

Lesson 10: CARE Group Principles

Introduction

In the last lesson we looked at the biblical foundations for small groups. After this clear biblical evidence it is not a question *if* the church needs small groups, but rather *how* we can organize and lead a small group so that people will get to know Jesus. Now this thought isn't new. But unfortunately there are few small groups that lead people to Jesus. But when we analyze growing small groups we see that they follow certain principles. It doesn't happen by accident if a small group succeeds or not, but rather depends on them following the basic principles for small groups. In this lesson we will study these CARE group principles and thus discover how these small groups can become successful missionary cells.

However, before we start looking at these practical elements for running a CARE group it is vital to understand that the crucial factor for the success of the CARE groups is the spiritual life of the core group members. It wasn't any different for the early Christian church. Before Jesus' ascension He gave His disciples important instructions and a promise. Read Jesus' words and jot down the command and promise.



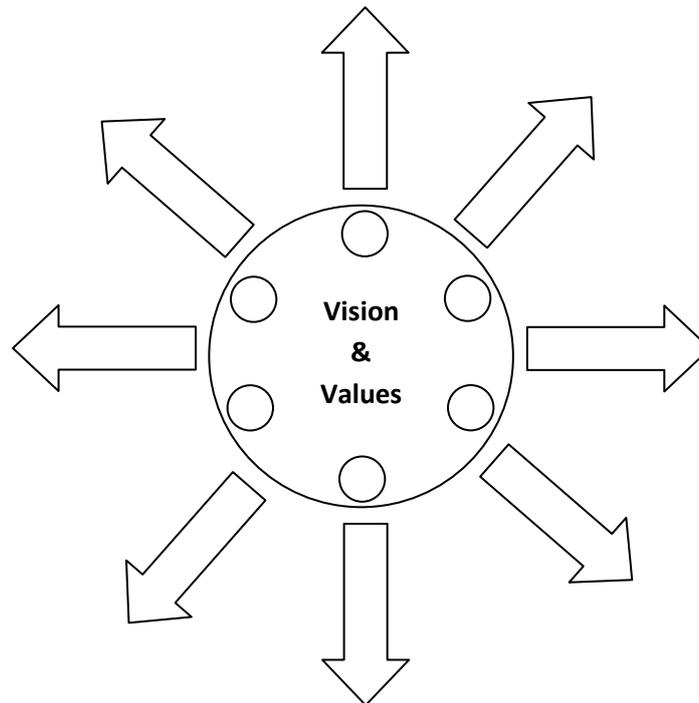
Acts 1:4,5,8

The Basic Requirement

Jesus gave them the command to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, but He made it clear that they could never do it in their own power. They needed the fullness of the Holy Spirit in their own lives in order to be able to reach others. The fire had to burn in their own hearts before they could spark a fire in others. Before we think about the practical questions of running a CARE group, this fact must be clear! The method alone doesn't make the difference! Not until we personally have a living relationship with Jesus and are filled with the Holy Ghost can we pass on the fire of faith to others.

The Power of a small group

It is a sociological principle that a small group with a clear vision and strong values can exercise great power over its environment. If the vision is clear and the values are strong, the small group will have an even greater influence on the social environment. The following figure illustrates this principle.



God's Vision and Values for Study Groups

This principle works in every area of society, but how much more when a small group is dedicated to Christ, embraces *His* vision, and obeys *His* values! We studied in detail this vision and the values in lesson 1 (God's Plan for His Church). The more consistently a small group follows God's vision and values, the more influence they will have on the people in their surroundings.

More specifically, if a small group of Adventists, who are ...

- genuinely converted,
- filled with the Holy Spirit,
- driven by Jesus' love,
- established in the Bible,
- persistent in prayer,
- united in their values and goals,
- joined in love,
- and willing to learn

... unite as a core group for the purpose of starting a CARE group, great things will happen! Jesus promised that He would work through His followers when they consecrate themselves for His service!

This spiritual attitude must grow.

This spiritual attitude is a basic prerequisite for successful CARE groups. In order for this attitude to grow it is important that the core team meets regularly to pray with each other, to learn, and to plan before any guests are invited. For example, this can take place as a discipleship group where the participants study topics, which strengthen their spiritual lives and teaches them how to establish a CARE group.

Basic Principles

Having laid this foundation we will now explore the basic principles that are important for the success of a small group. These principles are easily illustrated with a hand.

- The thumb can be covered up by the four fingers and represents **fellowship**.
- The index finger points out the direction and represents spiritual **leadership**.
- The middle finger is the largest finger and represents the priority of the study group, namely **evangelism**.
- The ring finger represents **the covenant of the core group members to be mutually accountable to one another**.
- The little finger needs to grow, therefore it represents **training**.



Principle #1 Fellowship

CARE groups start with the elementary needs which every person has in his heart. Everyone desires fellowship, appreciation, love, acceptance, and the sense of belonging. If we want to reach people, then we have to meet these legitimate needs. Jesus did it exactly the same way! It isn't sufficient to only proclaim the right message. In order for people to make a decision for Jesus they not only need doctrines, but also fellowship with believers. When these two things, message and fellowship, aren't addressed, people do not tend to make a solid decision for Christ. CARE groups create the ideal environment to connect the biblical message with fellowship. They create a familiar, warm atmosphere in which the needs of our friends will be met. They experience our fellowship, observe our faith, and learn to trust us. Thereby they become open to the biblical message.



Jesus has made this connection between faith and fellowship very plain. Read the following statements from Jesus and note what importance love and fellowship have in the conversion of a person.

John 13:34,35: _____

John 17:20,21: _____

Lived Fellowship in a CARE Group

Real fellowship creates an environment in the CARE group where people can get to know Jesus and grow in faith. It was this way in the early church and it hasn't changed to this day. Here are a few practical tips which show what this fellowship can look like.

- Meet regularly: It is important that a CARE group meets at least once a week. If the group meets less often than this it will be much more difficult to have real fellowship.
- Eat meals together: It is best to start a CARE group by eating a meal together because this creates an atmosphere of comfortable fellowship.
- Be involved in each other's lives: Fellowship isn't limited to Bible reading, singing, and prayer. We really want to take part in each other's lives.
- Share: In the CARE group we speak openly about what is going on in our lives and pray for and with each other.
- Celebrate together: Remember birthdays and other important occasions.
- Study the Bible: The Bible study is very practical and applicable to real life so that we can speak about our life and take part in the lives of the others.
- Communicate: Continue to communicate outside of CARE group, for example with phone calls, emails, text messages, etc.
- Get together: We spend leisure time together, for example on excursions, at birthday celebrations, at film or game evenings, etc.
- If someone needs help we tackle the problem together and help each other.

Basically everything we learned in lesson 5 (Winning Friends) about winning a person's heart and trust come into play here. Review the practical tips in that lesson.

Principle #2 Leadership

In order for a study group not to focus on itself, it needs a spiritual leader, who understands and keeps an eye on the vision, goals, and values of the CARE group and leads the group in that direction. In lesson 15 we will study in detail what it means to lead a CARE group.

Principle #3 **Evangelism**

The members of the core group must agree that the priority of the CARE group is to win people for Jesus. A CARE group which doesn't focus on evangelism will sooner or later fall asleep. It is absolutely necessary that a CARE group gears everything toward its goal of winning people for Jesus. We will study in detail how this can be done in lesson 14.

Principle #4 **Accountability**

In order for a CARE group to reach its goals it needs commitment, dependability, and a sense of responsibility in the core group. We can't expect these things from our guests. But we expect them from the Adventist members of the core group. It is important that we covenant with one another to...

- attend the CARE group meetings regularly and on time.
- support the CARE group and to assist with our talents.
- pray regularly for the CARE group and its guests.
- invite friends to the CARE group.
- genuinely testify of our faith.
- nurture the fellowship and support the unity of the core team.

Principle #5 **Training**

Training the CARE group leader and the members of the core team is a key to the success of the CARE group. We have to start here when we want to establish a new CARE group. When a leader is trained in the different areas of CARE group work, he/she then has the responsibility of training the other members of the core team. This can take place when, for example, he shows them how to lead out a Bible study and gives them the opportunity to try it out.

Challenge

1. Continue to pray for the 5 people that God has put on your heart.
2. Create a joint prayer list with the names of friends, who you want to invite to your CARE group.
3. Plan a joint activity to which you can also invite your friends. For example this could be a hike, a film evening, a game evening or a meal together.

