



A New Groups Resource  
Published by,



Introduction . . . . . Start New Groups - *Bob Mayfield*

Chapter 1 . . . . . Why Start New Groups - *Kiely Young*

Chapter 2 . . . . . Finding Your Target - *David Bond*

Chapter 3 . . . . . Show Them the Apprentice! - *Darryl Wilson*

Chapter 4 . . . . . Forming New Groups - *Mark Miller*

Chapter 5 . . . . . When and Where New Groups Begin - *Jeff Ingram*

Chapter 6 . . . . . Next Steps - *Sean Keith*

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## *Introduction: Start New Groups*

Would it be okay for your church to grow this year? Would it be all right if your church baptized more people, maybe a lot more people? Would it be okay if your worship services were full to overflowing? I would certainly hope you say “yes” to all these questions and even give each an enthusiastic “thumbs up!”

So let’s stretch our vision some. What would it take for your church to double in size in the next five years? What plans would you develop? Would the plan include your pastor preaching twice as hard? Or twice as long? What if the worship leader led twice as many songs? The pastor could make twice as many hospital visits, call twice as many deacon meetings, double the number of books he reads, and spend half as much time with his family. Obviously, these ideas are not going to engage twice as many people not currently connected to your church. These actions will probably make some difference, mostly to your pastor and his family.

But what if your church doubled the number of small groups or Sunday School classes it has in the next five years?

### **A December Start**

On a cold December day, a group of Sunday School leaders met for breakfast in a small conference room in downtown Nashville. As we sat around the table, the conversation moved to the real reason we were all there. We are kindred spirits who desperately want to see the church – the local church – impact communities with the gospel. We recognized that there has probably never been a moment in world history when the local church has as many resources, methods, and plans to reach the lost as it does today. Never! Yet, for all of our resources and ideas, the American church is not winning America to Christ.

Deep inside each of us gathered around that conference table was a burning desire to see local churches engage their neighbors with the gospel. We shared our hearts about wanting to see God move in our lives, in our churches, and in our country; and we had an idea.

New groups!

The more we shared around the table, the more excited we became. Starting new groups seemed so simple. We all know that the more groups that exist in a local church, the more people the church will reach with the gospel. More people will be involved in Bible study and leadership. More people will receive ministry. It is so obvious. What will impact more lives with the gospel: 5 groups or 10 groups?

We made a covenant that day to do whatever we could to encourage churches, pastors, Sunday School directors, small group leaders, and anyone else we could find to start new groups in their church. Two hours later we were in another meeting when two men who knew nothing about our breakfast discussion began talking about starting new groups as a way of evangelism and discipleship. We shared with our friends and peers and discovered we were not alone. Others were already thinking about the value of starting new groups as well.

As we talked, we realized we needed a plan. This handbook is part of the resources included in the plan. But it is more than a handbook, it is also meant to inspire you and encourage you to start new groups. Not just one group – many groups. Every contributor has experience starting new groups. In addition, each of us is starting new groups. We believe a movement of starting new groups in our churches will engage and reach more people than any other strategy of which we are aware.

- New groups can be started by any church: rural or urban; downtown or sub-urban; large or small; and of any ethnicity.
- As a general rule, a new group will usually increase attendance by about 10 people.
- New groups help the church actually do what it ought to be doing anyway – to equip the saints in the work of ministry and to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12).
- Starting new groups is a movement of lay people. Pastors and ministers inspire and motivate, but ultimately it is the average church member who actually starts a new group.
- All you need to start a new group is a leader, a Bible, and some passion. Money is optional.

## Definitions

Language is important, so as you read through this resource you need to be aware of some terms that we are using.

**Groups** - In the past, terms such as “units” or “classes” have been used, as in “start some new units.” We are combining these terms under the word “groups” because we believe the term better represents what we are connecting people to. Besides, who wants to belong to a unit!

**Open Groups** - An “open group” is designed so that a person with no prior back-ground can attend the group. Sunday School is a classic “open group” strategy. Discipleship groups are usually closed groups. For example, a new person would be completely lost if their first group experience was week 7 of an Experiencing God group. For our purposes we are espousing the open group strategy when we talk about new groups.

**Sunday School** - We are using the term “Sunday School” as an overall term that includes home groups and small groups. Also, many churches today refer to their Sun-day morning Bible study as Life Groups, Community Groups, Bible Fellowships, etc. It would be impossible to use all of these variations. So if you use one of these other names, please bear with us. Virtually everyone is familiar with the term Sunday School. When you read it, just insert the name you use for open Bible study groups in your church.

**Grading** - Every local church has a system to determine which group a person would belong to. Many churches age-grade and have different groups for 20’s, 30’s and 40 year old people, for example. Others use a life situation system based on the ages of the family’s children.

**Group Leader** - Groups today have a variety of terms for the person who leads the group, such as: Sunday School teacher, facilitator, small group leader, director, etc. In this resource, we use the term “group leader” to identify the person that the group looks to for leadership and who usually leads the Bible study group experience.

**New Groups Catalyst** - Most groups need someone to encourage them to begin a new group and provide some form of accountability. Although it seems that starting a new group is a natural thing for an existing group to do, the reality is very few groups ever initiate starting a new group on their own. Almost always, a person outside the group helps initiate the beginning of a new group. Often, this person is the pastor and/or the Sunday School director. This new group’s catalyst is a critical part of a new group’s movement in the local church.

## One Last Word

I saw a guy wearing a t-shirt recently about a certain political movement. We were in line together at a coffee shop and I was curious. I asked him how the movement represented on his shirt was doing. He didn't know; he just liked wearing the shirt!

A movement of new groups will take more than just wearing a shirt! It takes work to start a new group. For the average church member, starting new groups is counter intuitive. They do not understand it, and they are going to resist it. Do it anyway!

You are going to have to be a leader and leaders get criticized. Do it anyway!

People resist change, resist new surroundings, and resist new ideas. Do it anyway!

There are many people in your town or city who do not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Starting new groups and inviting them into a biblically functioning community is one of the best strategies you have to reach them. It will take work, persistence, and patience. Your work and ministry to start new groups is going to impact the eternal destination of a lot of people. In the end, it is worth doing.

There is only one way to join the start new groups movement.

Start a new group!

Welcome to the movement.

# Chapter 1 - Why Start New Groups

*Pastor, I know we need to reach more people. I know you want to start a new Sunday School class. I think that is great. But, remember, our class has been together for years and we LIKE it. We know you would not want to disturb US.*

Every pastor with a growth button has heard that statement. That thinking is “all about us,” and not about the people who need to hear the gospel of Christ. There are some basic biblical truths that all Christians need to remember.

- All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)
- The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. (Romans 6:23)
- But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)
- If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation....for whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:9-10,13)

Most people know these verses as “The Roman Road.” We also know that the “all” in Romans 3:23 means exactly what it says, ALL. Therefore since EVERYONE needs to hear, we must understand that we need to tell them. One of the best ways to tell them is to get them involved in a small group of people who love them and model the love of Christ before them as they come together to study the Bible. One out of every three people involved in a small group who do not know Jesus Christ as Savior will place their faith in Him within the first twelve months of being involved. That is reason enough to start a new Bible study group.

There are some statistics that may help you get a clearer picture of why starting a new group will make a difference, especially for young adults.

- 61% of those age 20-29 and 42% of those above 30 said they would be willing to be in a small group Bible study if a friend asked them to come.
- 89% of those age 20-29 and 75% of those above 30 said they would be willing to listen to someone tell them about Christianity.
- 63% of those 20-29 and 47 % of those above 30 said they would attend a church that presents truth to them in an understandable way.
- 58% of those age 20-29 and 38% of those above 30 said they would be likely to attend a church if the people there cared about them as a person.

\*\* NOTE: From research reported in *Lost and Found* by Ed Stetzer, Ritchie Stanley and Jason Hayes (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009).

Behind each of these is a relationship. Relationships open the door for us to tell people about the Savior who has changed our life. I heard one friend say it well, “It is one beggar, telling another beggar where to find food.”

If you think about it, there are limited kinds of un-churched people you will encounter in your community. There are the un-churched who have never been involved with any church. You will also find people who attended as

a child but no longer attend (some call them the de-churched). You will also find un-churched people who are friendly toward believers, but disconnected. They not particularly angry at the church, they just don't have a reason to attend. A fourth group are those hostile toward the church or who have had a bad experience with the church.

We will encounter some of each of these groups. We must respond to each with the love of Christ and look for open doors to share the gospel with them. We share knowing that not all will accept Christ, but with the hope that some will.

## Seeing as Christ Saw

*And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)*

How do you see the people in your community? Do you see the downhearted, distressed, homeless, broken families? Do you see the single parent families? Do you see the latch-key children? Do you see the alcoholics, the drug addict, and those with sexual addictions? Do you see the down and outs; the up and outs? Jesus saw them and had compassion on them all. He went where they were and ministered to them. We must do the same. They will listen if we go. They are searching for answers.

We have been commanded and commissioned to make disciples of the unreached people around us. When Jesus was asked a question about the greatest commandment, He pointed to two commands. Jesus told him to love the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. Jesus told the man the second command was to love his neighbor as he loves himself (see Matthew 22:36-40).

We demonstrate obedience to these commands by carrying out the Great Commission. We love our neighbors by telling them about the Lord we love with all our being with a view toward them becoming disciples as well (see Matthew 28:18-20).

## Putting It All Together

Philip Thurman is pastor of LifeBridge Community Church in Madison, Mississippi. The church began by meeting in homes and eventually met in a school. They also leased office space. Philip's wife began a small group Bible study and invited the wife of the owner of the leased space. The wife of the owner told her husband. He went to Philip's office one day and asked about this "Jesus stuff." Philip began meeting with him in his office. Soon both the owner and his wife came to Christ. Prior to his baptism, he asked if he could invite some family members and friends. He invited twenty-five or so to come and they did. He then asked Philip if he could teach him how to lead a small group Bible study and Philip gladly agreed. The owner started the new group with some of those who came to his baptism. He began discipling them just as Philip had done with him.

- All have sinned and need Jesus. (He is the only way to salvation.)
- Most people around us are not involved in a small group Bible study.
- A great majority in the community say they will listen to the gospel and even come to a small group Bible study if invited by a friend.
- The people in our communities need to hear the gospel.
- We are commanded to love people and commissioned to go after them.



- If we do not show them the love of Jesus, the enemy will keep swaying them with his lies.
- We have the opportunity of our lives to have supernatural spiritual community impact.

What more reasons do we need? Pray intensely and see specifically who Jesus wants you to reach in your neighborhoods.

There are countless friends waiting to be reached and discipled with the gospel. That is the reason to start a new small group Bible study in your church and in your community.

## Chapter 2 - Finding Your Target

Several years ago some friends were appointed as missionaries through the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Though they desired every person on their new home continent to be reached with the gospel, they did not describe their purpose in such broad terms. Instead, they talked about reaching a specific people group to which they had been assigned and about whom they had learned language, needs, social characteristics, family distinctives, and other information that allowed them to form a strategy specifically for reaching a group with the gospel.

The commission to go everywhere and teach everyone is a daunting task. But, the task becomes manageable when broken down into smaller segments. Starting new targeted groups within the context of a larger ministry means each group has a specific someone to reach and teach in a way that leads to life transformation.

### Why Determine a Target for Your New Group?

#### A Target Concentrates Outreach

Identifying a target for your new group will bring focus to your outreach efforts. Knowing your target group will help you understand what evangelism strategies may be most effective, what type of media may have the most impact, what community events and activities may be the best place to find prospects, what days or times may be the most fruitful, and many other factors that help outreach leaders narrow the possibilities for how intentional outreach might take place.

#### A Target Connects Guests

When guests visit your church, they need a way to quickly determine which group may be the best fit for them. Groups with generic names, broad age ranges, or creative titles may not communicate clearly. Guests are looking for people with whom they may easily build relationships. Targeted groups also assist church greeters and information center volunteers to more easily suggest groups for guests to attend. Churches who offer website-based systems for searching and connecting with groups will also find this method much easier to set up and administrate when using more targeted group names.

#### A Target Deepens Training

Training is an essential part of helping new group leaders to succeed. It follows that the more specific and applicable the training can be, the more likely the group leader can succeed. For example, training leaders on how to lead a group discussion is helpful. Training leaders on how to lead a discussion-driven group for young adults is better. Leaders of specific target groups can focus on learning specific information concerning the life needs, trends, values, concerns, questions, and interests of those who are in their sights. Church leaders will better know how to funnel news articles, research, study resources, teaching helps, and other insightful information directly to those who will have the most reason and opportunity to use it.

#### A Target Maximizes Resources

In today's information saturated world, the pure amount of resource material may be overwhelming. Choosing a target for your group enables you to immediately narrow your focus toward that which is most helpful for that group. Targeted groups also help small group ministries become better stewards of time and energy by spreading out the amount of volunteer hours and energy over the largest number of people possible rather than potentially duplicating efforts toward some people groups while ignoring others.

#### A Target Assigns Responsibility

We have all heard it said that no one does what is everyone's responsibility. When everyone is assigned to reach and minister to everyone, criteria for evaluation and accountability become difficult to establish and administer. When definite target groups are identified and assigned, the necessary aspects of a small group ministry become easier to manage. The purpose of evaluation is to see which groups may need additional training, leadership help, ideas for growth and ministry, or other assistance that might otherwise remain hidden in groups with no clear identifiable target.

### A Target Promotes Action

The nature of a target implies someone is aiming for it! When groups are generically assembled, a "wait and see who comes" approach is often an unintended consequence. Groups may be inclined to be more passive when it comes to intentional outreach. Groups that have a target, however, have a clear goal set before them. Leaders of target groups no longer see a crowd of people but can pick out specific individuals for contact. Prospect lists, church guest registration rolls, and other databases are no longer confusing information sources but are clear calls to action.

## Examples of Targets for Your New Group

**Age** - Perhaps the most longstanding grouping method is simply to target an age range of participants. While this approach is clear and specific (you're either between the ages of 30-39 or you're not), challenges exist. First, simple age ranges do little to really describe the life needs, family makeup, or other unique characteristics that may connect someone on a personal level with others in the group. An age range grouping may result in a class still so diverse that it is difficult to pinpoint much of a target group at all. For example, a class of 40-49 year olds could easily have parents of preschool children, parents of high school students, and grandparents. Strict age groups will also require some form of "promotion" which may present an additional complication to the ministry strategy for adults. Also, married couples may span more than one age range. Larger churches may have multiple classes with similar age groups. That means more to choose from which can be confusing for the guest.

Still, when examining the offering of groups within your adult group ministry, an age range may emerge that can serve as at least a starting point for launching a new unit. For example, if almost everyone in your adult ministry is over the age of forty, a group targeting thirty-somethings is certainly needed. The same may be true for smaller churches whose current or potential attendance may not warrant more specificity in their grouping system.

**Life Situation** - A second method for identifying a target group is to classify groups into life situations or life stages. Leaving chronological age out of the picture, target groups may include designations such as parents of teenagers, parents of preschoolers, single adults, retired adults, empty nesters, college students, young professionals, parents of children, and other life situations. These types of target groups provide a system of clear organization while allowing for a good deal of variety within the group. For example, a group for parents of elementary school children may include ages from 25-45, single parents, and married couples. Promotion or re-naming classes is still necessary because no one stays in the same life stage. For segments of your church other than adults, consider new groups for Pre-Teens, Middle School or Junior High, Older Preschoolers or other life stages that may currently be underserved or left out of your current structure.

**Affinity** - Some churches have found success in targeting special interest areas as a means for starting new groups. This may particular be successful when paired with a specific location such as a group meeting at a golf club. Other affinity areas could include recreational pursuits, hobbies, activity groups, or topical studies. One long term strategy may be to launch the new group through a specific interest study (such as a marriage, financial management, or Bible survey) and then transition the group into the standard grouping system used by the church.

**Area** - Geography provides another means for establishing target groups. This may be especially true in urban areas where people may travel some distance to attend worship services or even in smaller communities in which clear neighborhood or other physical boundaries exist. Multiple elementary schools, apartment complexes, natural landmarks, traffic patterns, subdivisions, and other distinctives may be a natural way of providing targets for your adult group ministry strategy.

**Access** - When determining potential target groups, consider how many options there are for people to connect in a group ministry. For example, if Sunday morning is the only time when groups meet, consider which groups are eliminated . . . those who work on Sundays, adults who teach in other age departments, etc. Starting new groups at other times and places may open up access to those who are otherwise unable to attend.

**Any and All** - Finally, remember that it is not necessary to adopt only one of these target group strategies. Instead, using several different targets (Ages, Affinities, Life Situation) at different access points (at church and in homes, on Sunday morning and times outside of Sunday morning) multiplies the opportunities for people to connect to the overall ministry of the church.

## Finding a Target for My Group

Having examined some reasons for and examples of target groups, the next step is to determine how to identify the target for the new groups needed in your church organization.

### Gaps

Examine the current structure for groups within your church. What seems to be missing? How has the passing of time affected your class line-up? For example, if the members of the “Young Adult” class now all have children in high school and college, the time is right for a new young adult group. If the Children’s Class/Department is heavily populated with older children, a group for younger children may be required. Remember, many large classes actually have “groups within the group.” Starting new groups out of the existing classes may clarify the mission and encourage others to be a part of a new group’s movement in your church.

### Community Needs and Demographics

Observe the significant changes taking place where you live. Has an increase or decrease in the availability of jobs affected the make-up or population of your community? Are new neighborhoods being built? Has there been a geographic shift concerning where residential growth is taking place? Are there other challenges that warrant close attention to how groups are structured, what resources to consider, or what needs can be met? Examine the latest demographic data (available from most local chambers of commerce) to see how the numbers of married couples, single families, numbers of children, and other descriptive information might help you determine what new groups are needed by your community.

### Personal Concerns

Finally, ask the Lord to give you a personal burden for some group in your community. This may come from your own life as a member of the target group or from lessons learned from having come out of it. For example, those who have grown children may have a special burden to help those who are beginning the journey or struggling through the teenage years. Others who have experienced the pain of divorce may have a special burden and understanding for how to connect with and help those who are now in its grasp. God will be faithful to lead you in your desire to make disciples.

As you prepare to launch new groups in your ministry, thinking through your target will be worth the time and effort. Having a target for your new group will help the group work efficiently, connect deeply, plan wisely, and grow transformationally.

## Chapter 3 - Show Them the Apprentices!

When I finished a training event in a church for teachers and leaders of adult groups, one of the teachers told me he finally figured out why his group did not believe him when he said they were going to start another group. He said it was because he had not shown them an apprentice.

They will believe you when you begin enlisting and training an apprentice!

### WHY IS LEADER MULTIPLICATION ESSENTIAL?

Jesus gave us the mission of multiplication when He commanded us to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). This is bigger than we can accomplish alone. Jesus recognized this when he said that the harvest is abundant but the workers are few (Matthew 9:37).

Paul understood the mission when he instructed Timothy, a young pastor, to commit to faithful men the things Paul had taught him so that those men would teach others also (see 2 Timothy 2:2). Three generations of multiplication were involved in Paul's directions. It is not just a matter of multiplying ourselves. Rather it is about multiplying ourselves into others who will multiply themselves.

The fact is that one shepherd can only lead so many sheep (John 10:12-13). More shepherds are required to reach and care for more sheep. Rick Warren quoted a Gallup survey which indicated that churches might have five times as many leaders serving if potential leaders were asked or trained. The lack of additional shepherds is the number one reason more new groups are not started today.

### HOW DO I ENLIST AND TRAIN MULTIPLYING LEADERS?

Jesus taught and modeled ministry (Mark 1:14-15) and prayed (Luke 6:12) before He called the twelve apostles (sent ones). After Jesus called them (Mark 3:13), He prepared them by continuing to teach and model ministry with them before sending them out. They were sent out in pairs (Mark 6:7) to do what He had been doing. Then He called them together for a report time (Mark 6:30).

Since people have varying abilities and previous experiences, multiplying leaders will usually require between six and twelve months. Consider these apprenticing steps:

- Pray. Ask for God's leadership in discovering those He wants you to apprentice.
- Observe. Spend time watching what God is doing in the lives of those in (and around) your group.
- Take them with you. Invite potential leaders to join you for life and group activities. Go to a ball game together. Make a visit. Have a meal. Plan a fellowship. Give them growing assignments.
- Debrief what they did. Ask questions. Listen. Affirm strengths and gifts. Offer suggestions for the future.
- Ask them to serve. Following God's leadership in prayer and observation, formalize your apprenticing efforts by asking them to join you in ministry. This will heighten their attention to your training efforts from that point forward.
- Increase the training pace. In anticipation of releasing the multiplying leader to serve, give an increasing number and mix of opportunities for leadership expression. For instance, move from one teaching Sunday to teaching every other Sunday prior to releasing them to serve.

- Set a launch date. After prayer and observation, determine a date to start the new group. Communicate the date with the apprentice and with the group. Hesitate to send the apprentice out alone. Remember, Jesus sent them out in pairs. If you are leaving the current group in the apprentice's hands so you can leave to start a new group, let the group know what you are doing and express confidence in the apprentice as he or she takes over the group's leadership.
- Celebrate the launch. Remember to praise God and affirm those who have helped launch the new group. Celebrate with sponsoring groups, the new group, and in the congregation.
- Lead them to choose an apprentice. Help your apprentice become a multiplying leader by leading him/her to prayerfully enlist and begin investing in an apprentice.
- Continue to coach. Following the launch of the new group, continue to encourage the new group leader. Coach him/her through challenges toward fruitfulness.

## WHAT APPRENTICING CURRICULUM SHOULD I USE?

The teaching plan for training your apprentice starts with your life and group leadership practices. Invite your apprentice to join you in both. Investing in an apprentice will appropriately begin with a time of getting acquainted. Then it is important to assess what the apprentice's knowledge, experience, and need may be. Prayer together is essential!

Beyond introduction and evaluation, asking many questions will help greatly. Addressing basics is important. Encourage quiet time practices. Demonstrate yours. Help him or her develop the ability to evaluate priorities. Other issues that will need to be addressed are lesson preparation, teaching, fellowship planning, making contacts and visits, organizing the group ministry, and mobilizing people into service. Affirm progress. And don't forget to spend time focusing on multiplying the new leader!

Hand off responsibility in increasing amounts. Follow this pattern of progression:

- I do, you watch.
- I do, you help.
- You do, I help.
- You do, I watch.
- You do, someone else watches.

Debriefing after each assignment reinforces the learning and allows for adjustments along the way.

In your weekly interaction, consider reading and discussing helpful Sunday School books and articles, like the following books by David Francis:

- *The 3D Sunday School: A Three Dimensional Strategy* (focus on inviting, discovering, and connecting)
- *I-6 Invite: A Six-Lane Strategy Toward an Inviting Sunday School* (focus on inviting)
- *The Discover Triad: Three Facets of a Dynamic Sunday School Class* (focus on discovering, teaching, and learning)

- *Connects: The Power of One Sunday School Class* (focus on connecting)

Note: These resources are available as free downloads from [lifeway.com/davidfrancis](http://lifeway.com/davidfrancis).

Avoid focusing only on one aspect, such as teaching. Keep your apprenticing balanced. This will keep both of you effective.

## WHERE CAN I FIND SPONSORS FOR MULTIPLYING GROUPS?

A sponsor is someone who will pray for, invite to, and fellowship with a new group. The pastor, educational staff, Sunday School/small groups director, and other leaders may be sponsors. Sponsors can also be individuals, Bible study groups, and the congregation as a whole. Finding one or more groups to pray, invite, and fellowship can greatly strengthen the new group launch.

**Pray.** Inviting people to pray for the new group prepares hearts and minds for the new group. Prayer sensitizes eyes and ears to others. We are more likely to be able to see God at work around them and to hear what God wants them to do when we are praying. Ask people to pray for leaders, people who will be reached, and lives that will be changed.

**Invite.** A month prior to the launch of a new group, ask other groups and the congregation to invite people within the target of the group that will be launched. Provide printed invitations. Mail invitations to all recent worship guests who are in the target range of the group. Set up a registration table. Share a testimony by the new group leader. Invite multiple times and ways.

**Fellowship.** Prior to and following the group launch, plan times of fun and ministry for the new group. Invite potential members to participate. Work to connect with guests and get contact information for follow up. Other Bible study groups may want to sponsor these fellowship times initially to encourage the new group.

Gathering a team of sponsors is also a way of multiplying leaders. It creates a culture of new group expectation and support.

## HOW CAN I BUILD MULTIPLICATION INTO MY GROUP?

There are several things you can do to instill multiplication into the DNA of a group. Consider the following ideas:

**Talk about it.** Talk about passing on faith to children, your community, and our world. Make it natural. Remind the group regularly about the need for more groups and more shepherds in order to reach and care for more sheep. Talk about it during regular and special group gatherings.

**Don't do it alone.** Enlist people to help. Give tasks and ministry away. Enlist leaders to carry out group roles and functions. Apprentice, release, and continue to coach.

**Expect every group leader to multiply.** Regularly ask who your group leaders are praying for and enlisting as their apprentice(s).

**Gather your team.** Gathering your leadership team can (1) identify insights into potential apprentices, (2) prevent multiple leaders from focusing on the same potential apprentice, and (3) reinforce multiplication steps.



## WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP?

Without focusing on others, group members will tend to keep Jesus to themselves. Without additional leaders, the group leader will tend to focus only on teaching and neglect the reaching and caring aspects of group life. Without apprentices, new groups will not be started when needed or with confident prepared leaders. Finally, an apprentice is a concrete reminder for the group that there is more work to do and more people to reach. Show them the apprentice!

## Chapter 4 - Forming New Groups

A healthy Sunday School and Small Group Ministry is constantly forming new groups. This idea of creating new groups is rooted in Scripture. Jesus told His disciples that He is the true vine and that His Father is the Gardener. Jesus explained that the Father cuts off every branch that does not bear fruit, pruning so that the vine will be more fruitful (see John 15:1-2).

Vines were pruned each year. New growth came at the cut. The trunk, with its strong root system, supported and nourished the new growth. The fruit was produced on the new growth, not the old. A growing Sunday School and/or Small Group Ministry is constantly creating new groups to bear much fruit.

### Forming New Groups--How?

In the introduction, Bob Mayfield reminded us that all you need to start a new group is a leader, a Bible, and some passion. New Group Catalysts must constantly be on the lookout for potential group leaders. Many churches make the mistake of forming new groups without adequate planning and preparation.

Let me suggest the following steps to effectively start a new group:

Seek God's wisdom. Pray about the need and ask the Father to provide leadership.

Clarify your vision. Help others catch the vision of connecting people through Bible study groups living and sharing the Gospel. Assess your growth potential. Seek to determine the number of un-churched people within a two or three miles radius of your church facilities. Find a way to communicate what you discover to encourage others to help you start new groups for those you discover.

Identify your target. Analyze the ages enrolled and attending in your existing organization to determine the accurate composition of each existing group. Compare the composition of the existing groups with the composition of the community surrounding your church. Also, examine the attendance patterns of the current groups. Have some of your existing groups become stagnant? Consider the unreached people groups in your area and insure that you have the right makeup of groups to reach your community.

Develop a plan of action. Consider the following steps:

*Identify a potential place.* Space to enlarge the organization by adding new Sunday School groups is essential to a growing Sunday School. Churches should also consider starting groups in homes or work settings in order to reach those who will not or cannot come to the church facilities.

*Discover the person of peace.* When starting a new group, look for a "person of peace" who has an affinity with the place and the people. This person will endorse and support the group as it launches. A person of peace may be a member of the church and or sponsoring group, a business owner, or the owner of the house where the group meetings will take place.

*Set a date to launch the group.* New groups can be started at any time. The natural time is at the start of the new Sunday School year. Reorganizing the Sunday School for growth is expected at this time. Another time to consider is at the start of the calendar year. Everything is new and the new group has some time to solidify itself before the summer months.

*Determine the day, time, and how often the group will meet.* If groups are going to impact the harvest, groups should be ongoing and consistent on when they meet.

*Obtain appropriate resources.* Remember your audience and your purpose when selecting resources.

*Build relationships with the target audience.* Conduct a seed event such as a fellowship, Backyard Kids Clubs, Vacation Bible School, Block Parties, prayer walks, etc.

*Celebrate the new beginning.*

*Train the class/group members.* Equip them based on the unique needs of the target and the Bible Study resources selected. Seek to answer questions about barriers that may keep the target group from understanding the gospel. Commission the leaders to fulfill the tasks for which they have been trained.

Options for Children (optional) – A decision will have to be made concerning children if the group expects to reach young and median adults and their children. Most traditional Sunday School organizations will provide groups for every age. On campus or off campus groups that meet during the week will need to consider options for children. Ideally, these options will provide age-appropriate Bible study and not just “babysitting.”

## Ways to Form New Groups

New groups can be started in several ways. Each way has strengths and weaknesses.

A “paper” group begins with a leader and a list of potential group members. Several years ago, I was an interim staff member at First Baptist Church in Cookeville, TN. The church started a group for college-age couples with this method. First, a group leader had a vision for expanding the church’s ministry to married Tennessee Tech University students. The group leader and the college department group diligently knocked on doors in the married housing units looking for people who were married but not attending a Bible study group. The group launched with six participants and the group leaders. None of the members had previously attended First Baptist.

While this group met on campus, the group could have easily met in one of these couple’s apartments or at a location on or near the college campus.

A second method that I might suggest is the dropout group. In many ways this group is formed much like the paper group. Every existing group is made up of non-attendees, sporadic attendees, irregular attendees, and regular attendees. Dropout groups are very successful in helping non-attendees and sporadic attendees become connected to a group where their needs are better met. To use this method, the new group catalyst enlists and empowers the new group leader and provides him with a list of people connected to the church who are presently not attending any groups on a regular basis. Many pastors have jumpstarted their Sunday School by beginning a pastor’s class using the dropout group method. In a church that has gone through some major crisis or whose worship attendance is larger than the Sunday School, this method can be very effective.

A third method for starting a new group is by dividing a current group. When using this method, one group is simply divided to become two or more groups. Many people shy away from using the dividing group method, but it can be an effective way to start a group. Do you really think any parent will be upset if you split the first-sixth-grade group in half? I doubt it. Yes, most adult groups will resist dividing their group, but the divided group remains an effective way to create new, age appropriate groups especially for preschoolers, children, and students. Some smaller churches may need to start groups for young adults both married and single...the divided group may be very effective to launch these types of groups. The key is focusing on the goal of connecting people through Bible study groups living and sharing the Gospel.

The most effective method for forming new adult groups is the seed technique. This method gives a new group the greatest probability for success. A successful “seed” group is composed of persons committed to Christ, to Bible study, and to reaching others. These seed members need to commit to being faithful in attendance until

the group is established. This group is often referred to as a mission group, because an existing group births the new group, much like a mother church births a new mission.

Don't forget about starting a group outside the regular meeting times and structure of your current groups. Challenge existing groups to plant a branch where lost people congregate and live. The branch strategy could be started using several of the methods above, but the key point is that the groups are started by an existing group in the harvest field.

Regardless of how started, new groups can be very effective in reaching the harvest fields that the Bible describes as "white unto harvest." The effectiveness of the groups depends on soil in which the group is planted. My daughter and son-in-law are missionaries in Indonesia. Like many parts of America, Indonesia is resistant to Christianity. But even there, people are looking for friends and asking spiritual questions. Start a group and work the soil. Trust God for the increase.

### Care and Feeding of the New Group

After a baby is born, the parents do everything in their power to ensure the well-being and prosperity of their child. A child needs help from others to grow and mature. Sunday School directors, Small Group Coordinators, and pastors must make sure the new groups are fed prospective members and that encouragement is provided during the early days of the new groups. With proper attention, passion, hard work, and undergirded with prayer, the group will grow and so will your church.

The author remembers a statement made by Carl George at a conference entitled *Breaking the 800 Barrier*; "Daughtering doesn't indicate proficiency; grand-daughtering does." Groups should be organized with apprentice leaders and should be expected to multiply when certain parameters are met. The group could consider forming a new group when the group reaches 8-12 participants for most off campus groups and 12-30 attendees for most on campus groups. Birthing takes place when either the apprentice or the existing leader leaves the group and forms a new group. These groups can be formed utilizing any of the methods suggested above.

Groups fulfilling the purpose of connecting people through Bible study groups living and sharing the gospel should be encouraged to stay open to new members. David Francis defines an open group as a group that expects guests every week. Group sessions should include a time for relationship building, Bible study, and testimonies (stories) from class/group members. Groups also provide regular opportunities to fellowship and build relationships with prospective members and guests. Evangelistic-minded groups utilize an "empty chair" to represent the next member God is calling to join the group.

### Conclusion

Forming New Groups should not be seen as an option, but as an opportunity to reach your community for Christ. In a study of Georgia's fastest growing Sun-day Schools, over half of the churches created new groups as the growth strategy. Others in the study were starting new groups in response to growth in their community. Churches that create new groups tend to develop a "whatever it takes" attitude. Are you willing to do "whatever it takes" and start a new group? Join the movement, start a group.

## Chapter 5 - When and Where New Groups Begin

An unknown author once said, "What may be done at any time will be done at no time." A new group will not form on its own one Sunday morning, or just happen by accident one Tuesday night. Leaders must be deliberate and prayerful regarding the opportunities God provides for their church. "Commit your works to the LORD, And your thoughts will be established" (Proverbs 16:3, NKJV).

### When to Start a New Group

When a new group begins is a strategic decision. Existing group leaders and church leaders plan months out before starting a new group. Leaders need to be enlisted and trained, curriculum choices made, meeting space secured, and a prospect file developed and worked. For example, say the church leadership determines there is a gap in their small group ministry. Most of the parents in the young adult group are parents of preschoolers. The next group consists primarily of parents of teenagers. There is a need for a new small group for young couples with children. Leaders are secured, a list of potential members and prospects is formed, curriculum chosen, and a meeting place is designated. The new group, Couples with School-age Children, can begin!

It is critical that leaders continually explain and gently reinforce the need for the group to begin praying, thinking, and planning to start a new group. Think in terms of a timeline of twelve to eighteen months for this group to begin a new group. The lead teacher is the key to keeping the class outwardly focused and working toward starting a new small group in the near future.

Perhaps about six months after creating the new Couples with Children group, the leaders and members notice several single adults with children attending the class. Of course, they are welcomed into the group, but leaders realize the needs of married adults with children and single adults with children are very different. Is it possible a new Bible study group just for single parents might be more effective at reaching, teaching, and ministering to these adults?

If so, then the existing group leaders prayerfully approach apprentice members about serving as the leader(s) and seed or core members of the new class. Training is provided for these new leaders in how to use the curriculum in teaching the Bible, how to organize a group for ministry and outreach, and why the group needs to re-produce itself. A date is set, meeting place secured, and contacts are made for the new group to begin. Then the whole process can begin again. Starting new groups should become the norm and not something only certain groups and leaders in the church are striving for.

### Where to Start a New Group

Where to meet is also a strategic decision. Where would the new group have the greatest probability of succeeding, at the church (on campus) or away from the church (off campus), like at someone's home, office, a school, or a coffee shop? There are advantages and disadvantages for both options.

Meeting at the church usually means having a classroom conducive to teaching preschool, children, youth, and adult groups. In most cases, being on campus pro-motes all age-groups being able to meet in one location during the same time period; this is both a convenience and security advantage. Preschoolers, children, and teenagers are able to have Bible study while adults meet. Disadvantages include difficulty in getting un-churched people to feel comfortable coming to the church facilities for Bible study and group meetings. In some cases, the expense of constructing and maintaining buildings for limited usage raises concerns of steward-ship for some.

The advantages of meeting off campus would include a more relaxed, “living room” feel for the group’s Bible study and fellowship; often, un-churched adults are more willing to come to a neighbor’s home rather than going to the church campus; the time schedule may be more relaxed; and a meal or refreshments can be enjoyed. The greatest disadvantage is what to do with younger children while the adults participate in their group time. Some approaches to this dilemma are providing Bible study for children at the church with parents dropping off their child on their way to their group meeting, enlisting parents to rotate to provide childcare, or enlisting several youth to lead the children’s Bible study time in a different room or at a home near to where the adults are meeting. Properly addressing these disadvantages are critical to the success of the adult group, the safety of minors, and providing a quality Bible study experience for the preschool, children, teenagers, and adults.

Small groups need to always be thinking about others. The small group is not just for the members to enjoy Bible study and fellowship week after week, although these are important to the health of the group. Small groups need to think through the childcare issue. Hopefully provision for the group member’s children will include a quality Bible study experience and not just a “baby-sitting” or entertainment time. Also, groups must constantly and intentionally focus on developing new leaders so new groups will have teachers and core members to start new groups.

We began this chapter with a quote by an unknown author. Another unknown author stated, “The best way to get something done is to begin.” You can begin today the process of starting a new group by answering the when and where questions. After all, the best way to start a new group is to begin.

## Chapter 6 - Next Steps

In this last chapter, we will think through the next steps after starting a new group. What should happen in the next 12 to 18 months? How do we keep the class growing and going in the right direction? What do we do if the new group withers or fails? How do we prevent our ongoing group from becoming a closed group? How do you work with a group that becomes “prophet” led and starts doing their own thing? How do we develop more leaders? How can the group leader do a better job of being a disciple maker? How do we multiply our group by starting new groups?

**Keep on Starting New Groups!** - Starting a new group is vital to the health and maturity of your church and your existing groups. I am grateful that you have been willing to lead out in starting a new group, but the goal is to keep on starting new groups. To reach the lost and the un-churched in our community, we have to start new groups. Then we have to “keep on” starting new groups to reach more people. We also need to start new churches and start new ministries. It is about connecting people around the Word of God in order to fulfill the mission of going and making disciples.

**New Terminology** - Terminology is important. The term, “new groups” refers to starting new Sunday School classes, new Life groups, new small groups, new bible study groups, or whatever name your ongoing small group Bible study ministry uses. We chose the term new groups because it is more generic and more common to connect all of these “names” into one common purpose. We call the person who is responsible for that small group community the “group leader.” We chose that term because a group leader is to “lead” the group in reaching lost people, teaching God’s Word, ministering to needs of the group, and developing leaders. The last term is the lifecycle of the group. In introducing this terminology, we understand that even ongoing groups have a lifecycle. There is a point in time of any new group that it becomes more and more difficult to remain open to new people. New groups tend to be more active, more focused on new people, open to change, and open to new opportunities.

**Multiplying DNA** - Developing a multiplying DNA in the early stages of the new group is important. One of the characteristics of the multiplying DNA of a group is intentional disciple making. We are to be about making disciples that we one day hope and pray will be disciple makers themselves. As a result, they will produce disciple makers and so forth. Also a multiplying group starts with the goal in mind of birthing or starting a new group at some point in the future. We anticipate that the window of opportunity for a group to start a new group is somewhere around 12 to 18 months after it begins. The new group begins with the same DNA that will hopefully start a new group 12 to 18 months from its beginning. Lastly, a multiplying group will enlist, train, develop, and send out new leaders. Some of the members are not ready for leadership. In the test tube of a new group, people can be given responsibilities, gifts be discovered, talents explored, and opportunities offered for the purpose of developing leaders who can be sent out to start new groups or work in pre-school, children, and student groups. When starting new groups, it is important to have the right DNA. Make sure your new group is about making disciples, sending out leaders and starting new groups.

**What do I do if my new group doesn’t make it?** - In the real world, sometimes things don’t turn out the way we want them to. So what do you do if the group you started doesn’t make it? Two things need to happen.

First, be honest in your evaluation of why it failed. Did we start it at a bad time? Was this the wrong target group? Did we do a good job of staying in contact with the prospects for the class? Did we choose the wrong leader(s) to start the new group? Did location play a factor? Did the planners do a good job in preparation of starting the new group? There are many questions to pursue in discovering “why” it didn’t make, but we evaluate not to blame someone but so we can do a better job next time.

Second, begin putting together a plan to try again. Failure is a part of life but it should not distract us from doing things we know we should be doing. We need to start new groups. So, what is your next target group? When will it meet? Who will lead it? When will it start? Where will they meet?

**How do we keep the new group growing and healthy?** - New groups can be difficult because people are starting new relationships and understanding their new roles in this new environment. Two things are important to keep in the forefront of the members of your group.

First, continue to grow spiritually. God's Word is the reason this new group is meeting. It is about studying God's Word together and individually. If we are not growing spiritually as individuals and as a group, we will not effectively make disciples.

Second, focus on relationships. Strengthen the relationships with each other and the relationships we seek to have with those new to our group. Take care of one another. Be there for one another. Do life together. But also, keep your attention and focus on reaching new people. The focus has to be inward and outward at the same time.

Lastly, focus on developing leaders. After you have been together for 12 to 18 months, some will step out into service in other ministries of the church. Some will need to help start a new group. And some will need to take leadership roles as you continue to reach more people for the existing group you started 12 to 18 months ago.

**What do I do if our group goes "rogue"?** - Of course, this would never happen in a Baptist Church. However, just in case your church happens to be one of those, don't fret. Our primary focus in this resource is about highlighting the standard of a healthy new group movement. A healthy new group teaches God's Word, makes disciples, develops leaders, ministers and cares for members, reaches new people, and starts new groups and ministries. If a group ceases to focus on these areas, that group runs the risk of forgetting why it was created. Point out to stray groups and their leaders the standard of a healthy group. If they choose to do otherwise, then let them alone. Find other leaders and willing folks who will help you start new groups. On the other hand, if they are teaching unbiblical truths, thwarting the work of the church, or denigrating the church and its leadership, then deal with it as your church would with any member or group that goes against the church.

**How do I develop leaders in the group?** - Start by praying that God would reveal to you who to begin to deal with leadership in the group. Conduct a spiritual gift assessment. Teach and discuss about Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 which talks about one body and many parts. Help members of your group discover how they "fit" into the new group. Encourage them to discover ways they can use their spiritual gifts, their unique abilities, and personality to serve one another in the group. Ask them to take on specific short term responsibilities. Give them a chance to succeed in something small so that they are ready to take on something bigger the next time.

When you are developing leaders, it is critical they know it is okay not to know every-thing. They can try lots of different roles and not feel like they are going to be judged. People need to know they are loved, even when they mess up. They also need to know God created them with gifts so they can serve. Let them know God not only made them to serve but He wants to use them in making a difference in someone else's life.

**What is the "lifecycle" of a new group?** - When a new group begins, the dynamics of that new group are unique. The attention is on new people. There is a point however where the focus begins to turn more inward. At that point, the group ceases being "new." Even after that point, a group may still be focused outwards but it is principally because of the focus of the leadership.



This is the point to emphasize that an evaluation of the group needs to be administered. No one but the actual membership of the group knows when this begins. Typically it will be between 12 to 18 months. For some it is shorter and for others it is longer. As you approach that point, you need to ask these questions:

- Which of the members are ready to be sent out as missionaries to other age groups (preschool, children or youth) and other ministries?
- Which of the members are ready to be the catalyst for starting a new group?
- Which of the members are ready to assume leadership of the existing group to begin to reach new people? (NOTE: this is a re-birth of the original group).

Starting new groups is essential to a healthy, growing, dynamic church. It isn't easy, but it's worth it. Thank you for joining us in creating a movement for starting new groups. I can't wait to see what God is going to do. New people will be reached, more people baptized, more churches started, more leaders equipped and sent out, and more lives changed. To God be the Glory!



