

Grand Avenue Small Groups: Discipleship through fellowship and hospitality

I think as we look ahead for our small groups for the next year we want to make it our aim to grow in the quality of our fellowship and grow in the quality of our hospitality. It is not that we are not doing a good job now but how can we continue to grow in these two very important biblical qualities?

Small Group Vision: Discipleship through fellowship and hospitality

Discipleship Vision: A serious concern for gospel-growth among the members of the small group.

To be a disciple means to be a learner. Yet, when Jesus taught, He did not seek to simply impart information but to awaken a serious commitment to himself through the teaching of the gospel. This is what we want to aim for in our small groups.

Fellowship Vision: To build a healthy fellowship through gospel-centered relationships

Koinonia is Greek for fellowship. The gospel creates Christian fellowship among God's people. *Koinonia* is intimate spiritual communion and participative sharing around the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Hospitality Vision: To make room for strangers through gospel-growth

Philoxenia is the Greek word for hospitality. It means love of the stranger. One of the great works of the gospel is that creates love for the stranger.

Small Group Vision: Discipleship through fellowship and hospitality explained:

Discipleship Vision: Discipleship is woven through the whole process. As I explain the Fellowship Vision and Hospitality Vision you will see how discipleship just naturally occurs.

Fellowship Vision: To build a healthy fellowship through gospel-centered relationships

We want to aim to develop third-hour conversations in our fellowship.

What are third-hour conversations in our fellowship? Think about it this way, there are first hour conversations, second-hour conversations and third-hour conversations we have in our relationships.

The difference between third-hour conversations and first-hour conversations has to do with the topic, quality, and repetition of the fellowship. Let me illustrate it this way: when you have lunch with someone you typically only get to *first hour topics*. First-hour topics usually include recent travel/vacation, health, family changes, work changes, and news/politics/sports.

Second-hour conversations may deal with one or more significant and personal issues but they are not likely important issues or deeper heart-level issues that a person might be willing to share. Most of the time, our small groups cannot move beyond first hour conversations because of time or size or both. However, there are the occasions where the groups may get to *second-hour topics* perhaps as they discuss the sermon and this is helped through repetition. Sometimes our groups cannot even get past our prayer requests because there are so many people in the group.

However, the ***third-hour conversation*** is where we need to get to in our groups. ***Third-hour conversations*** are when the group begins to discuss heart issues and how the sermon text or the gospel comes to bear on heart-motives or struggles with sin and what repentance looks like. **Third-hour conversations** deal with idols of the heart, core values, challenges in life, life goals, confusing situations in life, conflicts with others, and how the person and work of Christ are important. **Third-hour conversations** take time and intentionality by the group. So, **third-hour conversations** are the first part of our vision for our small groups.

Hospitality Vision: To make room for strangers through gospel-growth

What about our vision for hospitality. Numerical growth is not the goal of our small groups. It is not that we do not care about growth, we do. We want our groups to grow but numerical growth is not a healthy goal. When numerical growth becomes the goal then the gospel becomes a means to an end. Friends the gospel is not a means to an end—it is the end. The proper goal for our groups is to love our neighbors and love the stranger in light of the gospel. The gospel makes things grow but internally and externally and the gospel is the heart of hospitality.

Hospitality means that the gospel has formed in us a love for the stranger in such a way that we lovingly, faithfully and clearly hold out the gospel to them in how we treat them here at church and in our small groups. Hospitality is not a box we check but the DNA of who we are. The gospel forms hospitality in us. Certainly, we can all grow in hospitality and anyone can be hospitable but Christians have the particular ability to have hospitality formed in us because we have been loved by the One who gave His life for us. Jesus loved us when we were still enemies with Him and He forgave our sins. There is no one else on the planet that can learn hospitality from the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. This is only found in Christianity.

Friends anyone can read the story of the Good Samaritan and be inspired but this kind of loving your neighbor does not come from being inspired it comes from being filled with the Holy Spirit. It is the very Spirit of Christ that fills His people to be hospitable.

Small Group Format for 2018-2019 Explained

First, we are NOT going to break up our current groups and form new groups. However, we are going to ask our current groups to consider a new format. Now because I have met with all the small group leaders I know who is considering this format and who is not. So what I mean is that I do not want you to panic when I explain this because your group may not use this format.

The format is to form small groups within the larger group. The smaller groups are called **Table Fellowship Groups (TFG)**.

Most of our small groups are large enough to form some smaller groups within them. The larger group will still meet as a group every 4-6 weeks (the large group will set this schedule). The small group will be formed within the group. Each TFG needs a point person to make sure the group is meeting. The TFG will meet 3-4 times whenever it decides to meet for fellowship. This fellowship could be for a meal together, dessert, coffee, study, games, going out to eat, a service project or whatever. During this time the TFG will be learning how to practice hospitality with each other. This will feel a bit awkward at first but we will do some training.

1. **TFGs** are small groups within the larger small group.
 - a. **They allow for third-hour conversation sets.** Over time the sets and reps will pay off and allow the relational muscles to become healthy.
 - b. **Each TFG consists of 5-7 small group members (not counting children).** For example, if a group has 14 members in it, then it can possibly form 3 TFGs with five, five and four people or two TFGs with seven people in it. The group can decide how it wants to form its TFGs.
 - c. Every 4-6 weeks the larger small group will meet for fellowship and do its usual meeting things.
2. **We also need to provide training.** In order to help people develop the mindset for *third-hour conversation sets* and explain the expectations so we are able to move a little faster toward *third-hour conversation set* topics. Most people may need to be taught listening skills. For example, an exercise might be that anyone who speaks needs to respond to what the person before actually said (ask questions for clarification, affirm, even disagree), but not bring up a different topic (and especially a new topic where the new speaker is indirectly [because we're humble] the hero of the story) or what commonly happens, the first person is interrupted before he finishes! We need to practice asking simple questions to slow things down and personalize conversations.

Deep fellowship needs to be clearly defined for our people. We can follow-up with our people and give training during the monthly large group meeting. We will need to encourage our people to not just discuss health, work, sports, politics, entertainment topics, kids, and grandkids but third-hour topics such as values, motivations, challenges, goals/plans, confusions, conflicts, and life lessons. We need to train them to be intentional to press these third-hour topics through the sieve of the gospel. We need to encourage them to put their gospel glasses on and see life in light of the gospel, to see with new eyes.

Fifth Sunday Hospitality Training. We would like to help all of the families of Grand to grow in the ministry of hospitality so we will hold three Sunday night sessions to train in the ministry of hospitality. On the Sunday nights of **Sept. 30, 2018, Jan. 27, 2019** and **March 31, 2019**, we will gather as a church to enjoy

fellowship, a casual meal and talk about how to grow in hospitality. We want our evening together to be fun, memorable and centered on how to live life in light of the gospel.

Ideas for Training our People to Have Third-Hour Conversations:

1. Basics for Third-Hour Conversation Set:

a. Questions for Identifying the Heart Motives (basic)

- i. What else happened?
- ii. What heart-motive do you think was behind that behavior?
- iii. What actions could you take to move this forward?
- iv. Does this align with your values? With the gospel?
- v. What biblical text could speak to this?
- vi. How does thinking about the gospel and what Jesus did for you help you respond?

b. Questions for Identifying the Fruit (basic)

- i. What happened this week?
- ii. What were you thinking and feeling about what happened?
- iii. What/How did you respond?
- iv. What were you wanting, hoping to accomplish? (speaks to motivation)
- v. What was the fruit? (Identifies the fruit/thorns produced)
- vi. How does thinking about the gospel and what Jesus did for you help you respond?
- vii. What will repentance look like in your life?

c. Basic shepherding questions

- i. In what particular way have you grown in your understanding of the Christian life since we last met together?
- ii. In what particular way have you grown in your practice of the Christian life since we last met?
- iii. In what particular way do you feel you need instruction in your life?
- iv. In what particular way are you disappointed in your own pursuit of holiness?
- v. How specifically can I pray for you?

2. Advanced Questions to help process life in light of the gospel

- a. Questions to ask to help understand the person from *CrossTalk* by Mike Emlet, see handout developed by Eric Schumacher for a sample of the questions (advanced)
- b. X-Ray Questions by David Powlison, chapter 7 of *Seeing With New Eyes* (advanced)
- c. Questions from *The Pastor and Counseling* (advanced)
- d. One-to-One discipleship might flow out of the conversations so *Asking the Right Questions* by Matthew S. Harmon, see handout developed by Michael Felkins (advanced)