

Leading Growth Group leaders

When a leader or pastor visits a small group it is essential that they consider what the purpose of the visit is about and what messages they leave. Too often pastors visit a small group and, without knowing it send exactly the opposite message to the group that they would like to send.

Many pastors will visit a growth group and take responsibility for the bible study thinking they are “modelling” best practice for the growth group and the leader. This may well be the case and is a reasonable reason for a pastor to lead the study, however let’s consider the other take outs from this approach.

It might be considered that the messages sent are:

- That the pastor knows how to lead a good bible study.
 - Does this also suggest that the appointed leader doesn’t? At best it could say that the leader is not as good as the pastor. Could it possibly communicate to the group that the minister doesn’t trust the leader?
 - Could it possibly send the message that it takes a degree in theology to truly be able to read and understand God’s word?
- If the pastor answers all the questions ... again it could provide evidence of how great the pastor is and...
 - Very little about the leader
 - Potentially undermines the leader

The mistake of prioritisation

In most cases where the pastor or leader takes over the meeting they are making the mistake of prioritising the quality of the current meeting (the 2% of meetings where they are present) over the quality of all future meetings conducted by the leader (the 98% of meetings when they are not present. The leader has potentially missed a fantastic leadership and coaching opportunity.

One of the key requirements for the church leader / pastor is to equip leaders of growth groups as they minister to / disciple members of the congregation. Consider... how will the pastor know:

- How well the growth leader knows their bible?
- How well they lead a study?
- How they treat or honour God’s Word? Whether they sit under God’s Word or manipulate it to reinforce their own agenda?
- The strengths of the leader?
- The development needs of the leader?

Whilst there are other ways to find out some of the above, observation of the leader in action is a golden opportunity (a gift) to learn about the leader and to understand their development needs. There are very few opportunities to learn so much about a leader in one event. Following the meeting (within a week) the pastor / leader has a golden opportunity to coach the group leader – encouraging them with what they did well and identifying the key areas for improvement. Good coaching will have a significant impact on the group leader’s capability and motivation over the coming weeks / months (when the pastor is not able to be present).

NB. It is acknowledged that the meeting will always be influenced by the attendance of the pastor / leader however with some skill and experience the pastor / leader can minimise this impact sufficiently to be able to gain an impression of how the leader operates during a ‘normal’ meeting.

The importance of messaging

Assuming that the growth group leader is reasonable, sitting in on the growth group is a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate trust and to endorse them in front of their group. Think about how this is done:

- By supporting / encouraging the leader to run the bible study and lead the meeting (I trust you as a leader with scripture, prayer, leading this group and discipling the individual members);
- By letting the leader deal with any questions (perhaps this demonstrates an even higher level of trust?);
- By explaining to the group that you are here to support their leader and keen to see them lead the group.

A few Tips

Here are a few tips for how a Pastor might make the most out of visiting a Growth Group and encouraging the leader:

- Ensure that you and the growth group leader have shared expectations of what your intentions are for the night. Some suggestions might be to make clear:
 - Your intention is to support and encourage the leader and to see them in action. To this extent you would love to meet with the leader afterwards (within a week) to give them some feedback and encouragement.
 - You would like the group to know that the leader has the full support so it would be good for you to be able to speak at the start and explain why you are here. (NB they should be confident that you wish to promote them in front of the group and not undermine them).
 - Because you want the group to know that you support and trust the leader to lead you do not want to take over the study / devotion and you do not want to take over any of the questions. You could make it clear that you are happy to answer questions but only if asked by the group leader. (It may be helpful to explain how you plan to do this).
 - You might ask for some time to present something or explain something that only you, as the church leader, can do.
- Come prepared to present something which you as the church leader can only do. This might include:
 - Explaining the church mission or plan, explain the things across the church that you are thankful for, the issues that keep you up at night etc. NB - this is a real opportunity for you to build church wide leadership.
- During the formal parts of the meeting, work to be an active supporter of the leader eg
 - You might sit across from the leader so that as the leader leads you are not in the vision of the members.
 - It is amazing the power you have through your eyes. When people look to you it is a simple task to smile and then turn your head and eyes to devote your attention to the leader. The people will follow your gaze to the leader. It is the same for questions – simply turn your head to the leader (having already made it clear to the leader that this is what you will do). From time to time you may need to say something like “that’s a terrific question... what do you think John (insert growth group leader’s name).
 - NB. Of course nodding smiling etc is a clear demonstration of support for the leader.
- Take the time to mix with the group before and after the meeting. This is a golden opportunity to meet with people. It is amazing how well meeting with people at their growth group is received by individuals and they feel like they have had one to one personal time with you. This is a very effective way of meeting with the congregation.