

TWO SMALL GROUP PRACTICES

There are practices that we can engage in, that open the way to deeper fellowship or shared life with God and others.

(1) LISTENING - what kind of listening?

Develop the practice of a listening heart. Listening with one ear to heaven and one ear (and eye) to the person speaking.

- What is the person saying?
- What are they not saying?
- What might the Holy Spirit be saying?

Learn to catch yourself when you are not present to the person. Be careful of 'addictive helpfulness': we can have a default helpfulness that prevents us from being present in the moment.

Invite group members to do the same. We are learning together to listen for what God might be saying through one another. This kind of listening requires a slower pace.

Something practical to encourage listening to one another and listening to the Holy Spirit:

Each group meeting, light a candle and place it so that everyone can see it. Let the group know that at the end of the group time you will ask the group members to nominate the person who spoke the least to blow out the candle. (If it's a men's group buy a black candle or sit around a fire pit with a container of water to finish?)

(2) QUESTIONS – what kind of questions?

What we are referring to here is the questions people ask. When someone asks a question, there is a natural tendency to want to answer the question straight away (sometimes many people want to answer the question). Sometimes our questions are better off not being answered right away (and sometimes not at all).

What do you mean?

God is often at work in us in relation to the questions we have, and He wants us to come to Him and continue to come to Him with our questions – through relationship. A Small Group (and intentional spiritual relationships) is a great place to help nurture this in the lives of one another: *"How are you going with that question that you posed a few weeks ago?"*

Skill: Learn the power of a 'Wondering Question':

What is a wondering question? A wondering question is a question we ask in response to someone sharing something or asking a question. A wondering question is open ended: "As I have been listening to you, I wonder ...?" Don't ask them to try to answer the question in the moment, let them go away and bring the wondering question before God in prayer and then feedback next time the group meets.

BOTH OF THESE 'SKILLS' (LISTENING AND ASKING QUESTIONS) REQUIRE A SLOWER PACE THAN MANY GROUPS MIGHT BE USED TO.

This is not just the role of the Small Group Leader. Share this sheet with your group and learn over time how to practice them together. This will take intentionality each time your group meets. *For example:* after sharing the practices with your Small Group, remind them at the start of each subsequent group meeting and encourage the group to intentionally practice them (don't be concerned if you hear silence - it takes time and courage to learn).

THE REALITY OF LEADING A SMALL GROUP

I know what some of you are thinking: "these practices - I can't do that, these are my peers, I'm too young, I'm too old, this is too difficult. I didn't sign up for this." If this is you, you are in very good company. Virtually every person in the Bible that God worked in and through had the same reservations.

While we might get better at these skills, we won't always get it right and we will never master them - and that's the point. This is the way God works, in order that we learn more and more to rely on Him.

God is in the process of forming and transforming us as we lead. We don't have all the answers (or skills). We don't have it altogether with God and with others.

What do we have? What we have is what Isaiah expressed in chapter 6 of the book of Isaiah. After confessing his unworthiness, he says "*here am I send me,*" here am I use me. God works in and through our obedience - and like Abraham and Isaac in Genesis chapter 22, the blessings and life in all its fullness (John 10:10) comes on the other side of obedience.

God stretches us to strengthen us, and strengthens us to stretch us.

