

What Does A Successful GROWTH Group Look Like?

WINNING IS ALLOWED TO BE NICE

Everyone loves to actually “get it right” in some area of life. Whether it be parenthood, sports, career, ministry or any other endeavour, something nice happens inside us when we do something and know it hits the mark. We needn’t feel guilty about that, it is not necessarily an indicator of a deep-seeded and misguided need to achieve. God made us with an intention to do things, and actually enjoy it. Paul said “for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose”¹.

Something nice happens inside us when we do something and know it hits the mark

When it comes to leading a GROWTH Group, we want you to get it right, to actually do a good job, we want you to win! We figure that if you can actually know when you are doing a good job, you might want to come back and do it again, or even coach someone else in how to do the same thing. In our last session we defined the five main purposes of GROWTH Groups. What we now need to do is provide you with a clear idea of how to fulfil those purposes. You need to know what it looks like to win. Let us then consider each purpose and then define succinctly what it looks like to win in that area.

COMMUNITY

The small group context is not the only form of community, however it is a unique one. GROWTH Groups offer a specific environment where adults can interact somewhat as Christian siblings, dealing with the rough and tumble of real life without anyone needing to adopt the posture of teacher/parent. Together they can learn to get on with different personalities, agree on activities, debate contentious issues and support those who are under pressure.

Unlike our families, groups can be set up with an agreed code of conduct ensuring that when debate or interaction slips over the line of reasonable contention, we have the authority to pull it back into line. *Appendix 8: GROWTH Group Management Resources* provides you with a sample agreement which you can use to outline acceptable practice within the group. Relationships within groups need to operate within a framework of appropriate honesty and patient grace. Disclosure levels need to be managed and a consistent atmosphere of acceptance maintained, especially throughout the early “forming” and “storming” stages.

There are three community-based factors to be emphasised within the culture of the group, and as the leader you can highlight both error or progress in these areas, or simply channel conversations in order to model them effectively. The first is to foster progress in relationships so that they are continually growing deeper, stronger, more loving, or more trusting. They should be “developing” relationships, connections that are dynamic and progressive. Secondly, relationships should be kept healthy. Avoid them being poisoned by inappropriate negativity, especially about a person not present. Encourage a culture of honour where people aren’t judged, but rather are esteemed and encouraged. Manage the levels of disclosure and as appropriate, set boundaries for discussions that exclude counselling level interactions. Thirdly, establish a culture within the group where people are committed to growing the others in the group by contributing to their lives in some way. This might be through service, encouragement, prayer, or any other means. Perhaps the group could learn each other’s love languages and seek to contribute appropriately in ways that match the language of the others.

With these factors in mind, we know we are winning in the area of Community when we:

Win 1: Develop healthy, contributing relationships

¹ 1 Th 5:18

CELEBRATE

There is the potential to be part of a group that, due to its purpose, does not have any overt recognition of God as part of the format. These may be outreach or special-interest groups who seek to either fulfil a separate function, or create an environment where unbelievers will not feel threatened. GROWTH Groups however come with unique Christian distinctives. If facilitated well, an unbeliever can certainly attend and feel welcome, but they should be advised in advance that the group has a Christian focus.

It is vital that with each meeting there is an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the fact that God exists, longs to interact with people, and is a God of love. These things are so important, we need to hear them constantly. And whilst a group meeting in someone's house will prevent the ability to conduct a worship service complete with PA system, they present opportunities to embrace styles of worship and adoration that are unique to that close environment. The group can share in prayer, praise, communion or meditation in an intentional remembrance that feeds the soul of each participant. Our win in the area of Celebration is therefore to:

Win 2: Remember the reason we meet

CULTIVATE

As we have covered throughout this course, spiritual development is a required and natural part of group life. The unique opportunity for growth within the group however is the ability to work out in the context of community exactly how members can apply the truths they are learning. A sermon provides information, but the group provides a vehicle for application.

For example: it is one thing to learn about love, and to talk about love, but how exactly are they to love each other in the group? Groups are where lessons meet life, and together the members can literally flesh out ways to apply the truth and retain accountability in those areas.

Groups also present an ideal vehicle with which to facilitate the GROWTH Plan process. The group leader, or other designated people within the group, can take members through the process individually, or even together.

GROWTH Group DNA Map	Strengths		Requires GROWTH			
	Trend:	Trend:	Weakest H3 Component			Trend:
	→ Stable	↗ Growing	👤	👥	👉	↗ Growing
Submitted to Christ						
Worshipfully Living	//					
Intentional Stewards	//					
Passionately Seeking God				/		
Growing in Christlikeness			//			
Bible Centred	/					
Relationally Connecting	/					
Fully Participating	///					
Compassionately Caring	//			###	//	
Spirit Empowered	/					
Evangelistically Outreaching			###	/	###	/
Missions Engaged						

Areas of potential group focus

In *Appendix 8: GROWTH Group Management Resources* is a tool (shown above) with which the leader can map the cumulative dynamic of the group in regard to spiritual health. Being referenced against the Spiritual DNA, the tool is used in conjunction with the participant's GROWTH Plan, to indicate where each person is both strong and weak. If the results indicate the presence of a common trend amongst the group, then the leader can tailor a schedule of curricula and activities which will intentionally develop the areas of group weakness.

Every GROWTH Group meeting should have a purpose, even if that purpose is to build relational strength through a camping weekend. Every study should have an application point that facilitates transformation. For those who hunger for the development of others, this comes easy. They relate to Paul when he said: "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you"². For the rest of us, we need to simply be intentional in our preparation, setting aside a short amount of time to consider what might be called a "landing point", a moment when truth intersects with life and births potential transformation.

This then becomes the third win for GROWTH Groups:

Win 3: Promote applicable GROWTH toward the Spiritual DNA

CARE

In Galatians 5, Paul says two interesting statements. In verse 2 he says: “*Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you fulfil the law of Christ*”. Then in verse 5 he says that each person should “*carry their own load*”. We are to carry our own load, and carry another person’s burdens. When considering the practice and limits of caring for one another in the context of a GROWTH Group, the leader must be able to differentiate between a person’s responsibility to steward their own life (their load), and the burdens which are the infrequent and often unforeseen spikes of pressure, illness or circumstance that go beyond a person’s normal ability or responsibility to bear. Groups should be quick to address burdens, and slow to take on loads.

Every church needs a pastoral care net which serves to catch people when they are in need and offer spiritual support. At times a church can also offer limited practical support or even counselling, but access to these must be appropriately qualified. GROWTH Groups provide an excellent mechanism to ensure pastoral care is done throughout the church, however the group cannot be necessarily held responsible to do care which is beyond their means or qualification. The role of the group in the net is primarily to ensure the care is given, whether by the group itself or by someone more qualified. The key to this is frequently found in referral. The group can pray, encourage, even offer limited support, but then be quick to refer needs to appropriate and qualified carers. So, rather than being obliged to DO care, the group is required to facilitate access to care, whether it be from within the group or without. The win in regard to group member care is therefore:

Win 4: Facilitate adequate care of the group members

COMMUNICATE

Groups should learn to adopt an outward focus. There are seasons where such an emphasis will be more apparent than others, but the leader should have in mind an overall plan for the group to positively effect those beyond their doors. This focus might be multi-faceted in that the group may incorporate an element of mission or evangelism, but eventually the group needs to consider how best to share the relational strength found within it by also multiplying itself.

There are many ways in which a group can multiply itself in such a way as to bring life to the members. Although it is natural for them to mourn at the idea of potential separation, there can also be an excitement generated when new leaders are developed, potential group members recruited and new dreams are formed. The leader should have in their mind a long-term strategy (or potential strategies) for developing new co-leaders and apprentice leaders, and how to elegantly bring about that process. This course will equip you in how to plan ahead for such an outcome however, for the moment, a potential leader must be comfortable with the goal to:

Win 5: Multiply the influence of the group

THE SELF-TAUGHT GROUP

Leaders need not fret about being able to impart so many strategies and cultural requirements for a group. The group learns quickest when it teaches itself, and *STEP 1.2 – Starting Out in Small Group Life* is a course that takes the group through all of the above concepts, and teaches them to apply them. In that way, the group will more readily self-correct if a person tries to veer it off course. This video and workbook based course is available to use by all potential leaders who have completed this course. Leaders should also make us of the Meeting Planner included in *Appendix 8: GROWTH Group Management Resources* to assist them in structuring a meeting.

That then defines the five wins of GROWTH Group life. In our next session we will consider the actual skills you will need and can develop that will allow you to meet those goals.



In Summary:

- Leaders of GROWTH Groups need to know how to win at leading a group
- There are five key wins linked to the purposes of GROWTH Groups
 - 1) Community: Develop healthy, contributing relationships
 - 2) Celebrate: Remember the reason we meet
 - 3) Cultivate: Promote applicable GROWTH toward the Spiritual DNA
 - 4) Care: Facilitate adequate care of the group members
 - 5) Communicate: Multiply the influence of the group

Taken from STEP 4: Passing It On

NOTES:

- 1) Philippians 2:13
- 2) Galatians 4:19