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## Evangelism in Small Groups?

*How to incorporate evangelism into your small group setting, and into your life.*

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**Evangelism in groups? Gasp! Just when everyone was getting used to the "touchy-feely" stuff of groups with fellowship, learning/study, and sharing/prayer, now we have to add evangelism, too?**

Evangelism sends a shudder into most Christians; at least it does when we define evangelism with the "revival" or "turn or burn" style of outreach. For many of us, the word *evangelism* ranks just below *intimacy* as a negative part of the church environment.

This is an unnecessary fear, since outreach can be as natural as a drive down the street (and a lot safer, too). And in the small group setting, fear can be reduced significantly for both the "evangelist" and the "evangelized."

Outreach in our midwest, suburban setting has forced a change in thinking, a change that many of our large and small churches around the nation must also face: the people we encounter already know about God and even have experienced some of God and a church setting at one time or another, but have withdrawn. Very few of our evangelistic efforts can be considered "traditional textbook conversions," and we try very hard to avoid simply swapping sheep between pens (recruiting members from other churches).

In many ways, *outreach in our society has shifted from converting the unbelieving pagan to re-introducing the disillusioned believer to God and the church.*

The reintroduction to the church happens best when people are exposed to others just like them who are experiencing the same joys and stresses, yet have this interactive relationship with God. And, surprise, the best place for that exposure is in the safe setting of the home during the week in the small group.

That's enough philosophy—now, the practical!

Evangelism for the church through the small group happens at work:

- It's the co-worker who mentions a life issue. You then offer to pray about it, and maybe you ask if your small group can pray, too. Then when the issue is resolved, the co-worker receives a card from the group or the group receives a card from the co-worker. *Zap*—connections are made and a possible door is open.
- It's the two or three people who meet in the lunch room to talk and pray during their break, and are seen by their co-workers as having a different, more positive attitude. Maybe some of the coworkers ask if they might join the group and try it. *Poof*—another connection made and another door open.

One of our group leaders at Valley Christian is a manager of a discount mattress store. Several times each day, he gets the chance to talk with someone about life and church. And he usually ends up inviting the person to his group. At this point in time, he has three people who have started regularly coming to his group, and one started attending worship.

One man from our congregation is a technical support manager for a local health management company. He went to Promise Keepers, and when he returned to work, he discovered others who did, too. They began meeting once each week over lunch to talk and pray, and this was noticed by several people in his work place. Some criticized the lunches, while the majority asked what was happening and if they might be involved also.

Evangelism for the church through the small group happens at home and in the neighborhood:

- It's the small group who has a Christmas gathering, and plans to sing carols to the neighbors followed by an invitation to join them for cider and cookies back at the host's home.
- It's the subtle discussions over the back fence (yes, they still do exist if you look for them!) and the mention of the study group that meets each week, with "Oh, would you like to come along with me this week? We're talking about parenting issues."

One man from our congregation found a neighbor wandering around his house one night, locked out of his own home and very drunk. He helped him get back home, get the spare key out, and spent some time with him. They found some common interests, although there were some glaring differences. Slowly the neighbor found something that he liked in the man, and consented to play on the church softball team. He found these people to be "OK," and agreed to attend their small group. This Christmas, that man (now sober) accepted the Lord and has also led his girlfriend to Christ.

Evangelism for the church through small groups happens in settings that you can't imagine: at the gas station, grocery store, school, the children's athletic events, the mall. ... The key is to *have spiritual eyes* to see the need, *spiritual courage* to say the words, *spiritual life* that tells by your actions, and *spiritual heart* to care enough to share about Jesus. And openness to share your small group for others to find safe haven and Jesus Christ.

I believe that it's important to build into the small group structure the openness for the new person

to join the group at any time. God's timing is so unique, and to have an open door only two or three times each year is limiting God. (Some models of small groups differ on this point—you must choose the best model based on your setting and community.) Model and talk within the group setting the openness for new people, and the welcoming of their presence. Enjoy the richness of sharing between younger and mature believers.

And celebrate the filling of the open chair; stress the prayers for that person who has yet to be in that chair, and pray thanks when it is filled.

Formal evangelism has its place, and I believe that God intends and gifts evangelists to use their gifts in a mighty way. But I also believe that each of us has the opportunity to evangelize daily and weekly with our contacts, and we participate in a wonderful transitional and nonthreatening setting within the small groups.

But our first step is our understanding and willingness to share about Jesus. That's our most basic starting point for success, and our most difficult hurdle to overcome.

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