**Session 5 Outreach (Spiritual Gifts, Team Members, Open Chairs and Servant Evangelism)**

At its most basic, ministry is loving others. It is serving others with our God-given gifts and abilities. People receive more of God’s grace when they let the time, talents, and treasure given to them flow out to others. When this happens, growth groups—and by extension the larger Body of Christ—are strengthened and supported.

# Spiritual Gifts in Your Growth Group

A spiritual gift is a special enablement that God gives each believer, according to his grace, for the development of the Body of Christ. But these gifts aren’t given for our benefit. We are called to share them with others (Rom 12:6–8). Consequently, whatever spiritual gifts you have been given, God has already commissioned you by his Holy Spirit to give them away.

Spiritual gifts help believers discover their function in the overarching Body of Christ—their unique capacity to serve God and effectively advance his purposes in this world. Within a growth group, the collected gifts of all the participants create a roadmap detailing how the group can best experience God’s power, and how to minister most effectively. They also help growth group leaders empower participants to share the responsibilities for the group and turn its energy and focus outward, which keeps it healthy.

The following truths about spiritual gifts can help you discern their presence, develop their practice within your group, and deal with any misuses that spring up.

* Love is the source, substance, and goal of all spiritual gifts. It’s interesting that the “love chapter” (1 Corinthians 13) is couched right in the middle of the Apostle Paul’s discussion about spiritual gifts. So if you sense that a group member is exercising his or her spiritual gift in a non-loving way—such as being self-serving or manipulative—you have good reason to exercise caution and dig deeper.
* Spiritual gifts are best cultivated and best used within the environment of the Fruits of the Spirit. This fruit includes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When your group demonstrates these ideals, each member will find it much easier to identify and use their spiritual gifts.
* Spiritual gifts are not for our glory. Spiritual gifts should not bring attention to the people exercising them, but only to the giver of those gifts: Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 2:1–2).
* The use of spiritual gifts should produce peace and understanding. When used properly, these gifts will not “overtake” anyone or become a distraction within the group (1 Corinthians 14:30–33).
* Sowing spiritual gifts produces a harvest of community. There is a gathering effect in the use of spiritual gifts. When exercised properly, they bring people together and bring them to God. The fruit of spiritual gifts should be harmony, peace, clarity, and empowerment. If you don’t see this good fruit in your group, you’ll need to examine the tree more closely (Luke 6:43–44).

# Empowering Group Members to Minister

Empowering your group members means helping them do what God has created and commissioned them to do. It’s like holding a mirror up to their faces allowing them to see themselves the way the Lord sees them: as his own children. It means constantly making them aware that you are with them and for them.

A primary way you can empower your members to minister is to ask each person (or couple) in the group to champion a specific aspect of Growth group life in keeping with their spiritual gifts. Think of yourself as a synergist who is deploying gifts in such a way that people are built up and God’s purposes are fulfilled within your group.

To do this, begin by asking these questions:

* **As the group leader, what responsibilities can I safely release to others?**
* **How can I determine the group member’s spiritual gifts?**
* **Which spiritual gifts are represented in my group members?**

Once you’ve gained an understanding of the possible ministry opportunities/positions in your group, the next step is to compare those opportunities with the spiritual gifts of your group members to see where people are best equipped to serve.

Your end goal is to develop group members to “own” an entire position of responsibilities within the group. This way, one person oversees all the fellowship activities, another oversees the group’s evangelism, another oversees discipleship between group members, etc. Still, be cautious of moving too quickly. When empowering your members for service, it’s best to start them off with shorter-term responsibilities that you both know they can handle. Hopefully, these responsibilities will evolve into longer-term roles.

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| Role: Care Coordinator (e.g. a host, organize care meals, prayer partner) |
| Spiritual giftsEncouragement, Mercy | Sample responsibilitiesHost meetings; send reminder e-mails/calls; utilize phone lists; organize meals (hospitality); plan celebrations for birthdays and anniversaries; coordinate social activities; set up the home/refreshment rotation. Implement care meals for births and deaths. |
|  |
| Role: Teaching Coordinator (e.g. a co-leader, discussion leader, prayer coordinator) |
| Spiritual gifts Prophecy, Teaching  | Sample responsibilitiesPerform research on topics for Bible study; function as a resource-provider to help people grow; regularly help facilitate Bible studies and discussion; encourage prayer, worship, and spiritual encouragement; highlight other growth opportunities within the church. |
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| Role: Team Leader (e.g. ministry connector, plan events, keep details) |
| Spiritual giftsAdministration, Teaching  | Sample responsibilitiesEncourage the discovery of each participant’s spiritual gifts and involvement in fitting ministry teams; enlist participants for serving opportunities within the group. Keep attendance and up to date contact info. Schedule calendar and reservations. Order resources and curriculm. |
|  |
| Role: Recruiting Coordinator (e.g. group outreach, invitations, group growth) |
| Spiritual giftMercy, Encouragement  | Sample responsibilitiesEncourage and equip participants to invite unsaved friends to the group; spearhead outreach events or gatherings; integrate prayer for the nations and cultivate an external-focus within the group. Continually connect with Growth Track to incorporate new group members. |

As you lead your growth group on this path of spiritual-gift discovery and deployment, the commitment level of your group members will rise dramatically. Your group will become more outwardly-focused, selfless, and effective in sharing Christ through their words and actions. Participants will experience personal spiritual growth and the blessings that come with being a functioning part of biblical community. You are also creating a built-in system for leadership development, which will ensure balanced and healthy growth for your group—and your church—in the future.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind when empowering your group for ministry:

* **It’s best that you share with the group what you are doing and why.** Explain what you hope to see accomplished, why you want to see it accomplished, ways you plan on helping, and how each group member can control the process.
* **Make it clear that there is a role for each person, and that any role can be shared or split up over time.** Present small responsibilities at the beginning and let them grow into roles over time.
* **Let people know that it’s okay for them to “test-drive” a role for a season and then shift to another, if desired.** In fact, this is a great way to help participants find the right fit. Start functionally and formalize the roles over time—communicate that nobody needs to worry about getting locked into a role they don’t enjoy.
* **Spiritual maturity will factor into what roles members will gravitate to.** It will also factor into their rate of growth. Give it time—ownership is an organic process.
* **Be conscious of your own expectations about members’ progress and performance in their respective roles.** Instead of pushing maturity, just be ready with lots of affirmation and grace—especially as people take new steps.

**Outreach**

Evangelism is sharing God’s grace with others just as he shared it with us through his Son, Jesus Christ. His journey to the Cross paved a road for us to go and tell others the Good News. His bodily resurrection provided the enduring impetus on our hearts so that we *must* go, making the life of a “non-going believer” not only incompatible, but intolerable. Thus, evangelism is both a heart attitude and a lifestyle.

We go because God first sent. We reach out because he first loved us. We become all things to all people so that by all possible means some might be saved. Those who desire to share the gospel with others are responding to the aching heart of our Heavenly Father who is constantly in search of lost ones.

Did you know that over 80 percent of all new church members began attending their church because of a friendship with a member of that congregation? Relationships are the leading factor in bringing people to a place where their lives can be touched by God’s grace and changed forever. For this reason, growth groups play a key role in reaching spiritually-unconvinced people with the gospel.

Think of growth groups as ready-to-go outreach teams. They serve as training grounds for the meat-and-potatoes believers in a congregation—empowering them to grow in their faith and equipping them with the tools needed to be witnesses for Christ. Growth groups also provide visitors with more chances to develop relationships and connection within a church. In other words, they not only multiply a church’s outlets for evangelism, but also the entrances into that church’s life-changing community.

Finally, growth groups can be the initiating center of outreach for many believers who would have otherwise become stagnant if left on their own. They provide a natural way for believers to engage in relational evangelism with friends, neighbors, coworkers, and family members already within their sphere of influence. These people are the low-hanging fruit that believers are often intimidated to “pick” because of the personal nature of the relationships. However, the combination of groups and servant evangelism provides a way of outreach that is less threatening and more natural.

**Open Chairs**

In every Growth Group we want the member to understand there is an “open chair,” this chair is always reserved for the people/person who needs to be invited and connected to the group and it’s ministry. With this in mind don’t just give permission to group members to invite their friends—tell them you *want* them to invite their friends. Explain how the growth group community can be instrumental in helping each member fulfill his or her calling to make disciples and bring biblical truths to life (1 Peter 2:9–10).

Prayer is the first step to encouraging a missional mindset and turning the attention of the group outward. Focus especially on praying for people who already live in the relational circles of group members. Learn about and pray for the neighborhood where you meet, the needs in your community, and ways your church is already reaching out to meet those needs.

# The Power of Servant Evangelism

Servant evangelism is the practice of reaching people for Christ through loving acts of service. Generally, these acts are given as gifts to people within the community who lack the time, physical ability, or finances to accomplish them alone. They are rarely accompanied by explicit presentations of the gospel. Instead, recipients of servant evangelism witness the love of Christ demonstrated through the lives and work of the believers who serve them. This non-threatening approach to sharing the Good News is conducive to groups because the scope of many projects requires a team of participants.

When deciding which projects your group will participate in, the basic idea is to match the specific resources and talents within your group to a specific need in your group’s community. (If you need some practical suggestions, [ServantEvangelism.com](http://www.servantevangelism.com) is a great resource.) Some projects work better than others depending on the size and personality of the group, so start by presenting a list of viable options to your members. Working together come to a consensus on what will work best for the group as a whole.

If you are just starting out, consider doing one servant evangelism project per season of your group life. Ideally, it should take about as long as one of your usual gatherings. When the day of your project arrives, remind your members to be real and convey that what they’re doing comes with no strings attached.

Because discipleship necessarily involves a commitment to others, servant evangelism is a great way to prevent a group from turning in on itself and degenerating. As Steve Sjogren has said: “Groups that don’t reach outside of themselves, don’t last long. They typically turn inward and become consumed with the stress of their own interpersonal problems. Relational conflict will eventually erode a group from the inside out.”

On the other hand, when your group takes seriously Jesus’ command to love others, participants will experience greater connection. Evangelism leads to greater group cohesion and helps increase the faith of group members.

As the leader, if you don’t take the lead in cultivating an outward-orientation to your group’s life, it is very unlikely that somebody else will. The responsibility to get things started falls to you. So let people know from the beginning that evangelism will be an important part of your small-group’s life that will ensure everyone’s experience in the group is healthy and life-changing.