

NCD Pathway – Holistic Small Groups part 1

In the last two articles the topic I addressed was Loving Relationships. This time we will talk about Holistic Small Groups.

Often the question I am asked is, “What is a Holistic Small Group?”

All the questions in the survey relate to the degree to which the small groups in the church are places where “individual believers can find intimate community, practical help and intense spiritual interaction” (*Color Your World with NCD*, p116). The higher a question’s result, the greater its contribution to groups being “holistic”.

The questions are included in the survey because it has been shown to a high degree of accuracy in international statistical terms that they distinguish healthy growing churches from those in decline. In effect, churches with high scores for these questions are more likely to be growing and vice versa.

The questions can be grouped into five main areas:

1. Essential foundations for growing meaningful relationships
2. Growing relational depth
3. Relevancy
4. Small group leader training
5. Growing in numbers not just maturity.

Let’s look at the first two areas as they are closely linked to Loving Relationships and it makes sense to continue on that path.

Two questions are linked to the essential foundations for growing meaningful relationships:

Q90 – In my small group we trust each other

Q65 – I am a member of a small group in which I feel at home.

Growing meaningful holistic relationships always depends on a foundation of trust which has been proven over time. Trust can be broken very quickly and easily but repairing that trust is agonisingly slow. Therefore, it is paramount that small group leaders have this in mind. If people “feel at home” they are more likely to open up about themselves. “Holistic” small groups will stand the test of time, close bonds and trusting loving relationships are built in groups that stay together, even through tough times.

This brings me to the next set of questions about growing relational depth.

Q49 – I am a member of a small group in our church where it is possible to talk about personal problems

Q34 – My small group helps me grow in my spiritual life

Q55 – I am a member of a group in our church where others will pray with me if I need it

In the first article on Loving Relationships I talked about “The relational onion” and how growing relationships are like peeling away the layers of an onion and the closer you get to the centre the softer they are.

When we think about our church and how we might be meeting the needs of the questions above, we may think questions 34 and 55 are a good example of a Sabbath school class, but could that be extended to meet the need in question 49? For some churches it might, but it is my experience that we can talk on Spiritual or theological topics but it would not involve me airing my personal problems.

On the flip side, we may have several social or evangelistic groups which often develop shallow relationships for a short time, but often never develop into something deeper or more meaningful for the members.

Don't misunderstand me as I believe these groups are important. To contemplate small groups which largely do not help members grow in their spiritual life can be quite helpful in thinking about the place of small groups in the overall health and growth of the church.

If you are to "make friends" with the people in your community or neighbourhood, the first thing you would do is get to know them, find out the things they enjoy doing and what you have in common. Spend time with them, two people meet two people, which is the beginnings of a small group. You will build a friendship, you will rely on each other, trust each other and eventually you will talk about Spiritual things. Share your story and offer to be with them and pray with them in hard times.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 – Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour. If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.