

MULTIPLY

Questions

- What would you say is the ultimate lifespan for a small group?
- How do you feel about small groups that have a limit on the amount of people who can join?
- How much is Multiply on the agenda in your small group?

Terminology

Multiply or split or birth. They all mean the same thing really but split can sound a little negative whereas multiply indicates growth and life. So does birth but we stopped using it because there was almost always jokes about how much hard work birth is from mothers. Ironically 'birth' is perhaps the most apt description of the process because whilst multiplying a group is nearly always great long term, it can be very painful in its initial stages.

When talking about multiply we should make sure to avoid thinking that the "chessboard shuffle" is a form of multiplication. Closing groups down and reshuffling the people into different combinations is not multiplication – there has been no growth.

SHOULD SMALL GROUPS GROW?

Yes! This is a foundational principle to ensure the growth of the church. It is not optional. A church which fails to come to terms with an ability to multiply groups will find that groups become an end in themselves and will not become a vibrant part of the life of the church. A small group that maintains a resistance to growth will eventually die.

An acorn doesn't produce another acorn – it produces another tree, which in turn produces many acorns.

The spread of the Christian church around the globe has not always been smooth. The apostles met opposition from believers and non-believers. When we multiply our small groups it is for the purpose of furthering the spread of God's kingdom, however we can expect opposition from within just as Paul did when he first took his message to the gentiles. Just like the Jews of the first century AD, we like to maintain our comfortable group of people around us. We like having people around who we know and trust and can share our lives with. However God also wants us to send people to the non-believers and to welcome new people in – sometimes this can feel uncomfortable.

A small group multiplication strategy will only work if it aims to multiply *good small groups*. There is no point having lots and lots of bad groups. So the first aim of a group should be to be a good group that people want to be a part of. The secondary aim should be to share the love.

How to Grow

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This topic is covered extensively in the Reach training session so here are some summary points:

- Run a group that is intentional in its welcoming and service of non-Christians.
- Pray for each other's friends and family to know God.
- Constantly seek new members who are on the outer of the church community or not part of the church at all.

THE PLAN

Multiplication will be a challenge for practical and emotional reasons. Emotionally it is hard because as people grow together they are keen to stay together and are reluctant to form new groups. Having a definite plan on how the group will multiply is very important and there are a couple of different ways of doing it:

The Big Split

Divide the group down the middle. This is best done with a large, healthy group, which has developed a strong core of leadership and has grown over time. The group can ease into the 'split' by meeting as two groups for discussion within the same house and meeting as a big group for worship and a meal. Once the group splits, the two groups can continue to meet together occasionally until they have developed their new life. Praying for each other's groups is mandatory.

The Bud

A couple of leaders bud off with one or two group members to form a new group. Probably the best way for this to happen is through an Alpha course or a need amongst the community for a certain style of group.

NEW LEADERS

New groups will need new leaders and working out who they should be could be the deciding factor on whether that group is successful or dysfunctional. Take the leader selection process very seriously and invest plenty of time into the process. Holding a good meeting does not mean you are having maximum impact. We need to be continually on the lookout for future leaders to further the positive impact of the small group.

Acts 6

¹In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ²So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

⁵This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert

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to Judaism. ⁶They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

As your group grows it will be harder for one or two leaders to handle the workload. It is okay for a leader to need help and to bring others in to do some work. The trick is not to simply hand out jobs but to empower and equip people to share the leadership.

Who?

Look for leaders who will set a vision and not just maintain a group. Think who might make a good new leader and then test them against these three categories:

Affections: Where do their passions lie? Those suited to leadership need to love God, people, truth and the church. Analyze whether this person's affections may lie in other areas that could possibly compromise their small group leadership.

Reputation: Checking someone's reputation is a bit like checking references on a job application. Talk to people close to your potential leader and ask their opinions on whether they make a good candidate. Also get a feeling of the person's reputation amongst the group they're in.

Expectations: It's very easy for a small group to fail your expectations. Therefore make sure your potential leader discusses their expectations with you and others in detail. What do they think of authority structures at your church? How do they see the role of the small group leader?

3 Dangers

There may be people who are very keen to lead but are not appropriate because they will see the group as a place where their needs will be met rather than a place where they can serve. Three sorts of people to keep an eye out for are:

Teachers: May see the group as a soapbox for expressing their opinions on everything and supposed discussions may turn into sermons. Gifted teachers make great leaders only if they are also able to be sensitive to people in the group and run good learning discussions.

Counselors: May try and enter a therapeutic relationship with every member in an attempt to "change his or her lives". This can be very problematic as the counselor tries to deal with all the problems of all the people in the group as well as their own. These people need to be heavily coached in self-preservation and given strong guidelines on how much they should pursue one-on-one relationships with group members.

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Structure Freaks: Can end up leading groups that are very works based. They tend to be very critical of those who do not stick resolutely to the structure they have put in place and will play games of coercion (instead of collaboration) to get their desired results. Organised leaders are fantastic as long as they are able to balance their desire for structure with other gifts.

Here are some handy questions to ask of the people you might have in mind:

- Do they have a vision for your small group/s? If your potential leader is not keen on further growth or disagrees with your churches small group philosophy then it will be difficult for them to be a small group leader.
- Is their Christian faith vital and growing?
- Do they have the biblical qualities required of a leader in the Christian community (1 Tim 3)?
- Does their work and home situation allow them to be committed to leadership and learning how to lead?
- How have they handled previous leadership responsibilities?

How?

The process of developing someone into a small group leader is commonly referred to as 'apprenticing'. Apprenticing has sometimes been seen as a very formal process when in fact it can be as simple as gentle encouragement and affirmation of someone who has the potential to be a gifted leader.

"Understand the difference between an assistant and an apprentice. An assistant will help you carry a log, the apprentice will learn to carry the log themselves." - Carl George

It is much better to ease someone into their new role and provide support whilst they find their feet. Throwing someone in the deep end is irresponsible. Five easy steps to take with your apprentice:

1. I do, you watch, we talk.
2. I do, you help, we talk.
3. You do, I help, we talk.
4. You do, I watch, we talk.
5. We both train someone else.

Allow them to fail. Everyone makes mistakes and feels bad when they make them. Don't crack down on mistakes, instead find out how you can help them make things right. Encouragement is not something that is particularly common in many Australian friendship circles but that doesn't mean it isn't a great thing to do.

Training: We sometimes see training as being quite boring and mundane but a good training session can actually inspire a person and give them confidence. A

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visit to one of these sessions could boost a potential leader from a 'maybe' to a 'definitely'. Equipping leaders with the skills they need to do a good job is incredibly important and can come from a variety of different sources:

- Official church leader training.
- Meeting with a staff member or key church leader.
- On the job training between the leader and potential leader.

A leader should be trained in:

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GROUP INVOLVEMENT

There are many roles within small group life that people can develop in. We may be stuck in an idea that individuals do the leading. This is not necessarily the case. A great idea is to delegate responsibilities to groups of people and get them to work together and teach each other. This sort of delegation should be done well before your group multiplies to allow people to get used to their roles. Here are some areas they might get involved in:

Administration – We can think of this mainly as keeping the rosters but it can be so much more. Remembering people's birthdays, organizing gifts and prayer visits for those who are sick or under a lot of stress. Coordinating any giving to charity or acts of service your group might be involved in.

Prayer – Too often prayer is left to one person. Everyone should pray. Therefore the prayer leader/s prays for the group members, helps develop the prayer life of the group and generally promotes prayer around the place. Encourage these people to learn about prayer and teach the group what they learn (e.g. A new style of group prayer). Urge them to take responsibility for prayer during small group meetings and during the week. It's not that they are the only prayers however they are deliberate in their focus on prayer.

Teaching – Have a natural talent for studying the bible, preparing studies and most importantly leading the discussion. Some people are great at the preparation but struggle when it comes to communicating what they have learnt. Remember this person doesn't have to lead all the studies but rather has a responsibility to see that the teaching is regular and good and that those who are leading the discussion are well resourced and supported. Often their role is to teach the teachers.

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Evangelism – Everyone should reach out with the gospel but some people just seem to walk into evangelism opportunities several times a day. Due to their friendly and welcoming nature many people may join your group if the evangelists are encouraged by the group to make the invitations.

Hospitality – When new people join the group they should feel welcomed. Someone with the gift of hospitality can foster an atmosphere that will be new people friendly and also be very helpful in making people feel positive about a new group after multiplication.

MINIMISE THE TRAUMA

Matthew 13:1-9

The Parable of the Sower

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop--a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹He who has ears, let him hear."

A great truth of the parable of "reaping and sowing" is before we can reap something needs to be planted. It is part of our human nature, we all love to reap, we like the victories, we all like to gather in, but planting is hard work. Many things can go wrong; the soil may not be right; the weeds may choke our work; the sun may burn it up; the birds can come and pinch the seed. It is back breaking work, beset with problems and with no quick return or guarantee of 100% profit from our hard work or investment. You may find that people who you thought were committed to the group suddenly drop off when the group gets smaller, others may really struggle with the change. We should expect this to happen when we multiply our small groups. No planting = no harvest; no planting = no increase.

Set a Vision

"The seeds of the small group's future are in its creation"

Anxiety levels can rise when you suggest breaking up a group of solid friends. However if the group is founded on a principle of growth then at least you will avoid giving people a nasty shock. At the start of a group's life (or when new people join) the desire to grow to a size where you will multiply should be clearly established. The earlier you talk this through with the group members the better. Keep multiplication on the agenda all the time so that people will not be in for a nasty shock when you sit down and say: "well we have 14 people and I think it's

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time to split". Setting the vision early won't guarantee that everyone will be happy with breaking up the group but it does significantly reduce the confusion, hesitation and resistance that may arise.

Use the bible

People should not believe the group should grow because you are able to express your opinion convincingly, but because they are convicted by God's word. Besides you may have a tough time convincing people of your own opinions and the bible – the word of God - can often speak more clearly. Developing a mature attitude to Christian discipleship will assist in developing a vision for growth. If your group lacks a passion for the lost and growth of his kingdom then you need to study the scriptures and obey its commands. The following passage is a perfect example of a passage you might point to.

John 15

¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

From this passage we can see that we cannot expect the Christian experience to be one without pain. When you break up an established and loving group there is pain for each of its members. However from this time of pruning two groups then have the chance to grow and share God's majesty with a bunch of new people. Our small groups are part of God's vine and if we remain in him we will be do well.

Depend on God

1 Corinthians 3

⁵What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. ⁷So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. ⁹For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

Some very successful groups have failed terribly when it came to splitting the group into two. Whist there are plenty of things you can do to prepare your group to successfully negotiate the multiplication process, God is still going to need to be fully involved if both groups are to go on to be great groups themselves. *Pray your guts out that he will bless your decision to multiply your group.*

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Dealing with Grief

A great idea is to spend several sessions during the multiplication process talking about how people *feel*. *Everyone should have an opportunity to express grief or excitement or anxiety.* Don't try and solve people's issues right there and then, simply use the time to be aware of what the group is feeling and seek to help them through the process.

WHO GOES WHERE?

This is a very practical section, which addresses the very practical issue of who should go in which group. There are no clear-cut rules and careful consideration and discernment is very important. Picking names out of a hat is unlikely to provide you with two well-balanced groups. We would suggest looking at the following ways of dividing people up as a tool to help you in your decisions.

- Location – small group community can be greatly increased if everyone lives close to each other. Perhaps each group could be based in a certain area of town. There might be other people in that area of town that would be interested in joining.
- Age – two ways of doing this. The first is to put the older people together and younger people together. Alternatively you can try for an even spread of ages across both groups.
- Gender – make sure each group isn't loaded too heavily toward one gender or the other.
- Gifts – identify who is gifted in what areas and try and find a good balance of gifts in each area (eg. Gifted teachers in both groups).
- Friendships – this should not be dismissed as unimportant. Some people support each other very well and to break them up would be a mistake. Others may have a strong relationship outside of small group, which they could easily maintain without being in the same group.
- Rivalries – let's face it, some people just don't get along. Splitting them could be a good idea.

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Step by step

1. The small group leaders (and perhaps one or two other key people) come up with a draft list of the two groups.
2. Present the lists to the group and ask for private feedback from people during the week (important that there is confidentiality in this).
3. Make any changes arising from the feedback and present the list again. Tell the group that if there are still problems they need to let you know during the week, otherwise the list is final.
4. Work with church staff to see if there is anyone in the system that may be a great addition to your group.
5. Start together for a meal or prayer time but split into your new groups for discussion.
6. Eventually start meeting in separate homes on a regular basis.

DEATH AND FAILURE

Just as it is important to start a group well with vision and encouragement it is also important to end a group well. Sometimes groups will come to a natural end. All sorts of factors such as marriages, career changes, overseas or interstate travel and relationship breakdowns can mean a group loses its core and no longer functions as a good group. At this time it is perfectly acceptable to close the group down. The key is finishing well and not seeing it as a failure.

At the end of a group (whether due to multiplication or closing) there should be plenty of time spent reflecting on the good things that God has done and the prayers that have been answered. It may also be appropriate to look at the big picture. Your group may be a part of a several groups that came about through multiplication and so the group is still living on through others.

RESOURCES

Building A Church of Small Groups

by Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson

The Willow Creek guide to leading life changing small groups

by Bill Donahue

Nine Keys to Effective Group Leadership

By Carl F. George

Leadership Explosion: Multiplying Cell Group leaders to Reap the harvest

By Joel Comiskey