



WE'RE A CHURCH OF SMALL GROUPS

six reasons we are committed to small groups





Summary

Small groups are not the latest fad for discipleship. They are not a new strategy to promote church growth. They aren't a trendy way to structure the church or an attempt to streamline and replicate pastoral care. For more than two thousand years, believers have met in homes with other believers. As a church, we are committed to the priority of small groups. Small groups are the heartbeat of our church and the place where we experience deep, life-giving relationships for the purpose of growing in spiritual maturity. Together, we want to glorify God and make disciples. And small groups are critical to fulfilling our mission.



Five Minute Read



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Have you ever wondered why the Bible says so little about small groups?

If small groups are core to the church, why aren't they clearly mentioned in the Bible? Shouldn't we expect even a nod toward small groups? Though Scripture doesn't prohibit small groups, it's surprising that the Bible doesn't command them either. Nowhere in Scripture are small groups explicitly encouraged. *Are small groups biblical?*

The idea of smaller groups of people meeting together to share their lives, study God's Word, support one another and serve the community isn't a new concept. For more than two thousand years, believers have gathered together and met in homes with other believers. These groups weren't an add-on to the church. For some churches in the New Testament, these groups of believers were the only church in the city. These groups were the church.

When the New Testament was written, the typical church was so small that it was, in essence, a small group. Almost all of the New Testament churches met in a home. This means all of the values and benefits that a small group brings, these early churches already had in place. Small groups were not a program, this was their church experience.

Ultimately, the early church didn't have a choice regarding how to corporately gather together. Everything in their culture was small and neighborhood based. They didn't have vehicles to travel long distances or drive to the next town to attend the newest church plant. The nearest neighborhood church was their only option.

Beyond the challenges of travel, the early church was also a persecuted minority with little to no social standing, wealth or the ability to meet in the local town hall. So, it's no surprise that the early church gathered together in homes. Archeology reveals many of these homes took on additions and were expanded as the size of the church grew. This is important because it tells us that these house churches didn't set out to be a "small group". Instead, their mission was always to reach more people through multiplication. Since the beginning, the mission of the church has always maintained a clear vision for reaching more people as God is the One who builds His church.

What does the Bible say about believers gathering together in homes?

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| Acts 2:46 | And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread <i>in their homes</i> , [the believers] received their food with glad and generous hearts. |
| Acts 12:12 | When [Peter] realized this, he went to the <i>house of Mary</i> , the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. |
| Romans 16:3-5 | Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the <i>church in their house</i> . |
| 1 Corinthians 16:19 | The churches of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Prisca, together with the <i>church in their house</i> , send you hearty greetings in the Lord. |
| Colossians 4:15 | Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, Nympha and <i>the church in her house</i> . |
| Philemon verses 1-2 | To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and <i>the church in your house</i> . |

Small gatherings of believers are often referred to as “house churches”.

In the first century, small groups weren’t designed to streamline pastoral care or a slick strategy for church growth. Small groups were the church. The church was composed of believers gathering together in homes with other believers. In fact, every time the word “church” is used in the New Testament, this word is in reference to people. A church is more than a building with four walls and a roof. A church is an *assembly of God’s people*. This is why the early gatherings of small groups were called “house churches”.

What did these first century small groups do when they met together?

Study Scripture	The first thing we know about small groups and early gatherings of believers in homes is that they were devoted to studying Scripture and the Apostles teaching (Acts 2:42).
Support one another	We also know these early small groups were generous with one another and shared their possessions with those in need (Acts 2:44–45). In short, they cared for each other and this included not only believers, but also people in the community.
Pray for one another	Scripture also tells us these small groups gathered together for prayer (Acts 2:42) and they even met late at night to pray for one another during a crisis (Acts 12:12).
Share meals together	We also know these small groups opened their homes to one another and practiced hospitality. Often, these gatherings were in the evening and included food (Acts 2:46).



Application

Since the beginning of the church, fifty days after the death of Jesus, the purpose of small groups hasn’t changed. God’s people gather together to meet in homes so they can do the same thing that groups have always done. This is why we want to *share our lives, study God’s Word, support one another and serve our community*. If this was good enough for the early church, shouldn’t this work for us too? These are the four essentials of every small group. These four essentials give cohesion between groups and provide a common direction for our church. Similar to the early church, these four essentials define who we are and what we do in small groups.

We’re not just a church with small groups, we are a church of small groups. As a church, we are committed to the priority of small groups. We believe small groups are the best place for sustained spiritual growth to occur. This is also how a large church feels small as we move from rows to circles as we share our lives, study God’s word, support one another and have opportunities to serve our community. This is why we put such an emphasis on small groups in our approach to ministry. Small groups are not a program or add-on to our church, they’re the heartbeat of our ministry. Together, we want to glorify God and make disciples. And small groups are critical to fulfilling our mission.

Here are the six reasons our church is committed to small groups:

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| 1) They are biblical | Acts 2:42–47 |
| 2) They foster love | John 13:34–35 |
| 3) They promote fellowship | 1 Thessalonians 2:8 |
| 4) They shepherd the whole church | Ephesians 4:11–12 |
| 5) They encourage the use of spiritual gifts | 1 Corinthians 12:14–27 |
| 6) They build strong and faithful leaders | 2 Timothy 2:1–2 |