

## Faith Talk Groups

### Lesson 1: Pastor Preparation

Thank you, pastor, for your interest in starting Faith Talk groups in your church.

This is an important step toward helping your congregation grow in spiritual health and Christ-like maturity **and** helping members of your congregation grow in their participation in Jesus mission to reach new people with Jesus' gospel and make new disciples.

Your role in the process of establishing evangelistic Faith Talk groups is vital. **Your leadership – your vision – your involvement** – is necessary to give your groups the best possible chance for success.

This lesson is designed to help you understand the **nature and purposes** of Faith Talk groups as well as the **key characteristics of** and **objectives for** the kind of small groups we're talking about.

In this lesson we will also provide a brief overview of **your role in selecting, outfitting and supporting** facilitators for your groups.

Let's begin with the nature of Faith Talk groups – which of course is grounded in the Trinity.

#### 1. Trinitarian foundation for Faith Talk Groups

The community life, activities and purposes for FaithTalk groups spring from the life of ...

- The **Father, Son and Spirit**: Their mutual indwelling, fellowship, giving, receiving, sharing life is meant to be reflected in Faith Talk groups.
- **In Jesus**, group members seek to participate in his life as **servant-leaders** and disciplemakers.
- As the **Holy Spirit** is our guide, encourager, means of support; the one who comes along side us and focuses us on another (Jesus), group members seek to come along side people in their journey with Jesus to encourage, support and guide them as helpers of their joy.
- **Communion** is at the heart of each FT group: *You are a member of God's very own family ... and you belong in God's household with every other Christian.* (Eph. 2:19). Group members want everyone to come to experience God's love and take their place in the household of God.

FT groups are an effective way to experience Trinitarian life – with Father, Son and Spirit and with other people.

#### 2. Faith Talk Groups: Characteristics

- **Holistic**: FT groups include worship, prayer, word, fellowship, outreach, inclusion of new people and discipleship.

**Note:** *Some groups may not start as holistic groups; they may be comprised mostly of non-Christians who are unfamiliar with Christian practices, e.g. prayer, singing, Bible study, etc. Non-Christians need to be met "at their level" and engaged in meaningful ways. FT group members need to establish strong relationships with each other which lead to deeper exploration of Christian life and teachings. FT groups may begin with a discussion format but non-Christians need to be introduced (gradually and certainly in appropriate ways) to belief, repentance and Christian living.*

**Guard against giving a “bait and switch” impression:** Participants should know that the group is a Christian group and the purpose is to learn about Christianity, its relevance to contemporary living, its focus (Jesus) and its practices. Group members need to be led to respond to the lead of the Spirit in their lives and become disciples of Jesus. This should be a natural process tailored to the “pace” of an individual’s journey with Jesus.

- **Size:** The “ideal” group size is 3-12 people who choose to live together in a spiritual community for the purpose of Christ-centered worship, mutual edification, relational evangelism, discipleship and mission. Remember, some groups may begin as discussion groups that gradually develop into holistic groups.

**Note:** Some groups may function well between 15-20. However, in most cases they should multiply after reaching 15. Otherwise, the temptation will be to not multiply.

- Group members are involved in each other’s lives outside of weekly gatherings.
- Ministry and discipling occurs inside and outside the group and between gatherings
- Group members befriend non-Christians, share the gospel with them, draw them into Christ’s community and help them grow as disciples of Christ.
- Group members experience transformation and maturity as followers of Jesus.

### 3. Faith Talk Groups: Objectives

- Multiplication of new disciples (evangelism)
  - **Evangelistic** (include unchurched and non-Christian people) **from the beginning** and **throughout** the life of a group. Groups must be evangelistic from the start or they will likely not become evangelistic, i.e. they will likely not reach new people and make new disciples
- Members involved in Jesus’ mission
- Multiplication of new ministry leaders
- Multiplication of new groups – **must be intentional from the start**
- Multiplication of new churches (as leaders and groups multiply) –
- **Multiplication of leaders, groups and churches should be intentional from the start for it to happen.**

### 4. Pastor’s Key Roles

- Make Faith talk groups a priority for you (pastor) personally.
  - Cast vision for Faith Talk groups.
  - Fit Faith Talk groups into the mission/vision of the congregation.
  - Explain the purpose for Faith Talk groups.
  - Make Faith Talk groups a priority among congregational ministries.
  - Make Faith Talk groups a priority for with your church calendar and budget.
- a. **Pastor’s priority**– Pastors need to convey to the church that small groups are a priority, or at least share top priority, among other missional (vs. maintenance) ministries, i.e. small groups should not be a “minor” ministry or an “add-on” ministry. Small groups need to be declared and supported as an essential part of the overall vision, mission and health of the church.

- b. Casting vision** – *The purpose and priority of small groups needs to be conveyed clearly and regularly. The long-range purpose (new disciples, new groups, new leaders, new churches, etc.) needs to be communicated effectively.*
- c. Budget and calendar:** *Small group resources (training, discussion guides, etc.) need to be included in the church budget. Small group leader training and coaching needs to be a part of the church activity calendar.*

### Questions 1-6

1. What is your vision for Faith Talk groups?
2. What is your motivation for starting Faith Talk groups?
3. How will you share your vision for Faith Talk groups and gather support for it?
4. How will Faith Talk groups fit into the vision and mission of your congregation?
5. How will you make Faith Talk groups a personal priority?
6. What church budget and scheduling changes do you need to make to prioritize Faith Talk groups?

### 5. Pastor's Role: Initiating a Group

The most effective Faith Talk group ministries are led by pastors who

- Form and participate in a Faith Talk group
- Establish relationships with non-Christians
- Realign personal priorities - time, schedule, and ministry roles – in order to have time to develop relationships with non-Christians and start a Faith Talk group.

*This may be a major challenge for some pastors. However, experience has shown that the more pastors are personally involved in small groups, the more successful they are. If pastor are unable or unwilling to start a pilot group (pilot groups will be addressed in subsequent lessons) it is imperative that they identify and equip group facilitators who*

1. *Are gifted at facilitating small groups (facilitator skills and characteristics are addressed in another lesson)*
2. *Have evangelistic gifts. They have multiple relationships with non-Christians, are able to share the gospel with others and/or are able to help others share the gospel.)*
3. *Understand the purpose for FT groups and are committed to the vision for small groups (Identifying and equipping FT facilitators will be addressed in subsequent lessons)*

### Questions 7-15

7. Are you ready and willing to start a pilot group yourself?
8. How many unchurched and/or non-Christians do you consider to be close friends?
9. How do you develop relationships with unchurched and non-Christian people?
10. How will you begin to develop relationships with unchurched people?
11. Is there someone in your congregation who has relationships with unchurched or non-Christian people? (If so, they may lead a pilot group.)

### 6. Pastor's Role: Leader Development

- Select, prepare, coach and support group leaders.
- Don't appoint leaders, look for them.
- Existing leaders may not fit.
- Look for missional/evangelistic gifts. - people who already have relationships with unbelievers and who are engaged with their community.

- Look for people with key characteristics for effective group facilitation (described in another lesson)
- Be trained and train others.

Selecting the right FT facilitators is essential. **Don't compromise in this area.**

**Missional gift** – *people engaged in developing relationships with, serving, and/or discipling non-Christians*

**Evangelistic gift** – *able to “do the work of an evangelist”: share the gospel with people in appropriate ways and help others do so.*

*Pastors need to be willing to be trained in*  
 – *basic skills of promoting and supporting FT groups*  
 - *facilitating pilot groups*

*Pastors need to be willing to train others – or provide training for others (ask the MinDev team)*

**Exercise B** (note: there is no exercise A in this lesson)

- List people in your congregation who have missional/evangelistic gifts (people who have multiple relationships with unchurched people or non-Christians).
- Which of these people do you think have basic skills (basic understanding of the Bible and Christian doctrine, listening skills, able to ask good questions, etc.) for facilitating a Faith Talk group?
- Which of these people would be willing and able to receive training for facilitating a group?

## 7. Pastor's Role: Coach

- Encourage and develop leaders (provide training and resources)
- Pastor/coach needs to visit groups
- Evaluate groups

Even if pastors are unable (or unwilling?) to start a FT group, an essential role they have is to provide coaching for FT facilitators.

### **Coaches**

- *Encourage and support FT facilitators*
- *Provide resources*
- *Visit groups on occasion (to maintain a relational contact with the group and new members and to help establish a connection between new members and the local congregation)*
- *evaluate FT groups as to whether or not they are achieving key objectives (listed above) and to help them grow in their missional/evangelistic efforts.*

### **Note to Pastors**

- *Don't use Faith Talk groups to “build your church”.*
- *Don't give in to urgency – take time to develop healthy, holistic, evangelistic, discipling groups*

*If FT groups are viewed as a way to “build the church” or “get new members” they may be viewed with suspicion and become programmatic (focused on the program rather than people and making new disciples).*

## 8. Pilot Groups

- One pilot group – led by the pastor
- Start with unchurched people
- Don't multiply until ready (don't set a time limit)
- Don't multiply if new people aren't being added
- Don't multiply if new leaders aren't being developed
- Multiply from the pilot group
  
- Start with only **ONE pilot group**
  - Ensure that the MEM (Missional/Evangelistic/Multiplication) DNA is in the group before starting more groups
  - Get a "success" under your belt before starting more groups
  
- **Multiply when**
  - You have enough people
  - You have enough NEW people
  - you have a competent leader

Don't set a time limit for multiplying a new group (but don't wait much longer than 1 ½ years)

- **Multiply from the pilot group**
  - This will help ensure the MEM DNA will be in the new group
  
- ***Hold fast to your vision – Mission – Evangelism - Multiplying groups***

## 9. Training for Faith Talk Groups

- Become familiar with your role as a pastor in group development.
- Become familiar with your role as a coach.
- Read resources (listed below)
- Contact a member of the MinDev team to scheduling training for you and your pilot group facilitator (or for multiple pastors and facilitator candidates within a district).
- Continue with the online training available on this blog.

Please don't underestimate the importance of your role – your vision, your support – and your participation in evangelistic Faith Talk groups in your congregation.

Please let those of us on the MinDev team know if we can help you. We are praying for you and we would like to help.

### Resources

*The Naked Truth about Small Group Ministry*, Randall Neighbor

*How to Lead Small Groups*, Neal McBride

*Sticky Church*, Larry Osborne

*Destination: Community*, Lifeway

*Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, Gareth Icenogle

*How to Lead a Great Cell Group Meeting*, Joel Comiskey  
*Leading From the Heart: A Group Leader's Guide to a Passionate Ministry*, Michael Mack