

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members to accept:

1. that the Church is God's dwelling on earth and God's instrument to extend the kingdom of God on earth
2. that the Church has been given the commandment to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Meditation

Worship is to dedicate yourself to a life-style that honours God.

Theme: To live out a life-style to the honour of God

Read the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

Psalm 15:1-5

¹ LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary?
Who may live on your holy hill?
² He whose walk is blameless
and who does what is righteous,
who speaks the truth from his heart
³ and has no slander on his tongue,
who does his neighbour no wrong
and casts no slur on his fellowman,
⁴ who despises a vile man
but honours those who fear the LORD,
who keeps his oath
even when it hurts,
⁵ who lends his money without usury
and does not accept a bribe against the innocent.
He who does these things
will never be shaken.

What characterises a Christian life-style?

- he behaves in a blameless way
- he speaks the truth
- he does no harm to people
- he does not slander or gossip
- he does not approve, praise or explain away the evil behaviour of people, but rather abhors it
- he honours people who fear (trust in) God

- he remains faithful to his promises
- he helps the needy without making a profit
- he is incorruptible

The emphasis is on God's promise:
"He who does these things will never be shaken."

3. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to dedicate himself (in one or two sentences) to a life-style that will bring honour to God.

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

The theme for this meeting is: The Church

Read or explain in your own words.

1. The Church is not a building of stones, but a community of people (a spiritual house) in whom God lives through his Spirit (Ephesians 2:21-22).
2. The Church is not a company with directors, but a family (household) of God with a Father, brothers and sisters (Ephesians 2:19; 3:15).
3. The Church is not merely an organisation directed from the outside by human goals, policies and rules, but an organism (Ephesians 1:22-23) directed from the inside by God's Word and God's Spirit.
4. The Church is not a herd of cattle driven against their will by cowboys, but a flock of sheep that willingly follow their shepherds (1 Peter 5:2).
5. The Church is not an exclusive national community, but an inclusive international community (Romans 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-18; Colossians 3:11).
6. The Church is not only on earth, but also in heaven. The Church on earth is called the militant Church (cf. Revelation 12:13-17) and the part of the Church in heaven is called the triumphant Church (cf. Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 12:22-23).
7. The Church is not a completed reality yet, but will be a complete and perfect reality at Christ's second coming. Then the wedding of the Lamb with his Bride will take place.

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

Theme: The Church

- Day 1 Ephesians 2:11-22
The Church is a group of people in whom the Spirit of God lives
- Day 2^{BS} Ephesians 4:1-16
The job description of a congregation
- Day 3 1 Corinthians 12:1-11
The different tasks and gifts of members of the congregation
- Day 4 1 Corinthians 12:12-28
The Church is a Body with different members
- Day 5 John 10:1-16.
The Church is one flock with one Shepherd
- Day 6 1 Peter 2:4-10
The Church is God's people with believers in every nation
- Day 7 Ephesians 5:25-32
The Church is the Bride of Christ
- Day 8 Ephesians 1:15-23
The Church is the fullness of Christ
- Day 9 Acts 2:37-47
The first congregation among the Jews
- Day 10 Acts 10:24-35
The first congregation among the Gentiles

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.
If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: The characteristics of the Church

- Which different meanings does the word 'church' (Greek: ekklesia) have in the Bible?
- Which of the 6 pictures of the Church in the New Testament do you like best? Why?
- What is the relationship between Christ and the Church?
- What is the relationship between functions and forms in the Church?
- What are some examples of functions and forms in the Church?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following questions and record their answers:

- "In which aspect do you need to change your view of the Church?"
- "How much do the forms in your congregation express the truths in the Bible?"

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review of previous Bible verses

Let pairs of group members review each other's previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH Matthew 18:20

For where two or three
come together in my name,
there I am with them.

Matthew 18:20 (NIV)

3. Review of the Bible books

The last 6 letters of Paul, the 8 general letters and 1 apocalypse: 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1&2 Peter, 1&2&3 John, Jude, Revelation.

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

Theme: The job description of a congregation

1. Bible Study

Make use of the 5 step Bible Study method and study:

Ephesians 4:1-16

¹As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

⁷But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. ⁸This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men (Psalm 68:18)”
⁹(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions or: the depths of the earth? ¹⁰He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

¹²to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

2. Emphasis

- Ephesians 4:11-16 is the basis for this discipleship course.
- Ephesians 4:12 is the key verse (cf. the title).
- Ephesians 4:1-16 contains the 7 goals for building up a congregation.

3. Explanation for the group leader

4:1-3. Goal 1. Live out the Christian life.

The emphasis is on urging Christians to walk (behave) worthy of God’s calling.

The Christian life is characterised by 7 virtues: humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, love, unity and peace.

4:4-6. Goal 2. Keep the unity within diversity among Christians.

The emphasis is on God’s will: that the Church (Body of Christ) maintains unity within diversity and not within uniformity.

There must be a diversity of spiritual gifts, a diversity of tasks (ministries) and a diversity in how God calls and uses different Christians (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). The

Bible does not acknowledge a diversity of denominations! The Bible emphasis the unity of the Body of Christ. There are 7 aspects of this unity:

➤ *First: one Body, one Spirit and one hope.*

The one world-wide Church is the place where God (Christ) lives and works through his Spirit (cf. Ephesians 2:19-22). He guarantees a fantastic hopeful future in which all Christians will share.

➤ *Second: one Lord, one faith and one baptism.*

All Christians are baptised with one Holy Spirit into the one Body of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-13), confess the same faith in Jesus Christ and his Word, and live under the sovereign reign of the same Lord Jesus Christ within his kingdom.

➤ *Third: one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

The God of the Bible is one God and he reigns over all Christians, works out his plan through them and lives in them through his Holy Spirit.

The unity of the Church on the earth is anchored in the unity of the Triune God in heaven. This unity among Christians is visibly demonstrated by Christians worshipping the same God, having the same Saviour of sins and having the same Holy Spirit dwelling within them. Christians have the same faith, love and hope!

4:7-11. Goal 3. Supervise the functioning of grace and spiritual gifts.

The emphasis is on the diversity of gracious gifts (Greek: charis) which Christ has given to his followers at his ascension and enthronement in heaven.

‘The grace’ does not refer to the grace given to save those who believe in Christ, but rather the grace given to equip Christians for their tasks. Such grace may be expressed in loving Jesus Christ wholeheartedly, in forgiving another person’s serious offence against you, or in doing a special (difficult) ministry for Christ in the world. The word ‘grace’ is not the Greek word ‘charismata’, but may include ‘the spiritual gifts’ (Greek: charismata). This diversity of grace (and spiritual gifts) in the unity of the Body is very necessary to cause the Church to grow and to equip the Christians for their work of service.

Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:28-30, Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Peter 4:10-11 summarise a number of spiritual gifts. Precisely the diversity of these gifts enhances the unity of the Body, because every Christian has an ability to serve others and at the same has needs that can only be met by the service of others.

Some members in the Body have received gifts (verse 11) that are able to equip others for their work of service in the Body (verse 12).

There are three important truths to remember with respect to spiritual gifts:

- First: Christians need to recognize and acknowledge that spiritual gifts are not products of human ingenuity or ability, but are gifts given by Jesus Christ.
- Second: Christians need to regard their own spiritual gift as only one of many and moreover limited in scope (verse 7), because the gifts are apportioned, measured.
- Third: Christians need to use their spiritual gift, not to enhance their own glory, but to serve other people, to equip Christians to serve in a particular ministry, to build up the Body of Christ (Church) and to bring glory only to God. The emphasis should not be on the spiritual gift, but on the Giver, Jesus Christ.

4:13a,16. Goal 4. Build up the mutual relationships of Christians.

The emphasis is on the unity within the relationships. This unity may not be enforced from the outside (e.g. by belonging to a particular denomination, or by undergoing a particular ceremony, or by having a particular religious experience, or by following a particular leader, etc.) (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1-4), but needs to arise from the inside: from the same faith and the same knowledge.

All Christians should have the same objective Christian Faith, e.g. confess the same truths of the whole will of God in the Bible (Acts 20:27; cf. 1 Corinthians 4:6) and keep the same pattern of sound teaching (Romans 6:17; 2 Timothy 1:13; Titus 1:9).

All Christians should also have the same subjective knowledge of Jesus Christ, e.g. have the same personal, close and confidential relationship with Jesus Christ (John 17:3). Thus, the mutual relationships among Christians should be based on a personal relationship with their Saviour and Lord and on knowing and obeying his teachings in the Bible.

Every Christian has the task to obey 'the one another responsibilities': to love one another, to carry one another's burdens, to teach one another, to build one another up, etc.

4:13b-15. Goal 5. Make Christians disciples of Jesus Christ.

The emphasis is on growth to maturity. All the Christians should participate in making others into disciples of Jesus Christ. Every Christian should do what he can: speak a word of encouragement, pray, share a testimony or participate in the teaching, etc. Every Christian also needs the exhortation and encouragement of the other Christians in order to grow spiritually, develop Christian character and to obey Christ wholeheartedly.

Maturity is not measured by completing a particular discipleship course with a possible diploma attached to it, but is measured by Christ likeness. Some visible results of maturity are: steadfastness of faith within trials; having a good grip on the sound teachings of the Bible; always speaking the truth in love; living and acting from personal biblical convictions and from sincere motives; involvement in Christian service (ministry) and cooperation with other Christians in building up the Body of Christ. This personal growth to greater maturity and Christ likeness continues throughout life.

4:11-12. Goal 6. Equip the Christians for works of service.

The emphasis is on equipping (training) every Christian for a special task within the Body (the worldwide Church) and also within the world outside the Body. Equipping is usually done by Christians who have received gifts of equipping (verse 11). Some of them may execute their task as an office in the congregation, but always under the supervision of the body of elders!

'An office' is a public service or task to which Christ and the elders of the congregation call someone to perform. He is officially appointed by the elders and receives (limited) authority to carry out his particular responsibility. Some examples of offices in the congregation are: elder, deacon, missionary, preacher, evangelist, shepherd (pastor), teacher, (discipleship) group leader, youth leader, SunDay school teacher, janitor, administrator, etc.

The offices of the congregation are definitely not limited to the leaders (the elders) of the congregation! Every Christian has also received an office of being 'a prophet', 'priest' and 'king' in his own circle of influence. The Church in the New Testament does not acknowledge an office of 'a bishop' (overseer) above the elders (Greek: presbyters). It also does not acknowledge an office of 'a pastor' (shepherd) above the elders. All offices in the congregation must be supervised by the body of elders!

Every Christian needs to be equipped for a specific task (ministry, which is not the same as an office). Every Christian needs to exercise his or her task within and without the worldwide Christian Church and not only in the local congregation. A Christians has a task in his family, in his neighbourhood, in his society, and possibly in a Christian organisation working with children, youth, students, foreigners, refugees, the poor and those who need pastoral care. He may also get involved in a task in a foreign country.

The Christians are equipped to do evangelism, make disciples, preach, teach, give pastoral care, serve, support, lead, etc. No individual Christian should remain passive within the congregation. Every member need to function within the Body of Christ, with his calling, his abilities and gifts, his opportunities and assigned tasks whether great or small.

In this way the Christian Church becomes an influential community in the world! Christians build up a healthy personal life, a good marriage and family, help to establish schools and hospitals, enhance justice in the community, write books, make video's, develop leisure time activities, etc. Every Christian becomes a worker who helps to establish the kingdom of God in the hearts and lives of others!

4:15-16. Goal 7. Direct the focus continually on Jesus Christ.

The emphasis is on Jesus Christ himself. The focus in the Church is not on the Holy Spirit, but of God in Christ (cf. John 16:13-15).

The focus is not on the spiritual gifts, but on the fruit of the Spirit (compare 1 Corinthians 1:7 with 3:1-4; Galatians 5:22-23).

The focus is not on the special functions or offices (verse 11), but on the task of building up the Body of Christ in the whole world (verse 12).

The focus is not on elders (leaders) ruling or lording it over the flock, but on elders setting an example by walking in the front and by serving the flock of Jesus Christ (Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

The focus is not on theological knowledge (cf. John 7:15-16; Acts 4:13; Ephesians 4:14; 1 Corinthians 8:1; Luke 10:26,28), but on personal knowledge of Jesus Christ and personal convictions based on the sound teaching of the Christian Faith (Titus 1:9).

The focus is not on position, but on Christ likeness (Ephesians 4:13).

The focus is not on speaking the truth without love (dogmatism) or on showing 'love' (involvement in social projects) without truth (sentimentalism). The focus is on speaking truth in love that makes one grow in all things into Christ (Ephesians 4:15).

The focus is not on organisation, but on growing and serving as an organism (a Body), of which Jesus Christ is the Head (4:16). The discipleship group should develop close and transparent relationships that really practise the one another responsibilities (cf. Lead42).

The focus is not on completing a discipleship course, but on being a disciple of Jesus Christ (cf. John 6:66-69).

The focus is on Jesus Christ (John 14:6; 16:14; Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 1:22-23; 1 Corinthians 2:2; Philippians 3:7-16; Colossians 1:15-18).

4. Practical applications

➤ *Equip discipleship group leaders.*

This is the need of the hour! One discipleship group leader is enough to start a movement!

- Instead of dividing the congregation into many small groups who have no one to lead them (that is organising from the top down), start yourself by training a small group of Christians to become disciples (that is, train people from the bottom up)!
- Set aside at least one year to train one group of disciples (no more than 8) (a group of 4 is better)!
- Select the best men and women for your first discipleship group. Paul taught Timothy to select people on the basis of their faithfulness and ability to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2). Jesus selected his disciples after at least one year of observing them and after much prayer (Mark 3:14-15; Luke 6:12-13).
- Train and equip this small discipleship group by meeting together, preferably once a week for two hours. You could make use of these same materials. Such a discipleship group functions as a team in which each member bears responsibility and accountability towards the others.
- After one year these disciples could each (or two-by-two) start a discipleship group of 4 to 6 people.
- The original discipleship group leader should continue to mentor, coach and encourage the new discipleship group leaders.

➤ *Small groups.*

By continuing to train and equip more and more disciples who could become discipleship group leaders, more and more people in the congregation are involved in a small discipleship group.

Eventually there will be enough trained small group leaders to lead all kinds of small groups in the congregation: growth groups, discipleship groups, care groups, accountability groups, evangelistic Bible Study groups, etc.). Small groups form the nucleus or backbone of the congregation, because everyone is involved in giving and receiving. Small groups contribute to involving everyone in the congregation.

➤ *Workshops.*

Organise regular workshops, say once every two months, alongside (or before/after) the worship service with a small group focussing on a particular subject, e.g. “What is the Church according to the Bible?” or “How should a Church be led according to the Bible?” Organise regular workshops. Workshops contribute to equipping the congregation.

➤ *District gatherings.*

Organise every second month a gathering of all the Christians living in a particular district. Meet in a house. Sing together (20 minutes); the elder of the district explains a very short passage from the Bible (5 minutes); discuss questions and answers about any subject (20 minutes); pray for one another and for others (15 minutes); and fellowship together. District gatherings contribute to the fellowship within the congregation.

➤ *Pastoral care groups.*

Shift the care for one another from the elders to small groups of say three persons each (1 Corinthians 12:25-26). Pastoral co-workers should take care of the difficult cases. Pastoral care groups contribute to the healing within the congregation.

➤ *Special projects.*

Your congregation could join with other congregations in a city-wide project, e.g. clean up the neighbourhood, an outing with the destitute, a Christmas meal for the poor, read and write courses for the illiterate, a sports club for the street youth, a social gathering for the elderly, etc. Special projects contribute to making Christians the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16).

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.