
LAUNCHING & LEADING SMALL GROUPS

- SUBJECT: **What can Immanuel Bible Church do to intentionally build up our small group ministry?**
- COMPLEMENT: If we want to build up our small group ministry at Immanuel, the best place is to start with existing ministry leaders, encouraging and building up existing groups, then reaching out to potential group leaders.
- IDEA: Small groups sanctify at street level.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Assessment. *To what Immanuel groups do you belong?*

1. **Definition:** An "Immanuel group" would be any group of people you meet regularly with for a predetermined purpose.
2. **My groups:** Pastors, Elders, Immanuel Staff, Adult Ed & Groups Ministry Council, Care & Counseling Ministry Counsel, C&C Supervisors, Foundry Mid-Career Singles ABF, Encouragement Group, Summer Bible Study, Core Strength.
3. *What are your groups?*

4. The point:

- I (Bob) esteem all groups as helpful in some way.
- Groups influence us and God uses them to mature/ change us.
- Most people belong to more groups than they think they do.
- Groups do not guarantee growth/ maturity, but provide the environment where it can happen. A lot of what I get from a group depends on what I put into it.

B. Immanuel is a church WITH small groups. While some churches strive to be a church OF small groups, a church is not theologically/ biblically defined as a "group of groups." Rather, the local church is one body, composed of many individual members.

1 Corinthians 12:12 - ¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

My point: We are not encouraging small groups as a means of "church growth" or a better way of "doing church," solving a perceived problem, or anything like that. We encourage launching and leading small groups as a very helpful means of grace.

C. Purpose: Groups, as with ANY ministry of Immanuel, really only has one purpose: Sanctification/ becoming more Christ-like.

- Matthew 28:19–20 - ¹⁹Go 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 all that I have commanded you.** And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

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- Colossians 1:28 - ²⁸Him we proclaim, warning everyone and **teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.**
- Hebrews 3:12–13 - ¹²Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³**But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.**

D. Groups at Immanuel. Immanuel has...

1. **Large groups (the Worship Service, HeC).** Excel at accurate communication of Scripture, with a general exhortation to obey and grow, along with formal corporate worship. Includes fellowship of the Word and sharing of the Ordinances. Follow-up/ interaction/ accountability (being known) is difficult, if not impossible.
2. **Mid-sized groups (ABF's, Core Strength, some Women's Bible studies, etc.)** Accurate teaching with a *targeted* exhortation (based on the group demographic) to obey and grow. Can include fellowship & prayer. Follow-up/ interaction/ accountability (being known) is possible, but often constrained by time and the size of the group. Obstacles of superficiality must be intentionally overcome.
3. **Small Groups On-Campus (Women's Bible Studies, Subset Groups of ABF's, MOB, Core Strength, Student Ministries, HeC, Care & Counseling Groups).** Excels at greater learning due to demands of participation. Fellowship and prayer benefits from the smaller size. Can be more intimate, enhancing encouragement and accountability (being known). Group participation *may* result in less accurate teaching, placing greater demands on small group leaders. Also limited by time and room availability.
4. **Small Groups Off-Campus, meeting primarily in homes.** Similar to (3) above, but with potentially greater time/ space capacity. May also have geographic & convenience benefits and potentially greater intimacy (being known), occurring in the privacy of a home. Potential hospitality burdens for host home.
5. **Classes (IBI).** Predefined subject often centers around a topic/ subject. Term limited. Excels at accurate and in-depth teaching. Content (not fellowship) driven. May have interaction, but follow-up/ accountability (being known) is difficult and often lacking.
6. **Service Groups (Music & Worship, Parking, Ushers, Children's Ministry Leaders, Elder Councils, etc.)** Stated goal is often something other than sanctification and fellowship. However, relationships are often formed through

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service and may be a vehicle for organic spiritual encouragement and accountability (being known).

- E. Goal of this training:** The goal of this training is to encourage and train any group leader (mid-sized or small), AND to encourage the launch of new groups - particularly off-campus small groups.

II. WHAT CAN IMMANUEL BIBLE CHURCH DO TO INTENTIONALLY BUILD UP OUR SMALL GROUP MINISTRY?

A. Summary from above. We are defining a "small group" as:

1. **Size.** A group of about 6-12 people. More is OK, but 20 + loses the advantages of a small group.

2. **Atmosphere.** Has the atmosphere of love, devotion to one another, giving priority to time together, intention to grow spiritually.

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 - 1 Timothy 1:5 (NASB 95) - ⁵But the **goal of our instruction is love** from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.
 - Romans 12:10 (NASB 95) - ¹⁰**Be devoted to one another** in brotherly love; **give preference to one another** in honor;
 - 2 Peter 1:3–7 (ESV) - ³His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, ⁴by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. ⁵For this very reason, **make every effort** to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.
3. **Frequency.** Minimum of once per month, better twice, best every week. However, it is fine to take breaks or not meet the fifth week of the month to respect the host.

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4. Open or closed?

- Immanuel has both (**ABF's** are groups open to anyone who wants to attend). However, even there we have demographic distinctions to focus the teaching and provide easy assimilation.
- Classes and **Women's / Men's Bible Studies**; essentially "close" after the first few weeks, or close due to size limitations.
- **Small groups in homes** can be either open or closed. (It is your home.) Many small groups start by being open, and organically become closed.
- **Care & Counseling Groups** may become closed after a while.
 - Support groups
 - Addiction recovery groups
 - Accountability groups

What other types of groups might be closed?

B. WHAT MAKES IT AN "IMMANUEL GROUP?"

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Regardless of whether it meets on campus or off campus in a home, to be an Immanuel Group (sponsored and advertised by Immanuel) it must have the following:

1. Leadership. Group leaders must be/ have:

- a. **Member led.** The group must be hosted or led by a member of Immanuel.
- b. The **desire** to lead a group (or host if the host is not the leader).
- c. **Maturity** commensurate with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and the character qualifications of a deacon (1 Timothy 2:8-13).
- d. **Spiritually gifted:** Hospitality, teaching, leadership, service, giving, mercy, evangelism - the Lord will use any and all of these in the group. Group leaders exercise their gifts and encourage others in the group to exercise them as well.
- e. **Time and a place** to meet.
- f. Connection to **people** who would be part of the group.
- g. A **"kingdom focus."** Even more than the desire to exercise spiritual gifts like teaching or hospitality, or the enjoyment of social interaction, or the sense of obligation to a particular group of people, *the best leaders want to see Christ's kingdom grow by helping his people grow.* His or her focus is on love, moving from self to those in the group.

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Group leaders love the Lord. They love people. They "get it" about the imperative to make disciples. They make themselves bold by inviting others to "come and see."

2. **Elder oversight:** Accountable to an elder of Immanuel.
 - a. The elder **does not need to attend the group**. Nor must he review what is being taught (Members have agreed in writing to not intentionally teach in conflict with our Statement of Faith.)
 - b. The elder **should be aware** of the group's meeting and pray for the group/ group members.
 - c. **Subset groups of ABF's should be accountable to an elder from the ABF.**
 - d. **Independent groups** should be accountable to the **host/ leader's shepherding elder.**

Questions?

C. ELEMENTS OF A GREAT SMALL GROUP

Every group at Immanuel, in particular small groups, must have the following elements:

1. **Bible.** At some level, the Scripture must be taught and or discussed. Small groups may use live teaching or video-based curriculum, but the teacher/ leader is responsible for what is being taught.
 - a. **Teaching style:**
 - **Read the Bible.** If the rest of the group meeting was a flop, at least people were exposed to God's words.
 - Sometimes **sermon/ lecture** is appropriate, but uninterrupted preaching to a group of 6-12 can be awkward.
 - Usually, teaching with some type of **personal interaction** with the material is best for a small group. Use direct questions (tied to the text of the Scripture), indirect "open ended" questions, stories and case studies. Consider testimonies. Be personal and specific.
 - For **mixed groups**, men must teach, but **women** are strongly encouraged to read Scripture, ask questions, pray, testify, and fully participate in discussions.
 - **Learning Principle:** Adults (really anyone) learn best when they participate in (or "own") their own learning.
 - **Expect change.** Do you?
 - **Have something to say.** If the teacher is unsure of their point, the folks in the group are unlikely to be changed by it.
 - b. **Resources:**

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- It is fine (and recommended) to **use curriculum**. Available are Right Now Media, Faithlife TV/ Logos Mobile Ed courses, Immanuel's limited DVD library. In addition, purchased group video curriculum may be reimbursed by Adult Education & Groups (with advanced approval).
- It is fine to **do inductive Bible study** without curriculum.
- It is fine to **spread the teaching responsibilities around** to other group members. Primary teachers must be a member of Immanuel Bible Church.

- 2. Fellowship - but think "Discipleship."** The primary goal of any group at Immanuel, whether large, mid-sized, or small, is that individuals grow in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ, progressively knowing him as Savior and Lord.

To the extent that individuals view sanctification as their primary reason for meeting, fellowship with the Lord will translate into true fellowship with one another, with the group growing in transparency, intensity, and intimacy. People will both know one another and be known by one another.

- 3. Prayer.** Jesus commanded it. The early church did it (Acts 2:42). Unite in prayer before the living God.
- 4. Other ministries.** **Be careful of adding too much freight to your small group!** However, incorporating some aspect of these elements will tend to build your small group.
- (1) Service & Ministry.** Groups that serve together grow together. Make it a dynamic to pray for and unite in something outside yourselves.
- (2) Evangelism.** Be careful of adding too much freight to your small group! However, incorporating some aspect of these elements will tend to build your small group.
- 5. Transition season.** Healthy small groups should have a time of the year (typically summer) when members can decide whether to continue their involvement in the group, or if they desire, to discontinue attending the group.

D. HOW DO I GET STARTED?

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- 1. Pray about it!**
- 2. Talk to others. Find interest.**
- 3. Unless you are an elder, talk to your elder. Start with your ABF elders or the elder responsible for primary area of ministry. If you want to launch an independent small group, talk with your shepherding elder.**
- 4. Talk to Bob Hartman. Send me an email (hartman@ibc.church) or call my office (703-813-1969).**

III. Q & A