

Small Groups Make A Big Difference

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Exodus 18:1-26 NIV Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the Lord had brought Israel out of Egypt. ² After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her ³ and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, "I have become a foreigner in a foreign land"; ⁴ and the other was named Eliezer, for he said, "My father's God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh." ⁵ Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, together with Moses' sons and wife, came to him in the wilderness, where he was camped near the mountain of God. ⁶ Jethro had sent word to him, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons." ⁷ So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent. ⁸ Moses told his father-in-law about everything the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians for Israel's sake and about all the hardships they had met along the way and how the Lord had saved them. ⁹ Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the Lord had done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. ¹⁰ He said, "Praise be to the Lord, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹ Now I know that the Lord is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly." ¹² Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God. ¹³ The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening. ¹⁴ When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?" ¹⁵ Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will. ¹⁶ Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and instructions." ¹⁷ Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. ¹⁸ You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. ¹⁹ Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. ²⁰ Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. ²¹ But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. ²² Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. ²³ If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied." ²⁴ Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. ²⁵ He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. ²⁶ They served as judges for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but the simple ones they decided themselves.

John Maxwell makes three observations about the value of being part of a Life Group.

I. Small Groups can help the people.

- A. The people were being worn out by waiting.
- B. Moses was being worn out by the demands.

C. With the changes suggested by Jethro, the people “went home satisfied.”

II. Small Groups can help the pastors.

A. Verse 20 indicates Moses’ responsibility was teaching, not primarily as caregiver.

B. Verse 23 indicated this strategy would enable Moses to “stand the strain.”

C. **Acts 6:1-7 NIV** In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.” ⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

D. This enabled the spiritual leaders to remain true to their primary task.

E. When pastors are released to The Lord, the congregation can rise to new levels of ministry—as seen in the lives of Stephen and Phillip.

III. Small Groups can help the purposes.

A. This system worked for Israel in the Wilderness, and was put in place for the people of God when they were serving under a King.

B. This enabled the Israelites to live in peace, and to become representatives of God’s Kingdom to all the world.

C. This enables a church to exalt, equip, and evangelize.

D. In Acts 6:7, we see the church growing and the Kingdom expanding.

IV. Christian Life Lessons

A. Churches stop growing for three primary reasons:

1. Spiritual barriers (positive and negative)
2. Natural barriers
3. Needs are no longer being met.

B. Pastors are equippers.

1. Elders (Presbuteroi)...who lead by example and wisdom.
2. Overseers (Episcopoi)...who provide accountability and direction.
3. Shepherds (Poimen)...who feed, lead, and protect.

C. Churches need to find their rhythm of ministry.