to November in the fall. When small group ministries are not in session, group/ministry leaders are encouraged to connect with people from their group. This connection is geared towards forming intentional relationships with individuals already associated with their group. Having served in other churches, this researcher is used to small groups that continue throughout the calendar year. Groups would also run during holidays and look for ways to spend special occasions with group members. Therefore, the senior and associate pastor blessed the desire for this researcher and his wife to continue their 2022 small group without any breaks. This ministry context section sought to paint a picture of the landscape of Phoenix and Valley Gate Church to support the assertion of the problem.

¹⁷ Joe Mack Easterling, “Big Things Start Small: A Survey of the Role of Small Groups in Christianity’s Major Spiritual Awakenings,” (PhD diss., Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity, 2020), 140.

Problem Presented

Finding its roots in Phoenix, Arizona, in 2016 has been a blessing and a challenge for Valley Gate Church. After being launched from Grace Covenant in Washington, DC, Valley Gate has sought to establish itself with its own identity. The church plant would not be known as “Grace Covenant Phoenix” but Valley Gate Church. Thus, it must establish itself in the community, learn the Phoenix culture, build community partners, and establish its various ministries. The senior pastor, Darryl Morrison, shared with this researcher that there could be several areas to focus a DMIN action research project. Yet, Pastor Darryl indicated that small group ministry would be the primary aim. When Valley Gate Church established itself in the Tempe/Phoenix area, it never fully developed a plan for how the church would accomplish its small group ministry.

Several reasons were identified for never having a fully developed plan for small group ministry during the church’s launch. Some of the highlights that shed light upon the problem are: 1) the team that was sent from Grace Covenant in Washington, DC had a negative view of small group ministry because most of the groups from the sending church took on the personality of one staff member, 2) the small group ministry was never implemented right away by the senior pastor and the leadership team, 3) there was no buy-in from the team to meet together in a small group style, 4) the new church converts from Phoenix were not keen with meeting with others as many were experiencing Christ and the Church for the first time—they were still building trust, and 5) the team from DC also did not fully understand the culture of Phoenix.

The original problem direction this researcher was taking this DMIN research project was with an aim solely on the leadership development of a small group leader. However, after speaking with Pastor Darryl about the history behind the launch, the current state of the small

group ministry, and the events that led up until now, it was felt that the direction needed to focus on developing small group leaders and congregants at Valley Gate Church. Dr. Tim Sensing indicates four puzzles with four corresponding frameworks for addressing a ministry context problem.¹⁸ This researcher will adopt Sensing's developmental puzzle with a cultural framework to understand how the congregation's identity came to be and impart direction by addressing the church's small group ministry problem. Therefore, the problem is that Valley Gate Church does not grasp the purpose of small group ministry due to not implementing small groups with well-defined intent.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research is to create and implement a six-week congregational training to develop small group leaders and members at Valley Gate Church. The three main themes that emerged from the purpose of small group ministry are correcting intent, cultivating a strong community, and growing spiritually. Thus, this thesis project will develop research-driven congregational training focusing on correcting intent and building a more successful small group ministry. Since the church's inception, Pastor Darryl indicated that what he has instituted was a version of small groups, but it was without a clear intent. Not all the groups are on the same accord, nor has every group been given the same assignment or direction. At the end of 2018, Valley Gate Church brought on an associate small group pastor from their sending church in DC, Pastor Vincent Dinh. However, roughly a year after Pastor Vincent and his family settled into their new ministry at Valley Gate Church, the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic gripped the world. The pandemic caused a sizeable amount of fear and reluctance for the church to be willing to meet with each other for face-to-face fellowship. Therefore,

¹⁸ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 18.

combining the initial small group concerns from Valley Gate Church's launch and the COVID-19 pandemic caused the church's small group ministry to suffer.

Any momentum and community that the church had were hampered for two years. Specifically, the church's congregation was bound to primarily digital, online platforms from Spring 2020 until June 2021. Thankfully, Valley Gate Church returned to regular face-to-face meetings in June 2021. Now, Pastor Darryl, Pastor Vincent, and the leadership team believe that Valley Gate Church is in a place where the congregation is ripe for more clear direction with small groups—along with the resumption of consistent in-person services in the fall of 2021, a semester of small groups resumed. The aim of this research will help develop and implement training to be given to both congregants and leaders at Valley Gate Church. This training will establish a more robust small group ministry where its members have a clear intent and a deeper sense of community and grow more spiritually. The participants will be assessed from pre- and post-surveys. Now that a clear idea of the purpose of this DMIN action research project has been laid out, it would serve the project sufficiently to outline the researcher's presuppositions.

Basic Assumptions

Small group ministry is imperative for any church to thrive. This transformational ministry allows for smaller scaled fellowships, deep unity, and a pursuit of Christ. Discipleship happens on such a limited scale during Sunday worship. Sunday services are typically one-way interactions—the worship team leads people in song, an emcee may lead people to read some announcements, and the preacher will deliver a life-giving message. Then, once the service is finished, congregants pick up children from youth ministries, and then people go home. Some church attendees believe this is all the relationship they need with other believers. They are okay with not developing their spiritual walk. They settle for Sunday attendance and let that be their

baseline. This researcher presupposes that a Sunday worship service cannot be one's only source of spiritual growth. Sunday service is just the baseline—this service is purely a one-way experience. Unlocking the next level of one's Christian faith involves mirroring what the early church did in Acts 2:42-47. These Christians devoted themselves to biblical teaching, fellowship, eating meals together, praying, meeting tangible needs to ensure none lacked, meeting in each other's homes, and having glad, sincere hearts.

Christians were never intended to walk out their faith alone. There is unity within the Triune nature of God. There is unity within the community of believers, locally, and with the greater church universally. As people share their faith, help each other understand Scripture, serve the church and the community, and walk out their salvation, a character change begins deep within the recesses of the heart that transforms one's desires and character. Without an avenue like small groups, churches keep their teaching and preaching ministries, yet congregants are not fully impacted—they hear an excellent teaching sermon and gain some biblical insight, but their lives are largely no different than before. Hence, small groups are the avenue for sharing, prayers, discussions, support, Scripture reading, transparency, and sharing within a safe environment as the basis for transformative learning.¹⁹ This metamorphosis is the catalyst for a thriving church. Leaders are birthed from these small groups, prayer warriors are made, marriages are restored, accountability is practiced, and people worship and give sacrificially. In sum, small groups are where Christians thrive.

Church planting is no easy feat. The church planting staff wants to make sure not to do everything like how they did at their sending church. Church planters who plant in a new neighborhood, city, state, or country will work to establish themselves in their new community

¹⁹ Mariet Mikaelian, "The Transformative Learning Experiences of Southern California Church-Based Small Group Members," *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 2 (08, 2018), 178.

as they also begin to learn the culture to where they are sent. Phoenix and the surrounding cities, including Tempe, are very transient. The Phoenix Metropolitan, also known as the Phoenix Metro, is an area that is very transitory with people and families who migrate to and move away from the surrounding cities for various reasons. The main driving forces responsible for the region's transient nature are the popular colleges in Tempe and Phoenix, nearby military bases, many tech and aerospace industries, baseball and golf meccas, professional sports teams, and countless company headquarters. This researcher has been with Valley Gate Church since June 2021 and will relocate due to an Active Duty military assignment of three years in June 2024. This researcher has seen church members come and go for one year due to the city's transient nature. Thus, carrying out this DMIN action research project will be essential because the outcome will help the church establish its small group ministry with clear intent and ensure that people have solid biblical foundations. Establishing foundations will be paramount for believers maturing in their faith before being called away from the Phoenix/Tempe area.

Definitions

Small group ministry has been cited several times in this first chapter. Hence, defining key themes that will be expounded upon in this thesis will be necessary for the reader. Terminology utilized throughout the DMIN research project includes the church, discipleship, evangelism, fellowship, prayer, small group, and worship. These elements will be listed alphabetically and expounded upon for further clarity.

Church. The church is described with such comparisons as a flock, the body of Christ, a household, and the bride of Christ. These metaphors do not point to one person but identify a collection of individuals. Thus, Scripture supporting this definition comes from Colossians 1:18, which reveals that Christ is the head of the body, the church. Hence, the church is not a building

but is the people of God. As a body, bride, or flock, the church is alive, fluid, and comprised of people who must meet regularly. Donald Whitney says attempting to experience Christianity without a group setting would be “needlessly and sinfully miss[ing] much of the blessing and power of God.”²⁰

Discipleship. A disciple of Christ is a follower of Jesus. The word “disciple” appears 266 times in the New Testament.²¹ Discipleship is mentoring someone in their faith through an intentional relationship focused on Christ and His Word, intending to get the disciple to be more like Jesus. Earley and Dempsey define a disciple as one who is sacrificial, relational, and transformational, and they are someone who “has trusted Christ for salvation and has surrendered completely to Him. He or she is committed to practicing the spiritual disciplines in community and developing to their full potential for Christ and His mission.”²² This discipleship definition is vital to grasp because the ministry of small groups involves people committed to being in a discipleship relationship with one another.

Evangelism. Evangelism is simply spreading the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Evangelism can occur through word or deed. Whitney expresses the concept of evangelism as presenting Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinful people with the anticipated purpose of placing their trust in God, receiving Him as Savior, and serving Him.²³ Whitney indicates that all Christians are expected to evangelize, yet all Christians are not expected to use

²⁰ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 110-111.

²¹ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Discipleship Making Is...How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 22.

²² *Ibid.*, 28.

²³ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 120.

the same methods of evangelism.²⁴ This indication is accurate, and as small groups begin to mature and serve the communities surrounding them—each group will utilize different methods of evangelism.

Fellowship. For this DMIN action research project, understanding the concept of fellowship is crucial. In the Greek language of the New Testament, *koinonia* is translated as “fellowship,” “communion,” or “participation,” yet this noun does not find its appearance in the Gospels.²⁵ Hebrews 10:25 is a scriptural reminder that believers should not neglect meeting together as some may get into the habit of doing. Another basis for the fellowship of Christian believers stems from Acts 2:42-47 as the early church devoted themselves to the biblical teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, and ensuring that nobody was lacking. The key takeaway from Acts 2 is that they met with gladness and sincere hearts.

Prayer. Prayer is communication with God. Prayers can carry many forms. D.A. Carson seeks to further define prayer by showing that this communication with God needs to be planned to ensure one is spending time communing with God but must balance not getting into the habit of praying becoming formal religion.²⁶ Carson helps describe prayer as speaking aloud and articulating prayers by moving one’s lips as an expression of thoughts into sentences, and speaking aloud will even help the devotee’s mind from wandering.²⁷ Speaking aloud and praying through the Scriptures is helpful. It helps form one’s prayer and tie one’s petitions and communication to the Word of God.

²⁴ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 120.

²⁵ J. R. McRay, “Fellowship,” In, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Daniel J. Treier, and Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 582.

²⁶ D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation Praying with Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 2.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

Small Group. A small group may also be known as a “cell group,” “growth group,” “community group,” or maybe even a “Bible study group.” A small group is established when it is nurtured by shared ownership and devotion leading to a place to engage in life’s challenges, a space for people to grow spiritually, an irresistible community, and an avenue for the church to live counterculturally.²⁸ Gary McIntosh and Charles Arn unpack that a healthy-sized small group is between 8-12 people, but beyond that, the group becomes oversaturated, and its intimacy is hard to maintain.²⁹ Buys and Noguera write that the Jewish practice of having religious gatherings in houses of believers became widespread after the exile of Israel and that there were many ‘house synagogues’ during the early church and New Testament times. This definition of a small group will further be thoroughly expounded upon in the pages of this project.

Worship. The term “worship” indicates having and demonstrating reverence for God and is expressed in many forms. Worship is more than the praise and worship music played and sung during a Sunday service. The truth is that music is only a tiny part of worship. Steve Gladen defines worship as “anything that brings pleasure to God.”³⁰ Worship is multifaceted and expressed in many ways. A small group may write a letter to God, pray for someone they have not spoken to in a while, sing a song, or take a hike. The beauty of worship is that it can be expressive and reflective. Gladen teaches that worship does not need to involve music, but the

²⁸ Ryan Hartwig, Courtney W. Davis, and Jason A Sniff, *Leading Small Groups That Thrive: Five Shifts to Take Your Group to the Next Level* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Reflective, 2020), 15.

²⁹ Gary L. McIntosh and Charles Arn, *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 101.

³⁰ Steve Gladen, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose: Everything You Need to Lead a Healthy Group* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 116.

point of worship is grasped when members pause their busy lives, be still, and experience God.³¹

The following section will spend time developing uncontrollable constraints to this project.

Limitations

There will be some limitations beyond this research project's control. The first is that, as of May 2022, this researcher is not a part of the preaching team. Those who preach at Valley Gate Church are Pastor Darryl (senior pastor), Mrs. JoAnn Morrison, Pastor Vincent Dinh (associate, small groups pastor), Mr. Samuel Morrison (pastor's eldest son and young adult leader), and guest pastors. While this researcher is not a part of the team who preaches a Sunday morning message, both pastors fully support this DMIN action research project. This researcher has been at Valley Gate Church since June 2021 and has been able to teach the church's connect and baptism classes, but has not preached. Therefore, not having preached at Valley Gate Church may hinder some participants. Members may not know this researcher's background and hesitate to sign up for the six-week small group training.

Another limitation will be when this six-week course is offered. This DMIN action research project will compete with other developmental courses provided at the church, such as Celebrate Recovery (an addiction-based ministry), Financial Peace University (a finance-based ministry), youth ministry, and ongoing small groups. In addition to these groups, this DMIN action research project will be competing for time commitments with families, children, work, and other ministries at church, such as the worship team and the media team, who meet throughout the week for practice or projects. Naturally, this researcher will have to deconflict the church's schedule with the proposed plan of this thesis project.

³¹ Gladen, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose: Everything You Need to Lead a Healthy Group*, 116.

The COVID-19 illness, other sicknesses, or natural disasters are limitations beyond the control of this project. This project is proposing a six-week training to allow for completion. Complete attendance will ensure the entire content is covered to meet the training objectives. However, if a participant becomes ill and cannot attend, then make-up sessions could be an option depending on the class size and the number of non-attendees. Similarly, this researcher will need to strive always to be healthy enough to teach so that an illness does not negatively impact the forward progress of the curriculum. Yet, this, too, is beyond the control of this research project.

Delimitations

In 2016, the original team planted Valley Gate Church in Tempe, Arizona, from its sending church in Washington, DC. This researcher will purposefully target the original 20 members from Washington, DC, who are still connected with the church. This DMIN action research training will benefit these original planters because it will help correct any flawed small group foundations. Additionally, it will help ensure that the church is not holding onto any small group philosophies that may have worked at Grace Covenant Church in DC but do not fit the ministry context of Valley Gate Church in Arizona. This researcher will deliberately target two other groups: current small group leaders and current small group attendees. The training will help strengthen the small group ministry if leaders and attendees understand correcting intent, cultivating community, and growing spiritually. The target age group for this DMIN action research project will be any Valley Gate Church attendee or member over 18 years old. Additionally, there will not be any limitations based on gender, occupation, race, or current service at the church.

This thesis project is geared toward small group ministry; the ministry focus will naturally include small groups. It will not involve a deep dive into any other ministry at the church that is not a small group ministry model. This DMIN action research project is not an all-inclusive deep dive into all things related to a small group. Therefore, the specific focus will be limited to correcting intent, cultivating community, and growing spiritually because these areas are specifically related to the problem at Valley Gate Church. This research project will cover enough material to meet the project's intent but will not unpack every facet of small groups. This researcher is not simply implementing data from the latest small group book but took time to synthesize the data, notice common themes, and will strive to teach those three areas of correcting intent, cultivating community, and growing spiritually.

Lastly, the six-week training will be held at the church's facilities. On-site at Valley Gate Church is a multipurpose room with a kitchenette, adequate toileting, and separate childcare rooms if this researcher purchases babysitting for attendees. Should the attendance of the DMIN action research project grow beyond the seating capabilities of the multipurpose room, which comfortably has tables and chairs for 32, then having the training at church will allow the flexibility to conduct the training in the sanctuary. In sum, there will be variables that this researcher has control over to address the ministry problem outlined.

Thesis Statement

Small groups are crucial for establishing relationships with others within a congregation, and new church plants must establish themselves within the community they are called to serve. Pastors, staff, and leaders must be able to implement their ministries with clear intentions from the forefront of the launch. If clear intentions are never set forward from any church plant, then that church runs the risk of having ministries, such as small groups, establishing itself with bad

habits. This DMIN action research will focus on correcting the intent of its small group ministry. In doing so, Valley Gate Church will cultivate two predominant results—community and spiritual growth. The result of a strong community is built upon encouragement, fellowship, and evangelism. At the same time, developing spiritual growth will give rise to fostering worship, discipleship, prayer, and Scripture. Therefore, if Valley Gate Church implements the six-week congregational training, the church's small groups will have a clear direction, cultivate a strong community, and grow spiritually.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

Amid the rubble of small groups which require well-defined intent, Valley Gate Church's organized groups were lacking. This is precisely what happened at this researcher's home church—the small group ministry was launched, yet it was without clear guidance and intent. Research will show that the two main positive effects of a thriving small group ministry are a congregation that cultivates community and one that grows spiritually. This researcher will demonstrate that the literature supports the argument that if Valley Gate Church implements the six-week congregational training, the church will have clear direction on small group ministry, cultivate a strong community, and grow spiritually. A 2019 LifeWay study of US congregations revealed that in a typical month, an estimated 60 percent of congregants were involved in a class or a small group ministry at least once monthly.³² The same study indicated that 14 percent of churchgoers attend a class or small group two to three times per month, while 38 percent do not attend. While it appears a large percentage of US congregations are involved in groups at least every month, data like this will help with some statistical benchmarking as this researcher plans to conduct pre- and post-surveys, questionnaires, and interviews for this research project. This endeavor will strengthen this researcher's small group ministry context, and correcting intent will cause deeper communal bonds and spiritual maturity.

Literature Review

This literature review will reveal that if a church can rebrand and rebuild its small group ministry with clear intent, the byproduct will be stronger community and spiritual growth.

³² Harley Atkinson and Joshua Rose, "The Small-Group Ministry Movement of the Last Four Decades," *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 3 (2020), 552.

Church small group ministries must be built upon proper foundations. Correcting a small group ministry's intent is essential as this instrument is the heartbeat of the church. Launching with good small groups is critical as this is where one's faith and life intersect. Thus, developing this literature review into smaller subtopics will help dissect the two overarching byproducts—*community* and *spiritual growth*. The outline of this literature review is three-fold. It will begin by developing the theme of *correcting intent* which can be accomplished by adjusting identity, casting vision, and building properly. Secondly, building *community* will be further synthesized into encouragement, fellowship, and evangelism; and thirdly, the theme of *spiritual growth* will be synthesized into worship, discipleship, and prayer. Lastly, some time will be spent outlining challenges to the small group ministry. Suppose a church such as Valley Gate gets its small group ministry right and incorporates training with focused intent. In that case, the church will have more flourishing small groups with strong community bonds growing spiritually.

Understanding Small Group

While there is no biblical mandate to “go therefore and have small groups,” the aim for Jesus's followers to gather in supportive and compassionate ways is evident throughout Scripture. Overwhelmingly Acts 2:42-47 is a common reference for why churches pursue small groups. This researcher refers to these small-scale communities as “small groups,” but one may have heard these groups referred to as “cell groups,” “growth groups,” “community groups,” or maybe even as “Bible study groups.” Whatever the name a church ascribes to this ministry, it is understood that healthy groups will have a theological component, a relational component, a restoration component, and a missional component.³³ Gary McIntosh and Charles Arn emphatically set the stage for small groups and state, “In our opinion, small groups provide the

³³ Mikal Keefer, *Small Group Ministry Volunteer Handbook* (Colorado Springs, CO: Churchleaders Press, 2021), 21-22.

best possible means for the church to actually be the church. These groups provide an opportunity for people to worship God, support others in need, pray and care for others, grow in spiritual depth and character, develop close relationships, and participate in ministry and service.”³⁴ This framework supports the importance of addressing the problem at Valley Gate Church. Suppose congregants can develop close relationships, ask questions about the Word of God, and support each other in caring ways. In that case, this will foster spiritual growth and a flourishing sense of community.

The interface of the community of small groups helps attendees engage Scripture by talking about and integrating the Bible into daily life with one another.³⁵ Organizationally, small groups are valuable to larger, contemporary churches as attendees can care for one another, share prayer requests, put spiritual gifts to practice, and even discuss the ideas from the Sunday sermon.³⁶ An unfortunate reality for the typical American church is that “one of every ten first-time visitors come back to become an active participant.”³⁷ It is not programming, fancy preaching, sound theology, great location, or the facility that keeps drawing the newcomer back to the church, but it is the relationships and connections that the new person makes with the church and its members. Preaching, theology, worship, and location are great, but if the people are not connected to people, then they never become fully assimilated, and the likelihood of them leaving the church is exponentially high. So, what is the church to do? Build a robust small

³⁴ McIntosh and Arn, *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church*, 92.

³⁵ David Dunaetz, Diane Wong, Alexandria Draper, and Jacob Salsman, “Barriers to Leading Small Groups Among Generation Z and Younger Millennials: An Exploratory Factor Analysis and Implications for Recruitment and Training,” *Christian Education Journal* 19, no. 1 (2022): 154.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ McIntosh and Arn, *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church*, 74.

group ministry. Since the small group ministry was not properly given the intention to succeed since launch, the intent must be corrected. All churches should develop a platform for people to cultivate deep relationships and develop spiritual roots. Naturally, that platform is a small group.

Steven Manskar advocates that the Sunday morning worship service and the other congregational activities are promising avenues that help play a crucial role in Christian spiritual formations.³⁸ Still, these are insufficient to solidify spiritual formations, church members need relationships formed through small groups. Manskar describes a small group as one that meets regularly and has around three to fifteen people in regular attendance who grow in holiness together and are equipped to join the mission of God to the world.³⁹ Small group ministry is more than just another program offered at church; these are webs of interconnection between church members. These connections and relations help the visitor return and enable the parishioner to mature in the Lord. The Sunday worship experience alone does not offer this connectedness. With that said, not everyone thrives in unfamiliar settings. Thriving can be defined as the experience of development and success.⁴⁰ A successful small group would aim to create an environment where group members can plug in and thrive. The next portion of this literature review will synthesize correcting small group intent in greater detail.

Correcting Intent

Clear intentions are the key to any ministry, and those intentions are its foundation. As with building a home, one can only build upon a good foundation and must correct a poor foundation first. The foundation upon which Valley Gate Church built its small group ministry

³⁸ Steven W. Manskar, *Small Group Ministries: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability* (Nashville, TN: Cokesbury, 2016), 7.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Daniel J. Brown, Rachel Arnold, David Fletcher, and Martyn Standage, "Human Thriving," *European Psychologist* 22, no. 3 (2017), 167-168.

was faulty and wrought with a lack of buy-in and a negative view of small groups. The issue was not that small groups were never launched; the problem was that there was no apparent purpose behind small groups. The pastor allowed various groups to exist without understanding how small groups fit into the overall mission and vision of the church. Therefore, the literature shows that correcting the intentions behind that ministry would be crucial to its rebuilding and success. James Woods likens it to the mantra held by Japanese auto manufacturer Toyota. Wood indicates that the mantra behind the quality of a Toyota speaks to how a faulty foundation leads to a faulty product, causing a need for the product to be reworked, which costs resources, energy, and time.⁴¹ To paint clear intentions and purpose for small group ministry, one must do three things: adjust identity, cast vision, and build properly.

Adjusting Identity

When correcting intent, one should first adjust the identity of small groups. Identity involves how one develops a sense of self, and when this definition is applied to a small group ministry, the same concept occurs. Identity of the ministry means that the ministry is developing a sense of character and distinctiveness that describes its personality. Suppose a ministry leader aims to keep a group of voluntary members together. In that case, there must be a real identity because existing members are not motivated to continue without this clear identity. New members are unclear what the ministry is about.⁴² Johnson, Wittberg, and Gautier continue to purport that ministry identity is congruent with interests, fears, and culture to entice new members to join.⁴³ Thus, some key considerations may be to identify to what extent the small

⁴¹ James R. Woods, "A Pre-Methodological Theology for Biblically Proper Ecclesiological Health," (DMin diss., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 14.

⁴² Mary Johnson, Patricia Wittberg, and Mary L. Gautier, *New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2.

⁴³ Ibid.

group ministry impacts the mission and vision of the church. What is the purpose of a small group? Should the church be known as a church with small groups (e.g., ministry programming), or should it be known as a church consisting of small groups (e.g., building identity around groups)? What will the church adopt, and is this clear for existing and new members? Answering these questions will be vital in creating the culture and identity of a small group.

In one DMIN thesis, the idea of a virtual community was fleshed out. In an age where people can have an online identity different from the “real” world, having virtual meetups for small groups would pose a challenge in building identity. Karunakaran argues that people who meet in a virtual community can develop a false sense of identity because people are disembodied and exist merely in how and what they communicate to the greater group.⁴⁴ Hence another consideration that arose from literature is what a ministry should do with the rise of virtual groups and how that fits into the church’s current culture. Modern ministries will wrestle with offering virtual groups from such platforms as Zoom or adopting house-to-house meetings. The small group mentality that meets house-to-house has slowly developed in Western orientation, yet this has been observed as an excellent vehicle to move the church forward.⁴⁵

Does one’s church know that small groups are an excellent catalyst to compel its members towards holiness, accountability, relationship, leadership, and spiritual growth? If not, then discuss the benefits of the small group. Numerous researchers have advocated that small groups are also a perfect place for evangelism and collaboration.⁴⁶ Among the research which identifies the outlook of a small group as being positive stems benefits of how small groups

⁴⁴ Solomon A. Karunakaran, “An Evaluation of the Life Group Leadership Training Program at Metuchen Assembly of God Church in Metuchen, NJ,” (DMIN diss., Nyack College, Alliance Theological Seminary, 2018), 8.

⁴⁵ Woods, “A Pre-Methodological Theology for Biblically Proper Ecclesiological Health,” 19.

⁴⁶ John Sconiers, “Small Groups Evangelistic Growth at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church,” (DMIN diss., Liberty University School of Divinity, 2021), 30.

create a natural environment for people to flourish and ask questions; Christians share in community, and the atmosphere of the group allows for intergenerational and intercultural opportunities.⁴⁷ The Body of Christ makes a compelling apologetic for a small group—the universal church, consisting of Christ as its head and various smaller members making up the entirety of the Body. The theme of identity has been expanded, which gives rise to the next subtopic of casting vision.

Casting Vision

Once a ministry has sought to establish a clear identity, then the literature supports the next step in addressing this researcher’s ministry problem is to cast vision. Vision for ministry is “a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants to advance His kingdom and is based on an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances.”⁴⁸ Barna breaks this well-defined definition down further by indicating that vision portrays conditions that do not currently exist; it seeks to create a better future instead of replicating the past, as it seeks what God would want to do through gifted individuals.⁴⁹ Drilling down this meaning of vision further, one must differentiate between vision and mission. Barna suggests that “The mission statement is a definition of the general ministry objectives of the church. The vision statement is a clarification of the specific direction and activities the church will pursue toward making a true ministry impact.”⁵⁰ Understanding that a mission is more general while a vision is specific is essential. Given a better definition of vision, one can see how churches that

⁴⁷ Sconiers, “Small Groups Evangelistic Growth at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church,” 30-31.

⁴⁸ George Barna, *The Power of Vision: Discover and Apply God's Plan for Your Life and Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 28.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 28-29.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 39.

got off on the wrong footing should strive to ensure they project vision ahead for their ministry leaders and congregants.

As a small group planter, creating a group vision is important, and that vision is made based on the church's context and culture.⁵¹ Valley Gate Church was a sent church to Phoenix, Arizona, from Washington, DC. There are times when the planted church still carries fragments of ministry ideas and mannerisms of their parent church. Therefore, building the church's small group ministry on context and culture is essential. Like Valley Gate Church, the culture of the original core church planters changed when the team moved from DC to Phoenix. Hence, a new vision for the small group ministry needed to be cast, but it was not properly accomplished. Previous heritage should not shape the current small group ministry vision, but rather the ministry's current cultural contexts should. Carrying various small group ministry mannerisms from a previous church onto the church plant can hinder the new church that the people seek to represent. Small groups reflect the church; consequently, its group members represent it.⁵²

Gladden asserts that the best way group members represent the church is through alignment with the church's vision and mission by way of repeated exposure.⁵³ The purpose of having the small group represent the church through alignment of the vision is to get the church and small group moving along the same path. Sconiers reported in the implementation of his doctoral action research that he constantly provided vision and goals for the participants of the church's small group study at the end of every meeting; this would ensure members in his

⁵¹ John P. Tornifolio, "A Strategy for Conducting Evangelism and Discipleship with the Unchurched in the Cane Bay Plantation Residential Development's Restricted Communities in Summerville, SC," (PhD diss., Liberty University School of Divinity, 2020), 31.

⁵² Gladden, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose: Everything You Need to Lead a Healthy Group*, 28.

⁵³ Ibid.

research were pressing toward the objectives of the small group.⁵⁴ Thus, it is paramount to frequently cast the vision ahead for people in a new small group ministry, doctoral study, or church plant. Vision casting is vital for secular organizations as well. Andrews and Smits wrote that multidisciplinary teams could better function when that group's identification with the teams' mission, vision, and process is clearly articulated.⁵⁵ The clear expression of the group's vision causes the team members to have a better group identity and work towards their collective growth and performance. This necessary vision casting and identity is the same for the small group ministry in a church setting. When pastors cast vision to small group participants and leaders, the inspiration is caught, and small group members can adequately develop the ministry.

Building Properly

A ministry must be deconstructed and rebuilt if it is built upon unclear intent or needs more vision. In First Corinthians 3:10, Paul speaks about building as a wise builder, knowing that someone else will build upon the foundation that a church leader lays. Consequently, this researcher will continue showing how tackling the church's small group ministry intent will address the problem brought forward by this doctoral project. Congregants grow deeper with each other as successful small groups are established. Steve Gladen equates an iceberg to a small group, and he writes how underneath the surface is a large, hidden seven-eighths of the iceberg comprised of densely compressed ice reminiscent of the pressures of life.⁵⁶ Still, most people in small groups stay at the superficial level where the safe one-eighth are, and they never experience authenticity or transparency. This is part of the problem that occurred at Valley Gate

⁵⁴ Sconiers, "Small Groups Evangelistic Growth at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church," 83.

⁵⁵ Matthew Andrews and Stanley Smits, "Using Tacit Knowledge Exchanges to Improve Teamwork," *The ISM Journal of International Business* 3, no. 1 (09, 2019): 18.

⁵⁶ Gladen, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose: Everything You Need to Lead a Healthy Group*, 60.

Church. The congregants were and still are having organized small groups, but since the intent has not been clear, congregants do not go deep. Part of the problem that this DMIN action research problem will address is rebuilding so that groups can build close-knit communities.

Rebuilding on a proper foundation is crucial so a church can focus on building and training a core team of members and leaders. Parrott's thesis concluded that "church multiplication in the local church is one of the primary means through which the world can be reached for Christ."⁵⁷ Church multiplication should happen because pastors train leaders to reach others and be evangelistic in their approach of small groups instead of being a closed group (i.e., a group with an inward focus). Some niche small groups launched at Valley Gate Church but were so particular in their audience attraction that they were not evangelistic. In 2016, the Southern Baptist Convention reported that the denomination declined by around 200,000 members, the most significant decrease since 1881.⁵⁸ Although Valley Gate is not a Baptist church, this researcher believes this data is essential because newer church plants, like Valley Gate, are needed to share the message of Christ. To be successful in evangelistic approaches, churches require trained congregants and a good foundation.

The message of Christ is transcultural and life-giving. A five-pronged approach for the proper building of a small group is to 1) build upon a character of trust within a relational community; 2) have a compelling vision; 3) step ahead and lead; 4) call others to follow; and 5) empower those who followed.⁵⁹ What is being taught here is the importance of building trust and

⁵⁷ Ronnie Lee Parrott Jr., "Launching Forward: An Effective Core Team Development Strategy for Launching a Church Plant or Multisite Campus." (DMIN diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 93.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Karunakaran, "An Evaluation of the Life Group Leadership Training Program at Metuchen Assembly of God Church in Metuchen, NJ," 61.

vision, all while developing a discipleship model. The theme of discipleship will be fleshed out later in this literature review. Synthesized information shows various ways to frame a roadmap to success for small groups. Still, this researcher has sought to show how literature supports that correcting intent by adjusting identity, casting vision, and properly building is ideal.

Woods employs readers that the priority of Christ needs to be restored and that there are certain key aspects that the first-century church adopted that today's believers should retain. Today a healthy ministry can build upon exalting Christ, embracing people, and engaging the culture.⁶⁰ Ephesians 4:11-12 is an excellent example of Paul admonishing that the work of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers is for building up the body of Christ. Strengthening and helping the church grow is only meaningful if the foundations it is being built upon are of good, purposeful quality. When a church establishes itself in a new community, various people and offices are needed for a successful ministry. Thus, when establishing ministries in a new church, such as the small group ministry, the church plant team should call upon those offices outlined in Ephesians 4:11 for proper building.⁶¹ The training plan that this researcher created and will implement includes facets of adjusting identity, casting vision, and building properly because these will correct the lack of clear intent of small groups that Valley Gate Church launched. The byproduct of fixing intent will emerge a small group ministry with a building community and growing spiritually.

Building Community

Increasing development and urbanization, the three-year-long COVID-19 pandemic, ethnic/cultural diversity, and advances in modern technology are some of the reasons why it is

⁶⁰ Woods, "A Pre-Methodological Theology for Biblically Proper Ecclesiological Health," 178.

⁶¹ Michael Moore, "A Strategy to Plant Missional Churches that Multiply in Small Urban Communities," (DMin diss., Liberty University School of Divinity, 2020), 21.

harder for people to establish deep relationships with one another.⁶² People often treat the corporate Sunday worship experience as the culmination of the spiritual experience of their week without longing to go deeper. People are created for community with God and community with others. One of the best ways to establish this community is through the vehicle of small groups. Dunatez and others write about how American families have become smaller, and people are less likely to marry.⁶³ These individuals tend to have fewer face-to-face interactions with others, yet they could turn to the source of community that small groups can provide. Hence, with American families becoming smaller and more isolated, it is key for people to have groups that foster deeply-rooted relationships. Resilience, growth, and thriving reflect how individuals can adapt to adversity.⁶⁴ A thriving church community is predicated upon encouragement, fellowship, and evangelism.

Encouragement

People who feel defeated turn to different avenues for inspiration and support. Small groups are how a Christian builds community. When people are battling various struggles in life, brothers and sisters from the local congregation urge one another to take courage and trust in the Lord. Keefer writes, “Encouragement reminds us: We’re in this together. The history of the early church is one of encouragement. Jesus encouraged His disciples. The disciples encouraged one another. Missionaries encouraged the unsaved. Then and now, encouragement is part of the church’s mission—and your small group.”⁶⁵ From the first-century disciples up to the 18th

⁶² Bill Donahue and Charles Gowler, “Small Groups: The Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever?” *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring, 2014), 122.

⁶³ Dunaetz, Wong, Draper, and Salsman, “Barriers to Leading Small Groups Among Generation Z and Younger Millennials: An Exploratory Factor Analysis and Implications for Recruitment and Training,” 154.

⁶⁴ Brown, Arnold, Fletcher, and Standage, “Human Thriving,” 169.

⁶⁵ Keefer, *Small Group Ministry Volunteer Handbook*, 84.

century, encouragement has been a tenant of small groups. John Wesley, an 18th-century British Anglican minister, theologian, and Methodist initiator, advocated for small interactive groups that did more than hear the Word of God but that these groups would be a space for mutual encouragement, service, and fellowship.⁶⁶ Wesley called these groups classes, and not only was it a space for parishioners to partake in sacraments, but it was also a space where people could seek encouragement and fellowship.⁶⁷

When a small group ministry gets encouragement right, the attendees prosper. Small-group ministries that provide excellent support to one another scarcely need to call upon pastoral staff for pastoral care.⁶⁸ It is understood that there is a time and a place for professional pastoral counseling or even situations that exceed the capabilities of the small group leader. But the point is that great small group members are present emotionally, spiritually, physically, and relationally when challenges arise.⁶⁹ Therefore, to build a healthy community, a church's small group ministry ought to develop its arm of encouragement. To be an effective small group ministry that is good at encouraging, members should pray for each other, visit the sick, meet needs, and communicate concerns with one another. Research from Mariet Mikaelian looked to the transformative learning experiences of small group members to flesh this idea of encouragement out even more.

Mikaelian based her research on the premise of transformative learning and small groups. Transformative learning is a theory that Jack Mezirow originated in 1978—his theory describes a

⁶⁶ Robert J. Duncan Jr., "Congregational Revitalization through Small Group Ministry at Cokesbury United Methodist Church," (DMin diss., Drew University, 2017), 19.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Bill Search, *The Essential Guide for Small Group Leaders* (Carol Stream, IL: ChristianityToday, 2017), 59.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

process that seeks to transform one's perspective to be more open and reflective so that it can generate a true belief.⁷⁰ The literature demonstrates the necessity of meaningful relationships and a supportive group that encourages a caring environment for transformative learning to be effective.⁷¹ Additionally, the second premise of Mikaelian's research was the domain of the small group. She advocated that small groups facilitate change in one's behavior and life by providing an avenue for members to have close relationships, trust one another, be supported, and take risks.⁷² This transformative learning in small groups can only be grounded in a group that adopts an environment of encouragement. Thus, further bolstering the claim of the necessity for encouragement to occur in healthy small groups. This theory of transformative learning leads this researcher to another theory that thrives in groups—the principle of tacit knowledge credited to Michel Polanyi.

Tacit knowledge is achieved because the experiential learning process is transferred to others in a group.⁷³ Tacit knowledge differs from formal or explicit knowledge because formal knowledge is often written down and taught, but tacit knowledge is experienced. This researcher makes a crucial connection between small group encouragement and tacit knowledge. Hwang's research concluded that small to medium-sized companies that valued tacit knowledge sharing in groups were better performers and had more organizational capacity.⁷⁴ Additionally, it was found

⁷⁰ Mikaelian, "The Transformative Learning Experiences of Southern California Church-Based Small Group Members," 172-173.

⁷¹ Ibid., 173.

⁷² Ibid., 174.

⁷³ Seokyon Hwang, "Sharing Tacit Knowledge in Small-Medium Regional Construction Companies in the U.S.: The Current Status and the Impact of Organizational Ecology," *International Journal of Construction Management* 22, no. 9 (2022): 1746.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 1754.

that members of tacit knowledge-sharing groups were more likely to network with one another and be more active participants in the company.⁷⁵ As one can see, there is a link between tacit knowledge sharing, more robust performance, and more networking. Along the same lines of research regarding encouragement and tacit knowledge, Andrews and Smits determined that complex problems are tackled by using tacit knowledge in groups.⁷⁶ When team members reached high trust levels, it showed in their verbal and non-verbal exchanges. Transfer this to the church's small group ministry. As groups dissect complex passages of Scripture, recall points from Sunday's sermon, share a testimony, and pray for one another, then tacit knowledge is happening. Small groups build trust, encourage one another, and look for ways to tackle life's complex concerns. The small group component of fellowship is closely related to the facet of encouragement.

Fellowship

To a degree, encouragement bleeds over into fellowship, but specifically, fellowship deals with a common mutual relationship. In the Greek language of the New Testament, *koinonia* is translated as "fellowship," "communion," or "participation," yet this noun does not find its appearance in the Gospels.⁷⁷ Christianity is a corporate religion, and the early church practiced daily fellowship in temple courts and homes as they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42, 46-47). Fellowship is depicted as more than merely sharing material belongings, but the ultimate example of fellowship is

⁷⁵ Hwang, "Sharing Tacit Knowledge in Small-Medium Regional Construction Companies in the U.S.: The Current Status and the Impact of Organizational Ecology," 1754.

⁷⁶ Andrews and Smits, "Using Tacit Knowledge Exchanges to Improve Teamwork," 21.

⁷⁷ J. R. McRay, "Fellowship," In, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Daniel J. Treier, and Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 582.

friendship, as evidenced by the daily connectedness from Acts 2:42 and the early church's communalism described in Acts chapters 4 and 5.⁷⁸

Small groups cultivate strong bonds when believers fellowship with each other. The basis for this fellowship is their fellowship with God. Joseph Gunter elaborates more on how the gathering of congregants was a part of God's plan for believers to care for one another as he writes, "Christianity is personal but not individualistic. Christianity is corporate. The command to 'consider one another' is associated with church involvement. Fellowship cannot occur unless the church has gathered together."⁷⁹ When a church's small group ministry advocates for congregants to be involved in each other's lives, study Christ's teachings, meet in church and homes, share meals, and give to meet one another's needs, this creates the *koinonia*. Forming this environment requires believers to care enough to cultivate community within the congregation.

The *koinonia*—fellowship, communion, or participation in small groups- is crucial for establishing support systems. Albert Sarno created a paradigm to help people with trauma. Sarno suggests one must address interpersonal relations, and at the center of helping people through their trauma was the necessity for "relational intimacy and spending time with people in self-disclosure, while at the same time learning to compliment and enjoy the mystery of relationships."⁸⁰ Relational intimacy transpires within the context of the small group. Sarno advocates that the behavior changes they desire will ensue if those seeking therapy are actively and positively involved in their support systems. In contrast, the difference is not long-lived if

⁷⁸ McRay, "Fellowship," 582.

⁷⁹ Joseph Clay Gunter, "Developing a Small Group Ministry to Strengthen First Baptist Church Magnolia, Mississippi," (DMin diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 26.

⁸⁰ Albert Sarno, "Treating Veterans with Complex Traumagenic Disorders: When Childhood Traumas and Current Traumas Collide," *Journal of Military and Government Counseling* 2, no. 1 (2014): 55.

one is not actively involved.⁸¹ The same can be inferred within the realm of small groups. Those in small group ministry desiring to be more Christlike can only make lasting behavior changes when fellowshiping with others positively and actively in a group.

The fellowship aspect of a small group ministry is essential, but it cannot be the main focus. If a small group loses sight of the spiritual growth aspect of the small group, then the group could turn into a mere social club. This is what researchers Baumgartner and Flores discovered. As Flores planted a church in Chicago, he noted that the small group ministry needed to shift away from a “vague fellowship focus” towards embracing discipleship, sharing one’s experiences, and journeying together while studying the teachings of Christ Jesus.⁸² Fellowship is excellent, but when too much value is placed on the fellowship characteristic, then spiritual growth becomes stifled. Practical commitment to each other is one thing, but being devoted to reaching others and evangelizing is another tenant of building community.

Evangelism

Spreading the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the purpose of evangelism. A believer can do this by telling one’s testimony or sharing the Good News of Jesus. To most, evangelism does not come naturally, nor is it easy. This is usually listed as a believer’s most significant hurdle to overcome. However, when small groups make this a priority, they are cultivating community by reaching out to the society around them through prayer, sharing a personal encounter with Christ, welcoming the unsaved to their small group or church, or even through an act of practical evangelism such as shoveling a neighbor’s snowy driveway. Steve

⁸¹ Sarno, “Treating Veterans with Complex Traumagenic Disorders: When Childhood Traumas and Current Traumas Collide,” 55.

⁸² Baumgartner, Erich and Andres Flores, “Creating a Spiritual Learning Space: The Changing Leadership Roles in the Life Cycle of a Church Plant,” *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 11, no. 2 (Fall, 2017): 58.

Gladen asserts that “Availability is the key to evangelism. If your small group members become available, God will use them. If they’re willing to love people, doors will open. If they can simply tell their own stories, lives can be changed.”⁸³ Undoubtedly, the stories shared from stepping out of one’s comfort zone and reaching the unchurched with the saving message of Jesus are exciting, and they foster community.

The church in the 18th and 19th centuries was focused on pietism; however, until the mid-20th century, a shift occurred, propelling the church towards a greater emphasis on discipleship and evangelism.⁸⁴ The results then were a global church that focused on reaching the lost and American churches attempting to embrace Christ’s mandate to make disciples and evangelize the world.⁸⁵ Being outwardly focused on reaching others and not ascribing to a monastic outlook was vital for this transformation within the global church. Small groups proved more successful because they could go where large church organizations could not; small groups were better at reaching restricted or closed nations.⁸⁶ Even with the COVID-19 pandemic, a small group model would be more beneficial for the same reasons. Smaller collections of people can still meet to form necessary close-knit bonds and experience the transformational power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Sconier’s dissertation advocated that small groups thrive when they welcome an evangelistic outlook.⁸⁷ Specifically, Sconier taught that as small group members experience

⁸³ Gladen, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose: Everything You Need to Lead a Healthy Group*, 102.

⁸⁴ Tornifolio, “A Strategy for Conducting Evangelism and Discipleship with the Unchurched in the Cane Bay Plantation Residential Development’s Restricted Communities in Summerville, SC,” 7.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁸⁷ Sconiers, “Small Groups Evangelistic Growth at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church,” 36.

connectedness, they become faithful witnesses and shift their focus from self to others; thus accomplishing the strategic methodology of what the early New Testament Church achieved.⁸⁸ The current state of small groups in today's world allows groups to be engaged in discipleship and evangelism because the organic structure of healthy small groups permits its members to be intentional and reach others. The first overarching theme of *building community* emerged when discussing why this researcher's problem should be addressed. The secondary theme of *spiritual growth* appears and will be reviewed in the following sections.

Spiritual Growth

Research has supported that the outcomes of a thriving small group ministry are community and spiritual growth. This action research project is invested in implementing research-driven congregational teachings to develop small group leaders and members to create a congregation with stronger bonds (community) and greater spiritual maturity (spiritual growth). Various research supports that parishioners strengthen their walk with the Lord when they participate in a small group. Thus, this DMIN action research is aimed at both congregants and leaders. Atkinson and Rose highlight a 2017 research that pursued further clarity to find out if small groups played a significant part in cultivating a person's faith and spiritual maturity.⁸⁹ The findings determined a significant parallel between the amount of time a congregant participates in small groups and the deeper development of their spiritual maturity.⁹⁰ A separate 2014 study, from England, revealed that "87 percent of church-based small group participants believed small groups had strengthened their relationship with God."⁹¹ Hence, research trends support the

⁸⁸ Sconiers, "Small Groups Evangelistic Growth at New Gainesville Seventh-Day Adventist Church," 36.

⁸⁹ Atkinson and Rose, "The Small-Group Ministry Movement of the Last Four Decades," 553.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

correlation between participation in small group ministry and spiritual growth. Specifically, one's robust spiritual growth is centered upon worship, discipleship, prayer, and Scripture.

Worship

Worship is having and demonstrating a reverence for God which can be expressed in many forms, including singing. Keefer proclaims that singing in a small group may not be the best way to demonstrate worship because not everyone sings well, and it can make group members uncomfortable. Singing in a small group lacks the sensation and volume found when singing with the entire congregation, and that sound cannot be replicated in the small group setting.⁹² Within the context of the small group, there are various ways to give reverence to God: read the names of Jesus found in Scripture, be intentionally thankful, write praise, raise your hands, pray with your eyes open, serve one another, read Scripture passages, or listen to a worship song.⁹³ Worship looks different to different people; it can occur in various settings and aids in reflecting one's love and devotion to God.

Gladden believes other expressive ways help promote a deepening spiritual growth. Other forms of expressive worship may include prayer, verbalizing or writing what one is thankful for, sharing struggles, sitting silently before God, fasting, sharing testimonies, or practicing surrender by trusting and obeying.⁹⁴ Romans 12:1-2 discusses how followers of Christ are actual living sacrifices and offering one's life to Christ is true worship. Hebrews 12:28 reminds believers to be thankful and offer acceptable worship with reverence and awe. Worship will drive the group to build their spiritual muscles. Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff ascribe that effective small groups spend

⁹² Keefer, *Small Group Ministry Volunteer Handbook*, 93-94.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Gladden, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose: Everything You Need to Lead a Healthy Group*, 116-122.

about 15 minutes in worship.⁹⁵ These researchers concluded that the average amount of time groups spent in worship was five minutes but that most groups surveyed did not allocate any time for worship.⁹⁶ A group that does not worship together is not as spiritually healthy as one that does. Becoming spiritually mature through individual and corporate worship is key, and Christians learn to be Christians through the discipleship relationship.

Discipleship

A disciple of Christ is a follower of Jesus. Discipleship is mentoring someone in their faith through an intentional relationship focused on Christ and His Word, aiming to get the disciple to be more like Jesus. The importance of small groups as a vehicle for discipleship is prime. Tornifolio discusses the role of small group communities within the early church, specifically how “the early church began as groups, and that it was in the group context that believers conducted disciple making.”⁹⁷ Heather Lear provides a concise outlook on discipleship:

Discipleship is a way of living that follows the example and teaching of Jesus Christ. Our discipleship is how we live our lives in relationship with Christ and with other members of the household of God. A disciple is not someone who is merely content with having his or her sins forgiven, but who embraces the lifelong journey toward full Christ-likeness. This journey entails regular Christian practices and disciplines. Just as one needs to [practice] an instrument or sport to increase capacity and skill, there are Christian practices that should be engaged in to increase capacity for holiness and Christ-likeness to become natural [behavior].⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff, *Leading Small Groups That Thrive: Five Shifts to Take Your Group to the Next Level*, 86.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Tornifolio, “A Strategy for Conducting Evangelism and Discipleship with the Unchurched in the Cane Bay Plantation Residential Development’s Restricted Communities in Summerville, SC,” 52.

⁹⁸ Heather Heinzman Lear, “Making Disciples: Obstacles and Opportunities in Urban Congregations,” *International Review of Missions* 105, no. 1, 2016), 14.

Simply put, discipleship is not just about fellowship or community, but a deeply rooted spiritual growth aspect is ascribed to the act of discipleship with a growing advancement towards Christlikeness. Depending upon the small group's culture, it will help drive discipleship.

Suppose the culture of the small group ministry is one where members grow and learn in an authentic environment, where they are comfortable asking questions about the Word of God and can invite others. Members start attending regularly and experience accountability and growth.⁹⁹ The typical place in Scripture to support small group discipleship is the text of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Christ called and challenged His disciples to participate in discipleship ministry, not be mere spectators.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, Mark 3:14 indicates how Christ appointed the Twelve disciples so that they would be with Him, and He would send them out to preach. Gladen clarifies that before the disciples were sent to preach, they were invited to be in a relationship with Christ, “walk with him, eat with him, and watch how he handled conflicts. Discipleship—becoming more like Christ—is developed in relationships with people.”¹⁰¹ As with Christ and the Twelve, the same model is best carried out in a church’s small group ministry—between the small group leader and those members who attend the group.

Anthony McKee’s thesis on biblical discipleship aimed to show best practices for achieving the goals of Christlikeness through discipleship. A driving force behind McKee’s work is how present-day churches in America are in decline, yet “Christian discipleship has had over two-thousand years to develop.”¹⁰² According to his work, discipleship within the small group

⁹⁹ Lear, “Making Disciples: Obstacles and Opportunities in Urban Congregations,” 14.

¹⁰⁰ Jacob Dunlow, “Digital Discipleship: A Study of How Churches in New York Used Technology for Adult Discipleship During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 3 (2021), 459.

¹⁰¹ Gladen, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose: Everything You Need to Lead a Healthy Group*, 72.

¹⁰² Anthony McKee, “Proven Biblical Discipleship: Make it According to the Pattern,” (DMin diss., Liberty University School of Divinity, 2021), 24.

setting is one of the best practices. The small group was a deliberate teaching environment used by Jesus to reach and teach his disciples, and this is an excellent setting for modern-day Christ followers. As people develop and mature in their faith, the small group's intentional relationships are crucial to focusing its members on knowing Christ, obeying Him, and applying what they are learning in their church community.¹⁰³ Small group settings cultivate belongingness, and disciples imitate the mentor as they imitate Christ. Yet aside from discipleship, prayer is another tenant that builds one's spiritual growth.

Prayer

Healthy groups carve out time to pray for each other. They reflect upon what God has done in their lives, and then members share specific prayer needs. When groups spend time praying, they grow spiritually; when God answers those prayers, growth increases even more. Bill Search shapes the richness of prayer time within a group by setting aside appropriate time for prayer, laying down guidelines for meaningful requests with detail, writing the requests down, ensuring confidentiality is maintained, and then praying.¹⁰⁴ Although groups who have met more frequently may benefit from an increased time in prayer, not every group should pray "marathon" prayers. Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff's research showed that the more time group members spent in prayer, the less it impacted their spiritual growth.¹⁰⁵ This sounds counterintuitive as one would expect a more profound spiritual growth to occur when groups lather their small group in prayer time.

¹⁰³ McKee, "Proven Biblical Discipleship: Make it According to the Pattern," 25.

¹⁰⁴ Search, *The Essential Guide for Small Group Leaders*, 119.

¹⁰⁵ Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff, *Leading Small Groups That Thrive: Five Shifts to Take Your Group to the Next Level*, 87.

However, research does attribute a healthy amount of time to prayer. This concluding investigation indicates, “While groups spent an average of thirteen minutes in prayer, the groups that contributed the least to the members’ spiritual health spend more than twenty-one minutes in prayer.”¹⁰⁶ Just as Search offered guidelines for constructive prayer time to contribute to the group’s spiritual growth, Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff do the same. This trio collectively declares that instead of praying for a long time, the small group should first structure prayer around the group’s purpose to include context, time limits, and expectations; secondly, structure prayer around the group’s unique dynamics.¹⁰⁷ While prayer is a pillar of spiritual growth that should not be ignored, growth would never occur without the Scriptures.

Scripture

Spiritual growth will not happen if the Word of God is neglected. Paul highlights the importance of Scripture from 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Here Paul tells Timothy that the Scriptures are God-breathed. God has breathed life into the Scriptures as He has breathed life into humans, and He inspires Scripture.¹⁰⁸ This four-fold purpose of Scripture from 2 Timothy 3 involves 1) teaching (Gk. *didaskalia*) this aspect of Scripture helps people reach their full potential through learning; 2) reproof (Gk. *elegmos*) persuades believers to conduct themselves differently; 3) correction (Gk. *epanorthosis*) alters behaviors and restores when the Christian is doing wrong;

¹⁰⁶ Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff, *Leading Small Groups That Thrive: Five Shifts to Take Your Group to the Next Level*, 87.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 87-88.

¹⁰⁸ Aida Besancon Spencer, *2 Timothy and Titus: A New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 130.

and 4) training (Gk. *paideia*) in the same token as guiding someone from childhood into adulthood.¹⁰⁹

When small groups highlight good Scriptural-based curriculum in their meetings, attendees reap the benefits of being complete, mature, and equipped. Hutson provided commentary on how if God grants and gives Scripture, then worshippers ought to read and apply it to their life.¹¹⁰ Followers of God are confronted with Scripture to mature and change into the image of Christ because of the nature of God's inspired text. This is why spiritual growth within the small group context must involve getting into the Word of God. The importance of God's Word is found in other passages of Scripture, such as the wisdom literature.

Psalms 119:105 is an excellent passage of Scripture that deals with the essential nature of Scripture. The psalmist uses a word picture to liken the very Word of God to light for the psalmist's feet along his path. As with verse 130, the Scripture is used as an image of light to illuminate as if there is expected danger in darkness, but the Word of God provides clear direction.¹¹¹ Small groups are spaces where people are surrounded by community and receive encouragement when dealing with the dark trials of life. It is the Word of God that will illuminate direction and spiritual growth. The Hebrew word *ner* in Psalm 119:105 depicts a small clay lamp with a single wick that permits the psalmist to see and travel safely along his path so

¹⁰⁹ Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights: New Testament Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*. Vol. 11 (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 241.

¹¹⁰ Christopher R. Hutson, Mikeal Parsons, Charles Talbert, and Bruce Longenecker, *First and Second Timothy and Titus: Paideia: Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 203.

¹¹¹ Daniel J. Estes, *Psalms 73-150: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. New international version. ed. Vol. 13B (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019).

he does not wander astray.¹¹² Small group ministry is excellent and intentional for spiritual growth and community but has challenges.

Small Group Ministry Challenges

This section is not an exhaustive list of every obstacle small group ministries face. Yet it highlights the common themes from the data taken in this literature review. Gunter indicated that infrequent attendance was a challenge. He pointed to a LifeWay research that highlighted the shift in attendance from families in the 1990s and early 2000s as compared to church attendees today, indicating that twenty years ago, a family was considered active and committed to the church if they attended church three times a week; however, a typical church member is “active” nowadays if they attend a church service three times per month.¹¹³ Gunter makes a great point by showing how infrequent attendance challenges understanding the metanarrative of Scripture. On the other hand, attendance also provides a challenge as believers learn how to implement their Christian life into their secular worlds for most of one’s week.¹¹⁴ The challenge of infrequent attendance has second and third-order effects. It will negatively affect the individual’s understanding and application of Scripture, and the member will inadequately tread through life’s trials.

Another important small group ministry challenge to address is the aspect of gossip and segregation. Relationships created in a small group can be rich and foster the necessary vehicle for community and spiritual growth to flourish. However, they can lead to destructive church

¹¹² John D. Barry, Douglas Mangum, Derek R. Brown, Michael S. Heiser, Miles Custis, Elliot Ritzema, Matthew M. Whitehead, Michael R. Grigoni, and David Bomar, *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press., 2016), Psalm 119, Logos Bible Software.

¹¹³ Gunter, “Developing a Small Group Ministry to Strengthen First Baptist Church Magnolia, Mississippi,” 6.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

drama without healthy parameters. For example, the concerns shared in the group can breed damaging gossip, create exclusive cliques, breed animosity towards outsiders, and cause people to leave the church.¹¹⁵ Every small group must be a safe space to be sincere and open with each other without worrying about what is shared, leaving the boundaries of that group. Church ministries and the Christian community should be open for an outsider to feel welcome, disciple active individuals, and not be segregated without befriending others.¹¹⁶ Thwarting gossip and segregation are paramount because relatedness, resources, and motivation will enable collaboration.¹¹⁷

Additionally, protecting the Word of God is essential, meaning correct doctrine and application within the confines of a small group are important. Too often, the small group may land on an inappropriate understanding or application of Scripture. Therefore, a good curriculum based on Scripture and a prepared, trained leader are paramount. This action research project aims to teach members and leaders alike to ensure that small group ministry is serving to build community and spiritually grow members. Therefore, focusing the small group on the Word of God is crucial. Paul exhorts Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 by assuring him that God inspires Scripture and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

A ministry challenge when the Word of God is not highlighted in small groups is that the group members are never led to godliness, maturity, or service. In addition, Mariet Mikaelian pens how, “The church should faithfully teach the Word of God but should never forget the

¹¹⁵ McIntosh and Arn, *What Every Pastor Should Know: 101 Indispensable Rules of Thumb for Leading Your Church*, 92.

¹¹⁶ Michael T. McDowell, “An Insider’s Church for Outsiders: The Johannine “Come and See” Passages and Christian Engagement with the World,” *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)* 13, no. 9 (2022), 10.

¹¹⁷ Wendy Shoesmith, Awang Borhanuddin, Awang Faisal Bin, Emmanuel Joseph Pereira, Norhayati Nordin, Beena Giridharan, Dawn Forman, and Sue Fyfe, “Barriers and Enablers to Collaboration in the Mental Health System in Sabah, Malaysia: Towards a Theory of Collaboration,” *BJPsych Open* 6, no. 1 (2020): e4-e4, 4.

importance of relationships in the process of transformation and growth. The church should provide opportunities for the members to get connected and develop relationships.”¹¹⁸ Mikaelian speaks to the importance of the Word of God, all while not forgetting how relationships create the vehicle for community and spiritual growth to flourish. In addition to protecting the meaning of the Word of God, modern cultural trends are working against small group ministry.

Bill Donahue and Charles Gowler shed light on five cultural megatrends that hinder the advancement of a small group: 1) the shift from modernity to post-modernity; 2) the industrial age to the informational age; 3) the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom; 4) shift from production initiatives to consumer awareness; and 5) shift from religious identity to spiritual exploration.¹¹⁹ While these cultural trends are shaping the landscape of the Church, they also provide an opportunity for small group ministry to push back and address the culture of society and communities. Small groups may experience these cultural trends in the form of a member who expresses an eclectic spirituality, has a consumeristic mentality regarding the church, or adopts the narrative from the postmodern agenda. Therefore, this DMIN action research project must involve small group leaders. Community and spiritual growth are not just for a seeker, a non-believer, or the “baby” Christian but for every congregation member, including its small group leaders.

These leaders are not without their flaws either, so when addressing these problems, the church needs to have effective accountability in place for leaders. Tornifolio highly suggests accountability for lay leaders that neither hinders their training nor prohibits effective

¹¹⁸ Mikaelian, “The Transformative Learning Experiences of Southern California Church-Based Small Group Members,” 185.

¹¹⁹ Donahue and Gowler, “Small Groups: The Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever?,” 128-129.

accountability.¹²⁰ Dunaetz and others provided conclusions among Generation Z and Millennials; that these generations have six common barriers to leading small groups: 1) a desire to lead the group, 2) skills to navigate group dynamics, 3) yearning to influence others positively, 4) social support, 5) biblical foundations, and 6) stability.¹²¹ Recruiting and adequately equipping a small group ministry and its leaders is crucial. Tornifolio's dissertation advocates, "Without traditional training and accountability structures, traditional churches may not be able to guarantee the beliefs held by lay leaders, who pass through small group training on their way to ordination."¹²² This is of utmost importance that training and investments are poured into the small group leaders. These leaders will uphold the standards for their group and ensure their members are on a journey towards Christlikeness.

Nurturing a healthy group will address surface-level sharing, inconsistent attendance, working with awkward personalities, lousy curriculum, taking breaks yet meeting regularly, and dealing with self-absorbed members.¹²³ A challenge could stem from the group if there is no clear why or purpose behind the group. Again, frequent attendance is key. A study involving over 100 small groups from Mainline and Evangelical churches in over 22 US states and three countries abroad indicated that 75% of their small groups met weekly.¹²⁴ The weekly frequency of meetings was great because groups reportedly spent time together, contributed to each other's

¹²⁰ Tornifolio, "A Strategy for Conducting Evangelism and Discipleship with the Unchurched in the Cane Bay Plantation Residential Development's Restricted Communities in Summerville, SC," 38.

¹²¹ Dunaetz, Wong, Draper, and Salsman, "Barriers to Leading Small Groups Among Generation Z and Younger Millennials: An Exploratory Factor Analysis and Implications for Recruitment and Training," 166.

¹²² Tornifolio, "A Strategy for Conducting Evangelism and Discipleship with the Unchurched in the Cane Bay Plantation Residential Development's Restricted Communities in Summerville, SC," 38.

¹²³ Search, *The Essential Guide for Small Group Leaders*, 67-68.

¹²⁴ Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff, *Leading Small Groups That Thrive: Five Shifts to Take Your Group to the Next Level*, 82-83.

spiritual growth, and an occasional absence did not significantly hinder a member's development of community or their discipleship.¹²⁵ Insufficiencies abound when one overlooks the importance of adequately preparing a ministry for its inception and permanence.

Literature Review Conclusion

Without a doubt, the literature has directed this researcher toward three main themes of an effective small group ministry. The literature review highlighted the similarities between the texts and how the researched literature has supported this DMIN action research project. This literature review dealt with the three overarching small group themes of *intent*, *community*, and *spiritual growth* by developing them into smaller subtopics. The outline of this literature review was three-fold and sought to develop the theme of *correcting intent*, which was accomplished by adjusting identity, casting vision, and building properly. Secondly, building *community* was further synthesized into encouragement, fellowship, and evangelism; and the theme of *spiritual growth* was synthesized into worship, discipleship, and prayer. Lastly, this section stressed the challenges of the small group ministry. Spiritual convictions and one's faith enable individuals to thrive and grow via one's relationship with God and their religious, and social support.¹²⁶ The next portion of chapter two's conceptual framework will outline the theological and theoretical foundations that serve as the foundation of this researcher's thesis.

Theological Foundations

The Old and New Testaments are brimming with examples supporting the bedrock for small group communities. After reviewing the scriptural underpinnings, it will be apparent that scholarly works support the research's purpose to address small groups. Specifically, this section

¹²⁵ Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff, *Leading Small Groups That Thrive: Five Shifts to Take Your Group to the Next Level*, 82-83.

¹²⁶ Brown, Arnold, Fletcher, and Standage, "Human Thriving," 171.

will build upon biblical precedence for small groups from the Old Testament, New Testament, unity in the Godhead, and the importance of spiritual community. Again, one will not find a passage of Scripture that says, “thou shall have small groups” or to “go therefore and have small groups,” but the intention is to leave the reader intrigued with how the Bible abounds with foundations for supporting a small group ministry.

Old Testament

In Exodus 18:17-26 Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, a priest, came to meet Moses and advised him on how to serve better and judge the Israelite people. Jethro’s counsel would serve to alleviate Moses from the responsibilities of the daily judicial office, thus allowing Moses to recoup more time for mediating and teaching the law.¹²⁷ As readers can tell, this passage is about setting up a judicial system and not explicitly about small group ministry. However, in this passage, one can deduce concepts related to small group ministry. The plot here would capture the first time Scripture speaks about Moses acting as a judge toward the Israelites.¹²⁸ In Exodus, the people stood around Moses waiting for their time to be judged; they remained from sun-up to sun-down. Jethro saw this inefficiency and recognized it as a problem. Pokrifka points out that Jethro could foresee that the current system Moses had in place would eventually fail because the workload was too heavy for Moses, and the time that the Israelites were waiting around was too great; ultimately, this process would have led Moses and the people to experience burnout.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Thomas B. Dozeman, Joel N. Lohr, Craig A. Evans, and Rainer Albertz, *The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*. Edited by Thomas B. Dozeman, Joel N. Lohr, and Craig A. Evans (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 154.

¹²⁸ Junia H. Pokrifka, *Exodus: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2018), 201, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 202.

Jethro proposed a new system of delegated leadership to help reduce burnout by breaking up the tasks of the senior official and distributing them to subordinate leaders. Concerning small groups, burnout can happen if pastors do not set up appropriate levels of delegation of leadership positions held by wise leaders. Christopher Wright mentions that these notable subordinate judges must be “capable,” in Hebrew, the word is *hayil*, a masculine noun translated as “men of worth” and can also mean having moral character, substance, or valor.¹³⁰ Commentary by Bruce Wells points out that judicial personnel in the ancient Near East would function in the role of “judge” without having the title of “judge” but would have held positions that earned social respect—city elders, government officials, religious officials, and small groups of free citizens.¹³¹ Thus, parallel these “capable” appointed judges with small group leaders, and one will find leaders that should be trustworthy, reliable, and have high moral worth. As it was for Moses, establishing small group leaders that encompass being *hayil* will help thwart burnout and handle the concerns within the group.

Continuing in the vein of Old Testament passages, Deuteronomy 6:4-9 demonstrates how Moses is teaching adults Scripture, specifically the Shema. For a Jewish believer, the Shema is the foundational prayer to act in faithful obedience to God and the Ten Commandments. Other passages of Scripture emphasize the fear of God, but here in Deuteronomy 6, the passage captures the first time the demand to love God.¹³² The love of God must be learned, and for it to be learned, it must be taught. Hence in Deuteronomy, Moses commands that the teachings of

¹³⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 326, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹³¹ Bruce Wells and John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary. Exodus*. Edited by John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), Exodus 18, EPub edition.

¹³² Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., Jay Sklar, August H. Konkel, David Reimer, Miles V. Van Pelt, and Mary Willson Hannah, *ESV Expository Commentary: Deuteronomy-Ruth* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2021), 109.

God are written in the believer's heart, that it gets repeated to their children, and spoken about everywhere, including the Jewish believer's home. One's faith is perpetuated as the people of God pass it on to the next generation and others who do not know about God. Propagating the love of God and the high regard for learning Scripture is great to be done within the medium of the small group.

This text speaking to the passing of the faith is relevant not only to Old Testament Jews but also to modern-day Christians. Deanna Thompson writes that in this passage, Moses is calling on the Israelites to connect with the Word of God physically, and they do so by affixing it to one's hand and forehead.¹³³ Some Jews have taken this practice literally by attaching little boxes to one's head called phylacteries containing verses of the Torah inside them.¹³⁴ The takeaway is the physical connection to the Word of God and that Scripture was passed down to others. As Duguid and others expound, teaching Scripture here speaks to a repetition that takes place continually, meaning that as Scripture is metaphorically attached to one's body, the believer commits passages to memory.¹³⁵ It encompasses all that people do and think. A small group is a prime setting to plunge deeper into the Scriptures, allow for greater spiritual growth, and disciple the next generation.

Other examples of Scripture supporting the tenants of small groups include King David and his mighty men. Second Samuel 23 captures the names of David's mighty men. However, bringing up David's men is not to draw attention to their colossal adventures but to point out that King David fought alongside these men and had each other's trust and loyalty. Long expounds

¹³³ Deanna A. Thompson, Deanna A. *Deuteronomy: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 62, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Duguid et al., *ESV Expository Commentary: Deuteronomy-Ruth*, 110.

on this point to show how David and these men needed each other. Yet because of David's character and leadership, these men espoused mutual loyalty and even took on high-risk exploits.¹³⁶ Recall for a moment some of these exploits—Josheb-Basshebeth slaying 800 men, Eleazar fighting to the point of exhaustion, and his hand sticking to his sword, or Shammah defending crops of lentils. Trust and loyalty are paramount when establishing a high-functioning, effective small group ministry. David set the example of his leadership, and the more than 30 elite soldiers that followed him did so out of inspiration and devotion.¹³⁷ Commentary likens followers of Jesus Christ to His fellow soldiers who are prepared and motivated out of a devotion to God, just as David and his men were.¹³⁸ When paralleled to small groups, participants should have a loyalty to Christ and a deep commitment to other members within the group.

Psalm 133 is an excellent passage that bolsters the importance of brothers dwelling together in unity. Here, David encourages unity among saints that live together harmoniously. The psalmist brings two pictures of unity into play—oil running down Aaron's beard and Mount Hermon's dew. Unity expressed in Psalm 133:2 is like a fragrant and holy anointing oil calling attention to the sacredness of worship enjoyed in the tabernacle, as people are in fellowship and worship together; it is a pleasing aroma to God.¹³⁹ Psalm 133 continues in verse 3 indicating unity is analogous to dew. Tremper Longman explains that Mount Hermon is a lofty mountain and the only snowcapped peak in Israel, whereas Zion is a hill in Jerusalem; thus, since Zion

¹³⁶ V. Philips Long, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 466, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹³⁷ Duguid, Iain M., James M. Hamilton, Jay Sklar, John L. Mackay, Gary. Millar, and John. Olley, *ESV Expository Commentary: Vol. III. 1 Samuel - 2 Chronicles*. Edited by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019), 661.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 662.

¹³⁹ Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 101-150* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishing Group, 2021), 5m, ProQuest Ebook Central.

receives less precipitation, the picture of dew from Mount Hermon coming upon dry Zion would be both satisfying and joyful.¹⁴⁰ Unity among the people of God induces joyous pleasure.

The application of happiness observed in this passage is likened to the experience of unity God's people receive when they are gathered in a small group setting. The fragrant precious oil used in the anointing is an aromatic, pleasing oil that is both refreshing and energizing.¹⁴¹ When the people of God are gathered in a small group setting, they are unified and in one accord, which is refreshing and energizing to attendees of the group. When God's people are gathered together for worship and community in a small group, they may come dry and depleted from the trials of life, but the encouragement, fellowship, and edification they receive from each other in the group brings life into arid circumstances. The New Testament is also ripe with support for this research project's purpose.

New Testament

The basis of small group ministry can be gleaned from the Son of God, as He is appointing His 12 disciples to ministry and living life with them in intimate discipleship relationships. The selection of the Twelve is captured in other Gospels, but specifically in Mark 3:13-19, 34-35, shows that the Twelve have come to Christ to learn (3:13) and were appointed with authority to preach (3:14). Wessel, Strauss, and others point out that the purpose for the Christ choosing the Twelve is twofold: 1) they might be with Him; 2) they would be sent out to preach and have authority to drive out demons.¹⁴² Discipleship is a tenant of the small group ministry. Choosing the Twelve does not negate the need to meet in a traditional synagogue or to

¹⁴⁰ Tremper Longman, *Psalms an Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 439, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴¹ Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Psalms 101-150*, 5m, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴² Walter W. Wessel, Mark L. Strauss, Tremper Longman, and David E. Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Mark. Revised. Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 117, ProQuest Ebook Central.

learn from a priest. However, this highly relational model that Christ espoused allowed the disciples to break away from the large gathering and get intimate as a time for spiritual growth with Christ. Verse 13 encompasses the Greek phrase *apelthon pros auton*, which means “they departed to him,” indicating how they broke away from the larger group to join Jesus.¹⁴³ Similarly, with a small group, a disciple in a small group does not negate the need for the large corporate gatherings of the church; yet, it does provide an opportunity for church members to be alone with others who are more mature in their faith and learn from them in an intimate smaller group setting.

Wessel, Strauss, and others write, “Discipleship is first and foremost about attachment to the Master, being with Jesus and learning from him. The Twelve were to live with Jesus, travel with him, converse with him, and follow his model.”¹⁴⁴ Later, in Mark 3:34-35, it is imparted to readers that those in Christ’s inner circle, those seated around Him, were referred to as His family. The spiritual family of Jesus does God’s will. The group-oriented culture of the Middle East is not overlooked, nor is Christ’s own family; yet, what happens now is that Christ elevates the level of spiritual relationships. Towards the end of Mark 3, Christ affirms that those who are his mother, brother, and sister obey God. In Mark 3:21, Christ’s blood family declares that Jesus is out of his mind—either they did not believe He was the Messiah, or they did not want to get in trouble with Roman authorities. Jesus sees His new kinship and piggybacks off the selection of the spiritual family of the Twelve in verses 13-19 to denote the idea of Christ creating a new people of God.¹⁴⁵ Hence, spiritual ties can be closer than one’s earthly family ties. Christ’s blood

¹⁴³ Kim Huat Tan, *Mark a New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Lutterworth Press, 2016), 45.

¹⁴⁴ Wessel, Strauss, Longman, and Garland, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Mark. Revised. Vol. 1*, 117, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴⁵ Tan, *Mark a New Covenant Commentary*, 50.

family wanted to stifle His ministry, yet His selection of His 12 Disciples demonstrates the depth of affiliation people can develop in small group relationships. This level of richness, closeness, and spiritual community is built within the context of a small group.

Throughout the book of Hebrews, the author unpacks Christ's high priesthood. In Hebrews 10:19-25, it is learned that Christians can boldly enter Christ's divine presence and should continue to assemble. Additionally, verses 19-25 give three admonitions invoking Christians to draw near God, hold onto their confession of faith, and be concerned about not giving up meeting with one another. Looking closer at the first exhortation from Hebrews 10:22 is the call to draw near to God, and the opposite of drawing near to God would be to turn away from Him.¹⁴⁶ Correlating this to small group ministry, one would find that there is a strong desire for those involved in a small group not to be lukewarm, but since the veil is torn and believers have access to the High Priest, believers should draw near to God. Peterson and others remind readers that one draws near to God by continually approaching Him with confidence from the finished work of Christ.¹⁴⁷ The second exhortation from Hebrews 10:23 speaks about holding onto the confession of the faith. Commentary writer Michael Pearl implies that since the author of Hebrews gives a command to hold firmly to the faith, there must be another undesirable choice that the Hebrews may have considered, as some may have been on the edge of giving up on this new covenant.¹⁴⁸ The motivation for not giving up is hope. The hope of holding fast to the faith can be built up as Christians gather within the context of small groups.

¹⁴⁶ David Peterson, Eckhard J. Schnabel, and Nicholas Perrin, *Hebrews an Introduction and Commentary* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2020), 240.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 244.

¹⁴⁸ Michael Pearl, *Understanding the Book of Hebrews A Word-by-Word Commentary* (Ashland: No Greater Joy Ministries, 2021), 74.

The third appeal is covered in verses 24 and 25. Hebrews 10:24 speaks to how believers should encourage each other to gather and “promote” one another to good deeds when they meet. Thomas Schreiner and others advocate that the Greek word used here for “promote,” *παροξυσμόν*, is too tame in its original meaning, and the implication is more accurately caught through the NIV’s “spur” or the ESV’s “stir up.”¹⁴⁹ Being able to spur one another to good works cannot occur if believers are not meeting. Hebrews 10:25 encourages Christians to meet up to preserve the faith and not abandon these critical gatherings. If Christians neglect meeting with one another in corporate settings, it may question these individuals’ allegiance to God. The charge from verse 25 suggests that there is a thoughtful reflection on the needs of other believers by continuing to meet and not drifting away because of myriad reasons that encroach on fellowshiping with other believers.¹⁵⁰ To wrap this section up, Hebrews 10 demonstrates that small groups are a prime setting for Christians to draw near God, hold onto their faith, and continually meet with one another.

In addition to having a new spiritual family, being encouraged to meet regularly, and stirring each other to good works, another New Testament scriptural support for small groups expressed the encouragement that is received within the community of believers from such passages as 1 Thessalonians 5:11. Paul concludes his message in chapter 5 by exhorting the believers to comfort one another and build each other up. The command to comfort one another means to encourage each other, and believers need not fear Christ’s return; they can secure their election for salvation, and because of these two reasons, Christians can comfort one another.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, Andreas J. Köstenberger, T. Desmond Alexander, James M. Hamilton, K. A. Mathews, and Terry L. Wilder. *Commentary on Hebrews* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2015), 320, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁵⁰ Peterson, Schnabel, and Perrin, *Hebrews an Introduction and Commentary*, 243.

¹⁵¹ Jeffery A. D. Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 372.

Building each other up refers to building construction that speaks to the spiritual edification as believers commune together.¹⁵² Other commentary hits the communal aspect home by stressing to each believer the importance of exhorting and building each other up to represent each other as a part of walking in the newness of life.¹⁵³ This encouragement, support, and edification are the key qualities of a small group. There are also themes of unity expressed within God's triune nature.

Unity in the Godhead

The book of Genesis is where readers first understand that God was not created but is the Creator. By Him, all things are brought into existence. In Genesis 1:1-2, the reader learns of God's Triune nature. David Atkinson asserts that these first two verses of Genesis demonstrate a combination of the creative and animated Spirit of God and the creative and commanding Word of God.¹⁵⁴ Specifically, in Genesis 1:1, the commentary authors, Waltke and Fredricks describe how the name "God" used in this instance is the Hebrew name *Elohim* which is the plural form of God used to denote His majesty.¹⁵⁵ The plurality of the Godhead is spoken about in the Gospel of John. In John 1:1-3, readers are again reminded that in the very beginning of time was the Word of God, that very Word was God, and everything was created through Him. As God interacts with creation, one can see that there is unity among the community of the Triune Godhead.

¹⁵² Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians*, 372.

¹⁵³ Andy Johnson, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 111-112.

¹⁵⁴ David J. Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1–11* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 28.

¹⁵⁵ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), prologue (1:1-2:3), Epub edition.

Howard Vos sums up the doctrine of the Godhead nicely by stating, “Thus the entire Trinity participated in the creation. It would appear that the Father was the designer and issued the decree to create; the Son effected the design; and the Spirit was involved in some capacity [...] the omnipotent and intelligent Holy Spirit imparts capacity to matter and produces an ordered world.”¹⁵⁶ A small group that functions well will be able to have deep bonds and unity within the community of their small group. Whether looking at Genesis 1 or John 1, instances of living in communion within the Godhead abound. For example, in John 1:1, the phrase “with God” carries with it the meaning of “being from God” or “living in communion with God.”¹⁵⁷ Speaking to the communion that the Word has with the Father, Kanagaraj asserts that the Word, the *Logos*, shares in God’s very life, thus showing their active partnership and reciprocal indwelling as the Word was with and is God.¹⁵⁸

John 14:16-26 is another passage of Scripture that mentions all three Persons of the Trinity, calling out the unity within the community of the Godhead. Jesus announces that He will come again. In verse 16, Christ asks the Father to provide “another helper,” which in Greek is *allos parakletos*, referring to the Spirit of God.¹⁵⁹ In verse 20, John communicates to readers that the Son is in the Father, and Christians and the Son are in one another. Johannes Beutler explains how Jesus will ask the Father on behalf of the believer to send the Spirit—the *Paraclete*.¹⁶⁰ Here, all three Persons of the Trinity are in action to bring a common purpose of providing the Person

¹⁵⁶ Howard F. Vos, *Genesis- Everyday Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019), 14, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁵⁷ Jey J. Kanagaraj, *John a New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2013), 1-2.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 147-148.

¹⁶⁰ Johannes Beutler, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017), 294, ProQuest Ebook Central.

of the Holy Spirit to Believers. The unity within the community of the Godhead is at work again for a common goal.

This passage of John 14 also expounds upon the ministry of the Paraclete as a Comforter and an Advocate, the ministry of the Son that after death, believers will experience life because of Christ's work. Jesus's work will be realized on the day of Christ's return in the resurrection, and His followers will also be safeguarded because they will not be alone.¹⁶¹ Grant Osborne highlights the depth of the union of the Godhead. Osborne expounds on a three-stage union, with the first as Jesus indwells the Father, the second as a believer indwells Jesus, and the third as Jesus indwelling the believer.¹⁶² The union of the Godhead is reflected in a believer's union with Jesus. Recalling how in Genesis, the Trinity worked toward the common goal of creation, and here in John, the Godhead is at work to bring about the Advocate and union with God. Thus, if John 14:16-26 is to be summarized, then as the Word is embodied as a human, the *Paraclete* is Spirit embodied in the community of believers.¹⁶³ Much is the same with small groups; members of the group come together, in unity, for spiritual growth and deeper communal bonds.

Importance of Spiritual Community

Acts 2 gives readers an idealized picture of this early church Christian community. Interestingly, here in Acts 2:42-47, this community of believers is referred to as “those who believed” (*hoi pisteuones*); they are described as the “church” (*ekklesia*) in Acts 5 to denote their assembly.¹⁶⁴ This community devoted itself to four areas—teaching, fellowship, worship, and

¹⁶¹ Grant R. Osborne, *John Verse by Verse* (Ashland: Lexham Press, 2018), 223, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Marianne Meye Thompson, *John a Commentary*, First edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 321.

¹⁶⁴ Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary*. First ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 107.

prayer.¹⁶⁵ Adhering to the apostles' teaching did not mean that they needed to follow strict codified instruction; rather, they would be devoted to teachings and preachings such as heard from Peter's sermon.¹⁶⁶ Additionally, the believers did not have the completed New Testament at this time, so their instruction came from Christ's teachings and the Old Testament.¹⁶⁷ As the early believers met, they ate, fellowshiped, prayed together, and gave to those who lacked.

Holladay indicates that the Greek word *koinonia* demonstrates "sharing with each other," and here, the early believers did more than meet; they had a mutual sharing of resources—food, money, and even non-tangible items.¹⁶⁸ The early church met in the temple, and throughout the week, they met in smaller groups. Their sense of community was so strong that they met the needs of others, and that was more important than their own luxury. The *koinonia* exhibited in small group ministry is paramount to the level of relationship the group develops. This early church regularly met in the temple courts for worship and evangelistic activities but broke bread in private homes with sincere hearts—this was not just an occasional practice; it was their communal model.¹⁶⁹ The more people are vulnerable and share emotional support, food, prayers, and even shelter with each other, the deeper their spiritual community will be. This model is entirely in line with the purposes of this DMIN action research.

Romans 12:9-21 sheds light on the marks of a true Christian. Christians who live in connection with other believers are to demonstrate brotherly affection. Devotion and Christian

¹⁶⁵ Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights: New Testament Commentary Acts* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2016), 67.

¹⁶⁶ Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary*. First ed., 108.

¹⁶⁷ Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights: New Testament Commentary Acts*, 68.

¹⁶⁸ Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary*. First ed., 108.

¹⁶⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Acts Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 49.

love are additional operating principles that guide the small group ministry. As Paul lists the character qualities of those in the community of faith, he answers the question of how people look who show genuine love towards one another.¹⁷⁰ Brotherly affection is expressed by weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice. Christians are encouraged to love one another with brotherly devotion and outdo one another by showing honor and hospitality. David Garland and others indicate how other New Testament writers develop the concept of brotherly love beyond one's blood relationship to their family, and it is even expressed to the adoptive family of Christian brothers and sisters.¹⁷¹ These levels of devotion and love that fellow believers display are crucial for the overall health of a successful small group.

Another important aspect of small groups supported by Scripture is from Second Timothy. Specifically, in Second Timothy 1:13-14, Paul exhorts Timothy to remain loyal to the Gospel. In verse 13, Paul says to keep to sound teaching, which contains a template for making copies. Paul wanted Timothy to hold to the patterns of sound doctrine to meet the varying needs of his congregation.¹⁷² In verse 14, Paul tells Timothy to guard the gift entrusted to him, which is the pure doctrine of God. But Timothy is not just to defend it using his power but guard the sound teaching of the Gospel with the help of the Holy Spirit. Small groups ought to be a place that holds to sound doctrine and guards it. Likewise, small group leaders should carefully handle Scripture to not detract from or add to the sacred Word of God. The theological foundations section concludes by understanding that the Old and New Testaments support the underpinnings

¹⁷⁰ Aaron Sherwood, *Romans a Structural, Thematic, and Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 434.

¹⁷¹ David E. Garland, Eckhard J. Schnabel, and Nicholas Perrin, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), chapter 6, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁷² Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights: New Testament Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 182.

of small groups. The subsequent section will look at some research and models that have already preceded the theme of this DMIN action research project.

Theoretical Foundations

Given the theological implications behind small groups, biblical-centered small groups have progressed from the early church until modern times. Several practices exist that provide an excellent foundation from which to build. This researcher's theory that small groups have two overarching themes—building community and deepening spiritual growth has been supported throughout the literature. Hence the need not to shift from examining the Scripture and looking to current practices. Thus, the theoretical foundations section will explore the *historical concepts* that established the small groups of today and will expound upon the *ministry practices* that relate to the topic at hand.

Historical Concepts

The literature review and theological sections above have taken the time to point out how the pulse of small group ministry in Acts 2 included teaching, fellowship, meeting needs, breaking bread, praying together, and doing so with glad and sincere hearts. Yet, what was now beginning to morph was this concept of the house church as mentioned many times by Paul through such passages as Romans 16:3-5, Colossians 4:15, and Philemon 1:2.¹⁷³ This concept of small groups within the context of house churches persisted past the apostolic era, and became the norm, especially within cultures that lacked church buildings.¹⁷⁴ As the Christian movement spread to various regions, many came to the faith, which gave rise to the house church. Atkinson and Comiskey assert that it was the success of the house church movement during the first three

¹⁷³ Donahue and Gowler, "Small Groups: The Same Yesterday, Today, and Forever?" 119.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

centuries that ultimately caused the realization of Christianity's spread.¹⁷⁵ Before delving deeply into the historical concepts of small groups, spending a moment to recap Christianity is also essential for developing the backdrop from which small groups flourished.

Rome took control of Palestine in 63 BC; Jesus stepped on the scene and cleansed the temple around AD 30, and because he was a threat, he was crucified.¹⁷⁶ Following the conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity, and strict enforcement from Emperor Theodosius I, Christianity became the Roman state religion from AD 280s-395.¹⁷⁷ Ecumenical Church Councils were held in AD 325 and 381 to discuss orthodox doctrine, and during this time, Augustine perpetuated the conviction that Christianity supplanted Judaism.¹⁷⁸ From AD 500-1500, the split between Rome's Eastern and Western Empires grew—Emperor Justinian would forcibly baptize and demote Jews; in the 7th century, the Arabian prophet, Muhammad, would birth Islam, and in response, Rome launched eight crusades between 1096-1270.¹⁷⁹ As one can see, Christianity is spreading during this time, albeit forcibly at times, providing a framework for the house church and small group ministry.

Martin Luther played a role in the Protestant Reformation, challenging Roman doctrine in the 1500s; yet it was the Reformers who consulted Jewish rabbis to better study the Hebrew and Greek texts, and from the 14th-16th centuries, the Ottoman Turkish Empire was a formidable

¹⁷⁵ Harley Atkinson and Joel Comiskey, "Lessons from the Early House Church for Today's Cell Groups," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1, 2014, 76.

¹⁷⁶ Izak J.J. Spangenberg, "The Religious Roots of Racism in the Western World: A Brief Historical Overview," *Hervormde Teologische Studies* 75, no. 1, 2019, 2-3.

¹⁷⁷ Spangenberg, "The Religious Roots of Racism in the Western World: A Brief Historical Overview," 3.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 5-6.

military power in challenging Christians in the West.¹⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Luther recommended Christians meet in houses for prayer, reading, and sacraments.¹⁸¹ A German reformer named Martin Bucer, also a student of Calvin, began small groups in 1547 because he advocated that these groups were the only way to grow in holiness and establish a true Christian community.¹⁸² Eventually, with the colonization of the world from 1530-1950, European countries would subjugate lands and convert the peoples of the new land to Christianity.¹⁸³ In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Puritans also stressed the importance of establishing small groups; they called these groups *conventicles* and met in homes and at other times aside from the Sunday gathering.¹⁸⁴

The spread of Christianity gave rise to early house churches. Some church historians agree that the size of an earlier house church was likely 15-20 people, primarily due to the size constraints of the average house structure.¹⁸⁵ Where those gathered, they met in the dining room or in a formal space that could allow the meetings to spill out into gardens and yards dependent upon the house. Meeting in a common dining area would enable the churches to break bread with one another. While researchers cannot become too dogmatic on the size of a group, the size mentioned above of around 15-20 congregants was typical. Atkinson and Comiskey indicate that if the group began to outgrow the meeting space, then the small group would have to divide itself

¹⁸⁰ Spangenberg, "The Religious Roots of Racism in the Western World: A Brief Historical Overview," 6-7.

¹⁸¹ Peter Bunton, "300 Years of Small Groups- The European Church from Luther to Wesley," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014), 90.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Spangenberg, "The Religious Roots of Racism in the Western World: A Brief Historical Overview," 8.

¹⁸⁴ Bunton, "300 Years of Small Groups- The European Church from Luther to Wesley," 91.

¹⁸⁵ Atkinson and Comiskey, "Lessons from the Early House Church for Today's Cell Groups," 78.

and meet in another house.¹⁸⁶ Excavations near Corinth reveal that in atrium-style houses, rooms with adjacent courtyards could have fit nine people on couches or about 20 people should one remove the furniture.¹⁸⁷ These excavations show that the smaller house churches would have allowed for engaging experiences and personal discipleship.

Next is the concept of Pietism from the 17th-18th century. Pietism led to the further development of the modern small group ministry. The agenda of a house church appeared to be less rigid than that of the Piety movement. To live pious lives, Pietists held to the notion of their desire for a deeper personal relationship with God and to live out transformed lives.¹⁸⁸ Pietism, considered the first ecumenical movement within Protestantism, promoted a strong desire to study the Bible, foster holiness, and stress good works in meeting groups called *collegia or collegia pietatis*.¹⁸⁹ These efforts led to the formation of Reformed churches. For centuries, as the ministry of small groups morphed, they took the form of house churches, pious *collegia*, and were a staple ministry for the basis of the Lutheran and the Methodist churches. In the 1700s, the Methodists allowed various people to join these meetings: men and women, people from various age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds, and people from different maturity levels of the Christian faith.¹⁹⁰ Burton discusses that the primary purpose of these meetings was for discipleship and discipline with the goals of addressing purity and holiness.¹⁹¹ Within the

¹⁸⁶ Atkinson and Comiskey, "Lessons from the Early House Church for Today's Cell Groups," 79.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Bunton, "300 Years of Small Groups- The European Church from Luther to Wesley," 92.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 97-98.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 98.

centuries to follow in the American landscape, research also shows the theoretical implications stretched into the American church.

Moving past Pietism to the first half of the twentieth century were four spiritual awakenings. In his dissertation work, Joe Easterling proved that in every spiritual awakening from 1726-1979, there existed a noteworthy incidence of small groups in the *First Great Awakening* 1726-1791; the *Second Great Awakening* 1780-1850; the *Layman, Welsh, and Korean Revivals* 1857-1910; and the *Mid-Century Revival* 1949-1979.¹⁹² During the first half of the twentieth century, the small group context that dominated the United States and Canada was the Sunday school movement model.¹⁹³ Atkinson and Rose write how the Sunday school model typically held to these six characteristics: 1) a single individual usually led the group; 2) instruction was didactic in nature; 3) the class usually followed standardized lesson plans; 4) classes were usually confined to the church building; 5) classes always occurred on Sunday mornings; and 6) classes were not limited in size.¹⁹⁴ From the 1900s-1940s, and after the end of the First World War, Bible study groups mimicked small group study in many denominations, from the Wesleyans to the Roman Catholics.¹⁹⁵

It was not until the latter half of the twentieth century that the modern small group ministry movement would surpass the Sunday school model for Christian formation and disciple-making.¹⁹⁶ As a post-war development from the 1940s-1970s, house groups were embraced after

¹⁹² Easterling, "Big Things Start Small: A Survey of the Role of Small Groups in Christianity's Major Spiritual Awakenings," 222-225.

¹⁹³ Atkinson and Rose, "The Small-Group Ministry Movement of the Last Four Decades," 547.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 548.

¹⁹⁵ Roger L. Walton, *Disciples Together Discipleship Formation and the Role of Small Groups* (London, England: SCM Press, 2014), 86.

¹⁹⁶ Atkinson and Rose, "The Small-Group Ministry Movement of the Last Four Decades," 548.

the Second World War.¹⁹⁷ The modern small group ministry meets outside the church building for community and spiritual growth. A small group may choose to watch a specific set of teaching videos, cover a particular curriculum or Scripture, and may have components of worship. A small group ministry eruption from the 1960s-2000s was largely fueled by missions and discipleship from the *Base Christian Communities* in Latin America and *Cell Church* movement in Korea and Asia.¹⁹⁸ A small group can meet in one's house or may choose to meet at a park, restaurant, coffee shop, or in nature. Therefore, from the first-century church's pursuit of house churches to the development of small groups among subsequent generations, the previous generations have sought to clearly define the intent of what small group ministry means to them.

Dr. Harley Atkinson is a big proponent of small group research and surmises that small groups are beneficial to churches and their spiritual formation ministries because they: provide a sense of community, help people during their quest for spirituality, are an entry point into the church, create a safe environment for learning, it is an optimal way to study Scripture, and is a fruitful way to rally lay leaders.¹⁹⁹ Since the 1960s, the popularity of the small group has been on the rise because of the social context from which it was birthed. Initially, American society offered support from security and belongingness once provided by one's extended family and neighbors. However, as individuality became popular, the innate desire for a community still left many alienated, and they looked to small groups which offered individuals a sense of belonging.²⁰⁰ The way American Christians assimilated into the church was also changing.

¹⁹⁷ Walton, *Disciples Together Discipleship Formation and the Role of Small Groups*, 88.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 93.

¹⁹⁹ Harley Atkinson, *The Power of Small Groups in Christian Formation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2018), 15-16, Scribd.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 17-18.

People used to incorporate into the church by attending large corporate preaching, but now research indicates that individuals born after the 1950s prefer small group style workshops or smaller home church groups.²⁰¹ Now that significant time was spent developing the historical practices of a small group within the history of the church, and the next section will highlight the framework of various practices.

Small Group Ministry Models

Many small group models may be based on themes, a common activity or interest, a specific gender, or marital status. Defining what model fits one's church will depend on that church community, the leadership team, and the pastor. One of the models, known as the "cell church model," was popularized by South Korean pastor Yonggi Cho. Pastor Cho studied how Moses divided the millions of people he was judging into groups of 100s, 50s, and 10s, according to Exodus 18. Boren and Egli indicate that Cho emphasized the following four notions: 1) edification and evangelism, 2) groups involve Bible study and prayer, 3) stressing evangelism and practically meeting the needs of others, and 4) holding that every five to seven members are overseen by a section leader and roughly a group of five section leaders are overseen by pastors.²⁰² Cho believed in delegating leadership. An anticipated benefit to the cell church model is that the burden of leadership is spread out, but a con from this type of model can be purely driven by the caliber of the leader overseeing the group.

Carl George promoted the meta-church model in the early 90s, and what drove his way of thinking was a desire to be a church of small groups instead of a church with small groups.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Atkinson, *The Power of Small Groups in Christian Formation*, 25-26.

²⁰² Scott Boren and Jim Egli, "Small Group Models: Navigating the Commonalities and the Differences," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 2014, 153.

²⁰³ Ibid.

Research demonstrated that the different types of groups that stemmed from this meta-church model of small groups comprised more pastoral and loving groups, ones that desired to learn and understand Bible knowledge, others that were more about deciding and internally recognizing, and groups that did duties of service.²⁰⁴ Other meta-church group types included service groups, support groups, disciple-making groups, seeker groups, and community groups.²⁰⁵ Specific to these models, as the groups would grow, they would develop the next generation of leaders from within, and these new leaders would launch a new group. A fantastic bonus to this style of small group modeling is that the church can develop various types of small groups within their church; a predicted con to this style would be that the church could suffer from a lack of clear intent by having so many variations of small group ministry. The heart of the meta-church model seems to encompass how Christ sought to develop his leaders through discipleship.

Another small group model is having a small group based on neighborhood or geography. These small group models attempt to meet based on their proximity to others within a city or region.²⁰⁶ Since members are closer to each other, one benefit is that they can be more spontaneous. One con that the Keefer text discussed concerning a purely geographic-based small group ministry is that often there is not much diversity in these groups because specific neighborhoods or parts of the city have the same types of demographic.²⁰⁷ While there may not be much diversity, another thought is that these types of meetings make it easier for people to invite their neighbors who live close by. A neighborhood-style small group may encompass various attributes of other small group models.

²⁰⁴ Boren and Egli, "Small Group Models: Navigating the Commonalities and the Differences," 154.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 154-155.

²⁰⁶ Keefer, *Small Group Ministry Volunteer Handbook*, 18.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

The Groups of 12 model is another small group ministry model birthed in the 90s by Columbian pastor Cesar Castellanos.²⁰⁸ Three key components of the Groups of 12 model include a weekend retreat focused on spiritual bondage and an equipping school, an emphasis on external multiplication by gathering people from their circle of influence, and lastly, an intense oversight of leadership by other higher-ranked group leaders with the pastor at the top of the chain.²⁰⁹ Castellano attempted to solve the problem of taking too long for his small group leaders to be ready to lead; his aging process took about two years until people were prepared to lead. One con discussed in the research article was that the burden of having such an intense oversight and chain of command could be daunting. However, two benefits are that leaders can quickly become established, and secondly, they can seek to evangelize people outside the church's sphere of influence.

Another small group ministry model could include an affiliation group or issue-oriented group. This researcher believes that these types of small group models are very similar. An affiliation group forms around a particular hobby or interest, such as a surfing small group. In comparison, an issue-oriented group forms around a specific concern, like a battered women's group. These groups are similar in that they are typically visited by people interested in a hobby or share the same level of concern for the issues. As one will see in the subsequent paragraph, Atkinson indicates that this type of group can be called task-oriented. A benefit to these types of groups is that they fill a niche and are a natural springboard to the commonality of the hobby or

²⁰⁸ Boren and Egli, "Small Group Models: Navigating the Commonalities and the Differences," 155.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 156.

topic and serve an immediate need.²¹⁰ Unfortunately, these groups are so niched that they may challenge evangelism yet be an excellent catalyst for building a solid community.

Atkinson points out that the majority of small groups can be classified as one of four types of groups: 1) process-oriented, 2) content-oriented, 3) task-oriented, or 4) need-oriented.²¹¹ Process-oriented groups emphasize group identity followed by formatting; they may be known as affinity groups that gather peers with similar interests or home fellowship groups whose main focus is building biblical community and love.²¹² A content-oriented group would focus on learning subject matter or doctrinal themes and may find root in a Bible study group whose aim is studying Scriptures or a discussion group that looks to content or Scriptures for starting points of a discussion.²¹³ A task-oriented group is set on completing some undertaking; whether known as a committee, the primary focus is decision-making or an outreach group focusing on sharing the Christian message through evangelistic efforts.²¹⁴ Lastly, a need-oriented group stems from a need to change, and these individuals seek the support of like-minded people; these groups may be known as growth groups, support groups, or recovery groups.²¹⁵

Conclusion

In recalling the issue at the core of this DMIN action research project, what was discovered is that Valley Gate Church does not grasp the purpose of small group ministry due to not implementing small groups with well-defined intent. Chapter 2 has spent time developing the

²¹⁰ Keefer, *Small Group Ministry Volunteer Handbook*, 18.

²¹¹ Atkinson, *The Power of Small Groups in Christian Formation*, 59.

²¹² Ibid., 59-60.

²¹³ Ibid., 61.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 62-64.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 65-67.

purpose behind this thesis project. This DMIN action research aims to create and implement a six-week congregational training to develop small group leaders and members at Valley Gate Church. This researcher firmly believes that if Valley Gate Church implements the six-week congregational training, the church's small groups will have a clear direction, cultivate community, and grow spiritually. This DMIN action research project is not a how-to guide for small groups but serves to build the foundations of this ministry and help this researcher's ministry context. The review of precedent literature has directed this researcher toward three main themes of small group ministry.

The literature review developed a three-fold theme to help address the problem at Valley Gate Church by *correcting intent*, developing a strong *community*, and establishing *spiritual growth*. Scholarly works support the research's purpose to address small groups. The biblical principles underpinning this research project stemmed from Old Testament texts such as Exodus 18:17-26 and Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Also, New Testament passages like Mark 3 and Hebrews 10:19-25 continue to support acting as pillars of this research. Additionally, this researcher unpacked how unity within the community of the Godhead served as an example of unity within small groups; and the importance of spiritual community, as demonstrated in Acts 2. Lastly, the theoretical foundations outlined two notions. The first sought to trace the historical concepts from the first house church meetings towards concepts leading up to the modern-day small group. Secondly, several ministry practices, such as Cho's cell church, geographic-based, and affiliation group models, were developed. The next chapter of this DMIN action research project will outline how this problem will be addressed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Through the development of chapter one, this researcher took the time to paint a picture of Valley Gate Church. This 2016 church plant continues growing and developing as other young congregations do. Part of that development is with the church's small group ministry. While lives have been positively impacted through the church's small groups, the senior pastor believes that small groups were never launched with a well-defined intent. Thus, the birth of this DMIN action research project began to take root.

Chapter two of this thesis reviewed literature and fleshed out a three-fold theme to help address the problem at Valley Gate Church by *correcting intent*, developing a *strong community*, and establishing *spiritual growth*. Since small groups were never launched with a well-defined purpose, this researcher drew upon scholarly works to find scriptural support for the foundations of community and spiritual growth. Chapter two also looked at theoretical foundations outlined from the humble beginnings of the house church morphing into the constructs of the modern-day small group ministry.

Chapter three brings this researcher to a place to explain the methodology for this action research project. This researcher implemented a six-week training available to adults at Valley Gate Church to address the small group concern. This section will look at the intervention design and provide a narrative of how to implement the intervention. This will help paint a vivid process for others to implement this same project should one's church also have a small group ministry that was never given clear guidelines. Thus, implementing this six-week research project will help participants better understand the intent behind small groups. Sensing teaches that an action

research methodology is like a recipe. A methodology's recipe may include purpose, tasks, steps for each task, place, timelines, participants, ethical or confidentiality issues, resources, data collection tools, protocols for using tools, and evaluation procedures.²¹⁶ This section will address the Valley Gate Small Group recipe.

Intervention Design

Purpose

Small groups at Valley Gate Church exist but were never launched with expressed intent. This intervention will implement a six-week congregational training to develop small group leaders and members at Valley Gate Church. The plan's purpose is to provide availability to the entire congregation instead of only providing availability to staff, small group leaders, or ministry leaders. This researcher insists it would be more beneficial if the whole congregation was offered a chance to learn what the Scriptures and literature say about small groups. Suppose only a select few are given the opportunity. The church will be required to wait for a trickle-down effect of the knowledge passing from this researcher to leaders and staff, then down to small group attendees and the rest of the congregation. If the training is made available to everyone, then the majority of the church can hit the "reset" button on small groups and correct intent. Thus, it would be more advantageous for the entire congregation to learn about small groups instead of narrowly limiting the focus to current small group leaders, staff, and other leaders.

The intervention will assess current levels of knowledge, spiritual practices, and the meaning of small groups and then provide participants with six weeks of training. The intervention will culminate by assessing the learner's newfound understanding of small groups.

²¹⁶ Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 66.

The training will help drive the church towards building a strong community that is growing spiritually. The six-week intervention will make a difference in the problem of small groups at Valley Gate Church because it will allow the small groups to build upon solid foundations. Currently, small groups at Valley Gate Church are focused on different aspects. Some are more like fellowship hangouts without any slant toward addressing spiritual growth. Some small groups exist with various ministries just getting together without a clear purpose. Small groups at Valley Gate Church have not entirely missed the mark, but this intervention will be an excellent vector check for small group leaders and participants. Another way this six-week intervention addresses the problem is because some congregants may have just been focused on a single aspect of a small group, such as discipleship, while neglecting other elements like spiritual growth, worship, prayer, or evangelism.

Tasks

This researcher must first secure a time and place to conduct the training. Following that will include promoting the DMIN action research by recruiting participants. Once participants are gathered, an overview of the study will be presented to them, and they must provide their informed consent to participate. Before any training, this researcher will assess the participants' current knowledge. When the dates of the six-week training have been identified, refreshments and childcare will be forecasted. Also, before any training is conducted, the workbook material must be finalized, printed, and ready for participants. The implementation of the six-week training will commence. Once implementation is complete, post-training data will be collected. The pre- and post-data will be analyzed into themes and conclusions drawn from them. Steps for each of the tasks will be expounded upon below.

Timeline

The first step in implementation is deconflicting the church's scheduling. Calendar concerns are a hurdle that must be considered when implementing this research project. This researcher has targeted the spring of 2023 as the implementation semester for this project. Project realization dates will first depend upon Institutional Review Board approval. To obtain Institutional Review Board approval, the researcher must complete the computer-based Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative, submit an approved prospectus, and complete an online application through Cayuse. The Institutional Review Board will review the application, prospectus, and any additional documents, such as questionnaires, and either grant approval or modify the application. This researcher's Institutional Review Board approval can be found in Appendix J.

Since approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has been obtained, this researcher can begin implementing the project, targeting the spring of 2023. Since this researcher does not control the schedule at Valley Gate Church, he is working with the senior pastor on when this project will be implemented. During the last meeting with the senior pastor, Pastor Darryl, he indicated that possibly implementing it in January 2023 would be ideal. This would be a time when the entire church could volunteer to go through this six-week training. The church currently utilizes a semester-based approach to small groups with a meeting frequency of every other week. Spring small group semesters typically run from January to May, while fall small group semesters normally run from September to November. Project implementation could be conducted during the "off" weeks when small groups are not held. Thus, this researcher will give weight to concluding the training before a semester of small groups begins so that small group participants can apply their newfound intent.

Hence, this research project would occur on the opposite weeks that small groups are offered. However, the six-week training for this DMIN action researcher will likely commence in January 2023. Pastor Darryl indicated to this researcher that he is potentially considering pausing the church's small group schedule in the spring of 2023 to allow the entire church to hit the "reset" button on the current makeup of small groups. This will enable voluntary participants to receive training on what small groups are and allow the research from this DMIN project to be taught to the congregation. Participants in this study would have to sign up of their own volition and volunteer.

This researcher will begin implementing this project by letting the senior pastor, associate (small group) pastor, and leadership staff know that this researcher has submitted his thesis to the IRB. This will get the project at the forefront of the minds of the church leadership. An announcement to church staff would indicate that IRB has been approved. Next, specific dates with training would have to be advertised to recruit participants. An email solicitation using the church's management application, Fluro, will be sent out (see Appendix B). Additionally, pulpit messaging, announcements (see Appendix A), and face-to-face recruitment will occur three weeks before the implementation. Once dates and the number of participants are solidified, other details will be booked, such as which room will be discussed (large sanctuary versus smaller multipurpose room) and the venue. An email template of the recruitment is housed in Appendix B. This recruitment email will be used to recruit volunteers and will be initially sent out four weeks before the start of the project.

When making announcements regarding this DMIN action research project, it will be essential to explain who this researcher is (Jarrett Gallardo, a Liberty University doctoral candidate student). Also, describing what the expected outcome of this project is (the aim behind

receiving this six-week training) and where the project's training will take place (at the church, either in the sanctuary or the multipurpose room) are key. Announcements will be made regarding when this research project will commence (six weeks, likely in the early spring of 2023) and how to sign-up (in-person on the patio or online via our Valley Gate Church app). When people sign up, this researcher will email the consent form and have them printed for in-person contact. The consent form will be discussed later in this section.

Subsequently, more minor details such as food, drinks, and childcare will need to be worked out. This researcher will also utilize a print shop to print and bind the training booklet. The training booklet is not yet established but will include the six lessons outlined in the *steps for the six-week training* section below. There are two optimum choices for times to conduct the training. These times would be either directly after the Sunday church service at 11:45 a.m. or during an opportune weekday in the evenings around 6:30 p.m. Times for training will be discussed and solidified with Pastor Darryl and the church leadership team.

Place

The training will occur at Valley Gate Church, located at 1445 W. Southern Avenue in Tempe, Arizona. That is the address for the church building, which resides in a strip mall. At the church site, a multipurpose room has enough seating for at least 32 people. Should the number of participants who sign up to take this training exceed 32, having the activity at the church will allow this researcher to utilize the main sanctuary. A benefit of having the training at Valley Gate Church is that this researcher can pay out-of-pocket costs for food/light snacks, drinks, and childcare. Food and childcare are typically provided for important trainings offered at Valley Gate Church. Food is always an attraction for gathering people for events. Childcare is another advantage; often, a lack of child supervision can hinder some from attending.

This researcher is willing to cover childcare costs to involve more participants to make this a success. A final benefit of having the activity at the church is that seating options, toileting options, and a kitchenette are already available. It is anticipated that each session will be 90 minutes in length. This time will allow for 15 minutes of snacking and settling in, 15 minutes of warm-up, 45 minutes of instruction with time for questions and answers, and 15 minutes to wrap up and pick up children (See Appendix D for the full six-week outline). Lastly, another consideration for choosing the place for the implementation was that Valley Gate Church is a central location. Some congregation members travel from across the Phoenix-Metropolitan area to this church; the centrality of the church building was key.

Participants

Participants must be over the age of 18 years. There is no regard for a participant's sex, knowledge of Scripture, or position at the church. It is desired that both men and women enroll in this research study. Additionally, to get optimum results from this project, it will be ideal if long-time members, church staff, small group leaders, and small group participants enroll in this research project. This will give the project a broad range of participants by having leaders and non-leaders. This researcher will inform the congregation of the upcoming training via over-the-pulpit messaging, the events page on the church's website and app, and email. As alluded to, this researcher will ensure that participants receive refreshments, materials, and childcare. Valley Gate Church already pays and has vetted individuals for babysitting during guest presentations or special events. This researcher will pay for childcare to allow the maximum number of participants. This researcher will involve project participants to ensure that everyone gets surveyed before class, receives a workbook, and that each participant is surveyed at the end of the six-week training.

This researcher is okay with having a minimum number of participants within this ministry context. Valley Gate Church is comprised of about 230 Sunday attendees. In the spring of 2022, the church held training for leaders, which consisted of about 16 key leaders. Thus, this researcher believes he can get at least 10 committed participants at a bare minimum. However, the aim for the number of participants will likely be somewhere around 16 adults. This researcher will work with Pastor Darryl to encourage all current or future small group leaders, other ministry leaders, and staff at the church to attend this project's training. Yet, others who have not been volunteers or small group participants will also be allowed to join the training.

As stated in the ministry context section, this researcher is a lay leader at the church involved in the church's small group ministry through being an active small group leader. Additionally, this researcher engages in ushering, the emergency response team, and communication & teaching ministries at church. As a ministry Team Champion, this researcher is a lay leader, not a church staff member. This researcher is approaching the study with a bias that small group ministries are vital to the success of any church to flourish. The researcher will stick to the teaching plan and data collection methods to mitigate the bias being reflected onto the participants. This researcher was informed that this training would be launching in spring 2023 alongside the traditional small group offerings at the church, which may affect the number of participants in the study. Additionally, it is acceptable if some individuals do not want to participate or should they desire to drop out. This researcher will inform them that it is acceptable to do so and that their standing with Valley Gate Church, Liberty University, or this researcher would not be affected.

Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality

Participants will be emailed a consent form. If participants want these consent forms printed, the researcher will have the consent document printed. See Appendix C for a sample of the general consent form. The consent will cover the nature of the study, procedures, risks and benefits, identity protection, and how to withdraw from the research. As hinted above, this researcher has already informed the participants about withdrawing from the study. They can remove themselves without any repercussions.

Additionally, any participant will need to know that should they withdraw from the study, any information they provided for the project will not be utilized, and their data will be destroyed. This information is included on the disclosure consent form. Participants will be given a copy of their signed consent form but will return it to the researcher at least two weeks before conducting the first training session. Aside from confidentiality, no major ethical considerations are relevant to implementing this DMIN action research project.

Steps for the Six-Week Training

Before training, this researcher must assess participants' knowledge and understanding of small groups. At least three weeks before executing the first training session, the pre-training survey and questionnaire will need to have been conducted and completed by every participant. Additionally, the eight selected interviewees will need to complete their pre-training interviews. The survey, questionnaire, interview questions, and participants will be discussed later in this chapter's data collection tools and protocols section. Initial results will be compiled and shared with respondents. This will allow participants to see their baseline beliefs and sentiment. The information in the six-week training, outlined below, will be captured in a small group workbook given to every participant.

Lesson one: This first lesson is crucial and is needed to define small groups, outline their scriptural support, and gain support from the precedent literature. This first session would cover the overall aim of the six-week lesson plan and what this researcher plans to impart with the six-week training. The messaging of this lesson will need to be worded well, as this researcher does not want to discredit anybody's work thus far with small groups. The associate pastor's primary responsibility is to small groups. Some small groups continue to meet, and this researcher does not want to smear any of the work that the planting team from Washington, DC, has started. Tactfully navigating small groups is why this researcher has involved both pastors in developing this thesis project.

The first lesson will also cover the biblical references that give rise to the importance of a small group. Most of the information for this first lesson will be lifted from the theological foundation section of this research project. It will cover Old Testament texts such as Exodus 18:17-26, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and Second Samuel 23. It will also show how the unity of the Godhead serves as an example of community. The participants will have a workbook to capture the verses and items discussed. Lesson one would be an excellent time to bring up the brief history of the church for any participant who has never been to the Connect Class (Valley Gate Church's version of a membership class). Lastly, mentioning how all of this aims to adjust what Valley Gate Church identifies as small groups and then build upon a good foundation will be paramount. A figure showing how to build upon a good foundation will be illustrated in this chapter.

Lesson two: The second lesson of this DMIN action research project will finish outlining scriptural support for small groups from the New Testament from Mark 3:13-19,34-35, and Hebrews 10:19-25. Then it will dive into the historical concepts of small groups and what led to

the modern-day small group. During this lesson, it will also be wise to unpack the current look of the small groups offered by Valley Gate Church. The next portion of the teaching time of lesson two will end with introducing Acts 2:42-47. This week's second session will break down this Acts 2 passage so that the participants can grasp how the early church valued the sense of community, and belongingness, the actions these Christians took, and where they would meet (in the temple and house to house). These places of worship are essential as they will build upon lessons five and six.

Lesson three: Lesson three will discuss the first of two main points of small groups—building community. This project's handbook would discuss how one of the best ways of establishing a community in a church body is through the church's small group ministry. Building a solid community is predicated upon encouragement, fellowship, and evangelism. Developing the encouragement theme would entail discussing where defeated Christians turn to when they need support. Outlining the idea of fellowship would be captured in *koinonia* (Greek for fellowship, communion, or participation) and how building community has this fellowship aspect. The third pillar of building community is the notion of evangelism. Being in a small group would naturally cause people to share Christ with others outside the group.

Lesson four: The fourth lesson will discuss the second of two main points of small groups—spiritual growth. This project's workbook will house three facets of spiritual growth: worship, discipleship, and prayer. This researcher will mention that Scripture reading should be a part of spiritual growth. This researcher currently holds Scripture study as a presupposition about spiritual growth in small groups and will mention this during the training. This researcher believes that getting into the Word of God is a given for any small group ministry. The first facet discussed will be worship. It would be valuable to mention aspects of worship and how singing

is just one aspect of worship. It will also discuss other expressive forms of worship. The second facet of spiritual growth that stems from small groups is discipleship. For some, their focus on small groups may have centered on discipleship. However, discipleship is just one aspect of spiritual formation resulting from small group ministry. During week four, this researcher will flesh out Prayer as the third pillar of spiritual formation.

Lesson five: The fifth lesson of the six-week congregational training will take some time to examine the importance of spiritual community by unpacking a few Greek root words and diving into Romans 12:9-21 and Second Timothy 1:13-14. Additionally, both the church's and Tempe's demographics will be dissected. Valley Gate Church can ask itself if the church is genuinely becoming multi-ethnic and multi-generational, as the "about us" says in its tenets. The workbook will then outline various ministry practices of the small group ministry (themes, common activities, gender groups, marital status, or geographic biases). The purpose of outlining different ministry practices would be to highlight the types of small group practices Valley Gate Church wants to embrace. It will be crucial for both pastors and other key stakeholders to be on the same page regarding Valley Gate Church's small group ministry models. This researcher believes that the church desires to have a small group ministry based on gender, geography, and marital status; and has a structure with a hierarchy of oversight (meaning there is accountability over small group leaders).

Lesson six: The sixth and final lesson of this six-week congregational training would be to put it all together with the small group underpinnings of building a solid community and establishing more profound spiritual growth. It describes what a healthy-sized small group looks like, its locations, and the frequency of meetings while reiterating Acts 2:42-47. This lesson will also highlight common challenges experienced by a small group ministry and ways to overcome

those challenges. It would be imperative to recap everything discussed in the previous lessons. Equally important would be to have the church participants grasp where they would like to take their small groups to re-focus and paint a picture of where groups are heading. This vision casting is excellent because as Valley Gate Church breaks down and reframes its concept of small group ministry, rebuilding to correct the intent will have addressed the problem that the senior pastor asked this researcher to address. Lastly, before the participants are dismissed from this session, this researcher will discuss the necessity of the final survey to assess the participants' knowledge of the concept of small groups. This survey will gather information from the stakeholders with quantifiable questions.

Figure 1 demonstrates the current state of Valley Gate Church's small group ministry to the Tower of Pisa. Since small groups were never launched with well-defined intent, it led to varied types of small groups. The beginning foundation set the course for small group ministry at the church. Since its 2016 inception, Valley Gate Church has never held small group training available to the entire congregation. One previous small-group-specific training was geared toward upcoming and current small-group leaders. The current state of small group ministry serves its purpose but has room to be refined. Currently, small groups meet for 12 weeks in the fall and 12 weeks in the spring. Instead of being a church *with* small groups, it would be more desirable for Valley Gate Church to be a church *of* small groups.

Figure 1. Lack of Foundations

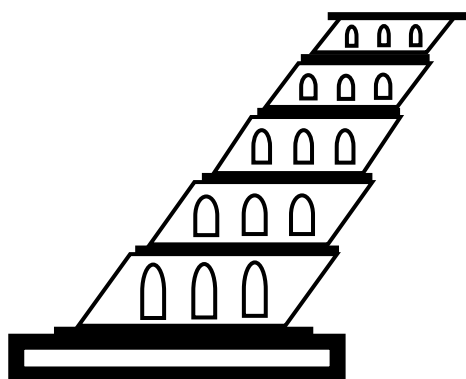


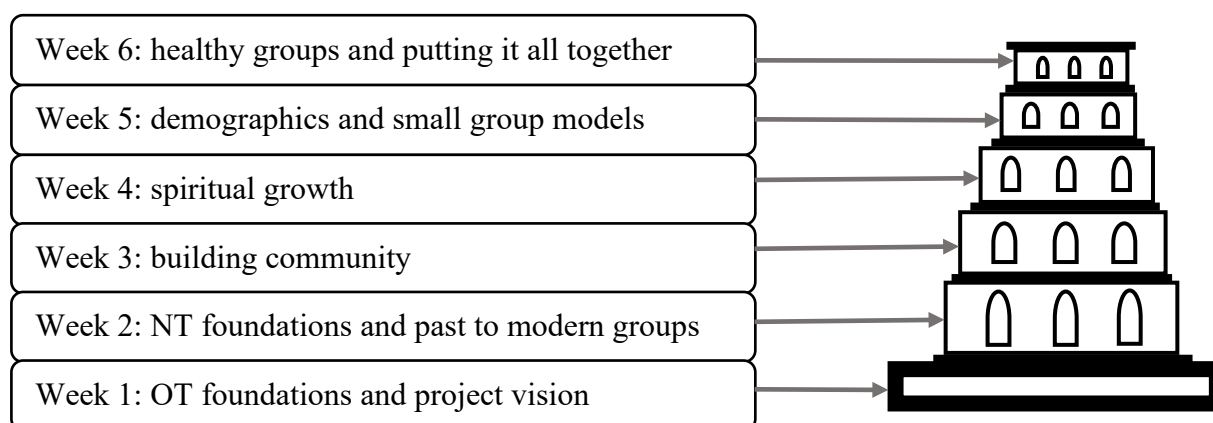
Figure 1 is a depiction of the Tower of Pisa, which was built upon a bad foundation. The six-part training will help correct intent and give Valley Gate Church's small group ministry a better foundation.

According to Smithsonian Magazine, the tower was built over 200 years from 1173 to 1372 A.D., but because this Italian region's ground consists of sand and clay, the tower boasts a northward lean.²¹⁷

Running this six-week intervention would help get the church back on track and correct the foundations and intent of its small group ministry. Being a church *of* small groups means that small groups are not a distant afterthought but are the church's primary focus used to bolster spiritual growth and strengthen the community of congregants. The intervention will build upon solid foundations by casting vision and highlighting Old and New Testament passages to correct the leaning Tower of Pisa. Each successive week will build upon the previous. The sixth and final week's lesson would include piecing it together and looking at what makes up a healthy small group. Figure 2 is a prime example of how the six lessons build upon a solid foundation to correct intent and establish a robust small group ministry.

²¹⁷ Kat Eschner, "One Time, They Closed the Leaning Tower of Pisa Because It Leaned Too Much," accessed June 18, 2022. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonianmag/one-time-they-closed-leaning-tower-pisa-because-it-leaned-too-much-180961657/>

Figure 2. Six Lessons to Correct Valley Gate Church Small Group Ministry Intent



Moving this project from idea to implementation involves some key stakeholders. This researcher will need primary approval from the senior pastor. There is no board of directors or group of elders that this researcher will need to gain approval. However, this researcher will need to continue to meet with the senior pastor and the associate (small group) pastor. It will be imperative to ensure that these two are in accord with what the church desires to pursue in the form of its small group ministry. This researcher wants to meet with both pastors and the church staff, current small group leaders, and other ministry leaders. If there is enough excitement about this DMIN action research project from church leaders, then this researcher believes that this will create the support needed to make this project a success. Finally, after the training is complete, it will be essential to involve pastors, staff, small group leaders, and other ministry leaders to brainstorm the next steps of the church's small group ministry. This research project does not include those next steps but focuses on addressing the problem that small groups at Valley Gate Church were never launched with clear intent. Now that the six-week training has been discussed, this researcher will focus on other aspects of this small group action research recipe.

Resources

This researcher relies on the church's means of communication for announcements to make this project successful. Valley Gate Church uses a church management platform called Fluro to send announcements, provide forms for event sign-ups, and send mass emails. Additionally, this researcher will have a PowerPoint slide deck in conjunction with the workbook. Both of which will be developed by this researcher. The workbook is a six-week student-style paperback workbook. It will have room for notes and fill-in-the-blanks and provide simple lesson breakdowns for participants to capture ideas and refer to them quickly. This researcher will utilize a print shop to print and bind the training booklet. The booklet will be the size of an 8.5"x11" piece of paper folded halfway on the short edge. It will be printed on both sides, and the cover will be heavier stock paper. This workbook will enable the participants of this research to be able to have material to go back and reference. The resources needed to succeed in this project are the internet, email, the participants' workbooks, a printer, and writing utensils.

Data Collection Tools and Protocols

Since any single approach to data collection will have its limitations, this researcher will utilize a multi-faceted approach to collect data. The following implementation of the intervention design section will uncover that this is called data triangulation. This researcher will employ three methods for gathering data: questionnaires, face-to-face interviews, and surveys. Every participant must complete a questionnaire and a survey before and after the training. Appendix E houses the information for the Pre- and Post-Survey and Questionnaire. It is a 16-question survey and questionnaire combination that should take respondents about 20 minutes to complete.

This researcher will use information from the survey to collect quantitative data and information from the questionnaire to gather qualitative data. Qualitative data champion, Daniel Grossoehme, indicates that qualitative research is how chaplains add to new knowledge; it is done so by careful research design, which may involve obtaining narratives directly from participants.²¹⁸ These narratives may come in the form of interviews, written texts such as a journal or survey, or visual cues such as drawings, yet spoken mediums are the typical source for the data.²¹⁹ Therefore, interviews will also be conducted.

The goal will be to perform eight face-to-face interviews. These interviews will strive to reach two church staff, two small group leaders, two other ministry leaders, and two small group participants. This type of sampling is purposive, in which the researcher purposefully selects the sample size with specific criteria for determining the interviewees. Each interviewee will be orally interviewed using open-ended questions in a face-to-face technique. This researcher will record the interviews to protect the integrity of the information from the interviews. See Appendix F for the list of the eight questions to be asked of interviewees. This researcher will use information from the interviews to collect qualitative data. These eight selected participants will complete a face-to-face interview before and after the training. Thus, enough time must be allotted to work around these individuals' schedules.

This researcher will utilize very brief longitudinal surveys and questionnaires that will ask questions over a short period. This researcher will give the same sample of participants the identical survey and questionnaire at the beginning of the study and then at the end of six weeks. This researcher will use three different types of tools to gather data—questionnaires, face-to-face

²¹⁸ Daniel H. Grossoehme, "Overview of Qualitative Research," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 20, no. 3 (2014): 109.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

interviews, and surveys. This researcher will examine how participants perceive small groups before the intervention. Data will be collected as participants will be re-surveyed to see how their perceptions changed after running the intervention. This will involve analyzing, reviewing, categorizing, identifying themes, and developing conclusions.

Evaluation Procedures

In anticipation of the data to be collected, this researcher has set benchmarks to show improvement in overall quantitative and qualitative progress using four criteria. The first criterion deals with a stronger affinity towards small-group ministry involvement. It is predicted that implementing this six-week intervention will reveal efficacy by demonstrating that at least 30% more participants will indicate a stronger affinity towards participating in small group ministry in their post-survey. Participant responses from the combination survey and questionnaire will help with this criterion, precisely, participants' answers to question 13. Interviewee responses to question 2 may also help shed some light on this answer.

The second criterion is recognizing that the church's community is built stronger outside the meeting of Sunday service. Therefore, this prediction towards revealing the effectiveness of this training will show that at least 80% of participants, who complete the training, understand that cultivating community happens outside of the corporate Sunday worship service. Participant responses from the combination survey and questionnaire will help with this criterion, precisely, participants' answers to question 16. Interviewee responses to question 6 will help answer this.

A third criterion indicates a participant's ability to realize that discipleship is one aspect of small group ministry but not the primary purpose. Hence, a third post-survey data point indicating participants have grasped the intent of small group ministry is when a majority, more than 75%, of participants show that discipleship is not the central theme behind small groups.

Participant responses from the combination survey and questionnaire will help with this criterion, specifically, answers to question 3. None of the interviewee questions are exclusively tailored toward discipleship; still, as this researcher is pulling out themes during data analysis, interviewee answers may be helpful to provide data for this.

Lastly, a fourth criterion involves looking at the qualitative data and analyzing participants' written responses to articulate the overarching purpose of small group ministry. With this question, to show an understanding of clear intent, this researcher anticipates that 80% of respondents will be able to articulate the correct purpose for small group ministry. Participant responses from the combination survey and questionnaire will help with this criterion, specifically, answers to question 5. Interviewee responses to questions 6 and 7 may help answer this.

A fair trial period would be six weeks to implement the project and four weeks to analyze the data. Four weeks would allow this researcher to examine the participants' pre-training and post-training surveys and questionnaires and develop significant themes. Stringer's text outlined several vital steps that need to take place to analyze action research data properly. Which involves reviewing the data, unitizing it, sort into categories, identifying themes, organizing it into categories, and developing a reporting framework.²²⁰ To synthesize the data and evaluate themes and conclusions appropriately, this researcher does not believe concept mapping will be an ideal method due to the meticulousness and artisanship needed for it. Instead, this researcher will aim to use the *interpretive questions* framework, which seeks to answer six inquiring questions about the data. These questions are the *why, what, how, who, where, and when* of the

²²⁰ Ernest Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 140.

problem, purpose, and study.²²¹ Four weeks should be enough time to begin drawing conclusions and seeing if the intervention has achieved its goal.

Lastly, this researcher will likely know many of the participants. It would be wise not to speak about the project outside its confines. For example, this researcher would not want to skew the data by talking to participants about the project. This researcher desires the data to be pure and maintain its integrity without seeming as though this researcher is moving participants towards attaining certain desired outcomes. The gaining of new knowledge and understanding of small group intent should come naturally as a part of the implementation of this project.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Now that the research project has been implemented, the previous intervention design section served as the how-to guide, and this implementation section documents how the project transpired. It records a step-by-step play of what happened from participant recruitment, informed consent collection, six-week project implementation, and how data was collected and analyzed. It will be an excellent lead-in to the results section. It will serve any researcher to keep a reflective journal to record immediate observations, themes, or findings. Since this researcher will have predispositions and advocate for change within his ministry context, keeping a journal will be important. Journaling will be convenient when recalling specific events of the implementation stage for this section.

Triangulation refers to using a cross-check method to gather data from several informants and various sources to produce a comprehensive and robust investigation.²²² Sensing indicates four types of triangulation approaches (data, investigator, theory, and methodological), and this

²²¹ Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed., 148.

²²² Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 72.

researcher will utilize the methodological triangulation method.²²³ The methodological triangulation approach uses multiple data collection methods such as interviews, questionnaires, surveys, examining documents, or focus groups to sharpen the aim of the data interpretation.²²⁴ Once the data was collected and arranged, successive themes began to emerge.

Participant Recruitment

As the intervention design section forecasted, this researcher sought to begin by having meetings with the senior pastor (Pastor Darryl) and associate/small group pastor (Pastor Vincent) to pin down a date for the project and begin to recruit participants. Once church leadership decided that the DMIN project could launch in mid-February 2023 and be offered to the whole church, it was time to advertise and get the word out. Another shocking decision from the church leadership was that they would put a pause on the regularly scheduled spring 2023, small groups for this DMIN project to be instituted first and then would launch small groups following soon on the heels of this DMIN project. Being able to solicit the entire church was a mighty win because it drastically opened the participant pool without competing ministries held simultaneously.

To attract project participants, this researcher worked with the media team to record a video announcement that aired for three weeks. The Institutional Review Board approved the contents of that announcement; the message transcript can be found in Appendix A. Once participants caught wind of the exciting doctoral research at the church, they found this researcher on the patio to continue inquiring about the study. On the patio at church, a table was set up with more information about the study, along with the consent and pre-training

²²³ Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 73-74.

²²⁴ Ibid., 74.

questionnaires and surveys. Most of the face-to-face recruitment happened while on the patio or in passing in the sanctuary at church. Also, this researcher collected names and contact information from interested parties and gave the potential participants a consent form (see Appendix C), which served great to outline the majority of a participant's questions. If participants were fully engaged, this researcher also gave the participant a pre-training questionnaire and survey, but more will be expounded on later in this section.

The church's software, Fluro, generated a generic sign-up form that asked participants for their contact information and if childcare was needed. Once registration closed, email was the primary method of communication once participants showed interest. Initially, 28 participants signed up, but two never showed up to session one or any session thereafter, which brought the total initial number down to 26 participants. Then after a few weeks, some participants had to drop the study, bringing the total number of participants who completed the training and handed in a pre- and post-training survey and questionnaire to 22 participants. Pastor Vincent, the associate/small group pastor, and his wife were silent observers for most of the study. It was understood that Pastor Vincent was there as a silent supporter but would engage the participants during the warm-up time of the sessions and any closing remarks of encouragement. Six sessions lasted from February 19, 2023, until March 26, 2023.

Form Collection

Collecting informed consent and pre- and post-training surveys and questionnaires proved more difficult than initially expected. In a utopian world, a participant would show interest, inquire about the study, and then complete the informed consent and pre-training survey and questionnaire. Participants would then return the documents and be ready before the first session on February 19, 2023. Having all completed forms before session one only occurred for

about 50% of the participants. This researcher sent follow-up emails and in-person reminders to participants who still needed to return their initial forms. At the beginning of the methodology section, it outlined that this researcher would do all the primary recruitment, messaging, and data collection through Fluro, but it was easier to use the researcher's Liberty University email to solicit form retrieval.

The pre- and post-training survey and questionnaire can be found in Appendix E. Right at the beginning of session one, since there were still outstanding informed consent and pre-training surveys and questionnaires, this researcher used the dedicated warm-up time for participants to complete those forms. That time was beneficial because the audience was captive and could easily return either form. From when participant solicitation was initiated until session one, it took a total of three weeks to collect pre-training surveys and questionnaires. Once this researcher collected all the forms, he ensured each participant got a printed workbook and a writing utensil. The audience was primed to engage in their learning once all their pre-training forms were collected.

The next task was to collect the post-training survey and questionnaires from the participants after completing the six weekly training sessions. The majority of the participants turned in their post-training surveys and questionnaires on the sixth week of training as time was allotted during this session for the participants to complete their post-training form just prior to dismissal. However, since not everyone could make the final sixth weekly lesson, collecting all the participant's post-training surveys and questionnaires took three weeks. The major hang-up involved people who missed the final in-person training session and needed to engage in make-up sessions. Once make-up sessions were completed, this researcher reminded the participants of

the importance of completing their last post-training surveys. An email was the primary source of getting any remaining surveys, and questionnaires turned in.

Facility Limitations

During the February to March timeframe, the church calendar was filled with many after-church activities such as choir rehearsal, mission trip planning, and Easter service preparations. Therefore, as with any ministry involved at the church, it is imperative to block necessary space, coordinate with church planners and leaders, and direct the training sessions in conjunction with the space required for the audience. Since there were 22 weekly participants, two silent observers, and this researcher, the training required space for 25 people. We accommodated these training needs in the multipurpose room. The church was gracious enough to prioritize this DMIN project, and the training was held in the multipurpose room without ever needing to change spaces.

Snacks, a lunch meal, and drinks were provided by this researcher and set up towards the rear of the multipurpose room. Lunch was lovely, and it was observed that participants would make positive comments about the various lunch options provided. It was discussed by the church leadership to give this researcher a key and instructions on closing the church, but instead, since Pastor Vincent attended all the services, he was able to help close and lock the church. Childcare was also provided for participants, and the childcare attendees watched the children in two adjoined Sunday School rooms used during a regular worship service. There was a total of 17 children that needed childcare, but the church facility was able to accommodate these children's after-church needs.

Six-Week Project Implementation

When a plan that sticks to the script works out great, it is a beautiful harmony of success. That is precisely what happened during each of the six-week training sessions. Most of the results were gathered during these sessions, along with the data collected from pre- and post-training surveys and questionnaires. For an outline of the six-week project, see Appendix D. During each session, the participants met with this researcher for 90 minutes. Each weekly lesson started with checking children into childcare and eating lunch for 15 minutes. Next, the group transitioned to a warm-up that helped facilitate connections and discussions for 15 minutes. Then, for about 45 minutes, the group discussed the material and read Scripture pertaining to each lesson. Each participant needed to bring their workbook with them. Extra workbooks and writing utensils were provided if a participant did not have a workbook. Finally, each session ended with a wrap-up, prayer, and picking up the children, which took about 15 minutes.

The training during these six weeks mimicked a teaching environment with this researcher commanding the flow of the conversations, asking open-ended questions, and calling on participants to read the text from the workbook or read Scripture. On a deeper level, this researcher purposefully infused elements of a small group such as refreshments, warm-ups, prayer, curriculum, and Scripture, following up with those who missed and allowing others to assist with set-up or tear-down. The workbook this researcher authored had embedded fill-in-the-blanks and open-ended questions to stimulate the learner and create dialogue. The workbook made the lessons not simply a one-sided lecture but encouraged group collaboration and participation. In large group settings like this, the teacher directing the discussion must ensure that everyone is comfortable and that all participants are engaged. The workbook was very helpful for the six-week project implementation. The end of each of the six lessons ended with

two open-ended questions: “1) What did you learn from this lesson? and 2) How will you apply what you’ve learned to your life?” As time permitted, participants discussed these at the end of the session or were encouraged to meditate upon the material further throughout the week.

Make-Up Sessions

If a participant could not attend a session, a make-up session was offered via a commercial video conferencing software called Microsoft Teams. What started as 28 sign-ups ended in 22 active participants that completed the six weeks of training and turned in pre- and post-training surveys and questionnaires. Understandably life’s challenges abound, and not everyone could make every in-person session. Work, sick families, pre-planned family vacations, hospitalizations, and lack of interest in the study were the reasons that plagued the six participants from not completing or joining the study from start to finish. Thankfully due to the Microsoft Teams platform, make-up sessions could be made available to all participants who missed the face-to-face sessions. Make-up sessions took no longer than 60 minutes since food was not involved. These sessions still had a brief warm-up, a moment of prayer, and proceeded with the lesson. As was necessary with the face-to-face sessions, all make-up session participants needed to have their workbooks with them and were called upon to read the text or Scripture, answer the fill-in-the-blanks, and discuss the questions.

Interviews

This researcher completed interviews to fulfill data triangulation. Once the six-week training was complete, then the interviews were conducted. The initial goal was to perform eight interviews, but instead, six interviewees were obtained. Two small group leaders, two other ministry leaders, and two small group participants were interviewed. Each interviewee was orally interviewed using open-ended questions via the Microsoft Teams collaborative meeting

software. The meeting allowed one-on-one interactions between the interviewee and the researcher while being able to work around the participant's work and family schedules.

Every interviewee was a full-time employee and volunteered at the church in some capacity. Interviews lasted no longer than 35 minutes, and verbal and non-verbal interactions were noted. See Appendix F for the list of the eight questions asked of each interviewee. For accuracy, the interview was also recorded. See Appendix H for the transcript of the interviews. Lastly, none of the participants viewed the interview questions before the interview. Themes and issues were predetermined, but other topics were pursued as dictated by the discourse, which is called semi-structured interviews.²²⁵

Obstacles

When implementing this project, a few obstacles hindered the forward movement. To begin, getting approval from the Institutional Review Board happened relatively quickly, and by late September 2022, this researcher had earned approval. The next obstacle was getting the endorsement from both pastors about when the DMIN project should launch. While waiting for final confirmation from the pastoral staff, this researcher was very busy creating a workbook. At first, creating a workbook was just an idea, but the more this project began to be fleshed out, the more having a tangible and interactive workbook made sense. Therefore, designing, outlining, drafting, and printing the workbook took a few months. From October 2022 to late January 2023, this researcher was busy crafting this workbook and learning about the nuances of printing, such as how the book would be bound, what the cover would look like, and the materials used in the body of the workbook. This researcher went with a local Alpha Graphics to have the workbooks printed in February 2023.

²²⁵ Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 107.

The other unforeseen obstacle was the amount of planning and finances the refreshments and childcare would cost. This researcher wanted to make it feel like the participants were getting extreme value from this free training by ordering a variety of cuisine and getting drinks and snacks for the adults and children. The children ate pizzas and snacks. There were 17 children and two after-church workers that were also paid for by this researcher. The planning it took to get weekly snacks and drinks, order catering, and find childcare was an unforeseen obstacle that this researcher did not expect to require as much attention to detail and commitment. Teaching the actual six-week training material was the easiest part of the training process.

Data Collection

As qualitative research advocates, Sensing and Grosseohme understand the importance of collecting qualitative data to organize and interpret participant data. This researcher has collected all 22 finalized pre- and post-training surveys and questionnaires. Now this researcher will begin to look at the six-week longitudinal data to track and trend how the research participants have grown to draw inferences as to whether these participants now have a clear direction of small groups and grasp the overarching pillars of small groups, which are cultivating a strong community, and growing spiritually. Therefore, this researcher will employ the method of content analysis. Drisko and Maschi write, “Content analysis may address language, content meaning, techniques of communication, specific events, or all of these simultaneously.”²²⁶ During the interviews, what was the tone in which the respondents answered questions? When examining the 20-question survey given to each participant, questions 1-4 are classified as a questionnaire style. They are a fixed choice involving yes or no choices, and questions 12-20 are

²²⁶ James W. Drisko and Tina Maschi, *Content Analysis*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), 25.

also questionnaire-style because they involve Likert scaling.²²⁷ Thus, questions 5-11 are survey-style because this researcher attempts to gauge the participants' responses to the training and capture their beliefs about each question.²²⁸

In addition to content analysis, this researcher will explore the data using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke propose an intentional, reflective, and meticulous qualitative approach, as this will serve as an excellent bedrock for thematic research analysis.²²⁹ Sensing says to generate themes, categories, and patterns from the qualitative data gathered.²³⁰ With the surveys and interviews collected, this researcher will begin to draw themes from the data. During the pre-training surveys, what were the thoughts and themes that reoccurred? How did this data compare to the post-training ideas that participants captured? This researcher will use all of this to meticulously comb through the data to see if this researcher was correct in addressing the specific problem outlined with small groups.

Conclusion

In this methodology chapter, this researcher focused on intervention design and implementation of the intervention design. Much like a recipe, certain ingredients will go into this DMIN action research to make it a success. Chapter three's *intervention design* section highlighted the project's purpose, tasks, place, timelines, participants, ethical or confidentiality issues, resources, data collection tools, protocols for using tools, and evaluation procedures.

²²⁷ Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 114.

²²⁸ Ibid., 119.

²²⁹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "What can 'Thematic Analysis' Offer Health and Wellbeing Researchers?," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 9, no. 1 (2014): 2.

²³⁰ Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 198.

Immediately after the project was implemented, the *implementation of intervention design* section was recorded as a step-by-step analysis of what actually took place. In the ensuing chapter, this researcher will provide the study's results and analyze the data using content and thematic analysis.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This research aimed to create and implement a six-week congregational training to develop Valley Gate Church members, small group participants, and ministry leaders' understanding of the intent of its small group ministry. Chapter 3 hypothesized expected results and expected trends that this researcher anticipated. This results chapter will illustrate the findings of the questionnaires, surveys, and interviews to answer whether this small group intervention served its purpose of yielding results. The collected data will be explained through graphs and charts. Stringer indicates that to make sense of research data, a researcher must analyze the data by categorizing results and then distill the data further into associated themes.²³¹

Therefore, this researcher will structure this results chapter by the two methods of data analysis used content analysis and thematic analysis. The content analysis heading will categorize findings by how the data was collected via surveys, questionnaires, and interviews. Next, this results chapter will recant themes from the data gathered. Lastly, the chapter will look at the original hypothesis made in the evaluation procedures section from chapter 3 to see if the results align with the original hypotheses. Data surrounding each question will be assessed and distilled in a way that brings meaning to correcting the original problem—not launching small groups with well-defined intent in 2016. This training will reveal that key individuals are now armed with important information about small groups and have corrected their original perceived intent of the church's small group ministry.

²³¹ Stringer, *Action Research*, 138 & 146.

Content Analysis

Understanding that content analysis seeks to address language, the meaning of the content, and specific events. This section will first look at a few of the relevant survey questions, then share the results from the questionnaire-style questions, and finally, this section will address pertinent interview data from the six interviewees. It will be wise to remind the reader that there was a total of 22 participants from which the data of this content analysis section was compiled. The tables and graphs depicted will show pre-training and post-training data.

Surveys

Participants were given space to answer questions on a handwritten, printed survey. A few participants needed to answer the survey questions electronically. Regardless of how the questions were answered, they were all compiled and scrutinized. Questions #5-11 are classified as *survey-style* questions, and the data tables are color coated in yellow. The following information in the yellow tables was compiled from the pre- and post-training surveys and questionnaires. Not all the data collected will be presented in chapter 4 of this thesis. Of Questions #5-11, only Questions #6, #8, #9, and #11 will be scrutinized in the body of this results section since they are specifically appropriate to build upon addressing the problem tackled in this research. See Appendix G for a complete list of all the compiled questions and survey data.

Q#6) What does the Bible say about small groups?

Q#6 Goal: To see if participants will recall themes of small groups from what Scripture says about community, discipleship, and house churches within the text of Scripture. Pre-training results will be critical to compare to post-training here. The yellow table below in Table 1.1 compiles all the participants' pre- and post-answers to this question.

Table 1.1. Table of Participant Data from Survey Question #6

Participant	Pre	Post
1	That whenever people meet to experience God's word that it glorifies God and is equivalent to going to church.	It is a way to grow spiritually, get a better understanding of Scripture, and make disciples.
2	Unsure, but I know that Paul encouraged the churches—that I liken to small groups in the New Testament.	Bible demonstrates small groups through the home churches that Paul writes to in the New Testament.
3	Matthew 18:20, for where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, there I am among them. 1 Thessalonians 5:11, therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. Proverbs 27:17, as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.	They are necessary.
4	Encourage one another and build each other up; iron sharpens iron; fellowship together.	Small groups are the way Jesus spread His Word through the disciples. The 12 were a small group.
5	Make it a habit to gather together because Jesus is there; where 2 or 3 are gathered; for encouragement; to build each other up.	Historically small groups led to intimate relationships for moments of spiritual growth. Small groups nurtured what was spoken and lead to actual growth within their lives.
6	I honestly cannot remember or recall specific examples of small group in the Bible.	The Bible emphasizes the importance of delegation, community, and fellowship. Through small groups, followers of Christ can gain so much with other followers.
7	None Given.	The Word should be shared in our houses.
8	The Bible says where two or more are gathered in His name, He is with us. Therefore, fellowshiping together and walking through this life of faith in Jesus Christ with other believers allows the Holy Spirit to move in our hearts and the atmosphere.	Small groups are to develop community and to help prevent burnout of our pastors and those in leadership.
9	The Bible says we need to build community with others, so we can continue to multiply His kingdom and help each other spiritually mature.	The Bible doesn't necessarily say the words "small group," but it talks about the evolution of how modern-day small groups started out as house churches. It's a time to fellowship (koinonia).and grow spiritually.

10	We were created to be in community with each other as Christians. Small groups help the church multiply and remain engaged.	Small groups are to build community and closeness to God.
11	Where two or more gather, God is there.	Small groups need to be biblical and loving in order to be effective in furthering God's kingdom and aide spiritual growth.
12	To meet, because if there's two or more the Lord is there and lots can be shared, like words of wisdom, encouragement, God's word, the Holy Spirit moves and takes over and supernatural things can happen.	Small groups are the prime setting for Christians to draw near to God, hold onto their faith, and continually meet with one another.
13	I am not sure.	From my memory, of what was taught the early church grew through small groups.
14	Where two or more are gathered, the Lord is there, but I'm not sure really.	It's a form of worship and pleases God when we meet to build community and learn about Him, it's like the dew from Aaron's beard.
15	To pray together, grow together, and help each other.	Draw near to God, confession of faith, and gathering.
16	Do not forsake the gathering of ourselves. So, coming together is important.	They started in the time of Jesus. Jesus used small group ministry to grow God's kingdom, and small groups have continued since then.
17	I am not sure.	Established when it is nurtured by shared ownership and devotion.
18	That we should pray for and encourage one another. We should live life together.	They are essential. They are useful for keeping order (judging amongst themselves), building spiritually, and for discipleship.
19	I am unsure.	It is a good way to grow spiritually to be a better disciple.
20	The Bible says small groups are good for fellowship and support. Small groups assist with personal accountability.	It is encouraged and recommended.
21	Not sure. I'd assume it describes the importance of fostering discipleship.	There are several ways the Bible talks about small groups. Essentially, they are good for a follower of Christ to be in community, fellowship, and grow spiritually in the Word of God.
22	Not sure.	Small groups create a space for spiritual growth, community, and are

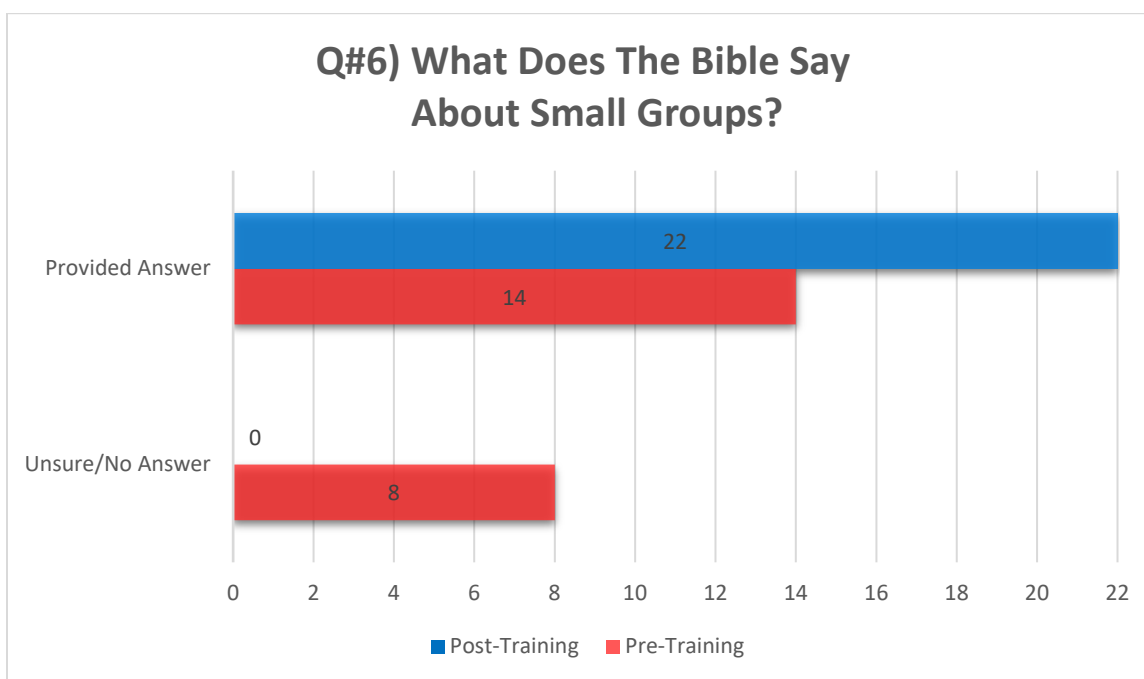
		an avenue for the church to live counterculturally.
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Table 1.2 below summarizes the results from Question #6. This question asks what does the Bible say about small groups? What is gleaned is that only one participant quoted actual Scripture references in the pre-training survey, whereas none quoted any specific Bible verses post-training. Scripture was alluded to, but no specific references were given. However, what was more astonishing was that at the end of the six-week training, all 22 participants provided an answer to this survey question. Initially, eight respondents were clueless about what the Bible says in support of small groups, but post-training survey results revealed that the six-week training was successful in showing participants that Scripture is supportive of small group tenants. The result was a 36% positive change in participants who provided an answer to this question.

Table 1.2. Table Summarizing Results from Survey Question #6
Q#6 Results:

Pre-training	Post-training	Change
Quoted an actual Scripture = 1 (5%)	Quoted an actual Scripture = 0	5% decrease
“Two or more are gathered” from Matthew 18:20 = 6 (27%)	“Two or more are gathered” reference = 0	27% decrease (this Bible verse is about church discipline)
I am not sure/no answer = 8 (36%)	I am not sure/no answer = 0	36% decrease

The graph represented in Figure 3 highlights that at the end of the six-week training, all 22 participants were able to provide an answer about what the Bible says about small groups.

Figure 3. Graph Summarizing Results from Survey Question #6**Q#8) Are small groups important? Please explain.**

Q#8 Goal: To better understand the participants' mindset of whether they value the importance of small groups. It would be ideal to compare the data from pre-training and post-training to get a sense of change from the six weeks. The yellow table below in Table 1.3 compiles all the participants' pre- and post-answers to this question.

Table 1.3. Table of Participant Data from Survey Question #8

Participant	Pre	Post
1	Yes. It is important to build relationship to help keep us accountable for our actions.	Yes. It is a way for us to remain accountable during our spiritual walk and encourage one another.
2	Yes, they help build relationships among members of a church so that all can function better as a community. There are opportunities for discipleship and to learn and grow in the Word.	Absolutely! They're an opportunity to build relationships and make the church more cohesive. Through relationships, there's an opportunity for accountability and spiritual growth. Also, an opportunity for more in-depth Bible study.

3	Yes. They help by causing people to get more engaged in studying the Word of God.	Small groups are the foundation of the church. It'll help individuals get to know one another, pray together, study God's Word together, and fellowship together.
4	Yes. They help you find out who you are; fellowship with others is important.	Yes. I believe you learn more about yourself and others through small groups. People of all ages should be in your small group.
5	Yes. We can learn to lean on each other and be open and transparent to receive support, truth, growth, and to be encouraged to stay the course.	Yes. Small groups are important because you develop more intimate (close) relationships, and they help you to grow.
6	I see small groups as a supplement to improving my spiritual life. It can have some benefits, but it may not be entirely necessary.	Small groups are important because it can build a community in the church. Not only that, but small groups can create accountability and inspire growth throughout the week.
7	Yes, I believe it allows a more intimate setting to worship and sharpens other believers. It also is a great way to learn more about church.	Yes, gives intimacy with other believers.
8	Yes, because it gives us the opportunity to grow closer to God along fellow believers to disciple and hold each other accountable. Also, so that when we leave small groups, we are able to disciple and share with others.	Yes, to build community, spiritual growth, encouragement and evangelism.
9	Yes. Small groups allow you to connect with others more than just on Sundays. It helps you fellowship with others to help encourage and grow in God's Word.	Yes, they are important. It is a way to connect with a small group of people outside of the Sunday service to encourage, fellowship, and grow with one another in Scripture. This group allows intimacy and helps us keep each other accountable in our walks of life.
10	Yes, they help leaders in discipleship and help participants to have community and is a forum for open discussion.	Yes. They create space for fellowship and discipleship within churches.
11	Yes, small groups are important because they help build community. They provide an opportunity for Christ followers to share their experiences and learn and grow together.	Yes, they are important because they contribute to the furthering of God's kingdom.

12	In my opinion, small groups are a “need” (not optional) to grow in many aspects but mostly in the faith and spiritually.	They are a need to grow spiritually, build community, evangelize, pray, and encourage each other, and build relationships.
13	Yes, because I believe they are a part of fellowship.	Yes, small groups are important because they allow a deeper level of fellowship and help with on Sunday evening. As Jarrett taught us you are allowed to share your personal struggles and or victories with your colleagues.
14	Yes, they help me learn about God outside of the Sunday service.	Yes, so members of the church can connect with each other on a deeper level, grow spiritually, evangelize, and encourage each other to walk with God.
15	Small groups are important because of spiritual growth and learning together.	Yes, very much. Because it’s a place to learn, fellowship, worship, and pray.
16	Yes. It’s another level of community.	Very important. Outside of church small groups is a chance to grow and equip believers at any stage to share the Good News and disciple younger believers.
17	Yes, keeps me involved gives me a passion I didn’t know I have learning more about God and the Word.	Yes, they help to grow a strong community.
18	Yes, as Christians, we are called to share and bear each other’s burdens. We are called to spur each other on. Iron sharpens iron.	Absolutely because they are useful to keep order (judging among themselves), building spiritually, and for discipleship.
19	Yes, by giving me peace about certain situations in my life, whether good or bad.	Yes, it is very important. Small groups are a way to build yourself up as well as encourage others. This is where Christians thrive.
20	Yes, the importance of small groups are spiritual growth, obedience, encouragement, and collective support.	Yes, small groups are important for spiritual growth and building community.
21	Yes, they provide an opportunity to grow together spiritually and in community.	Yes, they are good and important for maturity in our walk with Christ. Great for accountability.
22	Yes, it allows the opportunity to learn in a more intimate environment.	Yes, they allow for a more intimate experience and they ability to go deeper as you can discuss more openly.

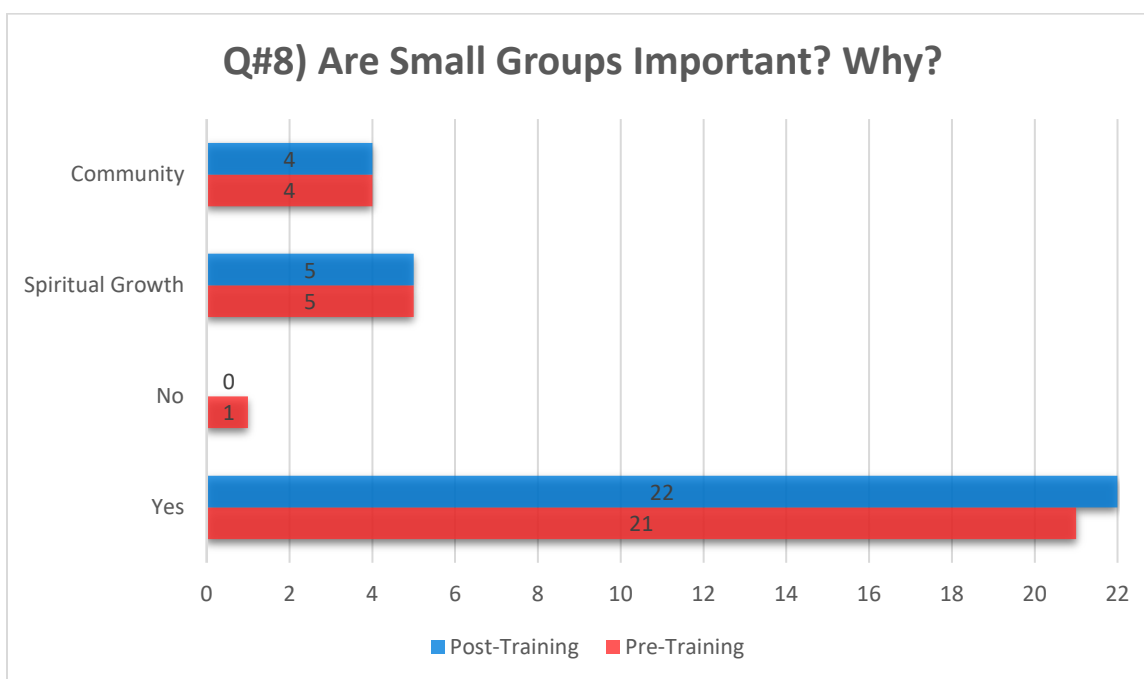
Table 1.4 below summarizes the results from Question #8. This question asks if small groups are important. What is gathered is that in the pre-training survey, one participant said that small groups were not important. One discovery was that all 22 participants indicated that small groups were important in post-training surveying. The top two pre- and post-reasons for the importance of small groups were spiritual growth and community. The result was 100% of respondents recognized the importance of the small group ministry.

Table 1.4. Table Summarizing Results from Survey Question #8

Q#8 Results:

Pre-training	Post-training	Change
Yes = 21 (95%)	Yes = 22 (100%)	5% increase
No = 1 (5%)	No = 0	5% decrease
Why- Spiritual Growth = 5 (23%)	Why- Spiritual Growth = 5 (23%)	No change
Why- Community = 4 (18%)	Why- Community 4 (18%)	No change
Why- Study Word/Bible = 4 (18%)	Why- Study Word/Bible = 3 (14%)	4 % decrease
Why- Relationships = 2 (9%)	Why- Relationships = 3 (14%)	5% increase
Why- Discipleship = 2 (9%)	Why- Discipleship = 2 (9%)	No change
Why- Fellowship = 2 (9%)	Why- Fellowship 5 = (23%)	14% increase

In Question #8, Participant #6 initially reported that small groups “may not be entirely necessary,” but at the end of the training, they changed their stance by indicating that small groups were vital for community, accountability, and growth. At the end of the 6-week project, 100% of respondents indicated that small groups were important. Figure 4 depicts a graphical representation of the participants’ response to the importance of small groups and the top two reasons.

Figure 4. Graph Summarizing Results from Survey Question #8**Q#9) How have small groups impacted you?**

Q#9 Goal: To better understand the participants' mindset and the historical impact of small groups in the lives of the participants. The yellow table below in Table 1.5 compiles all the participants' pre and post answers to this question.

Table 1.5. Table of Participant Data from Survey Question #9

Participant	Pre	Post
1	It has helped me develop relationships with other church members and given me a better understanding of God's Word.	They have helped me understand that people struggle with similar issues.
2	I have been discipled and encouraged repeatedly in small groups. They have also been opportunities for me to serve others.	When I first became a believer, I was discipled through a small group. They helped me learn to walk out the Word, apply the Word to my daily life. They prayed and encouraged me through hard times, and I was able to do the same for many of them.

3	I've gotten to know fellow church members. They cause me to want to learn more about God and His Word.	It allowed me to meet and get to know fellow church attendees. To fellowship, pray, and study God's Word together.
4	Once again small groups help you voice your opinion where sometimes in big groups, you cannot. You may be intimidated or just not comfortable in big groups.	Through small groups I have learned more about the Bible. I learned more about myself and my wife through small groups.
5	Small groups have inspired me to grow and to be accountable for the process.	Small groups have caused me to grow closer to God and gain an understanding of God's Word.
6	Small groups usually keep me going temporarily but does not have a long-lasting effect on my spiritual life.	Small groups, which have been effective, have kept me stronger in my walk and challenged me to maintain my faith. It also gave me an opportunity to connect with others.
7	None Given.	It gives me confidence to walk my spiritual life with others and opportunities to learn.
8	Small groups have grown me and stretched me out of my comfort zone. It has given me a sense of accountability to continue to live out my faith.	It has allowed me to be vulnerable and grown me spiritually. Also, has helped me be accountable for continuously living out my faith.
9	Small groups have impacted my spiritual growth a lot throughout college and my young adult life. I am able to connect and grow with others around me.	They have a positive impact in changing and encouraging my walk with Christ.
10	Given me a space to discuss and interpret the Word of God openly.	Given me a space to be open and discuss central themes and stories in the Word.
11	None Given.	They've helped me learn to be vulnerable in public spaces.
12	Being in a small group makes me stop to study the Bible and share with others, which is out of my comfort zone—it doesn't matter how busy life gets, you feel a sense of responsibility and commitment for your own sake and the rest of the group. I do not feel obligated, but if someone took the tie to study and not me it is not fair. The small group helps me see other perspectives that I didn't consider	Greatly, because not having extended family near me means that there are sisters and brothers in Christ who became my immediate family.

	because it may not relate to my experiences—and vice versa. We grow together, in discussion and prayers for each other. It's my "happy hour" to get going because I'm not alone.	
13	I have seen God's love shown in Jarrett and Liz. I have seen the faithfulness of Christ in these two. I have seen God's plan for a husband and wife, to continue to be played out. I also made closer connections outside of attending corporate worship.	Small groups have allowed the opportunity to connect with the brothers and sisters and grants me additional ways of how God is moving in the lives of His children.
14	They help me stay connected with people, the church, and God.	They have made me feel connected to the church, and like I know more people here other than the pastor.
15	It has impacted me in my spiritual walk, my family, and my work.	It has impacted me in many ways, such as spiritually, gaining new friends that I can call on whenever I need prayers.
16	I desire to lead a small group. It is important to not only be in community but also help new believers.	Yes, in a way that I see the value and importance of staying in community with one another.
17	Positively keeps me engaged.	Provided tools and information for my spiritual growth.
18	Helped to deepen community.	Get to know folks more. Accountability, encouragement, and spiritual growth.
19	Yes, by giving me peace about certain situations in my life, whether good or bad.	By giving me a better understanding on the way of Jesus and Scripture. How to be more Christian-like in my decision making and life process.
20	When I was associated with a small group, I felt I was able to tackle life with a collective group of followers. I felt like I was with people that understood me.	Small groups helped my spiritual growth and built strong relationships
21	Small groups have helped with a sense of accountability along with being around people that aspire to get closer to God as well.	They've helped me be in community. They've helped me view everyday life through Scripture.
22	"N/A"	In a very positive way. They have allowed me to be more open and learn. Although I am still new and have little understanding of the Bible.

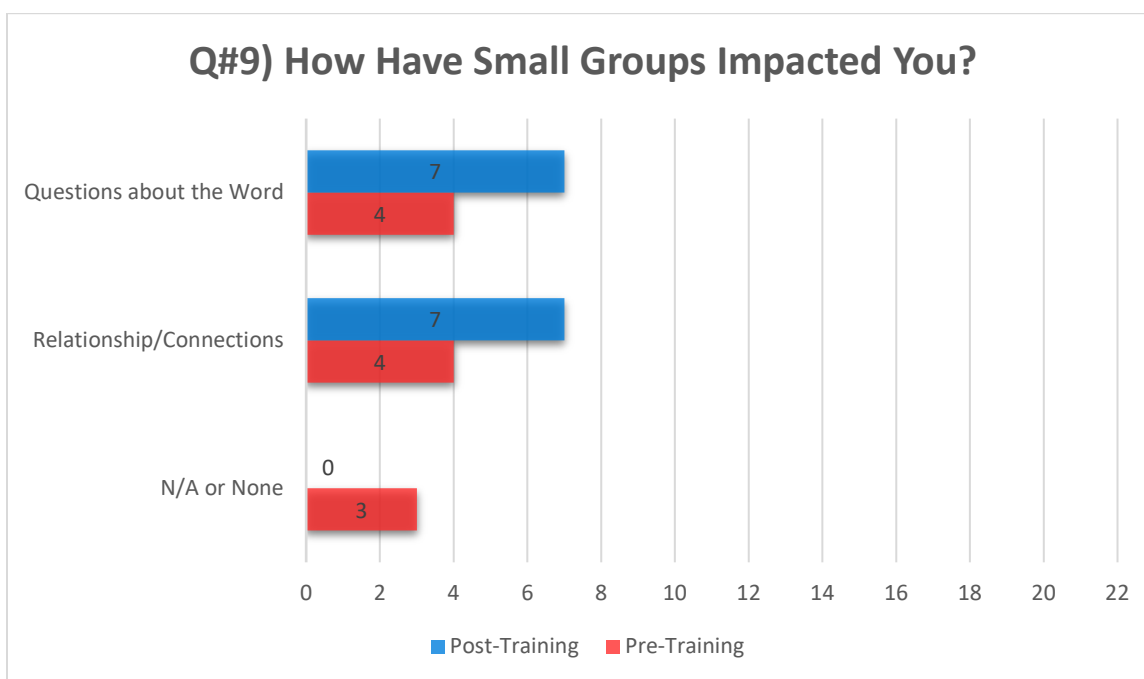
Table 1.6 below summarizes the results from Question #9. This question asks respondents how small groups have impacted them. What is learned is that the top two reasons for the impact of small groups have been related to relationships/connections with others and being able to have questions answered about the Word/understanding the Bible. One key finding was that in post-training surveying, all 22 participants recalled that small groups impacted them. Whereas in pre-training survey data, 14% of participants could not recall how small groups have impacted them, nor did they provide an answer.

Table 1.6. Table Summarizing Results from Survey Question #9

Q#9 Results:

Pre-training	Post-training	Change
Relationships/Connections = 4 (18%)	Relationships/Connections = 7 (32%)	14% increase
Questions About the Word/Bible = 4 (18%)	Questions About the Word/Bible = 7 (32%)	14% increase
Accountability = 3 (14%)	Accountability = 2 (9%)	5 % decrease
Discipleship = 1 (5%)	Discipleship = 1 (5%)	No change
Inspire = 1 (5%)	Inspire = 0	5% decrease
Encouragement = 1 (5%)	Encouragement = 2 (9%)	4 % increase
N/A or None = 3 (14%)	N/A or None = 0	14% decrease

Specifically, in Question #9, Participant #6 said small groups do not have a long-lasting effect on their spiritual growth. In the post-training survey, Participant #6 writes that small groups “have kept me stronger in my walk and challenged me to maintain my faith.” Additionally, by the end of the training, all respondents indicated that small groups had impacted them somehow, since everyone provided an answer. Figure 5 illustrates a graph of the participants’ responses to the top two reasons why, and shows how in post-training, there were no unanswered answers.

Figure 5. Graph Summarizing Results from Survey Question #9**Q#11) What is the recommended size of a small group?**

Q#11 Goal: To see what the participants believe a targeted size of a small group is. It will be helpful to assess the pre- and post-training results for this. It was learned that a group of between 8-12 participants was ideal. The yellow table below in Table 1.7 compiles all the participants' pre- and post-answers to this question.

Table 1.7. Table of Participant Data from Survey Question #11

Participant	Pre	Post
1	Less than 10	8-12
2	Less than or equal to 15	12
3	6-15	8-12
4	4-10	"3-8 people, 5-10 people"
5	6-8	8-12
6	7-10	8-12
7	None Given.	8-12
8	4-10	3-12
9	There is no recommended size.	8-12

10	15-20	8-12
11	About 10 people.	8-12
12	8-10	8-12
13	5-7	7-8
14	2	8-12
15	10	8-12
16	8-12	8-10
17	7	8-12
18	8-10	8-12
19	I am unsure, 10-15	8-12
20	5-10	8-12
21	10 or less	8-12 is highly effective
22	4-8	8-12

Table 1.8 below summarizes the results from Question #11. This question asks respondents what the recommended size of a small group is. What is learned is that the top two reasons for the impact of small groups have been related to relationships/connections with others and being able to have questions answered about the Word/understanding the Bible. One key finding was that in post-training surveying, all 22 participants recalled that small groups have impacted them. Whereas in pre-training survey data, 14% of participants could not recall how small groups have impacted them nor did they provide an answer.

Table 1.8. Table Summarizing Results from Survey Question #11

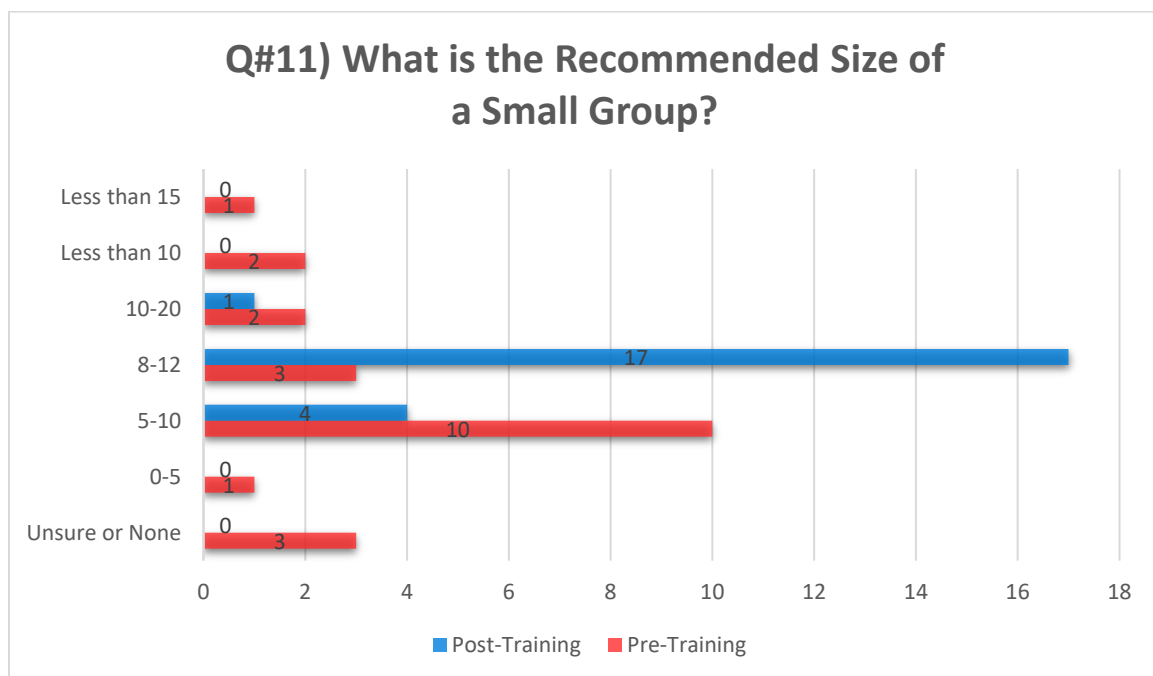
Q#11 Results:

Pre-training	Post-training	Change
Unsure or none = 3 (14%)	Unsure or none = 0	14% decrease
0-5 = 1 (5%)	0-5 = 0	5% decrease
5-10 = 10 (46%)	5-10 = 4 (18%)	28% decrease
8-12 = 3 (13%)	8-12 = 17 (77%)	64% increase
10-20 = 2 (9%)	10-20 = 1 (5%)	4% decrease
Less than 10 = 2 (9%)	Less than 10 = 0	9% decrease
Less than 15 = 1 (5%)	Less than 15 = 0	5% decrease

In Question #11, during the pre-training examination, the most popular answer for a suggested small group size was between 5-10 members at 46%. During the post-training

examination, the most popular answer for the suggested small group size was 8-12 members, at 77% of the respondents. Figure 6 depicts a graphical representation of the participants' response to the ideal size of a small group. The graph shows how 14% of the replies from the initial survey indicate that they had no clue or were unsure if there was a correct size for the number of participants in a small group. After the six-week training, 77% of the participants recalled the ideal size for a small group as 8-12 people.

Figure 6. Graph Summarizing Results from Survey Question #11



This section concludes by examining *survey-style* questions #6, #8, #9, and #11, displayed and outlined in the tables and graphs above. Now, continuing with analyzing the data through the content analysis method, this researcher will focus on analyzing the *questionnaire-style* questions asked of the participants.

Questionnaires

Participants answered the following questions by circling yes or no. Questions #1 to #4 from the participant survey are classified as *questionnaire-style* questions, and the tables for

these questions are color-coded blue in this thesis project. From the yes or no questions from questions #1 through #4, only question #2, will be studied in the body of this results section; see Appendix G for a complete list of all the compiled questions and survey data. Lastly, as a reminder, the data from question #2 was collected from the questionnaire results of 22 participants.

Q#2) Yes or No: Are small groups that meet on a weekly basis good practice?

Q#2 Answer: Yes

Q#2 Goal: To better understand the participants' attitudes toward meeting weekly. Most small groups at Valley Gate Church meet on an every-other-week schedule versus a weekly schedule. The blue table below in Table 2.1 compiles all the participants' pre- and post-answers to this question.

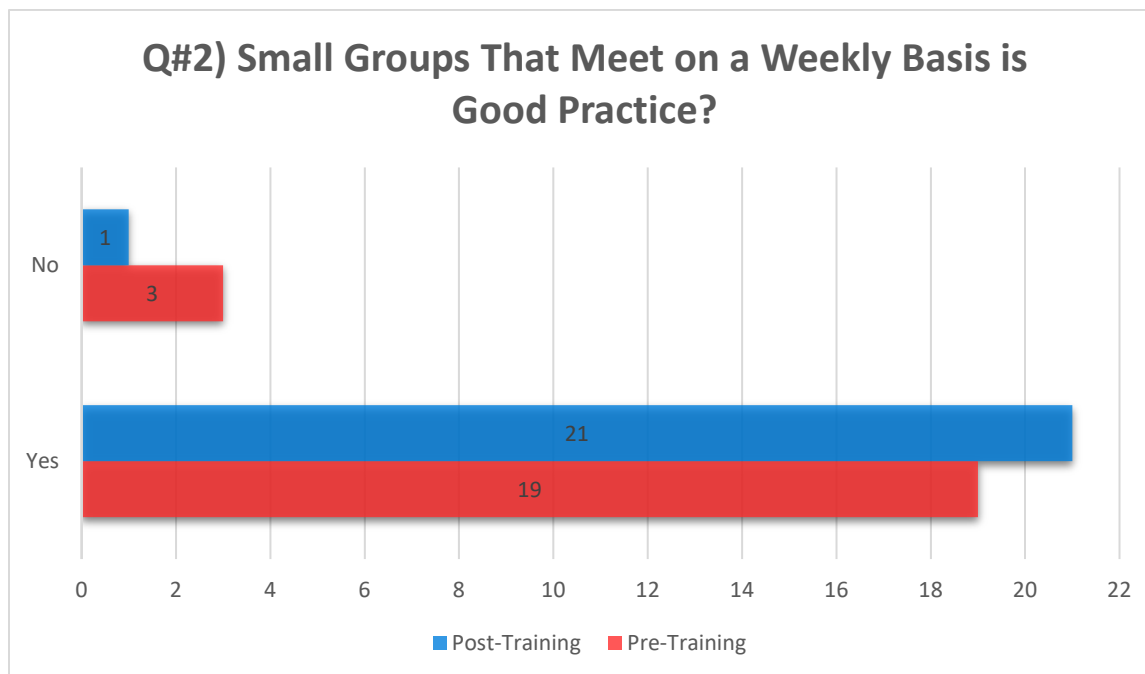
Table 2.1. Table of Participant Data from Questionnaire Question #2

Participant	Pre	Post	Change	Last Answer
1	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
2	Yes	No	Wrong	Incorrect
3	Yes	Yes	Now Correct	Correct
4	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
5	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
6	No	Yes	Now Correct	Correct
7	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
8	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
9	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
10	No	Yes	Now Correct	Correct
11	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
12	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
13	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
14	No	Yes	Now Correct	Correct
15	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
16	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
17	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
18	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
19	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
20	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct

21	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
22	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct

The results from this question indicate that in the pre-training questionnaire data, 86% of the participants thought meeting weekly for small groups was the ideal meeting frequency. The post-training questionnaire indicated that 95% of respondents understood that meeting weekly was good practice. This yielded a 9% increase in correct responses after training. Figure 7 below portrays a graphical depiction of the participants' responses to if the respondents thought meeting weekly was good practice.

Figure 7. Graph Summarizing Results from Questionnaire Question #2



Questions #12 through #20 from the participant survey are also classified as *questionnaire-style* questions because they use a Likert scale to gather data. This questionnaire table from Table 2.2 is also color coated in blue. From questions #12 through 20, only questions #13, #15, #17, #18, #19, and #20 will be examined in the body of the results section. For a

complete list of the entire data compiled from all 20 questions and surveys, please see Appendix G.

Q#12 - #20 Goal: These Likert scale questions aim to reach deeper into the subjective data, beliefs, and opinions of each participant's pre-training and post-training outlook.

Pulling quantitative data from these Likert scales will be easier since 22 total participants answered each question pre- and post-training.

Table 2.2. Table of Participant Data from Questionnaire Questions #12 - #20

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q#13) I am motivated to participate in small group ministry	----- -----	----- -----	2 pre (9%) 1 post (5%)	11 pre (50%) 5 post (23%)	9 pre (41%) 16 post (72%)
Q#15) Small groups are important for spiritual growth	----- -----	----- -----	----- 1 post (5%)	7 pre (32%) 2 post (9%)	15 pre (68%) 19 post (86%)
Q#17) Every church should value their small group ministry	----- -----	----- -----	----- -----	8 pre (36%) 4 post (18%)	14 pre (64%) 18 post (82%)
Q#18) Small groups are essential for cultivating community	----- -----	----- -----	1 pre (5%) 1 post (5%)	6 pre (27%) 4 post (18%)	15 pre (68%) 17 post (77%)
Q#19) I am equipped and empowered to be an active participant in a small group	----- -----	1 pre (5%) -----	4 pre (18%) 1 post (5%)	12 pre (54%) 5 post (23%)	5 pre (23%) 16 post (72%)
Q#20) I have a clear understanding of the purpose	----- -----	6 pre (27%) -----	4 pre (18%) -----	9 pre (41%) 5 post (23%)	3 pre (14%) 17 post (77%)

behind small group ministry					
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Table 2.3 below summarizes the results from some of the questions from Q#12 through Q#20. Question #13 demonstrates that only 41% of respondents were initially strongly motivated to participate in small groups, but by the end of the six-week training, 72% of participants were strongly motivated. Question #15 asks participants if they believe that small groups are important for spiritual growth, and pre-training results reveal that 68% strongly believe so, but by the end of the training, this figure climbs to 86%. Question #17 seeks to find value in the small group ministry, and initially, 64% would strongly agree, but as the six-week time revealed, this would rise to 82%.

Question #18's purpose is to see how likely respondents believe small groups help build community, and pre-training results reveal 68% strongly agree with this, increasing to 77% at the end of six weeks. Question #19 demonstrates that initially, only 23% of participants felt equipped and empowered to be active participants, and shockingly by the end, 72% felt strongly equipped and empowered. Finally, question #20 seeks to find if participants have a clear understanding of the purpose behind small group ministry. Before training, 14% of participants strongly agree with this, but after six weeks, 77% of participants strongly agree with having a clear understanding of small groups. To help recapture and summarize some of the data highlights from questions #12 through #20, Table 2.3 was built to showcase that data.

Table 2.3. Table Summarizing Results from Questionnaire Questions #12 - #20:

Q#13, #15, #17, #18, #19, & #20 Results:

Q#13	In pre-training results, 50% of participants agree that they are motivated to participate in a small group. In post-training results, 72% of the participants said that they strongly agree that they are motivated.
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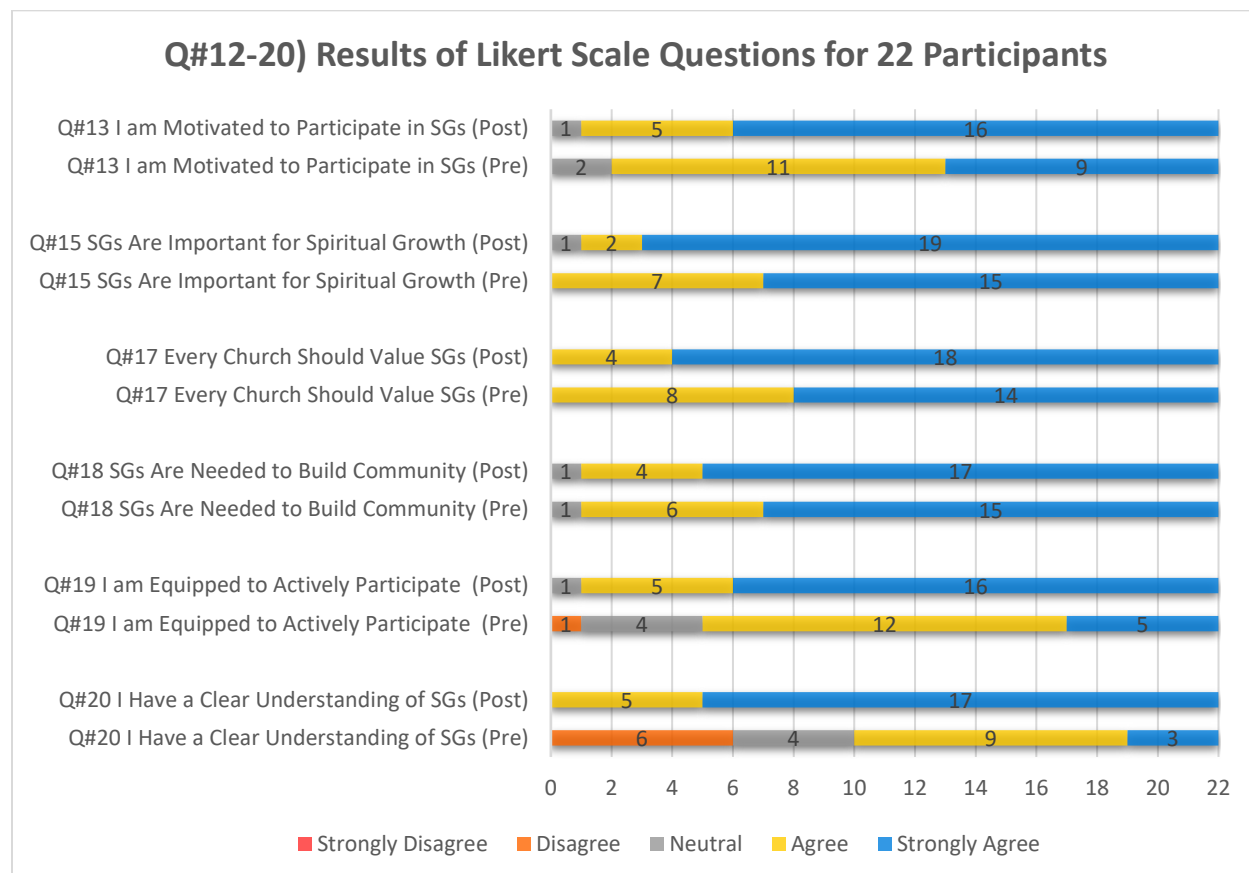
Q#15	In pre-training results, 68% of participants strongly agree that small groups are important. In post-training results, 86% of the participants said that they strongly agree with small groups importance. This is an 18% increase.
Q#17	In pre-training results, 64% of participants strongly agree that every church should value their small group ministry. In post-training results, 82% of the participants said that they strongly agree with small groups importance. This is an 18% increase.
Q#18	In pre-training results, 68% of participants strongly agree that small groups are essential for building community. In post-training results, 77% of the participants said that they strongly agree in kind. This is a 9% increase.
Q#19	In pre-training results, 23% of participants strongly agreed that they were strongly equipped to be an active participant in small group. In post-training results, 72% of the participants said that they strongly agree with being equipped as an active small group participant. This is a 49% increase.
Q#20	In pre-training results, 14% of participants strongly agreed that they had a clear understanding of small group ministry. In post-training results, 77% of the participants said that they strongly agree with possessing a clear understanding. This is a 63% increase.

The results from questions #13, #15, #17, #18, #19, and #20 are depicted in Figure 8 below and portray a graphical rendering of the participants' responses to each of the six questions in greater detail. At a glance, one will notice that in every one of the questions portrayed in the graph, the post-training results reveal that participants felt more strongly about that question. The *strongly agree* Likert scale choice was represented in the color blue. Therefore, Figure 8 shows the 22% increase in motivation to participate from Q#13. The graph illustrates the 18% increase from Q#15 and Q#17. Figure 8 will also show that 77% of participants strongly agree with small groups being essential for building community.

The graph will also depict the 49% increase in participants who feel strongly equipped and empowered to be active participants and how one participant disagreed with feeling

equipped or empowered in pre-training questioning. Lastly, Figure 8 will capture the 27% of respondents who initially disagreed with having a clear understanding of small groups, but by the end of training, an overwhelming 77% of participants would strongly agree to having a clear understanding of the purpose of small groups.

Figure 8. Graph Summarizing Results from Questionnaire Questions #12 - #20



This section examines the Likert scale style questions #13, #15, #17, #18, #19, and #20 displayed and outlined in the tables and graphs above. Now, continuing with analyzing the data through content analysis, this researcher will focus on analyzing the *interviews*. Six interviewees were selected, and each asked a series of eight questions.

Interviews

The transcripts for the six interviewees can be found in Appendix H. The transcripts are a word-for-word dictation between this researcher and six participants. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, one may see P# to indicate each participant referenced with a number instead of using their name. Also, names used in the body of the transcription were withheld for concealment. Only such names as the senior pastor or this researcher were kept as is. Lastly, the transcription also used time stamps because the interviews were recorded for accuracy. The information in the six tables below summarizes those interview results. This DMIN research project will examine Participant #12's interview responses which will be housed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Table Summarizing Results from Participant #12's Interview Results

1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?	A relationship through the pastor from work, 5 years ago in 2018.
2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?	Volunteering, helping, being a part of small group, and leading small groups.
3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?	The attitude of the participant.
4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?	Disagreeing with what is shared in group. Example of someone telling her how to raise her child.
5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?	Find a way to communicate through the disagreement.
6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?	Keep promotional cards and calendars and talk to people about the church.
7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?	Reading the Bible and listening to different sermons and podcasts.
8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?	To go deeper and study the Bible, and possibly Bible characters.

Table 3.1 summarizes the first interviewee's responses. Participant #12 was excited to be a part of this DMIN research project, and she has helped lead small groups at Valley Gate

Church out of her home. She believed the biggest challenge was the disagreements from what is shared in small groups. Participant #12 said someone attempted to advise her on raising her special needs child at a previous church's small group. She felt the person could not speak about the situation because the person did not have a child with the same diagnosis. Although the disagreement was challenging for her, she attempted to find ways to discuss the disagreement with the other person. Participant #12 reported that she has been blessed by small group ministry and seeks to help attendees connect and feel safe. The following summarized interview responses will be captured in Table 3.2 from Participant #16.

Table 3.2. Table Summarizing Results from Participant #16's Interview Results

1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?	Through a friend as he was going to audio engineering school.
2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?	Has attended small group (x2 men's small groups and young adults).
3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?	The intentionality of the leader and if they're prepared. Having group every week is helpful.
4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?	Action, not just sitting and learning in group but actually going and doing.
5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?	By participating, getting involved, and being a doer.
6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?	Attending young adults and the previous men's group. Had a text chat group with men.
7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?	Meeting with the pastor for accountability. Reading spiritual books.
8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?	Spiritual warfare and getting people to be active participants. Also, groups that go beyond the church.

Table 3.2 summarized the second interviewee's responses. This gentleman got connected to Valley Gate Church through connections from a friend. Most of Participant #16's small group involvement comprised young adults' and men's groups. In the interview, he heavily focused on

the intentionality of the leader being the catalyst for a flourishing small group. Participant #16 said that if the leader came prepared, guided the group, empowered the attendees, and connected with the group, it would genuinely help the group thrive. The biggest challenge he has seen is that sometimes the group sits and talks about being the hands and feet of Christ but rarely goes out and does the work. He recommended getting out and being a doer as the key to overcoming the challenge of being a stagnated group without action. He is in a discipleship relationship with men for accountability and spiritual growth. The next interviewee's summarized replies will be denoted in Table 3.3 from Participant #18.

Table 3.3. Table Summarizing Results from Participant #18's Interview Results

1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?	Was already involved in another church but came because of the teen ministry since June 2021.
2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?	No contribution to small group ministry at VGC because of timing of when they got involved and the semester of the groups.
3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?	Connectedness and relationships.
4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?	The focus on affinity groups, she does not want to be a part of a mom's group.
5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?	Being in this study and training. Also, getting involved.
6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?	Volunteering, being a greeter, connecting with people outside of Sunday, more intentional about being vulnerable with others.
7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?	Devotion and personal Bible study. Talking with other people and sharing needs.
8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?	Deeper history and contextual content of the Bible.

Table 3.3 summarized the third interviewee's responses. Participant #18 recently joined Valley Gate Church in 2021 and found the church through her child getting connected to the church's teen ministry. She grew up in the church, growing akin to the Sunday school model of

group and singing hymns. In her interview, Participant #18 affirms that if small group participants are not connected or in a relationship, they simply cannot flourish. Therefore, she believes getting involved is key. Participant #18 is signed up to be a co-leader in an upcoming church small group semester but also serves in various ministries at church to help build those relationships. She would like to see the church offer Old Testament Bible classes or deeper studies on a particular book of the Bible to grow deeper in. The following interviewee's results from participant #6 can be found in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4. Table Summarizing Results from Participant #6's Interview Results

1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?	Through Every Nation Campus (ENC) ministry through Arizona State University since 2019.
2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?	A previous men's small group, ENC, and young adults.
3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?	How spiritually connected the group is. The group should discuss both Jesus and real life. An inconsistent small group leader.
4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?	Spiritual depth of the group and the people, especially an unprepared leader.
5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?	Small group training, good curriculum with a clear end goal in sight.
6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?	Attending small groups, meeting outside the church, checking in with others, and attending church-wide events.
7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?	Prayer, personal Bible study, attending small groups, and being intentional.
8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?	To learn more about outreach, evangelism, and building connectedness.

Table 3.4 summarized the fourth interviewee's responses. This gentleman was connected to Valley Gate Church through associates from a university campus ministry. Most of Participant #6's small group interactions involved the university ministry, young adults, and men's groups.

He claimed that small groups will thrive if they are spiritually connected to the Word of God and each other. Developing this more, participant #6 said that the group should discuss both Jesus and real-life concerns. He added that an inconsistent small-group leader would thwart group growth. Participant #6 said that more small group training, engaging curriculum, and keeping the group's purpose in focus would help the group flourish. To build community at Valley Gate Church, Participant #6 is attending small groups, meeting with others outside of church, attending church events, and is in a discipleship relationship with two men from the church. The next two participants, P#10 and P#11 interviewed together since they were a husband-and-wife couple; their summarized results will be found in Table 3.5 and Table 3.6, respectively.

Table 3.5. Table Summarizing Results from Participant #10's Interview Results

1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?	Finding out the church through Instagram in September 2022.
2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?	This small group 101 training. Attending small group at Jarrett and Liz's house.
3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?	Having the size be more than 8-12 people will make it hard to connect. Also, the leaders and creating a safe space.
4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?	The size of the group being right and creating a safe space.
5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?	Strive to have the group be between 8-12 people. Ensure the privacy of the group is protected.
6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?	Becoming a part of small group ministry and volunteering in the nursery.
7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?	Reading and studying the Bible individually and together.
8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?	Learning about different types of small groups and different subjects.

Table 3.5 summarized the fifth interviewee's responses. She and her husband connected to Valley Gate Church by finding the church via social media. Participant #10 currently participates in small groups at the church and felt that small groups flourish because of the environment and space the leaders create for them. Ideally, leaders should strive to create a safe, non-judgmental space. Participant #10 said that it might be hard to make meaningful connections if groups are too big or too small. She advocated that when a leader ensures everyone's privacy is protected, that group can flourish. At Valley Gate Church, Participant #10 has been volunteering in the children's ministry and getting involved in various ministries to build those meaningful connections. The following table, Table 3.6, houses Participant #11's interview responses. Participant #11 is the husband of Participant #10.

Table 3.6. Table Summarizing Results from Participant #11's Interview Results

1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?	Finding out the church through Instagram in September 2022.
2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?	Celebrate Recovery involvement and small group at Jarrett and Liz's house.
3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?	Feeding attendees spiritually and connection to others. Not being centered on God.
4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?	The group not being centered on God.
5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?	Strive to keep the group on task and relate real life to the Bible.
6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?	Trying to be more involved in groups and activities and volunteer (helps with Order of Service).
7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?	Reading the Bible in different translations, resisting the flesh, and obeying God.
8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?	Deeper study of the Bible and doing it with other people.

Table 3.6 summarized the sixth interviewee's responses. As his wife previously explained, this family discovered Valley Gate Church through social media in 2022. Participant #11 has been involved with two small groups the church offers: a house small group and Celebrate Recovery, a Christian 12-step program for various addictions. He advocates that a thriving group will be one that spiritually feeds its attendees. When this happens, attendees are connected to God by diving deeper into the Word, and they have deeper connections to each other. The second interviewee said that to overcome the challenges outlined, they should keep the group on task and relate the Bible to real-life struggles and real concerns the attendees face. This researcher pointed out in the interview that another interviewee had brought up the same solution of relating the Word to real life.

This content analysis section sought to capture the language, the meaning of the content, and specific events from this DMIN action research project. Specifically, the *content analysis* section above shared results from the survey and questionnaire-style questions, and finally, this section summarized pertinent interview data from the six interviewees. The next type of data analysis used to describe the data in this chapter will be *thematic analysis*.

Thematic Analysis

Understanding that thematic analysis involves categorizing themes and patterns from the qualitative data is fundamental to this methodology. This subsection will first examine the various themes that emerged from the interviews. Then it will combine themes from the entire gamut of surveys, interviews, and questionnaire data. The tables used to summarize the themes in this section have been color-coded green. This DMIN research project will examine the interview themes outlined in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Table Summarizing Themes from Interview Results

Themes from the Interviews	How many times it was mentioned	How many participants mentioned it
Study the Word/Bible	6	5
Preparedness of the participant	3	3
Community, connectedness	2	2
Preparedness of the leader	2	2
Intentionality	2	2
Group Size	2	1
Centered on God	2	1
Real, genuine	1	1
Relationships	1	1
Confidentiality, trust, safe	1	1
Consistency, meets regularly	1	1
Prayer	1	1

As a reminder, only 6 of the 22 participants were selected for a more in-depth interview. The interview transcripts can be found in Appendix H. The themes were tallied by recording each time an interviewee brought up the theme during the interview. If an interviewee brought up the theme twice within their encounter, it was counted as being mentioned twice but only by one participant. An example is the “size is important” theme, as it was mentioned twice by the same participant.

The number one theme that emerged from the interviews was that interviewees mentioned how they thought that for small groups to flourish, they must be focused on the Word of God or some study of the Bible. Five of the six interviewees mentioned the importance of Scripture. The theme was that if a community of believers gather but do not take time to focus on Scripture, then it is a mere social gathering and not a small group. However, if the group also focuses its time on the Word, then that spiritual growth aspect exists. The second theme that emerged from the interviews was the preparedness of the participants.

The interviewees said the participants must be prepared and ready to engage with others. This meant different things for each interviewee. Participant #12 mentioned that the attitude and

readiness of the participant were critical to a thriving small group. Participant #16 stated that the participant needs to be an active participant and doer, not just someone sitting on the wayside as an attendee. Therefore, being equipped for community and prepared for spiritual growth were key. The third most mentioned theme during the interviews was the importance of community and connectedness, how prepared a leader was, and being intentional.

This needed to come up regarding the importance of community and connectedness because this was one of the key pillars that this researcher set his research upon, cultivating community and spiritual growth. The other third most mentioned theme was the preparedness of the leader. This is great because the six-week DMIN research project did not focus on the qualities of a successful small group leader since that was not the project's primary focus. However, interviewees such as Participant #6 said that the leader needs to come prepared with the curriculum while maintaining an attitude of consistency. For a list of the common themes mentioned during the interviews, refer to Table 4.1. Now that the themes from the interview results have been outlined, this DMIN research project will compile all the themes from the surveys, questionnaires, and interviews.

Table 4.2 summarizes all 22 participants' pre-training and post-training surveys and questionnaires. It also adds all the common themes from the six interviews. Hence, Table 4.2 lists every common theme mentioned in the written portions of the surveys and the verbal interviews.

Table 4.2. Table Summarizing Themes from Surveys, Questionnaires, and Interviews

Themes from all data	How many times it was mentioned	How many participants mentioned it
Community, connectedness	49	49
Spiritual Growth	30	30
Study the Word/Bible	24	23
Confidentiality, trust, safe	11	11

Group Size	10	9
Discipleship	9	9
Fellowship	7	7
Accountability	7	7
Inclusive	7	7
Relationships	6	6
Real, genuine	6	6
Relational, missional, restorational, and theological	5	5
Encouragement	3	3
Preparedness of the participant	3	3
Preparedness of the leader	2	2
Intentionality	2	2
Live, “do life” together	2	2
Centered on God	2	1
Consistency, meets regularly	1	1
Prayer	1	1
Inspiration	1	1

The number one theme pulled from all sources of data collection was community and connectedness. Community was a recurring theme among interviewees and surveyors and was mentioned 49 times. The fact that community was the number one theme is fantastic because this was one of this DMIN research project's overarching themes: community and spiritual growth. These findings indicate that community was of prime importance when responding to questions about how small groups have impacted others, what the Bible says about small groups, and what makes a group flourish.

Secondly, the second most popular theme from various data sources was spiritual growth. Participants mentioned spiritual growth 30 times. Spiritual growth is closely tied to the third most popular theme of studying the Word or the Bible. Studying the Word was mentioned 24 times. This finding of the popularity of these two themes delighted this researcher because spiritual growth was purported to be the second overarching pillar of a small group. When participants mentioned spiritual growth or the importance of the Word of God, they indicated

that small groups are important because they help build spiritual growth and that the Bible suggests that small group relationships are supported by studying Scripture.

The fourth most popular theme listed in Table 4.2 is a small group that maintains confidentiality, keeps its trust, and is safe. This researcher's field notes during the training recall that a few times during the in-person training, themes of "maintaining trust" and "confidentiality" during small group sessions were paramount. What was mentioned in small groups ought to never leave the confines of the small group. Doing so would help build rapport with other group members; trust would be formed, which would be the basis of having the members cultivate community and grow spiritually.

The fifth most common theme from the surveys, interviews, and questionnaires was that the group size is essential. There was a total of 10 mentions of size. Questions such as what a healthy small group looks like and what makes a small group flourish were key questions to extract the size component from participants. The six-week training highlighted that the ideal size for a small group is 8-12 people. Very small groups may find it hard to establish momentum in serving each other and growing. Very large groups may be hard to build more profound levels of trust since the size of the group may be too large.

The sixth most common theme listed in Table 4.2 was discipleship. Participants were asked what a healthy group looked like or how small groups impacted them. Discipleship is precisely what most of the respondents cited as a critical component of their small group outlook. What is interesting is that what was learned in the building of the six-week training was that discipleship is a sub-theme of small groups but not the main theme. Again, the two overarching themes of small groups are cultivating community and building spiritual growth.

There was a three-way tie for the seventh most common theme from all the data gathered from the 22 participants. The three seventh most popular themes from the data were fellowship, accountability, and inclusivity. Regarding fellowship, this answer mainly arose when it came to asking why participants thought small groups were essential and what a healthy group looked like. Even during the interview sessions, respondents felt that small group participants should also meet outside the group for bonding activities like bowling.

The second three-way tied theme as the seventh most popular on the list was accountability. This was an exciting find because the six-week training never really covered the sub-theme of accountability in detail, but respondents who brought this up recalled how they received accountability during their participation in small groups in the past. Two interviewees indicated that they were in discipleship relationships and would often be accountable for their actions to the person they met in discipleship relationships with.

The third three-way tied theme as the seventh most popular from Table 4.2 was inclusivity. Being inclusive was not a popular answer given during the interview sessions, but this was a typical response to what a healthy group looked like. Additionally, looking back to this researcher's field notes, during training session three, Participant #17 started to get emotional about the importance of being non-judgmental Christians who can accept and love people in a way that makes them feel included. Others chimed in and affirmed Participant #17's beliefs about making others feel comfortable and creating an atmosphere of inclusivity while holding to biblical truths. Just because one is included does not mean their beliefs are accepted as truth if they are not in line with Scripture.

The thematic list outlined in Table 4.2 involved compiling data from surveys, questionnaires, and interviews. The pre- and post-survey and questionnaires were reviewed and

collected for all 22 participants along with the six-interviewee data. A few of the top themes discussed in this section were community/connectedness, spiritual growth, the study of the Word/Bible, confidentiality, trust, safe, group size, discipleship, fellowship, accountability, and inclusion. This researcher found insight into these themes after sifting through the raw data gleaned from the DMIN research project participants.

Expected Results Examined

Four criteria were hypothesized from the evaluation procedures section of chapter 3 to see if the six-week intervention yielded positive results. The first prediction was that at least 30% more participants would indicate a stronger affinity towards participating in small group ministry post-survey. In pre-training questionnaire data from Q#13, it was noted that 41% of participants strongly agreed with their stance of being motivated to participate in small group ministry, and in post-training data, this jumped to 72% of participants who strongly agreed. This was an increase of 31% of those who strongly agreed to be motivated to participate in small groups. Fewer post-training participants were neutral or agreed because they changed their answers to strongly agree. Refer to Table 2.2 for the numbers to Q#13. In the end, this hypothesis was true, and an increase of 31% more participants indicated a stronger affinity towards getting involved in small groups.

The second forecast sought to see if the participants recognized the importance of meeting outside a Sunday service. The prediction was that at least 80% of participants understand that cultivating community happens apart from the corporate Sunday worship service. Looking to Appendix G for the responses to Q#16, one can see that in the pre-training questionnaire results, 50% of participants disagreed that they establish a deep sense of community by seeing others only on Sunday morning (18% strongly disagreed and 32%

disagreed). In post-training results, 68% of participants disagreed that they established a deep community by only seeing others on Sunday (18% strongly disagreed, and 50% disagreed).

Overall, this was a favorable 18% increase in participants who understood that community does not just happen on a Sunday morning worship service. This researcher did not quite reach the 80% target but was able to persuade 68% of the crowd. In the interviews, when asked how participants are building community at church, none of the responses included because of their attendance on Sunday, but interviewees highlighted various church activities, small groups, conferences, serving in various ministries, and even meeting outside the church.

The third criterion sought to find the participant's ability to realize that discipleship is one aspect of small group ministry but not the primary purpose. Hence, a third post-survey data point indicating participants have grasped the intent of small group ministry is when a majority, more than 75%, of participants show that discipleship is not the central theme behind small groups. Looking to Appendix G for the responses to Q#3, the data revealed that in pre-training responses, 14% of participants understood that discipleship was one aspect of small group ministry but not the primary purpose, and results jumped to 73% correct in post-training responses. This resulted in a 59% increase in the correct response after the six-week training. This researcher came close to meeting this metric as the hypothesis was 75% of participants, but only 73% of participants indicated that discipleship was a sub-theme in post-training data. Per Table 4.2, discipleship was the sixth most common theme distilled from all the surveys, questionnaires, and interviews.

The fourth criterion involved participants' responses to articulate the overarching purpose of small group ministry. To demonstrate if participants clearly understood the church's intent behind its small group ministry, this researcher anticipates that 80% of respondents will be able

to articulate the correct purpose for small group ministry. Looking to Appendix G for the responses to Q#5, pre-training data revealed that 50% of participants said community was one purpose, and 14% said spiritual growth. In post-training data, 77% of participants said that community and spiritual growth were the overarching purposes of small groups and the intent behind this ministry. Although this researcher anticipated that 80% of respondents would understand the overall intent of small group ministry, 77% in post-training data was close to the hypothesized result.

Conclusion

This researcher aimed to create and implement a six-week congregational training to develop Valley Gate Church members, small group participants, and ministry leaders' understanding of the intent of its small group ministry. This chapter thoroughly illustrated the findings of the questionnaires, surveys, and interviews to answer whether this small group intervention served its purpose of yielding results. This researcher arranged this results chapter by the two methods of data analysis used—content analysis and thematic analysis. Then this researcher revisited the original hypotheses made in the evaluation procedures section from chapter 3 to see if the results aligned with the initial suppositions. Two of the four criteria for evaluation were met.

Additionally, in the end, 72% of participants strongly agreed that they were motivated to participate in small groups, and 77% of participants understood the overall intent behind small group ministry as cultivating community and more profound spiritual growth. In the end, this training exposed that all 22 participants are now equipped with important information about small groups, and the majority have corrected their original perceived intent of the church's small group ministry. The final chapter will flesh out the results in greater detail.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This research contributes to small group knowledge by addressing concerns about not implementing proper intent when establishing a small group ministry. The conclusions drawn from the data show how this research project addressed Valley Gate Church's specific concern. Enduring small group research will not stop with this intervention as this researcher has demonstrated a need for further study. This researcher forecasts that an additional long-term study could be conducted to examine the long-term effectiveness of this project's implementation. Was the information taught about the overarching purpose of small groups caught? Do newly added members to Valley Gate Church now know that the purpose of small groups is spiritual growth and cultivating community?

This final chapter will examine the research implications, dissect research applications, speak to this research's limitations, and lay the bedrock for further investigation. This chapter will highlight what this researcher learned, the relevance and efficacy of the study, how it could be replicated, best practices, and warrants for additional investigation. This project will also demonstrate its reproducibility. Additionally, many prominent themes emerged from the data; thus, this research will make other minor conclusions from the results. Ultimately, this study aimed to help Valley Gate Church members grasp the purpose of small group ministry due to not implementing small groups with well-defined intent. The thesis was that if the church implemented this six-week congregational training, then the church's small groups would have a clear direction, cultivate a strong community, and grow spiritually.

Research Implications

Five palpable research implications can be deduced from examining the research: 1) having a foundational class will help reset intent and give clear direction, 2) small group participants are seeking community and connectedness, 3) a thriving small group focuses on the Word of God and allows members to ask questions to grow deeper spiritually, 4) churches should value their small group ministry, and 5) thriving small groups create an environment that is safe, non-retribution, and maintains confidentiality. This section will discuss these top five research implications in greater detail.

The first key researcher implication that emerged from this DMIN action research project was how having a foundational class about small groups proves to be worthwhile to help build intent and direction behind a church's small group ministry. Valley Gate Church already has classes on new membership and baptism preparation, hosts various marriage, women, and men's type seminars, and has specified training for children or media volunteers. However, having a small group 101-style class would be practical. The original problem at VGC was that there was no clear intent as the small group ministry was getting established at the church. As the now seven-year-old church was forming itself, the small group ministry materialized out of direction from the pastoral leadership.

This DMIN research project served as a small group 101 training, instilling the building blocks of the small group ministry and why it is essential. Suppose other churches create a foundational class or form expectations, purpose, and vision behind their small group ministry. In that case, these churches will create an environment for a healthy small group ministry to thrive. Having a foundational small group class with these expectations and lessons is vital. In

post-training results, 77% of the participants strongly agree with clearly understanding small groups. This data proved to be a 63% increase from pre-training data.

Therefore, when VGC launched small group ministries at the start of the church in 2016, some original small group attendees may have never understood what small group ministry was. In an article by Warrick Farah that examined the missiology of various church planting movements, blurred vision is one deterrent that can plague a new church plant.²³² Part of creating a clear vision involves setting the standard and the direction for new ministries. Therefore, having a small group foundational class that aligns with the church's culture surrounding small groups would be beneficial. Setting this clear direction corresponds with Tornifolio's work concerning how as a small group planter, one must craft a group vision based on the church's context and culture.²³³

This DMIN research project created an avenue for vision casting and establishing proper foundations. What this did was create a clear understanding of what the small group ministry was. This project's post-training results indicated that 72% of participants strongly agreed to be motivated to participate in small groups. This yielded an increase of 31% for those participants who strongly agreed. The fruit of such a small group foundations course is two-fold; not only will participants have a clearer understanding of what small group ministry is, but they will also be strongly motivated to be active participants in small groups.

The second unmistakable research implication was that the participants are hungry for relational intimacy through community and connectedness. Small groups provide the prime

²³² Warrick Farah, "The Genesis and Evolution of Church-Planting Movements Missiology," *Missiology: An International Review* 50, no. 4 (2022): 355.

²³³ Tornifolio, "A Strategy for Conducting Evangelism and Discipleship with the Unchurched in the Cane Bay Plantation Residential Development's Restricted Communities in Summerville, SC," 31.

avenue for congregations to build deeper connections apart from the Sunday worship service. In post-training data, 77% of participants indicated that small groups are essential for cultivating community. These findings align with Gunter's research that Christianity is a corporate endeavor in which its followers are encouraged to consider one another and gather for fellowship.²³⁴ Scripturally, fellowship is demonstrated in the Triune Godhead, in the first-century church, and with Jesus and his disciples. Community and connectedness abound as a research byproduct that participants are seeking through the avenue of small groups. This DMIN research project taught that a thriving church community is predicated upon encouragement, fellowship, and evangelism.

Small groups are impactful in creating connections. The two top reasons for the impact of small groups are linked to establishing relationships or connections with others and having questions answered about the Bible. So, whether the reason is community and connectedness or spiritual growth related to questions about Scripture, all 22 participants recalled that small groups impacted their lives. Cultivating community and connections are important and support Bill Search's claims that when life's challenges arise, great small group members are present emotionally, spiritually, physically, and relationally.²³⁵ Therefore, to build a healthy community, a church's small group ministry ought to develop its encouragement and community. In a predominantly white landscape, communal bonds are also important.

As discussed in the demographics section of this research project, Tempe is 64.1% White, 7.4% Black, 8.7% Asian, 9.4% two or more races, 7.6% other races, 2.4% Native American, and

²³⁴ Gunter, "Developing a Small Group Ministry to Strengthen First Baptist Church Magnolia, Mississippi," 26.

²³⁵ Search, *The Essential Guide for Small Group Leaders*, 59.

0.4% Pacific Islander.²³⁶ Yet, Tempe's racial demographics are different from the demographics of this researcher's ministry context. Valley Gate Church's racial makeup is about 63% Black, 17% Native American, 11% White, 5% Hispanic, and 4% Asian/Pacific Islanders. An African American senior pastor and a Vietnamese small groups pastor lead the church's pastoral leadership. The multi-ethnic racial makeup of VGC makes it unique and is a motivating factor for why some choose to get connected and build relationships with others in the church.

The third research implication of the DMIN project was that participants focus on the Word of God and how small groups allowed them to go deeper in their study of the Bible. The number one theme that emerged from the six interviews was that interviewees believed that flourishing small groups must be focused on the Word of God as if they take time to study the Bible. Interviewees recalled how healthy small groups allow attendees to ask questions about Scripture non-judgmentally, which will help small group participants grow deeper in their faith. The Bible's importance is in line with Aaron Tkaczynski's findings that when a church leader manages a small group that focuses some of its time on studying the Bible, it positively affects spiritual growth for the leader and non-leaders alike.²³⁷ This DMIN action research supported that one's robust spiritual growth is centered upon worship, discipleship, prayer, and Scripture.

Recalling work from Atkinson and Rose's 2017 research, this DMIN action research findings align with how small groups played a significant part in cultivating a person's faith and spiritual maturity. The Atkinson and Rose study found an important parallel between the amount of time a congregant participates in small groups and the richer development of their spiritual

²³⁶ US Census Bureau, "Quickfacts Tempe City Arizona."

²³⁷ Aaron Tkaczynski, "Take Me to Church: What Ministries are of Perceived Value for Attendees from a Nonprofit Marketing Perspective?" *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 22, no. 3 (2017): 7.

maturity.²³⁸ Understandably, the number one theme of the interviews was a focus on spiritual growth through the Word. Five of the six interviewees mentioned the importance of Scripture.

Interviewees said that while small groups are essential, if a community of believers gathers but only takes time to focus on Scripture, it is a mere social gathering and not a small group. However, if the group also focuses its time on the Word, understandably, developing the spiritual growth aspect of group attendees takes time. Post-training data observed that small groups are important for spiritual growth by 86% of respondents. This DMIN research finding corresponds with research from Stalling which focused on best practices for spiritual formation and how the purpose of the church is to help people mature in their walk with God and influence the spiritual formation of the lives of congregants.²³⁹

The results of this DMIN action research revealed that when participants mentioned spiritual growth or the importance of the Word of God, they indicated that small groups are important because they help build spiritual growth and that the Bible suggests that small group relationships are supported by studying Scripture. Easterling's study on the great spiritual awakenings and small groups found that Bible study was a corner stone of small groups during every spiritual awakening period, and all groups had high regard for Scripture, prayer, discipleship, and personal holiness.²⁴⁰ In a Barna research study from 2020-2021, 56% of Christians reported that their spiritual life was exclusively private.²⁴¹ While having a personal

²³⁸ Atkinson and Rose, "The Small-Group Ministry Movement of the Last Four Decades," 553.

²³⁹ Crystal D. Stalling, "Best Practices Spiritual Formation Models in the Christian Hybrid Church," (PhD diss., Liberty University School of Divinity, 2023), 130.

²⁴⁰ Easterling, "Big Things Start Small: A Survey of the Role of Small Groups in Christianity's Major Spiritual Awakenings," 231-233.

²⁴¹ Barna Group, "56% of Christians Feel Their Spiritual Life Is Entirely Private," accessed May 31, 2023, <https://www.barna.com/research/discipleship-friendship/>

spiritual life is important, spiritual growth that also occurs in a community is just as imperative; it is also biblical and small groups are a vital component to one's spiritual growth.

The fourth implication of this DMIN action research is that churches should value their small group ministry because it is a crucial ministry, and Scripture supports small group concepts. In post-training results, 72% of the participants said they strongly agreed with being equipped as an active small group participant, which yielded a 49% increase compared to pre-training results. Gladden's small group research leads him and his team at Saddleback Church to understand the importance of small group ministry because small groups focus on fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, and worship; whereas a Sunday service or a specialized training will not be able to emphasize the balanced approach that small groups take towards relationship and spiritual formation.²⁴²

When churches begin to realize the value behind their small group ministry, they can emphasize it, and small groups will start to shape the culture of that church. Gladden spoke about various biblical purposes for what happens at Saddleback, from its weekend corporate church services, orientation classes, small groups, and foundational essentials.²⁴³ However, it is from a church's small group ministry where the spiritual formation, community, and Acts 2:42-47 are lived out. In this DMIN action research, eight initial respondents were inexperienced about what the Bible says or supports about small groups, but post-training survey results exposed that the six-week training was successful in showing participants that Scripture is supportive of small group tenants. The result was a 36% positive change in participants who understood that small

²⁴² Steve Gladden, *Planning Small Groups with Purpose: A Field-Tested Guide to Design and Grow Your Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 21-22.

²⁴³ Ibid., 25.

groups are biblically supported. Final results revealed 100% of participants recognized the value of a small group ministry.

The final research implication is that thriving small groups create a safe, non-retributive environment and maintain confidentiality. This small group aspect was the fourth most popular theme deduced from all the gathered data. The results indicate that most participants understood that small groups needed to be a safe space for any participant. A key stage in small group formation is working through conflict, which helps build relational trust, and also plays a role in shared ownership.²⁴⁴ Small groups are a space where participants can ask questions, share their hearts, and get honest with one another.

This DMIN research taught how the small group ministry could be an evangelistic and safe place. Armstrong recalled multiple instances of nonbelievers joining a small group and, over time, giving their lives over to Christ all because the small group was a safe place to listen, ask questions of the faith, and finally commit to Jesus.²⁴⁵ This researcher's field notes gave respectful attention to a participant who was tearful during one of the six-week small group training sessions because they have experienced a small group where group members were judgmental. She did not feel safe asking questions. This was a turn-off towards the outlook of small groups. It was not until this DMIN action research that this participant could verbalize and validate the importance of groups being confidential and safe. To this date, post-DMIN action research, this specific individual is now an active participant in a weekly small group. Now that the five

²⁴⁴ Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff. *Leading Small Groups That Thrive: Five Shifts to Take Your Group to the Next Level*, 43-44.

²⁴⁵ Jacob Armstrong, *The Connected Life: Small Groups That Create Community* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017), 19-20.

research implications have been listed, this researcher will deduce research applications from the findings.

Research Applications

Jesus demonstrated small groups with His disciples. Jethro urged his son-in-law, Moses, to utilize the concept of small groups. King David and his men had intimacy and community within their band of warriors. The first-century church outlined a prime example of the house church and the ensuing small group ministry model. Given the support of the aforementioned small group examples from Scripture, this DMIN action research supports two applications that arose from the implementation of this project.

Perhaps the first research application is creating an enduring small group 101 or foundations-type class that leaders could implement at Valley Gate Church. Other classes are taught and scheduled throughout the year, such as the membership and baptism classes, but small group classes could be normally held and taught two or three times per year. This researcher made four hypotheses in chapter 3 of this thesis, all revisited at the end of chapter 4. The first prediction was that at least 30% more participants would indicate a stronger affinity towards participating in small group ministry post-survey. In post-training data, 72% of participants strongly agreed they were motivated to participate in small group ministry. Initially, only 41% were strongly motivated, so having this six-week class helped to lay the foundations for small groups, but this DMIN action research project also encouraged congregants to become active small group participants.

It is worth noting that having church educational classes is vital to help build foundations. Gladen writes how his church has developed Christian Life and Service Seminars (CLASSES) to help build foundations and learning opportunities of how Jesus followers can fulfill the Great

Commission while acknowledging that each class a church develops must be tailored to each congregation's needs.²⁴⁶ Should a new small groups foundational class be established at Valley Gate Church, it will prove worthwhile to help congregants understand what small groups are. At the end of the six-week training, 77% of the participants strongly agree with a clear understanding of small group.

The second research application is the information from this six-week DMIN action research training be part of the requirement for any member desiring to be a small group leader. The fourth most common theme among the six interviewees in this DMIN action research revealed the importance of the preparedness of the leader. Interviewees understood that if the leader were prepared and had good spiritual disciplines in their personal life, then it would make for great spiritual outcomes for the participants. Scott Boren advocates that, "Small group leadership is simply about having a clear vision for three things: Love God. Love people. Make disciples who love God and love people."²⁴⁷ Therefore, leadership within the context of small groups is important.

Applying this leadership aspect of this DMIN action research to other contexts comes down to the preparedness of the leader. If a doctor, pastor, counselor, or basketball coach does not first care for themselves by preparing and recharging, they will not be effective at helping others. Bill Search defends the five ways to keep a small group leader's spiritual batteries charged as to pray consistently, read Scripture daily, participate in church life, worship and listen to worship music, and read inspiring Christian books.²⁴⁸ Therefore, along with ensuring spiritual

²⁴⁶ Gladen, *Planning Small Groups with Purpose: A Field-Tested Guide to Design and Grow Your Ministry*, 26.

²⁴⁷ M. Scott Boren, *Leading Small Groups in the Way of Jesus*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 19, *ProQuest Ebook Central*.

²⁴⁸ Search, *The Essential Guide for Small Group Leaders*, 42.

disciplines are being practiced in the life of the leader, churches can also tailor a version of this DMIN action research project to empower their leaders for better understanding and service. This DMIN action research had some limitations and should also take the time to develop that discussion.

Research Limitations

Four significant research limitations are found in the development of this action research. In the order that they will be covered in this sub-section, they are: 1) the time and cost constraints; 2) the scope and focus of this research project; 3) the sample size; and 4) limitations of being a lay leader. Time and cost constraints played a role in being a research limitation in this project. The project's six-week training was a mini-longitudinal study, measuring pre-training responses and comparing those to post-training replies. Naturally, the next step would be the implementation of small groups to perform a longer longitudinal study on a subsequent semester of small groups or examine a yearlong track of the church's small group ministry for the 22 attendees of this project, and what the long-term effects are to Valley Gate Church's small group ministry.

Tim Sensing asserts that longitudinal studies are not practical for DMIN projects, however the more the researcher is engaged at the ministry site, the more a deeper understanding is fostered for the people and the context.²⁴⁹ Thus, time and cost constraints were a research limitation. This researcher did not have the time to be able to take the next step to follow all 22 participants during the next iteration of small groups at the church. Gathering that in-depth, follow-up data would require further research to follow the 22 participants to collect data from

²⁴⁹ Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, 223.

them throughout the next small groups sessions to learn how this DMIN foundational training impacted their future outlooks and participation in small groups.

Additionally, the costs were expensive. This researcher allocated money to print the 50-page workbooks, order weekly catering and drinks for attendees and their children, obtain writing utensils and class materials, and hire babysitters. If a longer longitudinal study were to be conducted, that would require a different model for food, drinks, and snacks. Since this was a six-week training project, and participants volunteered their time after church, this researcher did not mind spending more money on good food, snacks, and drinks. Even the workbooks were professionally bound at a local print shop.

The second research limitation was the scope and focus of this DMIN action research. The problem outlined in chapter one of this thesis was that VGC never set a clear intent for small groups, so this six-week training would help create the purpose behind small groups and give a foundation for the small group ministry. The six-week training would then make participants see that the two overarching themes of small groups are cultivating community and growing spiritually. This DMIN action research project did not focus on the nuts and bolts of small group. It did, however, outline the overarching purpose of small groups so that Valley Gate Church members can grasp the intent behind this valuable ministry.

Regarding building blocks of a church ministry plant, R. David Houston agrees that ministry planters must keep the Bible as their prevailing foundation.²⁵⁰ There are a plethora of great small group ministry how-to books in circulation. This DMIN action research training was not one of those. Instead, this small group training took a foundational and educational approach

²⁵⁰ R. David Houston, "Discovering Church Planter Building Blocks for Integration into Every Nation Campus Missionary Training Providing a Seamless Path from Campus Ministry to Church Planting Ministry," (DMin diss., Ashbury Theological Seminary, 2019), 131.

to help correct the intent of VGC's small group ministry. This training gave the 22 participants a solid foundation of small groups, and any future training can now be performed easily.

The third research limitation was the sample size. When this project's six-week training commenced, the average Sunday attendance was around 230 people. The original number of participants signed up for the initial meeting was 26, but only 22 participants finished the six-week training. The sample size of this research project was about 10 percent of Valley Gate Church's population. While not a large sample size, it was a sample representative of an average church attendee. Some participants had extensive small group experiences, while others were relatively new to the small group experience. Some participants were male some were female. Some were old, and some were in the young adult category.

Specific demographics regarding age, sex, and ethnicity were not obtained on the survey. Still, in future replication of this action research, researchers should consider including demographic information on pre- and post-training surveys and questionnaires. Another drawback to the sample size was that no church staff were active participants in this study. However, the church's small group pastor was a silent observer. It was understood that qualitative research did not require a very large sample size but focused on the quality of participants. Therefore, the sample quality was a good representation of the church overall, but it would have been nice if 30% or more of the church was in attendance.

The fourth research limitation was the restraints of being a lay leader. This researcher will acknowledge that there was a challenge working with church pastors and staff while being a relatively new congregant and not the church's senior pastor. This researcher and his family moved to Arizona in the summer of 2021 and got connected to Valley Gate Church shortly after arrival to the area. While it is a medium-sized congregation, the summer of 2023 typically yields

around 280 attendees on a Sunday morning. The church leadership consists of seven key staff members. Two staff members are Pastor Darryl, the senior pastor, and Pastor Vincent, the small group pastor. While developing this DMIN action research project, this researcher had to work with the church's pastors and staff to record the verbal advertising, email announcements, childcare protocols, finding available space, and, most importantly, the timing of the project's implementation.

This researcher has built a trusting relationship with the leadership team and both pastors at Valley Gate Church. Ultimately, it was the support of the church leadership that helped this DMIN action research project become a success. Without the blessing of VGC's leaders, there would be no ministry context from which to conduct this project. Thus, a good rapport between church pastoral leadership and lay leaders is critical for building effective ministries. Puls, Ludden, and Freemyer concluded in their research that the relationship between a pastor's leadership and their effectiveness in leading their congregation was surrounded by the level of trust, credibility, and transparency the pastor has with the lay leadership of a church.²⁵¹

Should one develop and implement a thesis project of similar scope and size to this action research, it may be easier if the DMIN researcher is the actual senior pastor or staff of the desired ministry context. Since this researcher was not a pastor at the church, he had to work with the various layers of church ministry to birth this research project. When pastors fail to have trusted social relationships with the laity of their congregation, it negatively affects the congregant's motivation and trust that they share with the pastor.²⁵² The relationships between the pastors, staff, and this researcher are great, but not being on staff was a research limitation as the

²⁵¹ Timothy R. Puls, Laverne L. Ludden, and James Freemyer, "Authentic Leadership and its Relationship to Ministerial Effectiveness," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 8, no. 1 (Spring, 2014): 68.

²⁵² Ibid.

ministerial effectiveness of other researchers who are staff members at the church may fair with an easier time navigating through the logistics of a DMIN project. Next, this conclusion will dive into potential future research.

Further Research

This research laid the bedrock for future research to come along and continue to work with the VGC ministry context to highlight how this DMIN action research will affect future cycles of small groups. Does this DMIN foundational training increase motivation to participate for the long haul? 72% of participants strongly agreed that they were motivated to participate in small groups, and 77% understood the overall intent behind small group ministry as cultivating community and deeper spiritual growth. However, what will the outlook be for respondents six months from now? One year from now?

Interview results from the six interviewees found in Table 4.1 reveal that the top three themes are the importance of studying the Bible, the participant's preparedness, and community and connectedness. Data from questionnaires, surveys, and interviews, as compiled in Table 4.2, show that community and connectedness, spiritual growth, and Bible study are of prime importance. Two surprising sub-themes emerged in the in-person training discussions and participants' written answers. These sub-themes are discipleship and accountability, and they each warrant further research.

Regarding discipleship, Boren pens, "Simply stated, discipleship is just showing others how to commune with God, relate to one another and engage with neighbors and networks [...] Discipleship manifests as we participate in this gift of communion, loving each other and engaging the world."²⁵³ Every Nation Ministries emphasizes discipleship as a prime component

²⁵³ Boren, *Leading Small Groups in the Way of Jesus*, 61.

of small groups. However, research from Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff indicated that when a small group ministry does not primarily focus on discipleship and community, then it builds deeper spiritual and communal bonds.²⁵⁴ This is counterintuitive, but their collective research showed that when a group focused on such categories as ministry, worship, evangelism, or giving, those small groups grew greater in community and spiritual richness.²⁵⁵

Since discipleship came up as a sub-theme, it would be interesting for further research to look into Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff's theory mentioned in the previous paragraph. Other researchers, such as McKee, advocate that intentional relationships through discipleship are essential for small group members to know Christ and apply what they are learning in a small group.²⁵⁶ Boren advocates that discipleship is important, but it is mainly demonstrated through spending time together rather than something taught; therefore, it is an essential category of small groups.²⁵⁷ Accountability was another sub-theme worth exploring.

Accountability can get an undeserved reputation for being too ridged because, ultimately, one is not accountable to their accountability partner but ultimately to God. However, the theme of accountability was mentioned seven times, so it was on the respondents' minds in this research. Aside from discipleship, accountability was given as another reason for the importance of small groups. Bob Kellemen's research advocated for accountability within the context of small groups as members endeavor to walk in truth before God and with others faithfully.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴ Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff, *Leading Small Groups That Thrive: Five Shifts to Take Your Group to the Next Level*, 56.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 56-57.

²⁵⁶ McKee, "Proven Biblical Discipleship: Make it According to the Pattern," 25.

²⁵⁷ Boren, *Leading Small Groups in the Way of Jesus*, 61-62.

²⁵⁸ Bob Kellemen, *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God's Care Through God's People*. Edited by Kevin Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 142. ProQuest Ebook Central.

Therefore, it would benefit future research to find out the link between small group ministry and accountability and to what extent accountability should be practiced in groups.

If this researcher were to approach this DMIN action research again, conducting a ministry study within the context where one is already established in leadership or on staff would be helpful. Should the primary researcher of a future project already be on staff at a church or already be an established leader there, it would make navigating the wickets of getting on the church calendar and going through the various stages of an agreement to the project easier. It is suspected that most DMIN students are operating in full-time ministry within the context God has called them to.

Conclusion

Valley Gate Church launched in 2016 determined to reach the lost in Arizona. As Valley Gate Church was set in motion, it began forming various ministries, including its small group ministry. Yet, the research concern was that VGC's small groups were not launched with clear intent. Accordingly, this DMIN action research project bolsters the church's small groups by casting a clear intent, cultivating a strong community, and growing spiritually. Prayerfully, the excitement of this ministry project will spill into the majority of the church attendees and hopefully be a catalyst that changes the church's small group culture.

This conclusion section took time to dissect five research implications of initiating a foundational class, understanding those seeking community, focusing on the Word of God for spiritual growth, finding value in one's small group ministry, and creating a confidential and safe environment. This concluding chapter also took time to support two research applications surrounding establishing a foundations class and making small group training the basis for any future small group leader. Next, the research limitations consisted of time and cost, the research

scope, sample size, and limitations of the laity. Further research compels others to look at the long-term effects of this research while diving deeper into the sub-themes of discipleship and accountability. In the end, small groups are where community and spiritual growth flourish.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT ANNOUNCEMENT

The following announcement will be given during times for the church's broadcasts of upcoming events on Sunday. Announcements happen after corporate worship and before the sermon. A recruitment announcement is typically pre-recorded, and this project's announcement will read as follows:

Hello Valley Gate Church,

Jarrett Gallardo here. As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting a project as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my project is to implement a six-week training to develop the intent behind our church's small group ministry.

Participants must be at least 18 years old but do not require any particular skill or position at the church. Voluntary participants will be asked to take pre- and post-training survey questionnaires and complete the six-week training. Each training session will be 90 minutes long; and participation will be completely anonymous, so no personal, identifying information will be collected.

Refreshments, materials, and childcare will be provided for free. So please see me on the patio or scan the QR code for more information. Thank you VGC family.

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

The following is an email that this researcher will send to congregants at the church through the church management platform called Fluro:

Dear Valley Gate Church Member:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting a project as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my project is to implement a six-week training to develop the intent behind our church's small group ministry, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older but do not require any particular skill or position at the church to be eligible. Participants, if willing, will be asked to pre- and post-training survey questionnaires. Additionally, participants will be asked to take part in a six-week training to develop the intent behind our church's small group ministry. Each training session will be 90 minutes long. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please click on the link here [insert link] or register by visiting the VGC app and completing the interest form found under the events page. I may be reached at [REDACTED].

After receiving your decision to participate, I will email you a consent form. The consent document will contain additional information about my project. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me two weeks before our first meeting.

Participants will have food, drinks, materials, and childcare provided free of charge. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jarrett Gallardo
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity
Email: jXXXXXXXXX4@liberty.edu
Cell Phone: XXX-XX-XXXX

APPENDIX C

GENERAL CONSENT FORM

Consent

Title of the Project: “Resetting Foundations. Implementation of Congregational Training for the Small Group Ministry: An Action Research to Correct Intent, Cultivate Community, and Grow Spiritually”

Principal Investigator: Jarrett Gallardo, MDiv in Chaplaincy, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Project

You are invited to participate in a project. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older but do not require any particular skill or position at the church to be eligible. Taking part in this project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?
--

The purpose of the project is to implement a six-week training to develop the intent behind our church’s small group ministry. Valley Gate Church was launched in 2016, and small groups followed shortly after. This study will provide purposeful intent behind the small group ministry.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. The first procedure is to take a typed or written survey and questionnaire. It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete this pre-training survey.
2. The second procedure is to attend six-week training to develop the intent behind Valley Gate Church’s small group ministry. Each weekly lesson will be 90 minutes long.
3. The third procedure is to take a typed or written survey and questionnaire. It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete this post-training survey.
4. The fourth procedure will only involve selected individuals. If selected, you will be asked to complete a pre-training and post-training face-to-face interview. These interviews will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. To protect the integrity of the interview there is a plan to audio record the interview.

How could you or others benefit from this project?

The direct benefit participants should expect to receive from taking part in this project are a deeper understanding of small group ministry. This project will examine Scripture, literature, and best practices to construct clear intent behind the small group ministry at Valley Gate Church. Benefits to society include, but are not limited to, building community-based small groups that

meet throughout the week and future opportunities for small groups to evangelize and serve the community around them.

What risks might you experience from being in this project?

The risks involved in this project are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this project will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses to the questionnaire and surveys will be anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the project?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this project is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Valley Gate Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting any pre- or post-survey without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the project?

If you choose to withdraw from the project, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this project.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the project?

The researcher conducting this project is Jarrett Gallardo. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at XXX-XXX-XXXX and/or jXXXXXXXXX4@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Al Sarno, at aXXXXXX@liberty.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a project participant?
--

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this project. Make sure you understand what the project is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the project records. If you have any questions about the project after you sign this document, you can contact the project team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the project.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this project.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX D

SIX-WEEK LESSON OUTLINE

This DMIN action research project will take six weeks to implement. The following outlines what a day of training will entail.

1. Lesson One (Week One): This first lesson is crucial, and the goal here is to define what small groups are, outline their Old Testament scriptural support, and gain support from the precedent literature. Examining the unity within the Godhead and an introduction to who Valley Gate Church is.
 - a. Refreshments and check-in children to daycare are (15 minutes)
 - b. Warm-up (15 minutes)
 - c. Lesson (45 minutes)
 - i. The overall aim of the six-week lesson and the problem being addressed
 - ii. Explain biblical references give rise to the importance of a small group
 - iii. Old Testament: Exodus 18:17-26, Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and Second Samuel 23
 - iv. Unity of the Godhead serves as an example of community
 - v. Good foundation illustration with tower (Figures 1 and 2)
 - vi. Who we are (not demographics yet, but recap of Valley Gate Church history).
 - d. Wrap-up, prayer, and pick up children (15 minutes)

2. Lesson Two (Week Two): This second lesson will outline the New Testament scriptural support from Mark 3:13-19,34-35, Hebrews 10:19-25, and Acts 2:42-47. It will also

speak about the historical concepts of small groups, and what led to the modern-day small group. Lesson two will also discuss a brief overview of current small group offerings.

- a. Refreshments and check-in children to daycare are (15 minutes)
 - b. Warm-up (15 minutes)
 - c. Lesson (45 minutes)
 - i. New Testament: Mark 3:13-19,34-35, and Hebrews 10:19-25
 - ii. Historical Concepts of small groups stemmed from house churches:
Romans 16:3-5, Colossians 4:15, and Philemon 1:2
 - iii. Pietism, the first ecumenical movement within Protestantism, promoted a strong desire to study the Bible, foster holiness, and stress good works; it did so in meeting groups called *collegia or collegia pietatis*
 - iv. The Sunday school movement model
 - v. Outline of Valley Gate Church small group offering
 - vi. Introduce Acts 2:42-47
 - d. Wrap-up, prayer, and pick up children (15 minutes)

3. Lesson Three (Week Three): This third lesson will outline the first of two main points of small groups—building community. The point of this lesson is to show that a strong community is predicated upon encouragement, fellowship, and evangelism.
 - a. Refreshments and check-in children to daycare are (15 minutes)
 - b. Warm-up (15 minutes)
 - c. Lesson (45 minutes)

- i. Encouragement: the history of the early church is one of encouragement. Jesus encouraged His disciples. The disciples encouraged one another. Missionaries encouraged the unsaved. Transformative learning supported in the role of small group.
 - ii. Fellowship: captured in the concept of *koinonia* (Greek for fellowship, communion, or participation). Building community involves fellowship. It is more than sharing material belongings; fellowship entails friendship.
 - iii. Evangelism: being in a small group would naturally cause people to share Christ with others outside the group. Mid-20th century, a shift occurred in the church, propelling the church towards a greater emphasis on discipleship and evangelism.
 - iv. Wrap-up, prayer, and pick up children (15 minutes)
- 4. Lesson Four (Week Four): The fourth lesson will discuss the second of two main points of small groups—spiritual growth. This lesson aims to expound upon spiritual growth from the facets of worship, discipleship, and prayer.
 - a. Refreshments and check-in children to daycare are (15 minutes)
 - b. Warm-up (15 minutes)
 - c. Lesson (45 minutes)
 - i. Worship: mention how singing is just one aspect of worship. Within the small group context, prayer, writing what one is thankful for, sharing struggles, sitting silently before God, fasting, sharing testimonies, or practicing surrender by trusting and obeying are all worship.

- ii. Discipleship: not just about fellowship or community, but a deeply rooted spiritual growth aspect ascribed to the act of discipleship with a growing advancement towards Christlikeness. Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 3:14.
 - iii. Prayer: groups that spend some time praying will grow spiritually; when God answers those prayers, growth increases even more. Structure no more than 21 minutes of prayer. Shown not to help growth during group.
 - iv. This researcher will mention that Scripture reading should be a part of spiritual growth. Emphasizing the importance of Scripture study.
 - v. Wrap-up, prayer, and pick up children (15 minutes)

- 5. Lesson Five (Week Five): The fifth lesson will discuss the scriptural importance of spiritual community. Then it will serve to highlight the church's demographics in light of the surrounding city of Tempe's demographics. The other goal would be to outline various ministry practices of the small group ministry and common challenges.
 - a. Refreshments and check-in children to daycare are (15 minutes)
 - b. Warm-up (15 minutes)
 - c. Lesson (45 minutes)
 - i. Importance of spiritual community (Acts 2 "those who believed" *hoi pisteuones*; they are not yet referred to as the "church" *ekklesia*. "Sharing with each other" demonstrates *koinonia*. Romans 12:9-21—marks of a true Christian and Second Timothy 1:13-14
 - ii. Valley Gate Church's racial makeup is about 63% Black, 17% Native American, 11% White, 5% Hispanic, and 4% Asian/Pacific Islanders.

Also, examine age spread. Is the church “multi-ethnic and multi-generational?”

- iii. Tempe demographics: examine racial makeup and age spread from US Census Bureau, “Quickfacts Tempe City Arizona.”
 - iv. Various small group ministry models fleshed out based on themes, shared activities, gender, marital status, or geographic reasons.
 - v. Wrap-up, prayer, and pick up children (15 minutes)

- 6. Lesson Six (Week Six): putting it all together with the small group underpinnings of building a solid community and establishing deeper spiritual growth. The goal is to describe what a healthy-sized small group looks like. It will also address small group ministry challenges, briefly recap previous lessons, and revisit Acts 2:42-47.
 - a. Refreshments and check-in children to daycare are (15 minutes)
 - b. Warm-up (15 minutes)
 - c. Lesson (45 minutes)
 - i. What does a healthy-sized group look like?
 - ii. Location and frequency of group.
 - iii. Small group ministry challenges
 - iv. Revisit Acts 2:42-47
 - v. Bringing it all together and recapping previous lessons.
 - vi. Hand out the final survey and final questionnaire. Give 1-week suspense.
 - vii. Wrap-up, prayer, and pick up children (15 minutes)

APPENDIX E

PRE- AND POST-TRAINING SURVEY AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre and Post Training Survey and Questionnaire Questions

Name: _____

Date: _____

Circle One: Pre-Training or Post-Training

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this thesis project. The aim is to form a deeper understanding of small group ministry. This six-week project will examine Scripture, literature, and best practices to construct clear intent behind the small group ministry at Valley Gate Church. Answers to these questions will be compiled before and after the training. The responses to these questions will be anonymous and the data in the thesis will be free of any personal identifying information.

Answer the following four questions by circling yes or no:

Q#1) Yes or No: Building a solid community is founded upon encouragement, fellowship, and evangelism within the small group?

Q#2) Yes or No: Are small groups that meet on a weekly basis good practice?

Q#3) Yes or No: Discipleship is the central theme behind the purpose of small groups?

Q#4) Yes or No: The concept of small groups was preserved within the context of house churches past the apostolic era?

Please answer the following questions in the space provided:

Q#5) What does Valley Gate Church believe the intent of small groups is?

Q#6) What does the Bible say about small groups?

Q#7) What types of small groups have you been a part of?

Q#8) Are small groups important? Please explain.

Q#9) How have small groups impacted you?

Q#10) What does a healthy small group look like?

Q#11) What is the recommend size of a small group?

Using the scale provided, indicate if you agree or disagree with the statements listed below:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q#12) I am currently involved in a small group					
Q#13) I am motivated to participate in small group ministry					
Q#14) I have had significant spiritual growth by attending the Sunday worship service					
Q#15) Small groups are important for spiritual growth					
Q#16) I have established a deep sense of community by seeing others only on Sunday morning					
Q#17) Every church should value their small group ministry					
Q#18) Small groups are essential for cultivating community					
Q#19) I am equipped and empowered to be an active participant in a small group					
Q#20) I have a clear understanding of the purpose behind small group ministry					

APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions will be asked to selected interviewees. These questions will be orally asked of the respondent and will be face-to-face. Responses will be recorded.

- 1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?
- 2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?
- 3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?
- 4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?
- 5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?
- 6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?
- 7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?
- 8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?

APPENDIX G

PRE- AND POST-TRAINING SURVEY, QUESTIONNAIRE, AND THEMES – RAW DATA

The following information was compiled from the pre and post training surveys, questionnaires, and themes from the interviews and the surveys. It is essentially the raw data of the DMIN project assembled for readers. Not all of the data collected was presented in chapter 4 of this thesis.

Answer the following four questions by circling yes or no (Q#1-4 are classified as *questionnaire* style questions and the tables for these questions are color coated blue):

Q#1) Yes or No: Building a solid community is founded upon encouragement, fellowship, and evangelism within the small group?

Q#1 Answer: Yes

Participant	Pre	Post	Change	Last Answer
1	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
2	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
3	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
4	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
5	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
6	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
7	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
8	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
9	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
10	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
11	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
12	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
13	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
14	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
15	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
16	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
17	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
18	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
19	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
20	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
21	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
22	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct

Q#1 Results: 100% correct pre- and post-training

Q#2) Yes or No: Are small groups that meet on a weekly basis good practice?

Q#2 Answer: Yes

Participant	Pre	Post	Change	Last Answer
1	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
2	Yes	No	Wrong	Incorrect
3	Yes	Yes	Now Correct	Correct
4	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
5	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
6	No	Yes	Now Correct	Correct
7	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
8	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
9	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
10	No	Yes	Now Correct	Correct
11	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
12	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
13	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
14	No	Yes	Now Correct	Correct
15	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
16	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
17	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
18	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
19	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
20	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
21	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
22	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct

Q#2 Results: 95% respondents understood that meeting weekly was good practice. 9% increase in correct response after training.

Q#3) Yes or No: Discipleship is the central theme behind the purpose of small groups?

Q#3 Answer: No

Participant	Pre	Post	Change	Last Answer
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1	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
2	Yes	Yes	Same	Wrong
3	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
4	Yes	Yes	Same	Wrong
5	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
6	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
7	No	No	Same	Correct
8	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
9	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
10	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
11	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
12	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
13	No	Yes	Now Wrong	Wrong
14	No	No	Same	Correct
15	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
16	Yes	Yes	Same	Wrong
17	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
18	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
19	Yes	Yes	Same	Wrong
20	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
21	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct
22	Yes	No	Now Correct	Correct

Q#3 Results: 73% correct after the training. A 59% increase in the correct response after the six-week training.

Q#4) Yes or No: The concept of small groups was preserved within the context of house churches past the apostolic era?

Q#4 Answer: Yes

Participant	Pre	Post	Change	Last Answer
1	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
2	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
3	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
4	Yes	None Given	N/A	N/A
5	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
6	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
7	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
8	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
9	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct

10	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
11	No	Yes	Now Correct	Correct
12	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
13	No	Yes	Now Correct	Correct
14	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
15	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
16	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
17	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
18	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
19	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
20	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
21	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct
22	Yes	Yes	Same	Correct

Q#4 Results: Post-training, 100% of participants answered correctly. A 9% increase in correct responses.

Please answer the following questions in the space provided: (Q#5-11 are classified as *survey* style questions and the data tables are color coated in yellow)

Q#5) What does Valley Gate Church believe the intent of small groups is?

Q#5 Goal: Have participants understand that building community and spiritual growth are key. Every Nation Ministries heavily advocates discipleship as a key component of small group.

Participant	Pre	Post
1	To help build community.	To build community and for spiritual growth.
2	To build community and for interpersonal relationships; for discipleship and “to do life” together.	Discipleship, spiritual growth, and building community.
3	To love God and each other. To live out trials and struggles; connect with others; engage in spiritual growth. Focus on following Christ and learn to be the Church!	To have a clear direction, cultivate strong community, and grow spiritually.
4	Encouragement, accountability, growth, and fellowship.	To help the church as a whole grow; small groups help the church get stronger.

5	For fellowship, encouragement, and discipling for growth and accountability.	They are intended to cultivate community and to grow spiritually.
6	None Given.	VGC believes that small groups help foster community and spiritual growth.
7	Fellowship with other believers and establish connections in the church.	Gain deeper experience with the church beyond the Sunday service.
8	To draw closer to one another to build fellowship and community so that we grow closer together; accountability.	To build spiritual community and encourage each other in our walk.
9	To continue to build a community with others at church, which is hard is we only see each other on Sunday. In order to spiritually grow and keep each other accountable, we have to connect outside of church hours.	VGC wants it to focus on the themes of building community and spiritual growth.
10	To encourage building bonds and relationships so that members can “do life together.”	To help attendees grow spiritually and create community.
11	To bring people closer to Christ and build a community.	To grow spiritually and help build community.
12	To build church community, fellowship, and encourage each other.	They create an environment where a believer’s faith and the lives of other Christians collide.
13	To unite the church.	Discipleship, connection, and spiritual growth.
14	To learn about Jesus together.	Help church members encourage their walk with God.
15	To grow spiritually and build community.	To imitate best practices of small group ministry and help attendees cultivate community and grow spiritually.
16	To grow in knowledge and confidence of Christ and build community.	To grow community with the church and to make disciples of Jesus.
17	Service; building community.	For clear direction to cultivate strong community and grow spiritually.
18	Grow in community.	To build community and to grow deeper spiritually
19	To build community and a better understanding of the Bible and God’s desire for certain topics.	To build community and spiritual growth.
20	Encourage to promote spiritual growth, fellowship, community, and initiate reading of the Bible.	Build community; spiritual growth.
21	Community; growth.	Build community; spiritual growth.

22	To bring us together and get closer to God.	Spiritual growth, worship, and build community.
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Q#5 Results:

Pre-training	Post-training	Change
Live/Do Life Together = 2 (9%)	Live/Do Life Together = 0	9% decrease
Community = 11 (50%)	Community = 17 (77%)	27% increase
Spiritual Growth = 3 (14%)	Spiritual Growth = 17 (77%)	63% increase
Accountability = 2 (9%)	Accountability = 0	9% decrease
Discipleship = 1 (5%)	Discipleship = 3 (14%)	9% increase

Q#6) What does the Bible say about small groups?

Q#6 Goal: To see if participants will recall themes of small group from what Scripture says about community, discipleship, and house churches within the text of Scripture. Pre-training results will be key to compare to post-training here.

Participant	Pre	Post
1	That whenever people meet to experience God's word that it glorifies God and is equivalent to going to church.	It is a way to grow spiritually, get a better understanding of Scripture, and make disciples.
2	Unsure, but I know that Paul encouraged the churches—that I liken to small groups in the New Testament.	Bible demonstrates small groups through the home churches that Paul writes to in the New Testament.
3	Matthew 18:20, for where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, there I am among them. 1 Thessalonians 5:11, therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. Proverbs 27:17, as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.	They are necessary.
4	Encourage one another and build each other up; iron sharpens iron; fellowship together.	Small groups are the way Jesus spread His Word through the disciples. The 12 were a small group.
5	Make it a habit to gather together because Jesus is there; where 2 or 3 are gathered; for encouragement; to build each other up.	Historically small groups led to intimate relationships for moments of spiritual growth. Small groups

		nurtured what was spoken and lead to actual growth within their lives.
6	I honestly cannot remember or recall specific examples of small group in the Bible.	The Bible emphasizes the importance of delegation, community, and fellowship. Through small groups, followers of Christ can gain so much with other followers.
7	None Given.	The Word should be shared in our houses.
8	The Bible says where two or more are gathered in His name, He is with us. Therefore, fellowshiping together and walking through this life of faith in Jesus Christ with other believers allows the Holy Spirit to move in our hearts and the atmosphere.	Small groups are to develop community and to help prevent burnout of our pastors and those in leadership.
9	The Bible says we need to build community with others, so we can continue to multiply His kingdom and help each other spiritually mature.	The Bible doesn't necessarily say the words "small group," but it talks about the evolution of how modern-day small groups started out as house churches. It's a time to fellowship (koinonia).and grow spiritually.
10	We were created to be in community with each other as Christians. Small groups help the church multiply and remain engaged.	Small groups are to build community and closeness to God.
11	Where two or more gather, God is there.	Small groups need to be biblical and loving in order to be effective in furthering God's kingdom and aide spiritual growth.
12	To meet, because if there's two or more the Lord is there and lots can be shared, like words of wisdom, encouragement, God's word, the Holy Spirit moves and takes over and supernatural things can happen.	Small groups are the prime setting for Christians to draw near to God, hold onto their faith, and continually meet with one another.
13	I am not sure.	From my memory, of what was taught the early church grew through small groups.
14	Where two or more are gathered, the Lord is there, but I'm not sure really.	It's a form of worship and pleases God when we meet to build community and learn about Him, it's like the dew from Aaron's beard.
15	To pray together, grow together, and help each other.	Draw near to God, confession of faith, and gathering.

16	Do not forsake the gathering of ourselves. So, coming together is important.	They started in the time of Jesus. Jesus used small group ministry to grow God's kingdom, and small groups have continued since then.
17	I am not sure.	Established when it is nurtured by shared ownership and devotion.
18	That we should pray for and encourage one another. We should live life together.	They are essential. They are useful for keeping order (judging amongst themselves), building spiritually, and for discipleship.
19	I am unsure.	It is a good way to grow spiritually to be a better disciple.
20	The Bible says small groups are good for fellowship and support. Small groups assist with personal accountability.	It is encouraged and recommended.
21	Not sure. I'd assume it describes the importance of fostering discipleship.	There are several ways the Bible talks about small groups. Essentially, they are good for a follower of Christ to be in community, fellowship, and grow spiritually in the Word of God.
22	Not sure.	Small groups create a space for spiritual growth, community, and are an avenue for the church to live counterculturally.

Q#6 Results:

Pre-training	Post-training	Change
Quoted an actual Scripture = 1 (5%)	Quoted an actual Scripture = 0	5% decrease
"Two or more are gathered" from Matthew 18:20 = 6 (27%)	"Two or more are gathered" reference = 0	27% decrease (this Bible verse is about church discipline)
I am not sure/no answer = 8 (36%)	I am not sure/no answer = 0	36% decrease

Q#7) What types of small groups have you been a part of?

Q#7 Goal: To better understand the participants' mindset and historical engagement of small groups in the past. It's expected pre and post data would be nearly identical.

Participant	Pre	Post
1	Marriage and finance.	Men's groups and Bible Studies.
2	General, women, and couples.	Women's, marriage, topical, and all others.
3	Several women's small groups; Financial Peace University (VGC); and Celebrate Recovery (VGC).	I have been a part of the small groups offered at VGC.
4	Home Bible studies; groups from past churches; "Sons of Covenant" study.	We've had a family small group. Me and my wife and 8 people, and we have been to a 5-person small group Bible study.
5	Women's groups; "Daughters of Covenant study;" prayer and healing small group; and marriage group.	Cell groups; women's groups; and Jesus oriented groups.
6	Youth; men's; book study groups; and young adult groups.	I have been a part of small groups varying in size and attendees. These groups often met inconsistently when only 4-5 people attended. Healthy groups I have been a part of focused on how much God has an effect on our lives.
7	Couples and men.	Couples, men, and career-based groups.
8	I am a part of young adults' small group and have been in small groups when I was in college.	I have been a part of an athletes' small group as well as young adults.
9	Young adults; (Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and Athletes in Action (AIA) small groups for college athletes and students.	I have been a part of process oriented small groups where the people in the group gathered based on similar interests.
10	Just one small group within VGC.	Small group with 4-8 members at someone's house.
11	Various small groups here at Valley Gate Church and some a few years back.	Celebrate recovery's breakout group.
12	Christian book studies and discipleship.	Bible study (cell and meta models)
13	Men's small group with Pastor Darryl. Me and Maya have visited Jarrett and Liz's but not consistently. Young adults for the first six months we attended VGC.	Jarrett and Liz's small group about once per month. Pastor Darryl's small group.
14	Pastor Vincent's small group (men's).	One that was Scripture-based learning more about Jesus.
15	Campus and universal groups.	Campus group and mixed group.
16	Men's small group.	Young adults and men's small group.

17	Women's, parents, and relationship.	Foundational and relationships.
18	Two different church small groups and women's ministry at a former church. It was only like 15 people, so it was similar to a small group.	Yes, a prior church's small groups.
19	Just your normal Bible study.	"Very small group."
20	Male small groups.	Group of the same gender for fellowship and spiritual growth. Mixed group that was content specific.
21	Men's and couples.	Biweekly small group with 4 attendees.
22	I have not been a part of any.	"Wives" group and marriage prep.

Q#7 Results:

Pre-training	Post-training	Change
Not been a part of any = 1 (5%)	Not been a part of any = 0	5% decrease
Men or Women = 13 (59%)	Men or Women = 5 (23%)	36% decrease
Age or profession = 5 (23%)	Age or profession = 4 (18%)	5% decrease
Marriage or couples = 5 (23%)	Marriage or couples = 4 (18%)	5% decrease

In Q#7, 100% of the respondents have been involved in some sort of small group that they recalled both pre and post training.

Q#8) Are small groups important? Please explain.

Q#8 Goal: To better understand the participants' mindset of whether they value the importance of small groups. It would be ideal to compare the data from pre-training and post-training to get a sense of change from the six weeks.

Participant	Pre	Post
1	Yes. It is important to build relationship to help keep us accountable for our actions.	Yes. It is a way for us to remain accountable during our spiritual walk and encourage one another.
2	Yes, they help build relationships among members of a church so that all can function better as a community. There are opportunities for discipleship and to learn and grow in the Word.	Absolutely! They're an opportunity to build relationships and make the church more cohesive. Through relationships, there's an opportunity for accountability and spiritual

		growth. Also, an opportunity for more in-depth Bible study.
3	Yes. They help by causing people to get more engaged in studying the Word of God.	Small groups are the foundation of the church. It'll help individuals get to know one another, pray together, study God's Word together, and fellowship together.
4	Yes. They help you find out who you are; fellowship with others is important.	Yes. I believe you learn more about yourself and others through small groups. People of all ages should be in your small group.
5	Yes. We can learn to lean on each other and be open and transparent to receive support, truth, growth, and to be encouraged to stay the course.	Yes. Small groups are important because you develop more intimate (close) relationships, and they help you to grow.
6	I see small groups as a supplement to improving my spiritual life. It can have some benefits, but it may not be entirely necessary.	Small groups are important because it can build a community in the church. Not only that, but small groups can create accountability and inspire growth throughout the week.
7	Yes, I believe it allows a more intimate setting to worship and sharpens other believers. It also is a great way to learn more about church.	Yes, gives intimacy with other believers.
8	Yes, because it gives us the opportunity to grow closer to God along fellow believers to disciple and hold each other accountable. Also, so that when we leave small groups, we are able to disciple and share with others.	Yes, to build community, spiritual growth, encouragement and evangelism.
9	Yes. Small groups allow you to connect with others more than just on Sundays. It helps you fellowship with others to help encourage and grow in God's Word.	Yes, they are important. It is a way to connect with a small group of people outside of the Sunday service to encourage, fellowship, and grow with one another in Scripture. This group allows intimacy and helps us keep each other accountable in our walks of life.
10	Yes, they help leaders in discipleship and help participants to have community and is a forum for open discussion.	Yes. They create space for fellowship and discipleship within churches.
11	Yes, small groups are important because they help build community. They provide an opportunity for Christ	Yes, they are important because they contribute to the furthering of God's kingdom.

	followers to share their experiences and learn and grow together.	
12	In my opinion, small groups are a “need” (not optional) to grow in many aspects but mostly in the faith and spiritually.	They are a need to grow spiritually, build community, evangelize, pray, and encourage each other, and build relationships.
13	Yes, because I believe they are a part of fellowship.	Yes, small groups are important because they allow a deeper level of fellowship and help with on Sunday evening. As Jarrett taught us you are allowed to share your personal struggles and or victories with your colleagues.
14	Yes, they help me learn about God outside of the Sunday service.	Yes, so members of the church can connect with each other on a deeper level, grow spiritually, evangelize, and encourage each other to walk with God.
15	Small groups are important because of spiritual growth and learning together.	Yes, very much. Because it’s a place to learn, fellowship, worship, and pray.
16	Yes. It’s another level of community.	Very important. Outside of church small groups is a chance to grow and equip believers at any stage to share the Good News and disciple younger believers.
17	Yes, keeps me involved gives me a passion I didn’t know I have learning more about God and the Word.	Yes, they help to grow a strong community.
18	Yes, as Christians, we are called to share and bear each other’s burdens. We are called to spur each other on. Iron sharpens iron.	Absolutely because they are useful to keep order (judging among themselves), building spiritually, and for discipleship.
19	Yes, by giving me peace about certain situations in my life, whether good or bad.	Yes, it is very important. Small groups are a way to build yourself up as well as encourage others. This is where Christians thrive.
20	Yes, the importance of small groups are spiritual growth, obedience, encouragement, and collective support.	Yes, small groups are important for spiritual growth and building community.
21	Yes, they provide an opportunity to grow together spiritually and in community.	Yes, they are good and important for maturity in our walk with Christ. Great for accountability.
22	Yes, it allows the opportunity to learn in a more intimate environment.	Yes, they allow for a more intimate experience and they ability to go

		deeper as you can discuss more openly.
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Q#8 Results:

Pre-training	Post-training	Change
Yes = 21 (95%)	Yes = 22 (100%)	5% increase
No = 1 (5%)	No = 0	5% decrease
Why- Spiritual Growth = 5 (23%)	Why- Spiritual Growth = 5 (23%)	No change
Why- Community = 4 (18%)	Why- Community 4 (18%)	No change
Why- Study Word/Bible = 4 (18%)	Why- Study Word/Bible = 3 (14%)	4 % decrease
Why- Relationships = 2 (9%)	Why- Relationships = 3 (14%)	5% increase
Why- Discipleship = 2 (9%)	Why- Discipleship = 2 (9%)	No change
Why- Fellowship = 2 (9%)	Why- Fellowship 5 = (23%)	14% increase

In Q#8, Participant #6 said that small groups “may not be entirely necessary” changed their stance at the end by indicating that small groups were for community, accountability, and growth. At the end of the 6-week project, 100% of respondents indicated that small groups were important.

Q#9) How have small groups impacted you?

Q#9 Goal: To better understand the participants’ mindset and the historical impact of small groups in the lives of the participants.

Participant	Pre	Post
1	It has helped me develop relationships with other church members and given me a better understanding of God’s Word.	They have helped me understand that people struggle with similar issues.
2	I have been discipled and encouraged repeatedly in small groups. They have also been opportunities for me to serve others.	When I first became a believer, I was discipled through a small group. They helped me learn to walk out the Word, apply the Word to my daily life. They prayed and encouraged me through hard times, and I was able to do the same for many of them.

3	I've gotten to know fellow church members. They cause me to want to learn more about God and His Word.	It allowed me to meet and get to know fellow church attendees. To fellowship, pray, and study God's Word together.
4	Once again small groups help you voice your opinion where sometimes in big groups, you cannot. You may be intimidated or just not comfortable in big groups.	Through small groups I have learned more about the Bible. I learned more about myself and my wife through small groups.
5	Small groups have inspired me to grow and to be accountable for the process.	Small groups have caused me to grow closer to God and gain an understanding of God's Word.
6	Small groups usually keep me going temporarily but does not have a long-lasting effect on my spiritual life.	Small groups, which have been effective, have kept me stronger in my walk and challenged me to maintain my faith. It also gave me an opportunity to connect with others.
7	None Given.	It gives me confidence to walk my spiritual life with others and opportunities to learn.
8	Small groups have grown me and stretched me out of my comfort zone. It has given me a sense of accountability to continue to live out my faith.	It has allowed me to be vulnerable and grown me spiritually. Also, has helped me be accountable for continuously living out my faith.
9	Small groups have impacted my spiritual growth a lot throughout college and my young adult life. I am able to connect and grow with others around me.	They have a positive impact in changing and encouraging my walk with Christ.
10	Given me a space to discuss and interpret the Word of God openly.	Given me a space to be open and discuss central themes and stories in the Word.
11	None Given.	They've helped me learn to be vulnerable in public spaces.
12	Being in a small group makes me stop to study the Bible and share with others, which is out of my comfort zone—it doesn't matter how busy life gets, you feel a sense of responsibility and commitment for your own sake and the rest of the group. I do not feel obligated, but if someone took the tie to study and not me it is not fair. The small group helps me see other perspectives that I didn't consider	Greatly, because not having extended family near me means that there are sisters and brothers in Christ who became my immediate family.

	because it may not relate to my experiences—and vice versa. We grow together, in discussion and prayers for each other. It's my "happy hour" to get going because I'm not alone.	
13	I have seen God's love shown in Jarrett and Liz. I have seen the faithfulness of Christ in these two. I have seen God's plan for a husband and wife, to continue to be played out. I also made closer connections outside of attending corporate worship.	Small groups have allowed the opportunity to connect with the brothers and sisters and grants me additional ways of how God is moving in the lives of His children.
14	They help me stay connected with people, the church, and God.	They have made me feel connected to the church, and like I know more people here other than the pastor.
15	It has impacted me in my spiritual walk, my family, and my work.	It has impacted me in many ways, such as spiritually, gaining new friends that I can call on whenever I need prayers.
16	I desire to lead a small group. It is important to not only be in community but also help new believers.	Yes, in a way that I see the value and importance of staying in community with one another.
17	Positively keeps me engaged.	Provided tools and information for my spiritual growth.
18	Helped to deepen community.	Get to know folks more. Accountability, encouragement, and spiritual growth.
19	Yes, by giving me peace about certain situations in my life, whether good or bad.	By giving me a better understanding on the way of Jesus and Scripture. How to be more Christian-like in my decision making and life process.
20	When I was associated with a small group, I felt I was able to tackle life with a collective group of followers. I felt like I was with people that understood me.	Small groups helped my spiritual growth and built strong relationships
21	Small groups have helped with a sense of accountability along with being around people that aspire to get closer to God as well.	They've helped me be in community. They've helped me view everyday life through Scripture.
22	"N/A"	In a very positive way. They have allowed me to be more open and learn. Although I am still new and have little understanding of the Bible.

Q#9 Results:

Pre-training	Post-training	Change
Relationships/Connections = 4 (18%)	Relationships/Connections = 7 (32%)	14% increase
Questions About the Word/Bible = 4 (18%)	Questions About the Word/Bible = 7 (32%)	14% increase
Accountability = 3 (14%)	Accountability = 2 (9%)	5 % decrease
Discipleship = 1 (5%)	Discipleship = 1 (5%)	No change
Inspire = 1 (5%)	Inspire = 0	5% decrease
Encourage = 1 (5%)	Encourage = 2 (9%)	4 % increase
N/A or None = 3 (14%)	N/A or None = 0	14% decrease

In Q#9, it was Participant #6 that said small groups do not have a long-lasting effect on their spiritual growth. In the post survey they go on to write, that small groups, “have kept me stronger in my walk and challenged me to maintain my faith.” Additionally, by the end of the training, all respondents indicated that that small groups have impacted them in some sort of way, meaning that everyone answered.

Q#10) What does a healthy small group look like?

Q#10 Goal: To better understand the participants’ outlook on the key components of a healthy small group. What are the crucial elements of the small group per the participants?

Participant	Pre	Post
1	It is when people are gathered in unity and peace.	They meet on a regular basis, everyone contributes, and nothing leaves the boundaries of the group.
2	Consistency; fellowship; accountability; and evidence of spiritual growth.	Meets regularly; safe place to share/place of trust; leaders are in direct contact/communication with pastoral staff for accountability; Biblical learning and spiritual growth.
3	Willing participants who meet weekly	A healthy small group should be between 8-12 people. They should have components of theology, relationship, restoration, and be missional. They should be comprised of a variety of races, marital statuses, and ages.

4	Look like things getting done and people getting filled with the right Word. Fellowship is a small group.	5-10 people, all age groups, all colors, and that meet every week or two weeks at least.
5	A healthy small group is confidential, builds trust to be open to share, it is not condemning but encourages all voices to be heard. It is a safe place to learn, share, and grow.	A healthy small group has 8-12 people, they meet weekly, share Scripture, develop relationship, encourage one another, and are missional.
6	Every member is participating, and everyone is encouraged to participate.	A healthy small group meets regularly and focuses on maintaining community and growing spiritually through worship, prayer, Scripture, fellowship, and evangelism.
7	Safe and open to all expressions that align with Biblical principles.	Inclusive, trusting, and safe.
8	A group of individuals that came together with the same purpose of growing closer to God and His people.	A healthy small group is anywhere from 3-12 individuals gathering in worship and prayer and studying God's Word.
9	A healthy small group is made up of people who are in a similar walk of life. People brought together to fellowship and encourage each other to continue and grow in their walk with Christ.	A healthy group focuses on building community and spiritual growth. It creates intimacy while having the components below: 1) theological, 2) relational, 3) restorational, and 4) missional.
10	Open discussion.	A healthy small group has 8-12 members and is inclusive with relational, theological, missional, and restorational components.
11	Everyone feels comfortable enough to talk about the Bible and relate to life. There is no judging or ill intent involved.	Biblical, loving, and diverse.
12	When the group gets personal, real, genuine and we get to really see each other. It's when we can pray and intercede for each other because we know what's going on in that person's life. Even after the session finishes, you continue to communicate with each other—it's more a friendship, of sisters and brothers in Christ relationships.	8-12 people in koinonia
13	None Given.	A healthy small group is one that is Bible-based, led by God's Word, Spirit, and blood. Committed to the

		concept of making disciples. A good small group has a transparent leader and prays, eats, believes, and holds others accountable.
14	People who want to help each other.	Has Scripture, fellowship, encouragement, and it evangelizes.
15	When there is growth, love, trust, and loyalty.	A small group that functions well will be able to have deep bonds and unity within the community of their small group.
16	I'm not too sure.	Active participants; spirit-filled leader; teachings on Biblical and current topics; how they relate and what God says, allowing for healthy and relevant discourse; prayer and praise reports.
17	Everyone learning and engaging for growth.	Safe, supported, and non-judgmental.
18	Folks participating and getting to know each other outside of the formal setting.	8-10 folks all engaged.
19	When participants are engaged and open to bear other perspectives and stories with no judgement or arguments, instead they must lift others up.	8-12 people having a theological, relational, and restorational component.
20	A committed group of followers supporting each other to achieve a common goal; to life and share the love of Christ.	Open, honest, committed, biblically grounded fellowship.
21	Communication, frequency, and growth.	Frequency, Scripture, fellowship, and worship.
22	Community, gathering, open discussion.	They have a theological, relational, restorational, and missional component.

Q#10 Results:

Pre-training	Post-training	Change
Confidential, trust, safe = 5 (23%)	Confidential, trust, safe = 5 (23%)	No change
Encouraged to participate, inclusive = 4 (18%)	Encouraged to participate, inclusive = 3 (14%)	4% decrease
Real, genuine = 3 (14%)	Real, genuine = 2 (9%)	5 % decrease
Consistent, meets regularly = 3 (14%)	Consistent, meets regularly = 5 (23%)	9 % increase

I don't know or None = 2 (9%)	I don't know or None = 0	9% decrease
Addressed a size component = 0	Addressed a size component = 8 (36%)	36 % increase
Relational, missional, restorational, & theological = 0	Relational, missional, restorational, & theological = 5 (23%)	23% decrease

In Q#10, during the post-training examination, 36% of participants indicated that a size component was important to small groups. Additionally, having the group maintain confidentiality, trust, and safety was what 23% of participants said were important.

Q#11) What is the recommended size of a small group?

Q#11 Goal: To see what the participants believe a targeted size of a small group is. It will be helpful to assess the pre- and post-training results for this. It was learned that a group of between 8-12 participants was ideal.

Participant	Pre	Post
1	Less than 10	8-12
2	Less than or equal to 15	12
3	6-15	8-12
4	4-10	"3-8 people, 5-10 people"
5	6-8	8-12
6	7-10	8-12
7	None Given.	8-12
8	4-10	3-12
9	There is no recommended size.	8-12
10	15-20	8-12
11	About 10 people.	8-12
12	8-10	8-12
13	5-7	7-8
14	2	8-12
15	10	8-12
16	8-12	8-10
17	7	8-12
18	8-10	8-12
19	I am unsure, 10-15	8-12
20	5-10	8-12
21	10 or less	8-12 is highly effective

22	4-8	8-12
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Q#11 Results:

Pre-training	Post-training	Change
Unsure or none = 3 (14%)	Unsure or none = 0	14% decrease
0-5 = 1 (5%)	0-5 = 0	5% decrease
5-10 = 10 (46%)	5-10 = 4 (18%)	28% decrease
8-12 = 3 (13%)	8-12 = 17 (77%)	64% increase
10-20 = 2 (9%)	10-20 = 1 (5%)	4% decrease
Less than 10 = 2 (9%)	Less than 10 = 0	9% decrease
Less than 15 = 1 (5%)	Less than 15 = 0	5% decrease

In Q#11, during the pre-training examination, the most popular small group size was between 5-10 members at 46%. During the post-training examination, the most popular small group size was 8-12 members at 77%.

Q#12-20 Using the scale provided, indicate if you agree or disagree with the statements listed below: (Likert scaling is used for Q#12-20 which classifies these questions in the *questionnaire* category and the table for these questions are color coated in blue)

Q#12-20 Goal: These Likert scale questions aim to reach deeper into the subjective data, beliefs, and opinions of each participant's pre-training and post-training outlook. Pulling quantitative data from these Likert scales will be easier since 22 total participants answered each question pre- and post-training.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q#12) I am currently involved in a small group	3 pre (14%) 1 post (5%)	5 pre (23%) 3 post (14%)	2 pre (9%) 2 post (9%)	6 pre (27%) 6 post (27%)	6 pre (27%) 10 post (45%)
Q#13) I am motivated to participate in small group ministry	----- -----	----- -----	2 pre (9%) 1 post (5%)	11 pre (50%) 5 post (23%)	9 pre (41%) 16 post (72%)

Q#14) I have had significant spiritual growth by attending the Sunday worship service	----- -----	----- 1 post (4%)	4 pre (18%) 3 post (14%)	7 pre (32%) 11 post (50%)	11 pre (50%) 7 post (32%)
Q#15) Small groups are important for spiritual growth	----- -----	----- -----	----- 1 post (5%)	7 pre (32%) 2 post (9%)	15 pre (68%) 19 post (86%)
Q#16) I have established a deep sense of community by seeing others only on Sunday morning	4 pre (18%) 4 post (18%)	7 pre (32%) 11 post (50%)	4 pre (18%) 1 post (5%)	5 pre (23%) 4 post (18%)	2 pre (9%) 2 post (9%)
Q#17) Every church should value their small group ministry	----- -----	----- -----	----- -----	8 pre (36%) 4 post (18%)	14 pre (64%) 18 post (82%)
Q#18) Small groups are essential for cultivating community	----- -----	----- -----	1 pre (5%) 1 post (5%)	6 pre (27%) 4 post (18%)	15 pre (68%) 17 post (77%)
Q#19) I am equipped and empowered to be an active participant in a small group	----- -----	1 pre (5%) -----	4 pre (18%) 1 post (5%)	12 pre (54%) 5 post (23%)	5 pre (23%) 16 post (72%)
Q#20) I have a clear understanding of the purpose behind small group ministry	----- -----	6 pre (27%) -----	4 pre (18%) -----	9 pre (41%) 5 post (23%)	3 pre (14%) 17 post (77%)

Q#12-20Results:

Q#12	In pre-training results, 27% of participants strongly agree that they are involved in a small group. In post-training data, 45% of participants indicated that they would strongly agree that they are involved in a small group.
Q#13	In pre-training results, 50% of participants agree that they are motivated to participate in a small group. In post-training results, 72% of the participants said that they strongly agree that they are motivated.
Q#14	In pre-training results, 50% of participants strongly agree that they get significant spiritual growth by attending Sunday worship. In post-training results, 32% of the participants responded in kind.
Q#15	In pre-training results, 68% of participants strongly agree that small groups are important. In post-training results, 86% of the participants said that they strongly agree with small groups importance. This is an 18% increase.
Q#16	In pre-training results, 32% of participants disagree that they build community by only seeing congregants on Sunday morning. In post-training results, 50% of the participants said that they disagree. This is an 18% decrease.
Q#17	In pre-training results, 64% of participants strongly agree that every church should value their small group ministry. In post-training results, 82% of the participants said that they strongly agree with small groups importance. This is an 18% increase.
Q#18	In pre-training results, 68% of participants strongly agree that small groups are essential for building community. In post-training results, 77% of the participants said that they strongly agree in kind. This is a 9% increase.
Q#19	In pre-training results, 23% of participants strongly agreed that they were strongly equipped to be an active participant in small group. In post-training results, 72% of the participants said that they strongly agree with being equipped as an active small group participant. This is a 49% increase.
Q#20	In pre-training results, 14% of participants strongly agreed that they had a clear understanding of small group ministry. In post-training results, 77% of the participants said that they strongly agree with possessing a clear understanding. This is a 63% increase.

Themes from the Interviews

There were six participants that were interviewed. The interview transcripts can be found in Appendix H. The themes tables are color coated green.

Themes from the Interviews	How many times it was mentioned	How many participants mentioned it
Study the Word/Bible	6	5
Preparedness of the participant	3	3
Community, connectedness	2	2
Preparedness of the leader	2	2
Intentionality	2	2
Group Size	2	1
Centered on God	2	1
Real, genuine	1	1
Relationships	1	1
Confidentiality, trust, safe	1	1
Consistency, meets regularly	1	1
Prayer	1	1

If an interviewee brought up the theme twice within their encounter, then it was counted as being mentioned twice but only by one participant. An example is with the “size is important” theme, it was mentioned twice by the same participant.

Themes from Survey, Questionnaire, and Interview

Themes from all data	How many times it was mentioned	How many participants mentioned it
Community, connectedness	49	49
Spiritual Growth	30	30
Study the Word/Bible	24	23
Confidentiality, trust, safe	11	11
Group Size	10	9
Discipleship	9	9
Fellowship	7	7
Accountability	7	7
Inclusive	7	7
Relationships	6	6
Real, genuine	6	6
Relational, missional, restorational, and theological	5	5
Encouragement	3	3

Preparedness of the participant	3	3
Preparedness of the leader	2	2
Intentionality	2	2
Live, “do life” together	2	2
Centered on God	2	1
Consistency, meets regularly	1	1
Prayer	1	1
Inspiration	1	1

This thematic list involved compiling data from surveys, questionnaires, and interviews. Both the pre and post survey and questionnaires were reviewed and compiled for all 22 participants.

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

This appendix is a transcript of the word-for-word literal dictation between this researcher and six participants. To maintain the anonymity of the participants, one may see P# to indicate the participants as opposed to using their name. Also, names used in the body of the transcription were withheld for concealment. Only such names such as the senior pastor or this researcher were kept as is. Lastly, there are also time stamps used in this transcription because the interviews were recorded for accuracy.

Interview with Participant #12 and Researcher

Date: 3 April 2023 at 1800

0:00:00

Researcher: Okay sis, so that first one, how did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?

P#12: Valley Gate Church, it just needed to happen, just when I got involved because of a relationship started with the pastors through work. I've been there five years now, thank God. Next Sunday, five years. Easter Sunday.

Researcher: That's awesome. Yeah. Easter Sunday was the first-time you guys came?

P#12: The first time we visited the church was as a family.

Researcher: That's a good time to visit; that's cool.

0:00:53

P#12: Right? Yes. I'm not stuck at home. I used to go to our Hispanic church for a while. And one day he woke up and said, "We really need to go to church, we have to." And I went over there, but I really didn't want to go to church. We just, we trust the kids and we show up at church. And glory to God.

0:01:40

Researcher: Okay, so since you're involved at VGC, what has been your contribution or involvement with small group ministry?

P#12: I kind of volunteer in any area that I can help. I like to be present. But specifically small groups, the first years, the first two years I was just attending, like, I was a member, but I was attending and participating in small groups. But I became, we tried to have a Hispanic group. The community was a third year, but something happened to me, and I ended up in the emergency

room and got surgery and everything else. We were not able to meet, to continue the Hispanic group and my recovery took over two months. So, it didn't happen.

0:02:51

P#12: The group was divided. There were Cubans, Dominicans.

Researcher: They were going to VGC?

P#12: Yeah, VGC. But they're moved, they don't live in Arizona anymore. I'm still in touch with them. Yeah. That's how I started. I didn't want to do it, but Pastor Darryl pushed me to do it, and I was obedient, and I was, the two or three weeks that we met, it was very good, it was very nice.

0:03:27

I don't know in your community, but in our Hispanic community, the small groups are very, it's kind of a cultura, it's kind of like another service. You come to the small group, you sing, you praise, I don't know if you remember about curritos, you know it's like a small, curritos history was, it's like they created curritos because when we evangelized, they sing like shorts, the same lines over and over.

0:04:05

But they are so good, and the music is so, you know, Latina, so that we when in the small groups we sing, and it feels like home when we did it.

Researcher: Is that a chorus? Does that mean chorus?

P#12: Curritos, yeah, yeah. If the translation, if there is a translation, yes. Yes. It's like, most of the curritos are like Bible verses, and you repeat them with that rhythm. That's it. It's nothing complex.

0:04:44

P#12: And this with the intention and purpose of people listen when you are not just, they don't hide because you're asking if they want prayers, you know, it's evangelism, you're going out. You talk to everybody, so, but the ones that are singing constantly, that's taking the people's time, even people who are not Christian, you know, get the music and the lyrics. So anyways, going back to the small groups, so it was nice because I feel it's just like home, having small groups.

0:05:15

P#12: That's how I started, getting involved. But I always participated, yeah. Just like anything that the church offers. That's my happy hour, let's be clear. Instead of going to a bar and drink, I go to church and hang out with my sisters and brothers. I know it should not be like a social club, but that's why you have to pray for each other, that's why you have to focus on the Bible, that's why you have to do the biblical part.

0:05:52

P#12: But it is necessary. And I'm not, I'm friendly but not social, so that's the only social things I do.

Researcher: At the church.

P#12: Yeah.

Researcher: Cool. Were you involved with any other groups besides the Hispanic one?

P#12: Yes, women, I've been in everything. Couples, women, what is it? Oh, for moms.

0:06:20

P#12: I participated for the moms, for parents. It didn't matter if you were the dad or the mom.

Researcher: And then you guys just recently led one out of your house recently, that was mixed, right? Yes, that was mixed, yes. Whoever wanted to get mixed here with this bilingual crazy song.

Researcher: Awesome, okay, cool. Okay, so why do you think some small groups flourish really well, but some groups don't flourish well?

P#12: In what aspect?

Researcher: Just the whole group, relationally, spiritually. Why do some groups really thrive, but some groups don't?

P#12: To be honest, it's the person.

0:07:17

Researcher: The leaders?

P#12: No.

Researcher: Oh, it's the person, the attending person?

P#12: Yes, the participant. In my opinion, because I've been both. And having my family and going to the same groups sometimes, because one of the books that we studied, one of the books, it was awesome. And I was, my experience was completely different than M [REDACTED] and E [REDACTED].

0:07:51

P#12: Because if you're shy, or if you are, I'm not shy, you know that. So, I think it's how the magic here, the keys that the leader made the rest of the group to ingrain with each scholar. It doesn't matter because all of them have different personalities. So, you have to find a way to make them connect in a way that they get along and they can open to each other and feel safe when they can open and talk and participate. Instead of feeling like they're not, some of them I noticed that they go like, more like to sit and receive.

0:08:40

P#12: They're not in the mood of participate, it's just receiving. participate, you just receive it. It's a very selfish, I keep telling other people, it's a selfish attitude, you receive and that's it. And I think that this book is more to participate and to talk and to discuss the Bible or whatever topic we're talking. It's intentionally, to me, the space is intentionally to create this posture. And it happens to specific people, not all of them.

0:09:27

P#12: So, I think that's... You said the questions are...

Researcher: Yeah, that's good. Why do some flourish but some don't? And you said it was mostly because of the participants are they gonna sit or are they not, or are they just gonna be a *what can you tell me* or they're gonna be an *active participant*?

P#12: Yeah, it's some of the responsibility of the environment lands in the hosts or on the leader, but at the same time you can be extremely resourceful and engaged with all of them, but if they do not want to participate, you will not make much difference in that person.

Researcher: That's good. What's been your biggest challenges that you've experienced in small group ministry?

0:10:31

P#12: Sometimes I disagree with what is shared, but I feel like sometimes, not recently, many years ago, I felt like I wasn't able to really speak to myself clear without offending others. Because also, I think that, but it's also linked to the cultural thing that I talk about it in our class, you know, in 101, because the perspective that you have is completely different to a lot of people who are locals, and they've never been out of here. And they do not see things the way I see. I believe that you've never been out, if you've never been exposed to other, to a different environment, you don't understand, you don't, what is that word, you cannot empathize with someone with a different opinion like mine.

0:11:47

P#12: That's a challenge.

Researcher: Okay, if those are challenges, not being able to emphasize with people and then also disagreeing with what is shared. How have you overcome those challenges?

P#12: How? I never stop talking. I always find a way to communicate clear without... If I see that the body language is telling me that you're out of line or something like that, I try to correct myself and explain a little more to make my point clear without offending.

0:12:29

P#12: Or not offending because it's not offensive, it's just it's different. And it's been so far, it's been successful.

Researcher: Good. Can you recall a specific point of disagreement that you had?

P#12: Yes, like in the mom's group one time, when you don't have a kid with special needs, you don't know. You cannot compare your child with mine.

0:13:01

P#12: All kids are different. So, in general, they're different, not even with special needs. So I was, in my comment, also prayer at the end, I emphasized on the special needs, on specifically for the behavior to stay, P [REDACTED] was very at peace, P [REDACTED] has ADHD and a lot of things, both things are on the spectrum, autism spectrum, so one is active, the other one is passive.

0:13:40

P#12: They're completely honest. So, I was struggling because I didn't know how to manage him. And he's extremely smart, but in every single area of the ADHD student group, he turned up, he wasn't able, now he can. He wasn't able to stay focused and stay in one place, you know, so a hyperactive kid, which is normal to me because he's my kid, but for other people when you ask or you comment about behavior and things like that, and they did not ask him to say no. Like, I was not giving him specific instructions or things like that.

0:14:31

P#12: And by the way, that still didn't happen at our church, it happened at this other church. And they don't, they didn't understand that it's not that I'm not giving him specific instructions or he's not being obedient, it's just he can't; certain things at that age he was not able to control yet. Now you see him, he's pretty normal. But when he was little, I didn't tell you because I don't believe in that. But and I was, I am, I believe the kids, I wish that they should be in church, not in a different room.

0:15:15

P#12: When they're tired, they just start playing around. And they sing, they stand, they sing, they draw, they do everything, but they're with you at church. They see you watching, they say, this was the other day when we were, I love L [REDACTED]. When she said about the blessing of having them do the prayer walk with the two of you, that's my point. If you don't do it with them, they will never see that it's normal and that it's the correct thing to do. And that it's necessary. They shouldn't be in a different class, unless it's a Sunday school. But regular services, the whole family should be together, praising and worshipping and receiving the Lord, because if they have at least my kids, when we get out of church, we all start talking about the Bible.

0:16:22

P#12: What does it say about this verse, and we talk, and we discuss, even since they were little. What did you learn, what did you get from, what did you take from this message? Things like that, it's just, to me, that's necessary, and that mom was telling me that I didn't keep my kid in place, like, steady in one specific place.

0:16:46

P#12: I cannot do that; my kid is hyperactive.

Researcher: Okay, so that was the disagreement was how to raise or correct, I guess, like your kiddo's special needs.

P#12: Yeah.

Researcher: That was a big challenge.

P#12: That was a big challenge in the other church. That was not up here in Valley Gate. I never, never, never have any... Well, it's just... I've never seen anybody saying anything about kids, honestly. I never have any problem with other people about my kids' behavior or anything. It's just... I think it's the Hispanic culture. We are kind of in other people's business too. So, yeah, I think so. I think that was one of the things that held me back to return, I don't know, maybe.

0:17:51

Researcher: To return to church?

P#12: Yeah. But that's the only thing that happened in that scope.

Researcher: Okay. And then specifically, building the community at VGC, what are you doing to build the community at VGC?

P#12: I normally, I try to keep things like promotional cards or things like that from church. Whenever I go, wherever I go, it doesn't matter where I am, if I start talking and sharing, I take out the calendars or post-it-notes, I write down information.

0:18:27

P#12: In the church, it's just, the community externally, it's more than in the church. At church, I just like to know how people are doing in general, and I just talk with them. I don't really do much. I invite people, but if they want, I'm like you; if they want to show up here, then it's up to you. Yeah, but I do share our church information with them. I think that's what I do.

Researcher: Cool. And then how are you growing specifically? Spiritually, spiritually. How are you growing spiritually?

0:19:38

P#12: Well, most of the time, it's just me reading the Bible and looking for other information that is more...I never, this is the first time I learned things that are serious. I learned that at Valley Gate. In my previous church, we never, at Puerto Rico, we didn't have like a theme. No those were studies, like Thursday nights studying the Bible, but not this, the El Curta de Avivamiento that we call on Sunday evening, because the morning one is for the Sunday School. So, I, because I don't really see that, like, in general, how do you say, la predica, la predicacion? The preaching, I don't know how to say that word.

0:20:53

P#12: What?

Researcher: Preaching?

P#12: Maybe, I'm sure that it's not that word, but you will get it. Let me finish the sentence. If not, I will find it. I will Google it. But I like to go and find for specific topics that, things that I need, because I don't get that from church because it's very focused on the theme for the month or the, I don't know, it's not a month, it's like quarters or something like that.

0:21:26

P#12: So yes, that's new. I started seeing that here in the States, but never before, or the Hispanic church never did that here, the two Hispanic churches.

Researcher: Okay.

P#12: So that's what I do to help me grow. Just read and study the Bible myself and do my own thing.

Researcher: Do you listen to like podcasts, sermons, like that?

P#12: Yes. I like, wait, what was the question?

0:22:02

Researcher: Do you listen to different like podcast or sermons?

P#12: Yes. Yes, constantly. Yes, I like that. Even I kind of stopped a little like a week ago because my whole family said that I'm a big podcast. And music and we were talking about how beautiful it is to be in silence and not talk. Because what the Bible says about being in silence, just waiting. And when they said that it came to my mind that, you know what, I'm not in silence just waiting. And because of that discussion between us, like a week or two weeks ago, I stopped a little. So, I'm like, yeah, just doing that less. I have music constantly, music or podcast, so I have to cut down a little.

0:23:01

Researcher: That's good. That's good, I'm the same way. There are times when I'm like, I'll have the Bible, I'm playing or something, you know, going on or a sermon, and then I'm like at a red light or something, and I'm like my internet will go off, or the podcast will shut off, and then it's quiet. I'm like, oh no, what's going on? And then I'm like oh wait, God, I can just talk to You I don't need to have something playing. I was reminded of that recently.

P#12: Yeah, but I didn't realize that I was all the time with something, listening to something until they pointed it out.

0:23:43

P#12: Which is funny because I really didn't saw that I was doing something like too much. To me it was normal, but when they told me, no mom, when you got into the car, your music is on or your podcast or audiobooks. And when you are at work, you are wearing your headphones. When you go to Frys, you have your headphones. When you are here, and we finish talking, and you're doing the cleaning and everything, you put your own music or something.

0:24:18

P#12: And I'm like, and E [REDACTED] said, "Every time I have to talk to you, I have to go and touch you or wave at you because I'm talking to you, you're not listening." And I'm like, oh God, yeah, it's true. So, I'm like addicts now, cutting, yeah.

Researcher: All right, and then the last thing is, if there was any additional topics related to the small group training or anything else that our whole class had our time together, what were some future topics that you would like, that you would desire to talk about, like if there was a future topic?

P#12: I think that we need more, and I feel like everybody was in the same line, more getting to the action of it while we are starting to practice what we are studying, to go deeper into the Bible and allow the Holy Spirit to move free without any, I mean we have to, we need to have a time of course I respect that and that's a thing here so I'm used to now. Why are you laughing?

0:25:52

Researcher: Because we got used to that too, like we're like oh they're really serious about the one-hour thing.

P#12: Yeah, because to me, for us, I'm so used to, we're going to start at 6:30pm. Okay, we go to 6:30pm, but you don't have a time of when it's going to end. When it ends, it ends. So, I think that the group should practice more praying for each other or sharing a Bible verse from the week with someone else before the whole discussion started or after. I don't know, I feel like it's just like push and go. Then it's like, time and vamos. The pressure of the timing and we have to meet, we have to be here at this time or whatever. That makes me anxious, you have no idea. But, in being empathetic with the community, and being obedient, and submitting myself, so I will follow the rules, or whatever is the expectation.

0:27:02

P#12: But to me, the small group should be more deep.

Researcher: Sis, do you mean like our small groups in general? When we're in our small group time?

P#12: Yes, the group, the small group, the six or seven of them together to have that one-on-one moment. I think it's, to me, that's what I would like to experience. That is my own expectation, and I'm asking the Holy Spirit to guide me and to talk to me at that moment. I feel like people, even I do this a lot of times, but I try to, when I go there, I start praying, since I, you know, setting my mind, preparing myself, and when you get there, you're ready to be shared, and you are in that, you're ready to receive and yes, praising and worshipping him and you kind of plug immediately, instantly.

0:28:33

P#12: I have some days that I just plug there because I want to go, and I need to go but there was so much stress that I just wanted to do it and that's it. And it takes longer for me to connect with him, and I don't even talk to people. So, I'm very reactive those days. So as maybe you noticed that sometimes I just want to be by myself because I'm trying to, the little time that I'm gonna have there, I wanna have it, it's my private moment. So, and I feel like if we have that time, we're gonna be very blessed.

0:29:12

P#12: That's my expectation, I'm not saying that that's what we should do or that we did it in a way or whatever, it's not about that, it's just, I feel like I miss that, that's all. I miss having that little bit.

Researcher: Got it. So, that means like instead of but like as far as learning something though would you want to learn how like how to break that cycle of us just being so I guess like bound by the time and to allow like people to linger to pray with each other to hang out is that what you like would desire to learn about that?

P#12: No, I would like to experience that. Learning would be what would I like to discuss on there? It would be more like studying a specific character from the Bible.

0:30:29

P#12: I was reading the chronological Bible. And I was, I'm so surprised with Abraham. The guy is crazy. And it's just these little things that I didn't know. And if we study as a group, we can practice trusting the Lord at the same time that we study about Abraham. But recognizing that as a man, he was deceiving a lot of other people just to benefit them. I don't know how to explain, but we learn that it's normal because we're humans and we're sinners, but at the same time we believe in a God that you have to trust him and he's gonna do for you so much because his promise is there. Things like that just that's just an example. Yeah, and then is that clear?

Researcher: That's clear That's what I study is a character like Abraham, but you want to experience not being so time bound.

0:31:41

Researcher: Yes. This thing says less than one minute. I don't know if it's going to cut off after it says less than one minute. I don't really use it that often.

P#12: It's okay. This is still up. Bye.

Participant #12 Interview Results:

1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?	A relationship through the pastor from work, 5 years ago in 2018.
2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?	Volunteering, helping, being a part of small group, and leading small groups.
3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?	The attitude of the participant.
4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?	Disagreeing with what is shared in group. Example of someone telling her how to raise her child.
5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?	Find a way to communicate through the disagreement.
6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?	Keep promotional cards and calendars and talk to people about the church.
7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?	Reading the Bible and listening to different sermons and podcasts.
8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?	To go deeper and study the Bible, and possibly Bible characters.

Interview with Participant #16 and Researcher

Date: 4 April 2023 at 1040

0:00:00

Researcher: Alright, okay, the first question J [REDACTED] is, how did you get involved with Valley Gate Church?

P#16: When I moved to Arizona, I think like seven years ago, I was going to school with a buddy of mine for audio engineering and he was talking about this church that they're building up their sound. They're a new church and everything and so I was like, you know that sounds pretty cool. But then I prayed, you know, I left up to God and God was like, *yeah go to that church.*

Researcher: So that's cool, you were in school for audio engineering?

P#16: Yes, the Conservatory of Recording Arts and Sciences.

0:00:45

Researcher: That's neat. Do you do anything with that right now? I know you work at the theater. Do you help out with the sound there?

P#16: When we have sound issues and stuff it does help for sure, but as far as like what I do with sound, you know nothing really. I feel like it was just more of a conduit to get me where I'm at now kind of thing, you know? But I mean, it's always helpful. I know London always needs help.

Researcher: I was gonna say what about the church there in the back?

P#16: Yeah, so I know they need sound help and stuff like that. It's just figuring out my schedule to be able to actually help them.

Researcher: Cool.

Researcher: That's where I started. I started off at the sound booth and helping build the sounds up for the church for a while.

Researcher: Oh, I didn't know that.

P#16: Yeah, so um we started off with like two little, small mixers, um some speakers and stuff and then as we kind of grew and learned more about sound. Sharon and I helped uh they you know we kind of got equipment and more equipment and stuff like that and then I know Pastor Darryl had some guys come out and we did like an audio training and everything, so I feel like I put my fair share of time into the sound and everything.

Researcher: Cool. All right, since your involvement with Valley Gate, what's been your contribution to small group ministry?

P#16: I'll be honest man. I have not contributed much except for going to one or two small groups.

0:02:37

Researcher: And those small groups are the young adults?

P#16: I went to two different men's small groups.

Researcher: Okay so you were an active participant in a men's small group, twice?

P#16: Yeah.

Researcher: Cool.

P#16: Then, I don't know how you classify this, but young adults...

Researcher: Yeah, that's a small group.

P#16: Okay, young adult every Thursday. I wasn't now because I work so such work and trying to you know get a new car and stuff like that. I haven't been as available to work or help on Thursday so that's kind of more active with small groups or young adults kind of in the past few months. If that made sense, I was kind of struggling with my words there.

Researcher: Yeah. Okay, so the two men small groups and young adults is something that you've been active with?

0:03:46

P#16: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay. How's your car doing?

P#16: Oh man, I'm just thankful it gets me from point A to point B at this time. I just really have to take it into Ford to really figure out the biggest problems. Because I know it's my transmission. My car is not doing the greatest, but my worrying about it has kind of almost ceased, if that makes sense. So, where my car isn't doing any better, God has really helped me not to worry so much about it.

Researcher: Gotcha. Okay, the third question in the interview is, what are some or why do some small groups really flourish but others don't? What do you think? What's the secret sauce that makes some of them flourish and some not flourish?

0:04:48

P#16: I think it's the I think it all comes down to the intentionality of whoever's leading this small group and by that I mean like how much time are you and then it depends like I don't know if there's like a lesson book or something but like how much time you're actually putting into you know leading the small group so like how much time outside of the small group are you preparing, like maybe lessons, extra questions, even like, like... and this can't, like, it shouldn't all be on you. Maybe at the start, like, do you want to empower the group to, you know, do more and this and that, but on a team, I just feel like sometimes it, small groups can fail when the leader is just like, well, let me prepare this message the day before kind of thing and then you

know hopefully throw it on to the small group on kind of leading while I take a backseat and like listen. You know and like don't get me wrong open floor small group where everyone is chatting and stuff like that is absolutely encouraging but I just think some guidance you know from that like from like leadership and stuff and then the second part of that for me. I would think it's just like if you don't have a small group, that's like for example young adults is every week So there's not a lot of time to be missed. So, say you have one that meet bi-weekly if you miss one week, you don't see the smaller for like another month. And so, I think how well outside of the small group is that group, you know, actually growing and staying in community and connecting and stuff like that.

0:06:34

P#16: Because you started in the small group with similar, like you joined the small group because you're either wanting to know more about what was going on, you're dealing with whatever problem, you know, everyone else in the small group is dealing with. So it could just be my lack of involvement in small groups, but I feel like in the small groups that I have participated in, outside of like, I mean, I desired to grow myself, so I just took my own routes and stuff, but those are, I would say, the bigger things that I've seen. Just how intentional is the leader actually leading the small group so that, you know, we're intentionally trying to grow whoever's in the small group, even if it's just a little bit, you know, and then what does the community look like outside of the small group because if it's mandated then I feel like more people will probably show up but you know like alright guys we're gonna do this together kind of thing you know you're more likely to see people like "flake" because there's an option of not doing it and then COVID made that worse for a lot of people.

Researcher: Yeah, okay so intentionality of the leader and then either frequency of the meetup and community outside of the group.

P#16: Yeah.

Researcher: Cool. What are your biggest challenges that you've seen the small group ministry?

0:07:54

P#16: I'm sorry, one more time.

Researcher: What are the biggest challenges that you see to small group ministry?

P#16: Like ours or just in general?

Researcher: Your biggest challenges that you've either observed, been a part of, witnessed, or that you believe are the biggest challenges to small group ministry?

P#16: I guess I would say like, I don't know. Action. So, like you can sit in a small group and talk and talk and talk, but like, I don't know. You know, Jesus taught his disciples and this and that, and then he sent them out in twos to go. You know, grow more people or disciple more people and this and that. So, what's your small group doing about the state of the world, or even if that's your small group? If that's what your small group's about, what are some action items

that you can walk away with so that we don't just sit and talk, but we're actually practically growing.

0:09:04

P#16: And then whatever the goal is of the small group, we can reach those goals. So yeah, I don't know if that made sense, but that's what kind of came to my heart as I was thinking about it.

Researcher: Yep. So, your challenges that you've seen is just not being an active small group, like walking it out. It's one thing to study the Bible and get built up, but now like either going to evangelize or going to do something or getting out there and being the hands and feet.

P#16: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay, got it.

P#16: And so, it's not like a challenge. It's a challenge that I've seen, but also like my self-experience. Like I can go to a small group and just kind of show up and just kind of be in the background and not really do much of anything, you know?

0:10:15

P#12: So, yeah. Yeah.

Researcher: Okay. How can you or how do people overcome that challenge?

P#12: I think just really participating in getting involved more. I think for me if I don't get involved, I don't say anything, if I don't do anything, it's easy for me to just ride that back seat and not have to do anything. And then also just, I don't know, for me, it's like accountability is a lot of things. Like you bring it up in my mind or bring it to my attention, then it's a little easier for me to do, which sounds, I don't know if that sounds bad, but I also have ADHD.

0:11:05

P#12: So, like attention deficit is like my life story. So, to overcome the challenges, I would say it's really just getting people involved I don't know asking those questions that you know get some people thinking. That's a tough question, man.

Researcher: Okay, participate, ask them plenty of questions, get them involved more, pray more, and doing those hands-on activities more.

P#16: Yeah. Yeah. I guess it just comes down to intentionality.

0:11:47

Researcher: Okay. Got it. The sixth question is, how are you specifically building community at VGC?

P#16: I would say for me, young adults. So, specifically, I'm sending young adults so that I can build that community with people who are just like-minded in age and stuff like that, you know? So, for a while, our men's group, the men's group thing we had, conference thing, we had like different tables, you know, and then we were encouraged to like to give each other's numbers at

our tables. For a long time, we had a group chat for our table eight, and I would check in and ask the men *how can I pay for them* and so on and so forth. So personally, for me, it's just checking in and I forgot the question I'm sorry.

Researcher: How are you building community at VGC?

0:12:55

P#16: Yeah, so just checking in and talking to people. You know, allowing God to like, I guess put people on my heart and then actually reaching out and so on and so forth.

Researcher: That's cool. Who all was in Table 8?

P#16: We had C [REDACTED], K [REDACTED], R [REDACTED], C [REDACTED], one with the dreads in the glasses that does the computers for the check-in and stuff like that. He's like the one with dreads. Oh man. I think he's on either the usher team or the security team.

Researcher: Is that J [REDACTED]?

0:13:32

Researcher: Uh-huh. Wait, no, you're talking about C [REDACTED].

P#16: Jarrett, you'll learn one thing about me, I'm awful at names, man. I can remember a face so fast.

Researcher: C [REDACTED], they got three or four kids, his wife is C [REDACTED].

P#16: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, okay. That's a cool table. C [REDACTED], K [REDACTED], R [REDACTED], you, and C [REDACTED]?!

0:13:57

P#16: Yeah, there's a couple other people I just like... I just can't say like, I don't like see their faces enough, I guess. And it was like, it's like one or two other guys.

Researcher: Is that a random flashlight behind you?

P#16: Huh?

Researcher: You just got a random flashlight behind your head?

P#16: It's uh... It's on my bed right here. I read at night. It's a good like lamp.

0:14:20

Researcher: That's cool.

P#16: Um, yeah. A good flashlight. And I got Bible verses over there. Dang. I'm a nerd.

Researcher: I love it. Okay. How are you specifically growing spiritually?

P#16: Yeah, man as you probably remember meet with Pastor Darryl on a weekly basis every Thursday. Then I'm doing the purple book right now.

Researcher: Do you do that with him?

P#16: I do with him. Yes, I do it in my own time and then we go we'll go over it so I try my best to stay a chapter or two ahead. Not that I don't want to go through it with him I just like I want to go through it and just like try to understand it the best I can, and I'll allow God to say, like, *all right God what are you saying?* All right Pastor Darryl what do you know?

Researcher: I bought a whole stack of purple books.

P#16: It's a great foundational book to grab a hold of. For sure. Yeah. Being a mature Christian, there is good meat in there. So, like every couple times a year to be honest if you've done a book, I just literally just flip through it like, *Oh yeah, spiritual gifts man like I forgot I'm not operating in that.* But I'm just growing in Christ like I try to read a couple books a month too. So, I read *Don't Give An Enemy a Seat At Your Table*. That was a good one. I'm reading. I'm working on *The Gentle and The Lowly* right now.

0:16:29

P#16: It's about the heart of Christ for sinners and sufferers. I don't know if you've read it.

Researcher: No.

P#16: Yeah, G [REDACTED] is the one that recommended the book in talking to the youth and stuff like that. And I have another one called *Deeper*, which is what I'll read after. Just kind of finding, like, you know, trying to understand Christ a little more in the seasons He's got me in, you know. Then I've committed or at least I'm trying to the book of James to memory to help with, you know, they say one thing I learned this year is like you want to push stuff out you got to put stuff in. So, Scripture memorization is one of those things that are like really good to fill you up to push anything like all the grossness out, I guess. Not I guess, I believe that.

0:17:21

P#16: And so, those are the things I do in my praying intentionally, you know, not just for other people, but also for myself, because I feel like we'll pray for a lot of people, but not believe God can do stuff for us, our own lives, so I'm getting more into doing that and believing it. Yeah, man.

Researcher: That's awesome. That's cool. The last question is, are there any additional, I know we've been talking about small groups, but are there any additional topics or a topic that you would like to discuss and learn more about? For like follow-up study now that you've gone through the six weeks of small group training. Any additional topics that you'd like to discuss, learn about, grow deeper in?

P#16: I would say, I've just, it's interesting and I've looked into it into my own, like I've read books on it, but like spiritual warfare and like how we should approach it and how serious it actually is. You know the devil is trying to take us down so we gotta be ready to fight. So, I kind of like spiritual warfare what that means, what that is, how it applies to us because it applies to every single Christian. No one's exempt.

0:18:53

P#16: So, I think that and then just more of the Bible. I mean give people an option or a small group to be reading their Bible maybe they'll read the Bible more. Hopefully yeah. Yeah, man. I mean, personally, I would just like to see like, real life changing, small groups. Small groups that have people who really want to go to value, not just go to, but become an active participant and leader in. You know and so really just any type of like encouragement, I don't know man I just want to see people like really take a hold of this thing and like really understand what the love of God is doing in their life, and like really understand like you know the purpose of the small group was this to go out and share the gospel. I just want to see small groups grow, I guess, beyond our church. I don't know, that sounds bad, but I love my church, but I love Jesus, and Jesus loves everybody. So how can we, you know, I mean, it gets, I feel like I'm answering my questions in my head as I'm talking, so that's all I have for you bro.

0:20:26

Researcher: I got it. Nope. I wrote it down. Spiritual warfare, small groups to be active participants, and then small groups to grow with that outward mindset of reaching others.

P#16: Yeah man.

Researcher: Cool.

P#16: After the training, just understanding more, it's just like Jesus was in a small group. Jesus' whole ministry was small groups, and the small groups went out and you know made disciples of the nations and this and that. So, like in my head I'm like wow like how do we get back to that like that was that's awesome like small groups are that powerful I didn't even think about it that way in the sense of like it being like able to be like wildfire. You know something small turning into something big. Stuff like that but the value of small group and the intimacy and the community it can create so.

Researcher: Word bro. Well, that was it, pancit.

P#16: I'll text you over the survey too as well.

Researcher: Cool man, I appreciate it.

P#16: How you doing man?

Researcher: I'm doing good.

P#16: How was your experience like leading and teaching this class and now that it's over, like how are you feeling?

Researcher: I was, there's like stuff in the background that you have to do that's busy like the food or go to the store or like just those little things but as we were in it and as we were discussing or even like in between sessions just like text messages or emails that I would get from people. Like *dude this is awesome* you know like *I'm learning and growing* and those things were a blessing. And then, so there was some busy work, but it's all for God's glory. Right now, what I'm dealing with is, there is a timeline that I to deal with for this thesis. I am at 126

total pages. I have 81 references. I need to at least get to 100 minimum. You have to find a journal article that is peer-reviewed or a published book. It can't be self-published or a primary source like the Bible or other first century primary resources.

0:23:21

Researcher: So, you have to do a lot of research. And then once you find something, then you've got to read through it and then does this even pertain? Given everything we've talked about in our small group training. Does this even fit? If it doesn't fit, then you got to go and like search again. So, I've been searching and then I have this timeline where I got to finish all of the results and the conclusions. Those are each about 20 pages each, chapter four and chapter five of the thesis. And then I have to send it to an editor, wait a couple of weeks, the editor will get it back to me and then I'll defend in the summer. I have to be at a certain point, I think it's before May 1st in all of my write-up and all of the final editing. And so, I have been like taking days of leave to work and it's been a lot. I was telling L■, that we didn't file our taxes yet, dude. Like I'm behind in life. I'm so far behind in life that like this school thing has been consuming. I was like, babe *I need help* because normally I get all of our tax documents and I was like it's about to be April 15th, and like I don't even know.

0:24:55

Researcher: And so, she was like, okay, I'll stay up and try and get some of the tax documents. So, then she was saying she'll help out. And I'm just like, dude, but I'm doing good though. It's just, there is a certain like healthy amount of stress that I'm feeling because of school and because of the timeline. But I have a really supportive faculty mentor, Dr. Al. He's been good through this whole process, just coaching me, dropping me Bible verses, texting me, and sending me emails. Like, dude, after August we'll be done, this is the home stretch. He's been very encouraging but now like the onus is on me to type. So, in my head I'm like *boy type what you doing boy type!* So, I'm feeling like the pressure of that, but I'm doing good man; yeah, my family's good. I don't know if this pollen thing was in that was in the air, but we were sneezing for like a whole week straight. I don't know if you have seasonal allergies or anything but.

P#16: I do yeah, I've been feeling it just recently with the wind it was bad yesterday man so I was like sneezing at work like a lot.

0:26:20

Researcher: Man, me and L■ we've been taking like Allegra and Zyrtec and we got this thing that we've been spraying in our nose and it's just like, dude, we're in the desert, man. Why do we even have pollen here? What the heck?

P#16: Yeah, you know, instead of you take like some Vicks Vapor Rub, you take like two deep breaths under your nose and then, what is it, you press on where your cheekbones are and then you just put your head back. It'll like start to drain that mucus that's back there and it clear up your nose. I was like yo, and I didn't think it worked until I tried it.

Researcher: Well cool bro I'm gonna pray it out until next time. God, you are awesome.

0:27:17

Researcher: Thank you for my brother J [REDACTED] and just taking time out of his day to come and chat about our small group and just be a part of this interview. And Father, I ask that the information that not only he and I have learned, but just our whole class, all 20-something of us that were together over the past six weeks, God, that you would be with us and that you would cause us to put what we learned into action, God. I think J [REDACTED] talked about that this morning, that we would be active participants of small groups and go and just have that mindset to reach others. Yes, build community in our church, but also, like, God, get out into the city of Tempe and Maricopa and Scottsdale, Phoenix, Mesa, just help us to be active participants in your world, God, and use us in the various spheres that you have us in.

0:28:12

Researcher: I'm praying over my brother's transmission on this Ford Focus, God. Man, I just pray, Lord, that if it's extra hours, if it's a cheaper mechanic who, instead of \$8,000 would do it for \$4,000 or something. God I don't know but we just ask for your hand to be in that so that J [REDACTED] can have reliable transportation God in that sketchy transportation and I just thank you for your hand and our friendship as well God I just pray that the time that L [REDACTED] and I are going to be stationed here that just my brother and I can continue to grow and meet up and just have moments like this. So, I thank you for J [REDACTED].

0:28:56

Researcher: I thank you for his walk. I thank you for his faith. Would you be with him this week? Lord, we love you and we ask these things in Christ's holy name. Amen.

P#16: Amen. Let's go! When two more people agree in prayer, God's going to do it. Love you bro.

Researcher: Love you bro. Peace.

Participant #16 Interview Results:

1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?	Through a friend as he was going to audio engineering school.
2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?	Has attended small group (x2 men's small groups and young adults).
3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?	The intentionality of the leader and if they're prepared. Having group every week is helpful.

4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?	Action, not just sitting and learning in group but actually going and doing.
5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?	By participating, getting involved, and being a doer.
6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?	Attending young adults and the previous men's group. Had a text chat group with men.
7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?	Meeting with the pastor for accountability. Reading spiritual books.
8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?	Spiritual warfare and getting people to be active participants. Also, groups that go beyond the church.

Interview with Participant #18 and Researcher

Date: 4 April 2023 at 1200

0:00:00

Researcher: All right, I got my pen here. The first question, Sis, is how did you become involved with VGC?

P#18: So, actually, I was talking to somebody, and they were saying what a great teen ministry that the church had, and that is what, I have a teenager who's about to go to college and I'm like, he had been complaining about our church. So, I was thinking about the reasons why I like that church and it was largely in part reasons that had to do with religion, not relationship with God, just the habits and stuff that I grew up liking and not necessarily ties to the word and what we're called to do. So, in the spirit of actually trying to do a good parenting thing, I decided to check it out for his benefit.

Researcher: That's cool. I'm curious, just a side note, what were some of those things that you appreciated from the other church?

0:01:06

P#18: I liked hymns. I grew up on hymns. I like hymns. I like when we sing together.

Researcher: At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light?

P#18: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I like that. But with the beat and you know, I grew up in Southern Baptist church, so I like when the pastors "hoop." I like when they, you know, *You know the Lord is coming!*

0:01:29

P#18: I enjoy all of that. You know, I am from, it was interested in the past when we were talking about, people being active in church two to three times a month. I am from the generation where we went to Sunday school, then we went to church, then we went on Tuesday, then we went on Thursday. So, all of those things I liked. But that's preference, right? And I think you should choose people over preferences.

Researcher: Cool. The second question is, since your involvement with VGC what has been your contribution to small group ministry?

P#18: I haven't had a contribution to small group ministry, so this this round is going to be my first go at it.

Researcher: Cool.

P#18: And primarily because I think I joined in like June, so it hasn't really been like there's only been one small group cycle since I've been there, and I was too new to kind of jump in.

0:02:29

Researcher: Yep, cool. All right, why do some small groups flourish while other small groups don't?

P#18: I think that that's because you have to be connected you know I learned the ideal size or whatever I think sometimes they're too small or too big and then like people want to know the Bible. But people want relationship and that's what the Bible is right? It's a love story not a rule book and I think sometimes we get very technical, or we set things up in a manner where we're focusing on because we want relationships we're focused on focusing on affinity groups right I don't want to be in a mom's group. I don't. Like quite honestly, one of my least favorite hats that I wear is the mother hat. So, the last thing that I want to do is spend more time mothering. Like, so I don't want to do that. So, if you're a mom, do this. I'm not signing up for that. So, I'd much rather, you know, study the book of James or do something with a mixed group of folks. So.

0:03:31

Researcher: Cool. Hey, that's good. So, what are you doing or what can you do to overcome some of those challenges?

P#18: I think being in your study is one. I think I saw a Pastor Vincent there soaking up everything and I'm sure he's going to be open to ideas. I signed up to be a helper this time whatever that means um, and just trying to get more involved. I think that it sucks when people say what they don't like it but they're not a part of the change process. So, I want to do that as much as possible.

Researcher: Come on! That's so true when people you know talk about that this is the change, I want to see but they don't do anything to help the change. All right, the sixth question is how are you specifically trying to build community at VGC?

P#18: I think talking, I'm a greeter, so I think that that's a great position to be in.

0:04:34

P#18: And I think talking to people, trying to connect outside of Sunday morning, hanging out with people, doing those things so that the church is more of just two hours on Sunday, it becomes your community of people. So, I think it requires a level of vulnerability, which is tough for me, but I am intentional about doing that.

Researcher: Word. So, when are the Gallardos gonna have a barbecue at y'all's house?

0:05:06

P#18: I know, that's right. That's so funny, a barbecue at our house. So, I have two very large dogs. It's gonna drive both you and your kids crazy. But I do think that perhaps you guys we can kick it like at K [REDACTED]'s house or something. He likes to cook. So, if you people like to eat, we can make that happen.

Researcher: Yeah, we'll pop up at K [REDACTED]'s house. I love it. Okay, that's good man. Alright. And then the seventh question is related to the other arm of small group is how are you specifically growing spiritually?

P#18: So, I think that those things happen in community. So, I have for decades that you know I have a devotion. I do those things. I think that talking to other people and sharing needs and really trying to live out the concept of whatever a couple weeks ago Pastor Darryl preached on when you have an issue, and you filter in opinions and views instead of getting what the Bible has to say about that.

0:06:23

P#18: So, I'm trying to do that. One of the things that my son always complained about our old church was he's just like, he said the same thing all the time. And I was like, that's Christianity. You know, the rules are simple, but it's a very difficult thing to do. You have to stick to the basics and focus on that. So just refocusing on covering the Word with what's happening and building relationships for the accountability factor.

Researcher: Word, love it. And the last question is, I know we've been studying all about small groups. Is there any additional topics like research from here or next steps that you would either like to see discussed, learned about, talked about, any additional topics?

0:07:05

P#18: Okay, so the two things that appeal to me the most, and I get that it's preference. When I was in college, I took an Old Testament Bible class, and I grew up in church. Like I mean I wasn't baptized until I was 14 but I was there from I feel like from the womb and I learned so much and I feel like so often we you know someone's preaches on Sunday and they take you know this snapshot in time, but knowing the history and what's the more contextual stuff? I love that kind of stuff. Then also like I like the studies of different books; A [REDACTED] had I forget what that series is called, but that little book that she held up they're a really popular series. We did those a lot where it's topical stuff, but it's also areas that you grow deeper in because God can use anything to speak to you. So, I'm in the practice of reading through the Bible every year and like Jarrett I say when we are like in about March or April, if you're doing a read-through from beginning-to-end and in a historical way.

Researcher: Like 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel?

P#18: No, like Deuteronomy and Numbers. Ugh, like all the "begats" and the...like if you could just, I mean so many times I fell asleep and had to start over just because it just wasn't very, it was hard for that to come alive to me.

0:08:28

P#18: And it's interesting because a couple of my favorite Scriptures come from Deuteronomy now, and that's after years of being like, what are you talking about? You know, so that's good. You know, oftentimes we know these Scriptures, but you don't really hear people pull from the first part of Numbers with all the "begats" you don't. So, you know, learning that type of stuff is pretty cool, at least, I think.

Researcher: That's awesome. In your chronological read, do you ever use, like, the Bible Project? Have you heard of them?

P#18: Yes, the Bible Project was amazing.

0:09:11

P#18: Like, I did do that one time and I really like their setup, I like the way that they read it to you, they're vivid in that. I even donated to them because they make it come alive, they make it something that's helpful to you. So yeah.

Researcher: I use their Read Through the Bible in a Year app and then once I am about to start a new book, I'll watch that overview video to see like, okay, what are we getting into here? And then it's just always a good refresher.

P#18: Yeah, it really is. I think that, and I get it, Sunday morning really isn't the time for it, but we just take such a clip instead of a, here's the big picture. And you're like, oh, you know, so I want to know that when you're going from here to the Sea of Galilee, the whole joint is just only as big as Rhode Island. Like that helps me visualize what we're talking about. So, I studied in Israel, and I was so shocked at how close everything is. Like we're thinking, you know, they travel for days but then you have to like, oh they're wrong. But they were, you know, like all of these other reasons. Not like they were going from Virginia to California and back. That wasn't it. So.

Researcher: What I'm trying to learn right now is, I've just got done with 1 Samuel, I'm in 2 Samuel now, and when they consulted the Urim and the Thummim have you've heard of those?

0:10:34

P#18: That's the basic part about the Bible. That doesn't even ring a bell. The Urim and the Thummim?

Researcher: It's like a dice and however it landed like this was the voice of God like all right so I don't know if it was like a Urim or a Thummim that they rolled and then like okay God said let's fight the army or something like that and then Saul went to go talk to that medium lady and then brought back Samuel the prophet and I was like, No! What?

P#18: Why are you doing something? Isn't this idolatry. But when you put it in context of the times, I think it makes, like it's so important, especially like in this day and age, because we're in this society where people meet us where we are.

0:11:30

P#18: So, it makes it harder for us to see the other. Like when I was in Israel, I, um, you know, Shabbat, they don't do any electric anything on the Sabbath. Like you can't even make your toast. Well, I'm an American, and I'm entitled, and I'm young. So, I plugged the toaster in to make my toast because I wanted some toast. This isn't my jam. You would have thought, I would have shot somebody in the head.

0:11:51

P#18: It was such an uproar. They were like, if you ever do something like this again, we're gonna kick you out of this hotel, and all of these things. I'm like, oh, this is a big deal, and so that moment, it hadn't dawned on me. Like, you know, other people's beliefs, you really have to do that, you know? So, it's interesting, so.

Researcher: That is interesting.

0:12:10

P#18: Yeah, don't plug in the toaster.

Researcher: Don't plug in the toaster because even the elevators just stop on every floor. Like, it's no work on the Sabbath. Like, they take that seriously, so. What in our world do we take seriously? Like, I mean, I don't think that we don't have those kinds of rules or they're very convenient culture. Yeah.

Researcher: Cool sis that is the end of the interview. Are there any questions before I pray it out?

P#18: No, no questions.

Researcher: Cool, all right. Well, I appreciate your time, sis.

0:12:49

Researcher: That was awesome, so I appreciate it. Let's pray. God, you're so awesome, and I just thank you for being who you are. I thank you for getting to know more about Sister K [REDACTED] and her heart around her own personal growth and also her desire to build community at our church. And I just ask, Lord, that you would be with her this week. I pray that her, as she's yoked to you God, that her burden at work would be light because of her being yoked to you. I just thank you for her son as well. He's just been such a blessing being able to grow with B [REDACTED] and bless K [REDACTED] as well. God I'm looking forward for the moment that we can eat some barbecue at Mr. K [REDACTED]'s house as well. So, Father would you be with K [REDACTED] and be with myself this day Lord.

0:13:40

Researcher: Bless the rest of our time in our week. God, we love you and we ask these things in Jesus' name, amen.

P#18: Amen. I want to apologize for being late and you know "Doctor Jarrett" has an amazing right to it, so I'm so excited for you.

Researcher: Well, I'm trying to be like you sis.

P#18: Good stuff. What do you have going on the rest of the day?

0:14:16

Researcher: I'm gonna be typing. I took a couple of days of leave to work. I'm like on this timeline where I have the chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the theses done. I think I'm at like 116 pages. I'm currently at 81 resources. I need a minimum of 100, so I need to find more resources. I just, I need to compile now chapter four and five the results and the conclusions so I need to begin to flesh that out start typing and then So today I'm gonna be typing and maybe only doing one load of laundry because L [REDACTED] says when I take leave and I stay home that I start doing a bunch of house stuff. So, she said don't do house stuff.

P#18: Yes, you need to not do house stuff because you have a dissertation to write onward and upward so I'm praying for you I look forward to the completed project and it being some great stuff.

Researcher: Word sis! Cool.

0:15:27

P#18: Alright, have a good one.

Researcher: Thank you. Bye.

Participant #18 Interview Results:

1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?	Was already involved in another church but came because of the teen ministry since June 2021.
2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?	No contribution to small group ministry at VGC because of timing of when they got involved and the semester of the groups.
3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?	Connectedness and relationships.
4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?	The focus on affinity groups, she does not want to be a part of a mom's group.
5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?	Being in this study and training. Also, getting involved.
6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?	Volunteering, being a greeter, connecting with people outside of Sunday, more intentional about being vulnerable with others.
7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?	Devotion and personal Bible study. Talking with other people and sharing needs.
8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?	Deeper history and contextual content of the Bible.

Interview with Participant #6 and Researcher

Date: 5 April 2023 at 1100

0:00:00

Researcher: All right. Okay, the first one, bro, is how did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?

P#6: Okay, well, when I first attended ASU, Arizona State University, my freshman or sophomore year, one of those semesters, I got connected with Every Nation Campus. I forgot who was the head at that time, but they were having a little event. B [REDACTED], he's another churchgoer at Valley Gate. He kind of invited me out to his church, which is Valley Gate, and that's just kind of where I got connected. I was really part of it. So, I think I was on the media team of L [REDACTED] back then, and then I had to go home, back home to Virginia. I think it was 2019.

0:01:01

P#6: Then I came back here to Arizona. I was kind of like on and off. But now that's like, now I'm kind of like full, fully back into it, fully immersed. So, yeah, that's just how I became involved with Valley Gate.

Researcher: I have a question for, was B [REDACTED] helping out with the campus at the time?

P#6: Yeah, at the time, yeah, because he only had B [REDACTED] at the time. So, he was a little bit more involved, but once him and B [REDACTED] got pregnant again, then he kind of like stepped away, but yeah, he was helping.

0:01:44

P#6: ENC with Bethel, I think it was more on the um, I think it was more on the, on the Valley Gate side I think it was just going because I don't know if Valley Gate and Bethel had a thing going on. That'd be cool if they did.

Researcher: I'm curious if they had that partnership. That'd be cool.

P#6: Yeah, because I know like, I think it was me, and I don't know if you know E [REDACTED].

Researcher: No.

0:02:15

P#6: Yeah, so like she was on ASU, and she was part of ENC as well. So, it was me, E [REDACTED], and B [REDACTED] were like the Valley Gate, and then everybody else in that group went to Bethel.

Researcher: Dude, that's cool man.

P#6: Yeah. All right.

Researcher: Well, this is a side question, but you moved to Virginia, in 2019, just to go back to Virginia?

P#6: Yeah, it was kind of like I had financial issues paying ASU, so I couldn't go attend that semester. So, I had to go back to Virginia, I lived there. And then I just came back to finish up school.

Researcher: Were you close to the Grace Covenant Church at all in Virginia?

0:03:05

P#6: No, I was not.

Researcher: Okay, you know about that church though, right? The church.

P#6: Yeah, I know about Grace Covenant, yeah. I think it was a little bit, I think it was maybe like 30 minutes away from where I stayed with my grandma. So, it was like 30 minutes away from where she was.

Researcher: And you're in school at ASU right now?

P#6: Yeah, well I'm trying to go back to ASU, yeah.

Researcher: What are you studying over there?

0:03:36

P#6: So, I'm trying to study secondary education in math.

Researcher: That would be for your master's?

P#6: That would be for my bachelor's.

Researcher: Okay.

P#6: Yeah.

Researcher: That's neat, man. Cool.

P#6: Yeah, it's really cool, because this job, right now I'm student teaching, so it's like I have my own classroom, I have my own roster, my own grades, so I can have two.

0:03:58

P#6: I basically have the teacher responsibilities enrolled, but I just don't have the degree yet. So, once I get that degree, I have a job secured here and everything.

Researcher: Do they pay you teacher pay?

P#6: No, they don't. Yeah.

Researcher: Okay. One day, one day, bro.

0:04:18

P#6: One day, yeah.

Researcher: Okay, question number two is, since your involvement with Valley Gate, what's been your contribution to small group ministry?

P#6: Yeah, so when I first started with Valley Gate, actually me, B [REDACTED] invited me out to kind of like a small men's group. So, we always used to meet at Chick-fil-A, right on, what was that? That was on University, like right by ASU. It was like maybe five to six of us just talking about just like men. I think we went over a book.

0:04:55

P#6: I just can't remember what it was. But yes, we did like kind of like a men's group. That was really cool. I got to meet E [REDACTED] and some other folks. I don't think they go; they don't attend Valley Gate anymore and then of course the ENC as well like that was kind of like it was kind of more of a medium-sized group not really like a small group and then when I came back from home for Virginia right now. I'm currently in young adults so yeah.

Researcher: Way awesome man.

P#6: Yeah.

Researcher: All right, the third question is, why do you think some groups flourish but others don't?

0:05:46

P#6: That's a really good question. It's kind of like, I kind of just see it as, it's multiple factors. So, one would be kind of how spiritual it is, how much church are we going to talk about versus how much life are we going to talk about. Not even like really church in a sense, but more kind of like Jesus and like reading the scripture. Because I've been in groups where like, all we did was just read the Bible, but we didn't really talk about life. Then I've been in groups where we talked about life but didn't really like to connect that to the Bible. So, I think those who flourish or those groups that I attended at least consistently um they had a really healthy mix of real-life stuff and Jesus and kind of like connecting them together while on the opposite, I think it's just kind of like, which extreme does it go to?

0:06:52

P#6: So that's kind of like that healthy balance, and then a second thing would probably be just the people there. Because I feel like if we have, if you have a leader, small group leader who is like really inconsistent, doesn't communicate, and you know, has trouble, you know, keeping that balance, I think that's where it's kind of like falls apart because I've had had groups where the leader was really inconsistent like we didn't really meet a lot and all that so I mean nothing on them like I still love them but you know it's just kind of like with small groups I think in order for it to flourish you have a good leader.

Researcher: That's been a common theme. I like how you connected the how much Bible, how much Jesus versus how much life.

0:07:42

Researcher: Because if it's just life, no Bible, or if it's just Bible, but we don't get into dealing with real issues, then it's just this didactic Bible study without any connection. So that's good, man.

P#6: Yeah. Yeah.

Researcher: Okay.

P#6: I definitely have no issue with that too. I think you know, we want to get to a point where like we have enough understanding and knowledge of my God that we can like have those like hey, like let's just like this small group. Let's just do like a whole study on you know Daniel and just like read like his life like that definitely be awesome I would love to be part of those groups, too. I think just kind of like the maturity level as well.

0:08:26

P#6: I think that's kind of more, like a better way to put it, just kind of like the maturity level.

Researcher: Cool. What are some ways people overcome those two challenges that you highlighted?

P#6: I think some ways, I think just kind of, I know for one, small group training definitely did help on the leader side. Just kind of like understanding what small groups are for. Because before attending the six weeks, I kind of like thought of small groups as kind of like, oh, it's not really that important.

0:09:06

P#6: You know, church is more than enough. You know, coming to like those Wednesday night events or something, like that's enough. But when we really kind of talked about, so when we really kind of talked about like what small groups are for and like looking at the Old Testament and New Testament and like kind of resetting those foundations, I kind of understood why small groups are important and like what they're used for.

0:09:33

P#6: So, I definitely think training would help out a lot. I think just also just one thing that does help out a lot, at least, you know, kind of looking at the teacher side as kind of like a curriculum or kind of more like a road map or a guide map, just kind of like something to lean on, but not like rely too much on it. So, like for example, so if I had like a six week small group, if you gave me lead on a six week small group and so you're just kind of like, go ahead. Like I wouldn't really know where to start. Like, well, what kind of small group do we want? Like, do we want like, like, you know, it's just kind of like hard for me. So, I think if you said, okay, here's a small group, you're gonna take lead on six weeks, and then here's a theme, or here's the message that we wanna basically get to in the next six weeks.

0:10:34

P#6: And that's kinda like more like, okay, understand. So just kinda like, what'd be really helpful is if the church gave kind of like, not really like a curriculum, like week one, week two, like this is exactly what you're supposed to say, like a script, but more kind of like, what's the end goal? Like, what's the, at the end of the six weeks, what should the group know? Or like, what should the group learn?

0:10:59

Researcher: Got it. Any specific ways to overcome, I know you mentioned an inconsistent small group leader. With those two things that you just mentioned about overcoming training, and then the roadmap, would those help out the leader aspect?

P#6: I think so, yeah, the leader aspect would definitely help out a lot. And it's also kind of just like leaving kind of like that wiggle room.

0:11:28

P#6: Like I know all leaders are not the same. I know that life happens. But I think, yeah, I think that's just definitely like a big kind of a big thing because I feel like if we did have like that roadmap like if I did have to miss next week then I could probably like call like Q [REDACTED] or something like, hey Q [REDACTED] like I'm gonna miss out on this meeting or miss out on this week would you be able like to take my group or like would you be able to kind of like connect with them so it's just kind of like so we're just all on the same page I think just kind of like that if everyone is on the same page, I think that'll help out a lot.

Researcher: Cool.

P#6: Yeah.

0:12:08

Researcher: Number six, how are you specifically building community at VGC?

P#6: Just kind of like attending like those small groups. I know that last week at our like young adult small group we went bowling, and so that was like really cool because we had like two months straight of like, you know, coming together and like having like our small groups at the church, but then like Thursday we're like, hey, like let's just chill and let's just go out and go bowling. So that was really fun. Then I kind of like check up like every Sunday always check up with Pastor Darryl and B [REDACTED], after service kind of like hey, how's it going? You know catch up. Then kind of you know go do our thing so that's kind of like what I do with building community. I try to like to come out to events and stuff I know the prayer walk I wasn't able to go, but you know, I try to like attend events as much as possible when I can.

0:13:20

P#6: But that's, yeah, that's about it.

Researcher: That's good, man. Nope, that's good. And then how are you specifically growing spiritually? Spiritually?

P#6: Well, for me, outside of Valley Gate or kind of both?

Researcher: Just what do you do? What do you do to grow spiritually?

P#6: So, for me, I know that I've been, this year was just kind of like a change in my walk of God. I felt like this year I've been more like coming back and kind of like just getting the ball rolling with just being part of God's kingdom. So, I know for one, what I've been doing is I've been praying every day on my way to work. And you know, it's like a 20-minute commute, so

it's like 20 minutes of prayer. So, I'm like praying every day. I try to read my Bible every day. I know it's kind of hard for me because, you know, I don't want to make up excuses, but it's been kind of hard. So just been kind of trying to read my Word, and then also just attending the small groups.

0:14:31

P#6: So, young adults, and then of course church. So that's how I've been going spiritually. I know I've been wanting to get on this *75 Worship* thing that I talked about last, that last week, but it's been kind of, of course, with time and stuff, but I think just for me, just being intentional is how I've been growing spiritually lately. Just being like, okay, I'm going to pray in the morning because I want to have that time with God because I know this is probably the only time I can, and I want to do it because I intend to read my Bible tonight like for sure because you know this is why and so just kind of like having the why as to what I'm doing so yeah.

Researcher: I love it. That last question bro is just what additional topics would you like to see discussed or learn more about? It's kind of like at the end of a thesis what additional studies could they go from here?

0:15:40

Researcher: So, what additional topics interest you, would you like to discuss, learn more about? That's my question.

P#6: Yeah, definitely I would love to learn more about outreaching. I know that's something that I used to do when I was younger in church. A little bit about outreaching and then just kind of like, um, that kind of goes hand in hand with like evangelism as well. Um, and then also just kind of more, I know small groups are, it's kind of tough because it's really broad, but you know, more specifically about like building connections and building relationships in our small groups.

0:16:22

P#6: Um, I know like for, for me, it's like really easy to like make connections with the kids and having that student-teacher relationship. But I know with adults, for me, I just take time because those relationships matter. Because if I meet an adult, is this going to be a relationship that's going to last for just a while? Or is it going to have a long-lasting relationship? So just building that connection in that small group. Um yeah, that's pretty much it.

Researcher: Cool. Yeah, cool A[REDACTED]. I appreciate your time, bro. Time from your workday just to do this interview. So, you're a rock star.

P#6: Yeah of course. Yeah, I'm always happy to help.

Researcher: Do you mind if I pray us out?

P#6: Yeah

Researcher: God, I just thank you for today. I thank you for the breath of life, and I just rejoice with my bro being able to go to WrestleMania. That was so cool, God. I just thank you for allowing him to have that experience, and I thank you for his heart and compassion to be around the young adults and to be around the children and just to build that community at VGC, God.

And I God, I just ask that your Holy Spirit, would continue to lead A [REDACTED], continue to lead myself, and use us in mighty ways this coming year, God.

0:17:44

Researcher: And I just thank you for all that we've learned over the past six weeks, and I just pray that it's also not material that we learned, but that we're going to go and do, God. And I just ask that you would bless A [REDACTED], bless his finances, bless his future studies, bless his school and his workspace. God, and I just pray that you would bless him and keep him for the rest of the school year. So, Lord, we love you and we're looking forward to what you're going to do in our lives. We ask these things in Christ's holy name, amen.

P#6: Amen, awesome.

Researcher: Cool, man.

P#6: Thank you, I appreciate you.

0:18:20

Researcher: Yep, take care.

P#6: Alright, I'll see you next time.

Participant #6 Interview Results:

1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?	Through Every Nation Campus (ENC) ministry through Arizona State University since 2019.
2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?	A previous men's small group, ENC, and young adults.
3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?	How spiritually connected the group is. The group should discuss both Jesus and real life. An inconsistent small group leader.
4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?	Spiritual depth of the group and the people, especially an unprepared leader.
5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?	Small group training, good curriculum with a clear end goal in sight.
6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?	Attending small groups, meeting outside the church, checking in with others, and attending church-wide events.
7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?	Prayer, personal Bible study, attending small groups, and being intentional.

8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?	To learn more about outreach, evangelism, and building connectedness.
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Interview with Participants #10 & #11 and Researcher

Date: 5 April 2023 at 1830

0:00:00

Researcher: First question is how did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?

P#10: I became involved with Valley Gate Church by finding out on Instagram and then I started attending, like, every Sunday pretty much after that.

Researcher: Wait, when was that, A [REDACTED]?

P#10: September, the first week of September.

Researcher: September of 2022?

P#10: Yes, 2022.

Researcher: Okay, great. And O [REDACTED]?

P#11: Um, same. I just started attending with A [REDACTED] and, you know, we liked it there. It was diverse, and that's why we kept coming back.

0:00:57

P#11: Well, not only because it was diverse, but because we liked the way that Pastor Darryl preaches. It was a friendly environment. So, we decided to continue attending each week.

Researcher: And then this isn't in the questions, but tell me more about y'all's um Upbringing did you guys grow up around church? Was church foreign to you? Did you guys find Christ later in life? Like, I forgot that part of you all's story.

P#10: Yeah, I grew up around church, okay, I grew up in church a lot and I was baptized at a young age. I think well not too young some people get baptized younger than that. I think I was like 10 when I got baptized. I don't really understand what it meant but you know I grew up around it, so it was just what we did, and I didn't really understand. We stopped going to church like when I was a teenager and from that time into like my very early 20s, I wasn't really like going to church or like hardcore practicing as a Christian.

0:02:12

P#10: I started going back to church like a little bit after O [REDACTED] was born, so around born around like 2017, 2018. Um, and finally like really committed to being a Christian, rededicated my life to Christ by getting baptized again in, what was that 2020? Yeah.

Researcher: That's cool. And then O [REDACTED], did you grow up around church like A [REDACTED]?

P#11: Yeah, I grew up going to church. I think I stopped around... We stopped going every Sunday, when I was about 12 or 13 years old. Other than that, I still was a Christian. I still prayed. I still periodically read the Bible. Yeah, so I've always been a Christian my entire life.

0:03:22

P#11: I started going to church again. Just watching, I think, consistently. I want to say 2019 when I was watching consistently. Then in 2020 we got baptized and then we were still watching consistently over the internet through COVID. And then we moved to Arizona and then Valley Gate was the first church we went to here. So.

Researcher: Cool. Awesome, y'all.

0:04:08

Researcher: Okay. Since you guys' involvement with Valley Gate Church, have you guys contributed or what has been your contributions to small group ministry?

P#10: For me, just attending your training, we kind of came at the tail end of all the small group stuff for the winter so we didn't really uh had the chance to like sign up for anything or do anything with the old small group cycle but um hopefully contributing in the next you know era of small group for Valley Gate would be like maybe a co-leader for me.

Researcher: Nice, did you sign up for a co-leader?

P#10: Yeah, I did.

Researcher: Sweet! And O [REDACTED], what's been your contribution to small group?

P#11: Nothing too much. I've just been going to the training.

0:05:00

P#11: If you would consider Celebrate Recovery a small group, then I would go to Celebrate Recovery.

Researcher: I would consider it. I don't know if B [REDACTED] agrees that it's a small group, but yeah, it's a small group.

P#11: Yeah, well, yeah, I go there most Mondays. I try to go. And yeah, that's all so far.

Researcher: That's awesome. Okay, cool.

0:05:26

Researcher: So, the small group training. Y'all been to our house once, right? Twice?

P#11: Twice. Oh yeah, twice.

P#10: So yeah, that too.

Researcher: Yeah. Okay the third question y'all is why do you guys think some small groups flourish and really thrive, but others don't?

P#10: I think some small groups flourish and thrive because it's like the environment and like the space that you create for it. And I think that might be a reason why others don't because it really just depends on like the leaders and the environment that they create for it, the safe space.

0:06:18

P#10: And I think we touched on that in like our last session of like not being the, trying to be the all of all, like the just being given like...what did we say with it like not even really like...all those things that like you would give on to the pastor, get that on to the pastor, or trying not to be like judgmental and things like that. So, I feel like that to be a reason why some groups work, and some don't. Also, size, it could be possible that some churches have more leeway with the sizes of the small groups, maybe they're smaller, and then other churches are larger, and so their small groups are actually like larger small groups.

Researcher: Is there any one that's better than another? Like size-wise, you mentioned size.

0:07:09

Researcher: Is size a flourishing, or does size make it not flourish?

P#10: I think size can make it either or because if you have too many it can make it a little impersonal but if you have too little...

P#11: Like 8 to 12?

P#10: Yeah, I think that was it, 8-12.

Researcher: O [REDACTED], anything. Why do some thrive? And yes, it's 8-12 people, y'all. 8 to 12 yeah. Why do some thrive and why do some not?

0:08:03

P#11: I think some thrive because they feed the attendees spiritually. People will feel a real connection, but not just like a connection to like the people, more like they feel like they're building their connection with God by attending the small groups. It's allowing them to dive deeper into the Word. So, I feel like when you get that, those type of feelings, it makes you want to keep going and you're building community. Yea, those are the two pillars—community and spiritual growth. So yeah, so those small groups will thrive, but I guess the small groups that won't thrive would be the ones where it's not, centered around God, that's not the foundation of the group. Like the attendees are going, maybe for the wrong reasons.

0:09:24

P#11: And maybe the leaders aren't too engaged. And don't know how to properly facilitate a small group. That'll cause a group not to thrive.

Researcher: Okay, leaders, when it's not centered on God. What did you say about the leaders again?

P#11: The leaders aren't, yeah like the leaders aren't ensuring that the group is centered around God, and they aren't making an effort to dive deeper into the Word.

Researcher: Got it. Okay, y'all brought up those challenges and what would potentially cause a group to flourish or not. What are some ways to overcome those challenges?

P#10: Precisely just making sure that like all of the small groups have between 8 and 12 people and are, for like the environment issue and creating the space, just making sure that all the group

members are aware that there's like a rule that nothing can leave the room and you know ensuring that everybody's privacy is protected.

0:10:58

Researcher: Cool. O [REDACTED]?

P#11: Um, I guess to overcome the challenge of not being centered on God, I guess you can always just refer to the Bible to make sure that the group is staying on task and people are sharing their real life, like basically relating their real life into the Bible. Like keeping it biblical, essentially, and not like going too far off of the course. You know what I'm saying? So, like not too far off course and making sure that everything comes back to the Bible, and back to God and Jesus.

Researcher: That's interesting somebody else also brought up relating real life to the Bible as well. Cool.

0:12:05

Researcher: Somebody else brought up size too, so that's cool. All right. The sixth question, y'all, is how are you guys specifically building community at VGC?

P#10: For me specifically, becoming part of the small group ministry, and I think for me, building community at VGC also, it kind of helped when I joined, when I started volunteering in the nursery, just like connecting me with a bunch of people and meeting a bunch of people and all their babies and stuff. It's really kind of helped build a community to care for people's kids, you know, you gotta, it takes a village, so.

Researcher: Yeah.

0:12:53

Researcher: Cool. What's been the most challenging thing at a nursery?

P#10: I've only done it once so far, but it's mostly just like, some of them have like, a lot of separation anxiety, you know, they're at that age where it can be like rough to separate them from their parents. We have one that like, cried the entire time last time until we had to just get her mom. So, separation anxiety is like real rough, especially since they know their parents are like in the next room. Most of them are old enough to know that their parents are not far.

Researcher: When we moved here, they don't change poop or pee diapers. They don't change diapers at all.

0:13:38

Researcher: And that was new. Like, and they did it in the church in San Antonio and they did it at the church in Guam. And so, like, I remember the first time I saw the number pop up on the screen. I was like, oh shoot, that's my number. Oh, I gotta go grab them. So, then I went to go grab her and they're like, oh, K [REDACTED] pooped. And I was in my head, I'm like, oh yeah, that's right.

0:14:07

Researcher: Because I think L█ started in the nursery and then she went to pre-K. And L█ was like, dude, they called you because they don't change poop diapers. And she was serving in the other classroom. And I was like, oh, I didn't know that. That's funny. Okay, O█, how are you specifically building community at VGC?

P#11: Just trying to be involved the same way. Just being and trying to volunteer in any way that I can. That's all, just trying to volunteer. You know, attending a small group with you and L█ and speaking to people I don't know.

Researcher: I think I saw you when you came to the Man Power event. You came to the Man Power didn't you?

P#11: Yes, I did.

Researcher: Okay I remember seeing you face. Did we meet there, or did we not meet there?

P#11: Yeah, I believe we did.

Researcher: Cool. Like maybe we just did a quick "Hey I'm Jarrett, Hey I'm O█." There was a lot of people there. That church was packed, and I was like where are all these dudes from? Like I don't see y'all, there was some really big dudes like football-looking player dudes, especially that dude who won the beanbag toss thing.

0:15:46

Researcher: I'm like, where's this big guy from? Like, I've never seen this big guy in my life.

P#11: Um hum.

Researcher: Okay, that's good man. That's good. That's how y'all are getting in community. Okay, the seventh question y'all is, how are you guys specifically growing spiritually?

P#10: For me, reading the Bible, studying the Bible. We do Bible studies sometimes, not as often as we should, but we do study the Bible together. Being more in touch with my prayer life. I am trying to get that to where I want it to be. I want a really intense prayer life, but sometimes it just doesn't get that way.

Researcher: Do you work from home?

P#10: No, I work in the office, and we have they just started giving us one day a week at home.

Researcher: Somebody was just talking, and I typically don't do my car ride my car is how I listen to the Bible through the Bible app or Bible Project, but somebody was talking about during their 22-minute car ride, that's their 22 minutes of prayer time that they have with the Lord.

P#10: Oh yeah, I usually do worship during that time, especially in the morning time.

Researcher: Oh, you gotta have worship music or the Bible or something during this traffic.

P#10: Yeah.

Researcher: Cool. Okay so reading and studying the Bible individually and together and then prayer, is there anything else to add?

P#10: No.

Researcher: Cool. O [REDACTED]?

P#11: I'll tell you some of the same thing. So basically, just praying, reading the Bible consistently, reading the Bible in like different translations.

0:17:48

P#11: Just praying over hard, tough situations, resisting flesh. Just obeying God consistently.

Researcher: Nice.

P#11: Yeah, that's about it.

Researcher: When you say different translations, different English translations, or are you looking up the Hebrew and the Greek?

P#11: Oh yeah, just different like English translations. So, like, what would that be called? Different... Translations?

0:18:28

Researcher: Yeah, different translations.

P#11: Oh, okay, yeah. I've been looking at the Messianic version too.

Researcher: What is that?

P#11: It's like the ones where they use the Hebrew names.

Researcher: Okay, cool.

P#11: So, it's just like comparing them and studying the Bible more. To see the different, I guess, ways that things can be interpreted or written.

0:18:53

Researcher: Do you guys have, it sounds like you guys do study Bibles together, or Bible study together, do you guys have a study Bible with commentary and footnotes on the bottom?

P#11: Is that one?

P#10: Yeah, we have one. We just don't look at it.

P#11: We should probably start reading it.

0:19:18

Researcher: Yo, look. The commentary on the bottom. Like the bottom part. Like, I don't know what this. That looks like it's a... Here, let me read it. *Rosh*...Head, top, leader. Okay, it's what book? 1 Chronicles. Okay, so this is in the Old Testament. So, this is a Hebrew word that this

study Bible is breaking down more. Then for each one of the verses, it's giving more background. Like the Bible is all up here, all up here, and then commentary would be here.

0:19:53

Researcher: And like, they're all like that. So, your guy's study Bible is probably something similar where the text is at the top and then it goes into more detail about the surrounding text on the bottom part but if you guys already have a study Bible y'all that's gold right there. Check out check out the bottom part because it's dope. Okay resisting the flesh, obeying God, reading the Bible, and praying. Cool. The eighth and last question is what additional topics would you guys like to discuss? Did you guys want to learn about? Just most say like now from further study like if you're writing a dissertation or a thesis what would be studying next? So, I'm just trying to get in your guys' brain. Are there any topics, now that you guys have been trained on what small group is, are there any additional topics that you guys would like to discuss and learn about? And it doesn't even have to be related to small group either.

0:21:07

Researcher: I'm just trying to see where y'all are at.

P#10: For me, but different like, just the different types of small groups. Like, there are so many subjects that you could possibly have a small group on or like different like marriage, women, men, like those are the basic ones, but they get into like different Christian texts and like mental health and like all the different types of things that you could possibly have a small group around, like more about like adapting to I guess the different subjects, but still staying biblical. Is there anything else? No, nothing really, nothing else besides that, I think just different subjects. And that's like a real live, like get into the word, like studying of the Bible, like deep.

0:22:11

P#10: I feel like I need that, too.

P#11: Yeah, that's what I was going to say. Basically, that, yeah, just like a deep, yeah, just like studying the Bible, and like really studying it for what it is, to really understand the type of person that Jesus was. And because reading the New Testament more, it's like you're getting to know Him. So, it's interesting to read through that with somebody else to get their perspective of how they see it and how we can relate that to our everyday life today and how we make decisions and move each day.

0:22:54

Researcher: Cool. Deeper study of the Bible and doing it with other people.

P#11: Which is basically just a small group. I mean, yeah. Technically, I guess, right?

P#10: Yeah, more like a Bible study. I mean, it's kind of like actual Bible study services during the week.

Researcher: That's good y'all. Cool. Anything else y'all want to talk about?

P#11: That's everything. How about you?

Researcher: What are you eating for dinner?

P#10: We had chicken parmesan.

Researcher: Oh, you already had it?

P#10: Yeah, I hurried up and cooked it when we got home.

Researcher: We had a snack and then we haven't really had dinner. Did you guys go to the marriage prep the marriage meeting right?

P#10: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay you guys remember; did you guys ever take home any of the hummus?

P#10 & P#11: No.

Researcher: We took home this giant cup of hummus and they were giving away like "Who wants more hummus?" But I'm like, dude, we don't even eat hummus. Well, I finished the whole giant cup of hummus and so I had that as a snack not in one sitting but over the course of since when did we meet Friday?

0:24:18

Researcher: So, like every single day. I just trying to be eating little chunks of hummus and I don't even really eat hummus.

P#11: What do they taste like?

Researcher: Um... It's pretty bland. It's like... It's chickpeas with like garlic and seasoning, and salt. That's really all it is. But what does it taste like? It has the consistency of like a thicker pancake mix with like almost like a little cornmeal but not as like corn meal-ish and then the taste is there's some salt garlic and like kind of like if you just mashed a bland vegetable, I'm trying to think, maybe like a potato.

0:25:14

Researcher: Yeah, if you mash that, I know that's, well yeah, chickpeas are pretty starchy. Yeah, so I think that's a good analogy and it tastes, it just has a bland taste. Not good, not bad, it's just, it's just there.

P#11: "It's just there."

Researcher: But they were throwing a lot of it away. I was like... Anyways, that's what I had for a snack. We haven't had dinner yet. But we're gonna hop on. L ■ went over to Costco. And we have family coming in tomorrow. I think they live in Wisconsin. It's my friend's aunt and her two kids.

0:25:53

Researcher: They're gonna hang out with us tomorrow.

P#11: That sounds fun.

P#10: Yeah.

Researcher: Word. All right, y'all. You guys mind if I pray this out?

P#11: That's great.

Researcher: Cool.

0:26:09

Researcher: God, I just thank you so much for O [REDACTED] and A [REDACTED] and their heart to just to be able to help me out and make space for answering these questions here this evening. God, I thank you that I was able to hear their story again on how you've kept them at a young age and how their lives were dedicated to you and that they're serving you and that they've called VGC home for this season and that they've starting to build community and even to serve in various ministries and in various ways. I just thank you God, I thank you for calling all of us I thank you for saving us God and I just ask that you would bless the M [REDACTED] family in a mighty and special way and Father I also ask that the things that they've put forth as far as how to even overcome challenges in a small group whether it's size preparation leadership I just pray God that they would even have an impact and making small groups better at VGC or wherever they're planted God. So, I thank you Lord for them and their hearts to serve and I just thank you for our time together, Father would you be with us throughout the rest of this week and going into Easter Sunday God?

0:27:31

Researcher: We love you, and we ask these things in Christ's mighty name Amen.

P#10 and P#11: Amen

Researcher: Cool fam I appreciate y'all. Bye.

Participant #10 Interview Results:

1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?	Finding out the church through Instagram in September 2022.
2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?	This small group 101 training. Attending small group at Jarrett and Liz's house.
3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?	Having the size be more than 8-12 people will make it hard to connect. Also, the leaders and creating a safe space.
4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?	The size of the group being right and creating a safe space.

5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?	Strive to have the group be between 8-12 people. Ensure the privacy of the group is protected.
6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?	Becoming a part of small group ministry and volunteering in the nursery.
7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?	Reading and studying the Bible individually and together.
8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?	Learning about different types of small groups and different subjects.

Participant #11 Interview Results:

1) How did you become involved with Valley Gate Church?	Finding out the church through Instagram in September 2022.
2) Since your involvement with Valley Gate Church, what has been your contribution to the small group ministry?	Celebrate Recovery involvement and small group at Jarrett and Liz's house.
3) Why do some small groups flourish while others do the opposite?	Feeding attendees spiritually and connection to others. Not being centered on God.
4) What are your biggest challenges to small group ministry?	The group not being centered on God.
5) What can you do to overcome those challenges?	Strive to keep the group on task and relate real life to the Bible.
6) How are you specifically building community at Valley Gate Church?	Trying to be more involved in groups and activities and volunteer (helps with Order of Service).
7) How are you specifically growing spiritually?	Reading the Bible in different translations, resisting the flesh, and obeying God.
8) What additional topic(s) would you like to discuss and learn about?	Deeper study of the Bible and doing it with other people.

APPENDIX I

SIX-WEEK TRAINING PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

(Workbook begins on next page)

Embedded in the following 50 pages of this thesis is a participant workbook. This researcher created the workbook. Every DMIN action research participant received a printed and bound copy.



Resetting Foundations Small Group Ministry

Jarrett Gallardo

Doctor of Ministry Thesis

Project Workbook

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

To our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Chief Cornerstone

These next six weeks are not just another church class, and it's not a simple academic exercise. I want you to walk away from this knowing the purposes for small group, become a more connected member of Christ's body, and put some action to what you learn. Let's get it!



LESSON I - OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATION AND PROJECT VISION

Week One Aim

This first lesson is crucial, and the goal here is to define what small groups are, outline their Old Testament scriptural support, and gain support from authoritative literature. Finally, this lesson will examine the unity within the Godhead and provide an introduction to who Valley Gate Church is.

Why Are We Here?

If Valley Gate Church implements the six-week congregational training, then the church's small groups will have a clear direction, cultivate strong

1) _____, and grow 2) _____.

Small Groups Defined

A small group may also be known as “cell groups,” “growth groups,” “community groups,” or maybe even as “Bible study groups.” A small group is established when it is nurtured by shared ownership and devotion leading to a place to engage in life's challenges, a space for people to grow spiritually in an irresistible community, and an avenue for the church to live counterculturally.¹

Old Testament

Exodus 18:17-26

Exodus 18:17-18, 21

¹⁷ “What you’re doing is not good,” Moses’s father-in-law said to him. ¹⁸ “You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you. You can’t do it alone.

²¹ But you should select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating dishonest profit. Place them over the people as commanders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.

Jethro proposed a new system of ³⁾ _____
 _____ to help reduce burnout by breaking up the tasks of the senior official and distributing them to subordinate leaders.

These appointed leaders were *hayil* a Hebrew noun to mean high

⁴⁾ _____, substance, or valor.² As it was for Moses, establishing small group leaders that encompass being *hayil* will help prevent burnout and entrust capable individuals to handle the concerns within a group.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

⁶ These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. ⁷ Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

This passage demonstrates how Moses teaches adults Scripture, specifically the Shema. For a Jewish believer, the Shema is the foundational principle for the Ten Commandments. The takeaway here is the physical connection to the Word of God and the fact that Scripture was passed down to others. A small group is a prime setting to plunge deeper into the Scriptures, allow for greater spiritual growth, and disciple the next generation.

Second Samuel 23

Second Samuel 23 captures the names of David’s mighty men. However, bringing up David’s men is not to draw attention to their colossal adventures

but to point out that King David fought alongside these men, and had each other's trust and loyalty. David and these men needed each other. Recall for a moment some of these exploits—Josheb-Basshebeth slaying 800 men, Eleazar fighting to the point of exhaustion, and his hand sticking to his sword, or Shammah defending crops of lentils.

5) _____ and 6) _____ are paramount when establishing a high-functioning, effective small group ministry.

Unity of the Godhead

The book of Genesis is where readers first understand that God was not created but is the Creator. By Him, all things are brought into existence. In Genesis 1:1-2, the reader learns of God's Triune nature. "God" used in this instance is the Hebrew name *Elohim* which is the plural form of God used to denote His majesty.³ The plurality of the Godhead is spoken about in the Gospel of John. In John 1:1-3, readers are again reminded that in the very beginning of time was the Word of God, that very Word was God, and everything was created through Him.

A small group that functions well will be able to have deep bonds and unity within the community of their small group. Whether looking at Genesis 1 or John 1, instances of living in communion within the Godhead abound. For example, in John 1:1, the phrase "with God" carries with it the meaning of "being from God" or "living in communion with God."⁴ The Word was *with* God testifies to the distinction while emphasizing the intimate relationship between Father and Son. Yet the Word was *God* meaning Christ shares the same character, essence, and quality of God.

The Word, or the 7) _____, shares in God's very life thus showing their active partnership and reciprocal indwelling as the Word was with and is God.⁵ John 14:16-26 is another passage of Scripture that mentions all three Persons of the Trinity, calling out the unity within the community of the Godhead. In Genesis, the Trinity worked towards the common goal of creation, and here in John 14, the Godhead is at work to bring about the Advocate.

Establishing Foundations

Figure 1. Lack of Foundations

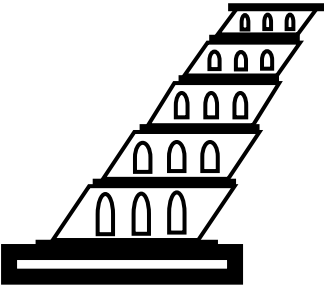
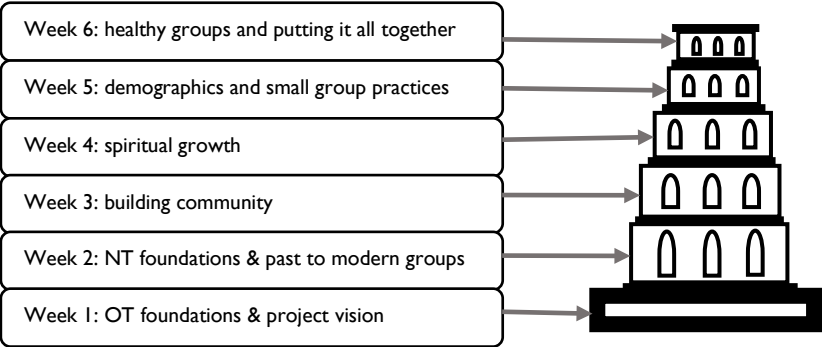


Figure 1 is a depiction of the Tower of Pisa, which was built upon a bad foundation. The six-part training will help correct intent and give Valley Gate Church's small group ministry a solid foundation.

According to Smithsonian Magazine, the tower was built over 200 years from 1173 to 1372 A.D., but because this Italian region's ground consists of sand and clay, the tower boasts a northward lean. 5

Figure 2. Six Lessons to Correct Small Group Intent



Week 6: healthy groups and putting it all together

Week 5: demographics and small group practices

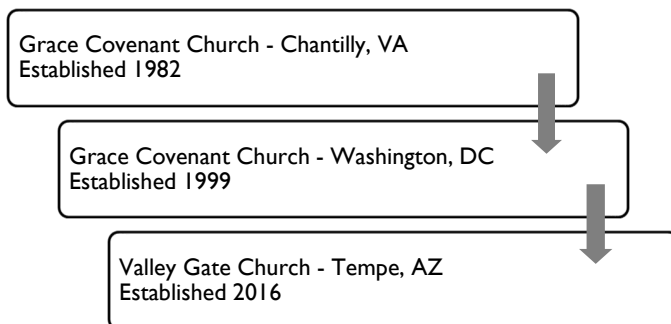
Week 4: spiritual growth

Week 3: building community

Week 2: NT foundations & past to modern groups

Week 1: OT foundations & project vision

Who We Are



Valley Gate Church had its humble beginnings in 2016 when the church officially launched. The senior pastor at Valley Gate Church, Pastor Darryl Morrison, is a native of Phoenix, Arizona, and he and his wife had been away from Arizona for more than 20 years. Darryl and JoAnn sowed into a calling from God to return to Arizona. That became a reality in the fall of 2015. The call to plant uprooted Pastor Darryl, JoAnn, their five children, and a small team of 20 people from their sending church in Washington DC called Grace Covenant Church, and they all headed to Arizona.

Valley Gate Church is a church plant that is a part of the Every Nation family of churches from Chantilly, VA and Washington, DC. Every Nation Ministries is a non-denominational, evangelical ministry focusing on world missions, church planting, and campus ministry. At the time of this research, Every Nation Ministries has established 466 churches globally, 119 active church plants, and 1,076 university campus ministries.⁷

Church plants have all kinds of hurdles to endure—finances, volunteers, securing a building, and establishing ministries are just a few of those barriers. The ministry of small group is one that VGC has sought to establish since its inception. Small groups are important because they create an environment where a believer's faith and the lives of other Christians collide.

Apply

What did you learn from this lesson?

How will you apply what you've learned to your life?



Week Two Aim

This second lesson will outline the New Testament's scriptural support for small groups. It will dive into the historical concepts of small groups, and what led up to the modern-day small group. Lesson two will also discuss a brief overview of the existing small groups offered by Valley Gate Church.

New Testament

Mark 3:13-19, 34-35

The basis of small group ministry can be gleaned from the Son of God, as He is appointing His 12 disciples to ministry and living life with them in intimate discipleship relationships.

According to Mark 3:13-15 the purposes of Jesus choosing the Twelve are:

- 1) ¹⁾ _____
- 2) ²⁾ _____

- 3) ³⁾ _____

Discipleship is a tenant of the small group ministry. Choosing the Twelve did not negate the need to meet in a traditional synagogue or to learn from a priest. However, this highly relational model that Christ adopted allowed the disciples to break away from the large gathering and get intimate for moments of spiritual growth with Christ.⁸ Similarly, with a small group, being a disciple in a small group does not negate the need for the large corporate gatherings of the church. Yet it does provide an opportunity for church members to be alone with others who are more mature in their faith and learn from them in an intimate smaller group setting.

Here towards the end of Mark 3, Christ affirms that those who are his mother, brother, and sister are those who obey God. This new kinship piggybacks off the selection of the spiritual family of the Twelve in verses 13-19 and represents the idea of Christ creating the new people of God.⁹ Hence spiritual ties can be closer than the ties of one's earthly family. The level of richness of one's ⁴⁾_____ and spiritual ⁵⁾_____ are built within the context of a small group.

Hebrews 10:19-25

Throughout the book of Hebrews, the author unpacks Christ's high priesthood. In Hebrews 10:19-25, it is learned that Christians can boldly enter Christ's divine presence and should continue to assemble together.

Hebrews 10:22-25

²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.

²³ Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Hebrews 10:22-25 gives Christians three exhortations for godliness:

1) draw ⁶⁾ _____ .

2) hold onto their ⁷⁾ _____ .

3) be concerned about not giving up ⁸⁾ _____ with one another.

Hebrews 10 demonstrates that small groups are a prime setting for Christians to draw near to God, hold onto their faith, and continually meet with one another.

Historical Concepts of Small Groups

Romans 16:3-5

³ Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, ⁴ who risked their own necks for my life. Not only do I thank them, but so do all the Gentile churches. ⁵ Greet also the church that meets in their home. Greet my dear friend Epaphroditus, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.

Colossians 4:15

¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her home.

Philemon 1:1-2

¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother: To Philemon our dear friend and coworker, ² to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church that meets in your home.

This concept of small groups within the context of **house churches** persisted past the apostolic era, and became the norm, especially within cultures that lacked church buildings.¹⁰ As the Christian movement spread to various regions, many were coming to the faith, which gave rise to the house church. It was the success of the house church movement during the first three centuries that ultimately caused the realization of **Christianity's spread**. Church

historians agree that the size of an earlier house church was likely between 9) _____ to 10) _____ people, primarily due to the size constraints of an average house structure.¹¹ Meeting in a common dining area would enable the members to break bread with one another.

Rome took control of Palestine in 11) _____ BC; Jesus stepped on the scene and cleansed the temple around AD 12) _____, and because he was a threat, he was crucified.¹² Following the conversion of Emperor Constantine to Christianity, and strict enforcement from Emperor Theodosius I, 13) _____ became the Roman state religion from AD 280s-395.¹³

Ecumenical Church Councils were held in AD 325 and 381 to discuss orthodox doctrine, and during this time Augustine would maintain the conviction that Christianity superseded Judaism.¹⁴ Then from AD 500-1500 the split of Rome's Eastern and Western Empires grew. Additionally, in the 7th century, the Arabian prophet, Muhammad would birth Islam, and in response, Rome launched eight crusades between 1096-1270.¹⁵

Martin Luther played a role in the Protestant Reformation challenging Roman doctrine in the 1500s. Luther recommended Christians meet in houses for 14) _____, 15) _____, and sacraments.¹⁶

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the **Puritans** also stressed the importance of establishing small groups; they called these groups *conventicles* and met in homes and at other times aside from the Sunday gathering.¹⁷

Pietism, the first ecumenical movement within Protestantism, promoted a strong desire to study the Bible, foster holiness, and stress good works; it did so in meeting groups called *collegia* or *collegia pietatis*.¹⁸

These efforts led to the formation of Reformed churches. For centuries as the ministry of small groups morphed, it took the form of house churches, and was a staple ministry for the basis of the **Lutheran** and the **Methodist churches**. In the 1700s, the Methodists would allow people to join these meetings—

including men, women, various age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and people from different maturity levels of the Christian faith.¹⁹ During the first half of the twentieth century, the small group context that dominated the United States and Canada was the **Sunday school movement model**.²⁰ The Sunday school model typically held to these six characteristics: 1) a single individual usually led the group, 2) instruction was didactic in nature, 3) the classes followed standardized lesson plans, 4) classes were usually confined to the church building, 5) classes always occurred on Sunday mornings, and 6) classes were not limited in size.²¹

From 1900 to 1940s after the end of the First World War, Bible study groups mimicked small group study in many denominations from the Wesleyans to the Roman Catholics.²² It was not until the latter half of the 16) _____ that the modern **small group ministry movement would surpass the Sunday school model** for Christian formation and disciple-making.²³

A **small group ministry eruption** from the 17) _____ to 18) _____ was fueled by missions & discipleship largely from the *Base Christian Communities* in Latin America and the *Cell Church* movement in Korea and Asia.²⁴

Valley Gate Church Small Group Offerings

The men's, women's, marriage, mixed, and young adult small groups are seasonal. Having seasonal small groups means they meet from February to May in the spring season and from August to November in the fall season. During the periods when small group ministries are not in session, group/ministry leaders are encouraged to connect with people from their group. This connection is geared towards forming intentional relationships with individuals already associated with their group. Small group ministries at Valley Gate Church seek to imitate the best practices of small group ministry to help attendees cultivate community and grow spiritually. Be on the lookout for the next small group offerings at church and visit the website:
<https://www.valleygatechurch.org/small-group>

Introduce Acts 2:42-47

Overwhelmingly Acts 2:42-47 is a common reference for why churches pursue small groups.

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. ⁴⁵ They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2 gives readers a portrait of an idealized picture of what this early church Christian community looked like.

According to Acts 2, this community devoted themselves to what four areas:

1) ¹⁹⁾ _____

2) ²⁰⁾ _____

3) ²¹⁾ _____

4) ²²⁾ _____

Apply

What did you learn from this lesson?

How will you apply what you've learned to your life?



Week Three Aim

This third lesson discusses the first of two overarching reasons for small groups—strong community. People often treat the corporate Sunday worship experience as the culmination of the spiritual experience of their week without longing to go deeper. People are created for community with God and community with others. One of the best ways to establish this community is through the vehicle of small groups. Building a solid community is founded upon encouragement, fellowship, and evangelism.

Building Community

Increasing development and urbanization, the three-year-long COVID-19 pandemic, ethnic/cultural diversity, and advances in modern technology are some of the reasons why it is harder for people to establish deep relationships with one another.²⁵ People often treat the corporate Sunday worship experience as the culmination of the spiritual experience of their week without longing to ¹⁾ _____.

People are created for community with God and community with others. One of the best ways to establish this community is through the vehicle of small

groups.

American families have become smaller, and people are not as likely to get married, these individuals tend to have fewer face-to-face interactions with others, yet they could turn to the source of community that small groups can provide.²⁶ Therefore, with American families becoming smaller and more isolated, it is key for people to have groups that foster deeply rooted relationships. A thriving church community is built upon encouragement, fellowship, and evangelism.

Encouragement

People who feel defeated turn to different avenues for inspiration and support. Small groups are how a Christian builds community. When people are battling various struggles in life, brothers and sisters from the local congregation urge one another to take courage and trust in the Lord.

Christian author Mikal Keefer writes, “Encouragement reminds us: We’re in this together. The history of the early church is one of encouragement. Jesus encouraged His disciples. The disciples encouraged one another. Missionaries encouraged the unsaved. Then and now, encouragement is part of the mission of the church—and your small group.”²⁷

When small group ministry gets encouragement right, the attendees²⁾ _____. In fact, small group ministries that provide excellent support to one another scarcely call upon pastoral staff for pastoral care.²⁸ It is understood that there is a time and a place for professional pastoral counseling, or even situations that exceed the capabilities of the small group leader. But the point is that when challenges arise, great small groups are present emotionally, spiritually, physically, and relationally.

To be an effective small group ministry that is good at encouraging, members should³⁾ _____ for each other, ⁴⁾ _____ the sick, meet **needs**, and communicate ⁵⁾ _____ with one another.

Tacit knowledge is achieved when the learning process is experiential and is transferred to others in a group.²⁹ Tacit knowledge is different from formal or explicit knowledge because formal knowledge is often written down and taught, but tacit knowledge is experienced. In two separate company research studies, it was found that small to medium-sized companies that valued tacit knowledge sharing in groups were better ⁶⁾ _____, had more

7) _____ capacity, and were more active

8) _____.³⁰

Small groups that have these types of tacit knowledge exchanges have high

9) _____ and tackle complex challenges.³¹

Fellowship

Fellowship deals with a common mutual relationship. In the Greek language of the New Testament, ¹⁰⁾ _____ is translated as “fellowship,” “communion,” or “participation.”³² Christianity is a corporate religion, and the early church practiced daily fellowship in temple courts and homes as they devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42, 46-47).

Joseph Gunter elaborates more on how the gathering of congregants was a part of God’s plan for believers to care for one another and he writes how, “Christianity is personal but not individualistic. Christianity is corporate. The command to ‘consider one another’ is associated with church involvement. Fellowship cannot occur unless the church has gathered together.”³³

Acts 2:42, 46-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

⁴⁶ Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Fellowship is depicted as more than merely sharing material belongings, but the ultimate example of fellowship is **friendship**; as evidenced by the daily connectedness from Acts 2:42 and the early church's communalism described in Acts chapters 4 and 5.³⁴

The **koinonia**—fellowship, communion, or participation that occurs in small groups is crucial for support systems to be established. Those in small group ministry, desiring to be more Christlike, will make lasting behavior changes when fellowshiping with others positively and actively in a group.

The fellowship aspect of a small group ministry is important, but it cannot be the main focus. If a small group loses sight of the spiritual growth aspect, then the group could turn into a mere social club.

Evangelism

Spreading the ¹¹⁾_____ of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the purpose of evangelism. A believer can do this by **telling one's testimony or sharing about the Good News of Jesus**. To most, evangelism does not come naturally, nor is it easy. This is usually listed as a believer's most significant hurdle to overcome. However, when small groups make this a priority, they are cultivating community by reaching out to the society around them through prayer, sharing a personal encounter with Christ, welcoming the unsaved to one's small group or church, or even through an act of practical evangelism such as shoveling a neighbor's snowy driveway.

Steve Gladen, the small groups pastor at Saddleback Church writes, "Availability is the key to evangelism. If your small group members become available, God will use them. If they're willing to love people, doors will open. If they can simply tell their own stories, lives can be changed."³⁵

The church in the 18th and 19th centuries was focused on pietism, but up until the mid-20th century, a shift occurred in the church, propelling the church towards a greater emphasis on **discipleship** and **evangelism**.³⁶ The results then were a global church that focused on reaching the lost and American

churches attempting to embrace Christ's mandate to make disciples and evangelize the world.

Regarding evangelism, small groups proved to be more successful because they could go where large church organizations could not; small groups are better at reaching ¹²⁾_____ or closed nations.³⁷

As small group members experience **connectedness**, they begin to become faithful ¹³⁾_____ and shift their focus from self to ¹⁴⁾_____; thereby accomplishing the strategic approach of what the early New Testament Church was able to achieve.³⁸

The current state of small groups in today's world allows groups to be engaged in discipleship and evangelism because the organic structure of healthy small groups permits its members to **be intentional** and reach others.

Purpose of Small Group

Building Community	Spiritual Growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement • Fellowship • Evangelism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship • Discipleship • Prayer • Scripture

Apply

What did you learn from this lesson?

How will you apply what you've learned to your life?



LESSON 4- SPIRITUAL GROWTH: WORSHIP, DISCIPLESHIP, AND PRAYER

Week Four Aim

This fourth lesson discusses the second of two overarching reasons for small groups—spiritual growth. The act of worship goes beyond music and singing, and this lesson will explore that in greater detail. Also, the concept of discipleship will be fleshed out as the key to spiritual growth. Along with the value of spending time in prayer. Finally, this lesson will emphasize the importance of incorporating the study of Scripture into the group.

Spiritual Growth

Findings from a 2017 research by Atkinson and Rose, determined that there was a significant parallel between the amount of time a congregant participates in small groups and the deeper development of their **spiritual maturity**.³⁹ Those participating in healthy small groups grew their faith.

In a 2014 report, 87 percent of church-based small group participants believed small groups had **strengthened their relationship with God**.⁴⁰

Worship

Worship is having and demonstrating ¹⁾_____ for God which can

be expressed in the form of singing, but this is just one of the ways to express worship. Mikal Keefer claims that singing in the context of a small group may not even be the best way to demonstrate worship because not everyone sings well, it makes people feel uncomfortable, and singing with an entire congregation has a certain sensation and volume associated with it, which can be hard to replicate in a small group setting.⁴¹

Within the context of the small group, there are various ways to give reverence to God: read the ²⁾ _____ found in Scripture, be intentionally thankful, write praise, ³⁾ _____ your hands, ⁴⁾ _____ with your eyes open, serve one another, ⁵⁾ _____ Scripture passages, or ⁶⁾ _____ to a worship song.⁴²

Romans 12:1-2

¹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. ² Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

According to Romans 12:1-2, the follower of Christ presents their lives as:

⁷⁾ _____.

What does “true worship” mean?

⁸⁾ _____

_____.

Hebrews 12:28-29

²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

Read another translation of Hebrews 12:28. According to Hebrews 12:28, the believer is reminded to be thankful and offer acceptable ⁹⁾ _____ with ¹⁰⁾ _____ and ¹¹⁾ _____.

Take note that the verb “serve” is also translated as “worship.”

Worship will drive the group to build their spiritual muscles. Effective small groups spend about ¹²⁾ _____ minutes in worship, but the average amount of time groups dedicate to worship is 5 minutes.⁴³ A group that does not worship together is not as spiritually healthy as one that does.

Discipleship

A ¹³⁾ _____ of Christ is a follower of Jesus. Discipleship is the act of mentoring someone in their faith through an intentional relationship focused on Christ and His Word, aiming for the disciple to be more like Jesus. The importance of small groups as a vehicle for discipleship is key.

Discipleship ministries director, Heather Lear writes, “Discipleship is a way of living that follows the example and teaching of Jesus Christ. Our discipleship is how we live our lives in relationship with Christ and with other members of the household of God. A disciple is not someone who is merely content with having his or her sins forgiven, but who embraces the lifelong journey toward full Christ-likeness. This journey entails regular Christian practices and disciplines.”⁴⁴

Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁸ Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Christ called and challenged His disciples to participate in discipleship, not to be mere spectators!

Mark 3:14-15

¹⁴ He appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, to send them out to preach, ¹⁵ and to have authority to drive out demons.

Why did Christ appoint the Twelve disciples?

¹⁴) _____.

The small group was a deliberate teaching environment used by Jesus to reach and teach his disciples, and this is a great setting for modern-day Christ followers. As people develop and mature in their faith, the small group's **intentional relationships** are key to focusing its members on knowing Christ, obeying Him, and applying what they are learning in community.⁴⁵

Prayer

Healthy groups carve out time to pray for each other. They spend time

¹⁵) _____ upon what God has done in their life, and then members share ¹⁶) _____ prayer needs. When groups spend time praying, they grow spiritually, and when God answers those prayers, growth increases even more.

Bill Search, the ministries pastor at Crossing Community Church, shapes the richness of prayer moments within a group by setting aside appropriate time for prayer, laying down guidelines for meaningful requests with detail, writing the requests down, ensuring confidentiality is maintained, and then praying.⁴⁶

The average small group spends about 13 minutes in prayer. In most settings, spending no more than 21 minutes in prayer in a small group setting proved to be most beneficial.⁴⁷ Anything more typically did not contribute to a member's spiritual health.

Instead of praying for a long amount of time, the small group should first structure prayer around the group's ¹⁷) _____ to include its context, time limits, and expectations; and secondly, structure prayer around the group's unique ¹⁸) _____.⁴⁸

Scripture

Spiritual growth does not occur without the Word of God. The interface of the community of small groups helps attendees engage Scripture by talking about and integrating the Bible into daily life with one another.⁴⁹

2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, why is Scripture so important?

19) _____

When the Word of God is highlighted in small group, its group members are led to godliness, maturity, or service.

Psalms 119:105

Your Word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.

The psalmist describes the Word of God as a lamp that lights his steps so that he does not stray from his path.

Recall Deuteronomy 6:6-7. Make God's Word a focal point of life.

Purpose of Small Group

Building Community	Spiritual Growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement • Fellowship • Evangelism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship • Discipleship • Prayer • Scripture

Apply

What did you learn from this lesson?

How will you apply what you've learned to your life?



LESSON 5- DEMOGRAPHICS AND SMALL GROUP MODELS

Week Five Aim

The fifth lesson of this training will take some time to examine the importance of spiritual community by unpacking a few Greek root words and diving into Romans 12:9-21 and Second Timothy 1:13-14. Additionally, both the church's and Tempe's demographics will be dissected. Through this lesson, Valley Gate Church can ask itself if the church is genuinely becoming multi-ethnic and multi-generational, as the "about us" says in its tenets. Lastly, various small group ministry models will be outlined.

Importance of Spiritual Community

Acts 2 gives readers a portrait of an idealized picture of what this early church's Christian community looked like. Interestingly, in Acts 2:42-47, this community of believers is referred to as "those who believed" (*hoi pisteuones*); but later in Acts 5, they are described as the "church" or (*ekklesia*) to denote their assembly.⁵⁰ This community devoted itself to four areas—¹⁾ _____, _____, _____, and _____.⁵¹

Also, from Acts 2:42 the Greek word **koinonia** demonstrates “sharing with each other” and here, the early believers did more than meet, but they practiced a mutual ²⁾ _____ of resources, food, money, and even non-tangible items (emotional support, prayers, love, etc.).⁵²

Romans 12:9-21 shed light on the marks of a true Christian. Christians who live in connection with other believers are to demonstrate

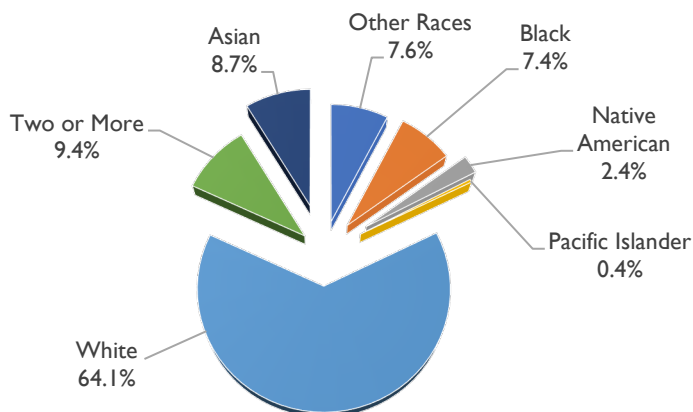
³⁾ _____. Devotion and Christian love are additional operating principles that guide the small group ministry.

Brotherly affection is expressed by weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice. Christians are encouraged to love one another with brotherly devotion and outdo one another by showing the honor and hospitality of a true Christian.

Tempe Demographics

Valley Gate Church is located in Tempe, Arizona but very closely borders the larger city of Phoenix, Arizona. Tempe is a suburb of Phoenix and shares borders with other cities in Arizona, such as Mesa, Chandler, Guadalupe, and Scottsdale. Valley Gate Church is precisely one mile away from the Phoenix border. According to the July 2021 population data from the US Census Bureau, the city of Tempe has a population of ⁴⁾ _____ people.⁵³

Racial Demographics of Tempe

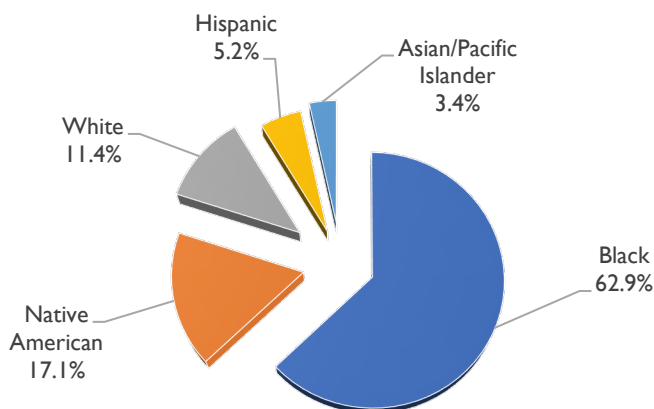


Of the entire Tempe population, 23.1% claim to be Hispanic, while 76.9% of the population declare to be non-Hispanic. The age spread of those that reside in Tempe, beginning with the youngest to the eldest, are: 18-24 years old (22.2%), 25-44 years old (34.1%), 46-64 years old (18.4%), and >65 years old (10.8%).⁵⁴ Interestingly, Tempe's racial demographics are different from the demographics of Valley Gate Church.

Valley Gate Church's Demographics

Since its inception in 2016, Valley Gate Church has grown from a team of 20, to an estimated membership of 140 congregants. The recent average Sunday attendance is around 230 persons. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the average Sunday attendance was nearing 300 people. Undoubtedly, the pandemic deterred a great deal of the church's momentum. Fortunately, in the summer of 2021, the church resumed its face-to-face services, and in the fall of 2021, Valley Gate Church officially re-launched its small group platform. Valley Gate Church's racial makeup is about 63% Black, 17% Native American, 11% White, 5% Hispanic, and 4% Asian/Pacific Islanders.

Racial Demographics of VGC



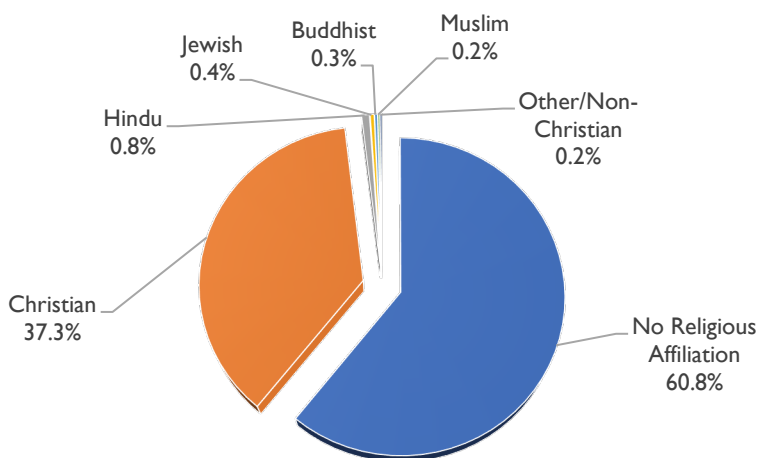
The racial makeup of Valley Gate Church is different from that of Tempe. There are more African American attendees, and one reason people attend

VGC is because of its slant towards being predominately African American. Every Nation churches across the globe strive to be multi-ethnic and multi-generational. Although Valley Gate Church is predominately African American, it has more ethnic diversity than the surrounding city of Tempe.

Church members come to Valley Gate Church from surrounding cities like Gilbert, Mesa, Guadalupe, and Phoenix. Yet, some who live in Peoria, Glendale, or Queen Creek may make 40-50 minute commutes on a typical Sunday. What is likely drawing these individuals to the church, aside from a great pastor, genuine people, an active children's ministry, and upbeat worship, is attributed to the racial makeup of Valley Gate Church leaning towards being predominately African American. There is a draw for the African American community to find affinity in a landscape that is predominantly Caucasian.

About one-third of the religious composition of the adults in Tempe claim to be Christian, or ⁵⁾ _____% to be precise. Of this 37.3% Christian demographic, 16.9% are evangelical Protestant, 13.6% are Catholic, 6.4% are Mormons, and 0.4% are Orthodox.⁵⁵

Religious Demographics of Tempe



Although 37.3% claim to be Christian, it is reported that a very small percentage are either Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or other/non-Christian.

Therefore, the remaining 60.8% of Tempe's population either denies any religious affiliation or does not know what to believe.

What are you doing to reach the unsaved demographic?

Small Group Ministry Models

Many small group models may be based on themes, a common activity or interest, a specific gender, or marital status. Defining what model fits one's church will depend on that church community, the leadership team, and the pastor.

Cell Church Model

Popularized by South Korean pastor Yonggi Cho. Pastor Cho studied the model of how Moses divided the millions of people he was judging into different groups of 100s, 50s, and 10s, according to Exodus 18. Pastor Cho emphasized the following four concepts: 1) edification and evangelism, 2) groups involve Bible study and prayer, 3) stressing evangelism and practically meeting the needs of others, and 4) every five to seven members are overseen by a section leader and roughly a group of five section leaders are overseen by pastors.⁵⁶ A benefit to the cell church model is that the burden of

⁶⁾ _____ is spread out, but a con is that the group is largely driven by the caliber of the leader overseeing the group.

Meta-Church Model

Carl George promoted the meta-church model in the early 90s, and what drove his way of thinking was a desire to be a church of small groups instead of a church with small groups.⁵⁷ Other meta-church group types included: service groups, support groups, community groups, seeker groups, and disciple-making groups.⁵⁸ Specific to these models, as the groups would grow, they would develop the next generation of leaders from ⁷⁾ _____, and these new

leaders would launch a ⁸⁾ _____. One pro of this style of small group is that the church can develop various types of small groups within their church; a con would be that the church could suffer from a lack of clear intent by having so many variations of small group ministry.

Neighborhood or Geography Model

These types of small group models attempt to meet based on their ⁹⁾ _____ to others within a city or region.⁵⁹ Since members are closer to each other, one benefit is that they can be more spontaneous with one another. Yet, a con would be that there often is a lack of diversity in these groups because specific neighborhoods usually have a similar type of demographic. A neighborhood-style small group may encompass various attributes of other small group models.

Groups of 12 Model

This model is another small group ministry model which was birthed in the 90s by Columbian pastor Cesar Castellanos.⁶⁰ Three key components of the Groups of 12 model include a weekend retreat focused on spiritual bondage and an equipping school, an emphasis on ¹⁰⁾ _____ by gathering people from their circle of influence, and lastly, an intense oversight of leadership by other higher-ranked group leaders with the pastor at the top of the chain.⁶¹ The benefits of this model are that leaders are quickly established, and the group can seek to evangelize people outside the church's sphere of influence. A con to this model is the extensive chain-of-command style of leadership.

Affiliation Group or Issue-Oriented Model

An affiliation group forms around a particular ¹¹⁾ _____ or interest, such as a surfing small group. In comparison, an issue-oriented group forms around a common ¹²⁾ _____, like a battered women's group. These groups are similar in that they are typically visited by people who are interested in the hobby or share the same level of concern for the issue. A benefit is that they serve a particular niche, yet a con is that they are so specific that evangelism and reaching others without the same need is a challenge.

Models Summed Up

Given the various types of small group models listed above, the majority of small groups can be classified as one of four types of groups: 1) process-oriented, 2) content-oriented, 3) task-oriented, or 4) need-oriented.⁶²

<p>Process Oriented Places emphasis on group identity; they may be known as affinity groups that gather peers with similar interests or home fellowship groups whose main focus is the building of biblical community and love.</p>	<p>Content Oriented Focuses on learning subject matter or doctrinal themes and may find root in a Bible study group whose aim is studying Scriptures or a discussion group that looks to content or Scriptures for starting points of a discussion</p>
<p>Task Oriented Sets on completing some activity that has the primary focus of decision making or an outreach group with its attention on sharing the Christian message through evangelistic efforts.</p>	<p>Need Oriented Stems from a need to change and these individuals seek the support of likeminded people; these groups may be known as growth groups, support groups, or recovery groups.</p>

Apply

What did you learn from this lesson?

How will you apply what you've learned to your life?



Week Six Aim

The sixth and final lesson of the newly learned small group foundations training will be putting everything together for building a solid community and establishing deeper spiritual growth. The goal is to describe what a healthy-sized small group looks like. It will also address small group ministry challenges, briefly recap previous lessons, and revisit Acts 2:42-47.

Purpose of Small Group

Building Community	Spiritual Growth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement • Fellowship • Evangelism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worship • Discipleship • Prayer • Scripture

Christians were never intended to walk out their faith alone. We learned about the expressed unity within the Triune nature of God. In the same token, there is ¹⁾_____ within the community of believers, locally, and with the greater church universally. As people share their faith, help each other

understand Scripture, serve the church and the community, and walk out their salvation, there begins a character change from deep within the recesses of the heart that transforms one's desires and character.

Without an avenue like small groups, churches keep their teaching and preaching ministries, yet congregants are not fully impacted—they hear a great teaching sermon and gain some biblical insight, but their lives are largely ²⁾ _____ than before. Hence, small groups are the avenue for sharing, prayers, discussions, support, Scripture reading, and transparency—sharing and support within a safe environment is the basis for transformative learning.⁶³

A 2019 LifeWay study of US congregations revealed that in a typical month, an estimated ³⁾ _____ percent of congregants were involved in a class or a small group ministry at least once per month.⁶⁴ 14% of churchgoers attend a class or small group 2-3 times per month, while 38% do not attend at all.⁶⁵

VGC is not at a 60% small group participant rate, but we sure can be!

Small Group Ministry Challenges

Attendance

A LifeWay research highlighted the shift in attendance from families in the 1990s and early 2000s as compared to church attendees today, indicating that twenty years ago a family was considered active and committed to the church if they attended church three times a week; however, a typical church member is “active” nowadays if they make a church service ⁴⁾ _____ times per month.⁶⁶

Attendance also impacts an individual's understanding of Scripture. This influences how a small group attendee applies Scripture to their circumstances as they tread through life's trials.

Scripture

Protecting the Word of God is essential, meaning correct ⁵⁾ _____ and ⁶⁾ _____ within the boundaries of a small group are important. It may be the case that the small group lands on an inappropriate

understanding or application of Scripture. Therefore, a good curriculum based on Scripture, and a prepared, trained leader are paramount. Recall from week four, in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul assures Timothy that Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. A ministry challenge when the Word of God is not highlighted in a small group is that the group members are never led to godliness, maturity, or service.

Gossip and Segregation

Relationships created in a small group can be rich and foster the necessary vehicle for community and spiritual growth to flourish. However, if left unchecked without healthy parameters, they can also lead to destructive church drama. For example, the concerns shared in the group can breed damaging gossip, they can create exclusive cliques, breed animosity towards outsiders, and cause people to leave the church.⁶⁷ Every small group must be a safe space to be sincere and open with each other without worrying about what is shared leaving the ⁷⁾ _____ of that group.

Cultural Megatrends

Five cultural megatrends that hinder the advancement of a small group: 1) the shift from modernity to post-modernity, 2) the industrial age to the informational age, 3) the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom, 4) the shift from production initiatives to consumer awareness, and 5) shift from religious identity to spiritual exploration.⁶⁸ Small groups may experience these cultural trends in the form of a member who expresses an ⁸⁾ _____ spirituality, has a consumeristic mentality regarding the church, or adopts the narrative from the postmodern agenda.

Six-Week Lesson Recap

Lesson I

- Two overarching reasons behind small group
- Old Testament Scriptural support
- Unity within the community of the Godhead

Lesson 2

- New Testament Scriptural support
- Historical concept of small group through the ages
- VGC small group offerings

Lesson 3

- Building Community
- Encouragement, Fellowship, & Evangelism

Lesson 4

- Spiritual Growth
- Worship, Discipleship, Prayer, & Scripture

Lesson 5

- Tempe and VGC demographics
- Small Group ministry models

Lesson 6

- Small Group ministry challenges
- A healthy small group
- Acts 2:42-47

Describe a Healthy Group

A healthy-sized small group is between ⁹⁾_____ people, but beyond that, the group becomes oversaturated, and its intimacy is hard to maintain.⁶⁹ 3-8 people (purpose: for intimacy/sharing), 9-15 people (purpose: study/task achievement), and 16-25 people (purpose: fellowship/socializing).⁷⁰

Healthy groups will have a theological component, a relational component, a restoration component, and a missional component.⁷¹

Leading a small group that thrives involves first finding out your church's stance on small group ministry, identifying the beneficiaries of the group's community (women, young adults, married, mixed, etc.) then building a purpose for your group.⁷²

Once your group's purpose is established, then connect people's ¹⁰⁾ _____ to the *why* of your group—begin to think how to link a potential member's wants (their motivations—such as friendship, Bible study, accountability, relationship, fellowship) with what that member needs (the purpose for every small group—cultivating community and spiritual growth).⁷³

Nurturing a healthy group will be sure to address these concerns:⁷⁴

- surface-level sharing: be open, sincere, and ¹¹⁾ _____ with each other
- inconsistent attendance: reminding everyone to be a regular ¹²⁾ _____ and to expect strong attendance; everyone should model the group's importance
- awkward personalities: there will be rude people, individuals with bad manners, or those who need extra space, etc.—that group's leader will have to work with these people
- bad curriculum: dull or uninteresting material that does not connect with group members can strain groups
- holidays and summer breaks: it is ¹³⁾ _____ to take breaks but schedule the next meeting, be consistent, and be sure to meet for an outing or event during the break
- self-absorbed members: members of a group that do not serve others or give to others can kill group momentum, so everyone should commit to serving

A study involving over 100 small groups from mainline and evangelical churches in over 22 US states and 3 countries abroad, indicated that 75% of their small groups met on a ¹⁴⁾ _____ basis. This was a good thing because the groups reportedly spent time together, contributed to each other's spiritual growth, and an occasional absence did not have a large hindrance in a member's development of community or their discipleship.⁷⁵

Revisit Acts 2:42-47

Acts 2:42-47

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the

breaking of bread, and to prayer.

⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. ⁴⁵ They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Unlocking the next level of one's Christian faith involves mirroring what the early church did in Acts 2:42-47. These Christians devoted themselves to biblical teaching, fellowship, eating meals together, praying with one another, meeting tangible needs to ensure none lacked, gathering in each other's homes, and having glad and sincere hearts.

The early church met in the temple, but throughout the week met in smaller groups and their sense of community was so strong that they ensured the needs of others were met and were more important than their own luxury. The *koinonia* exhibited in a small group ministry is paramount to the level of relationship the group develops. This early church regularly met in the temple courts for worship and evangelistic activities, but broke bread in private homes with sincere hearts—this was not just an occasional practice, but it was their communal model.⁷⁶ The more people are vulnerable and share emotional support, food, prayers, and even shelter with each other, the deeper their spiritual community will be.

Small Groups are Crucial

Transforming our church's small group ministry will be the catalyst for a thriving house of worship. Leaders are birthed from these small groups, prayer warriors are made, marriages are restored, accountability is practiced, and people worship and give sacrificially. In sum, small groups are where Christians thrive.

Apply

What did you learn from this lesson?

How will you apply what you've learned to your life?

Fill in the Blank Answers

Lesson 1

1. community
2. spiritually
3. delegated leadership
4. moral character
5. Trust
6. loyalty
7. Logos

Lesson 2

1. That they might be with Him
2. They would be sent to preach
3. Have authority to drive out demons (perform miracles, signs, and wonders)
4. closeness
5. community
6. near to God
7. confession of faith
8. gathering or meeting
9. 15
10. 20
11. 63
12. 30
13. Christianity
14. prayer
15. reading
16. 20th century
17. 1960s
18. 2000
19. teaching
20. fellowship
21. worship
22. prayer

Lesson 3

1. go deeper
2. prosper
3. pray
4. visit

5. concerns
6. performers
7. organizational
8. participants
9. trust levels
10. *koinonia*
11. message
12. restricted
13. witnesses
14. others

Lesson 4

1. reverence
2. names of Jesus
3. raise
4. pray
5. read
6. listen
7. a living sacrifice
8. dedication of the total person to living for God's honor
9. worship or service
10. reverence
11. awe
12. 15
13. disciple
14. So that they'd be with Him and preach
15. reflecting
16. specific
17. purpose
18. dynamics
19. for teaching, rebuking, correcting, training in righteousness, and doing good works

Lesson 5

1. teaching, fellowship, worship, and prayer
2. sharing
3. brotherly affection
4. 184,118
5. 37.3%

6. leadership
7. within
8. new group
9. proximity
10. external multiplication
11. hobby
12. concern

Lesson 6

1. unity
2. no different
3. 60
4. 3
5. doctrine
6. application
7. boundaries
8. eclectic
9. 8-12
10. why
11. vulnerable
12. contributor
13. okay
14. weekly

Endnotes:

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APPENDIX J

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 21, 2022

Jarrett Gallardo
Albert Sarno

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY22-23-311 Resetting Foundations. Training for Small Group Ministry-
Jarrett Gallardo

Dear Jarrett Gallardo and Albert Sarno,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research because your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application. Any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. **If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.**

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office