

How to Handle Seasons of Discouragement

by Rick Howerton

After the group exited our home one particular night, I welcomed some discouraging questions and deliberated on a few statements, "Should I really be a small group leader? *I couldn't have really heard from God when He asked me to take this group on. If I had I would be more effective a leader. Why am I not more sensitive to the needs of my group members? Do I really care about them? Am I incapable of getting the group to be authentic and open in conversation? Do I really know enough about the Bible to lead a small group?*"

It had been a tough night. During the Bible discussion time, no matter what I tried, I couldn't get the group to converse. When an individual did talk they simply regurgitated what someone else had told them before, another teacher's thoughts, what they'd heard in a sermon, or what "my dad used to tell me."

When prayer time came it was even more discouraging. I asked for prayer requests prefacing these essential minutes by stating that we should focus on our own personal needs. But the only thing I heard was to pray for a sick co-worker, our pastor, or a concern for a family member's health.

I did find out, however, during prayer time that a group member voiced that they'd been going through a really difficult life situation. They looked my direction as if to say, "Where were you? I needed you."

It felt like I had come up to bat with the bases loaded. The team needed just one more run to win the game. They had their eye on me—depending on me to hit the ball. My moment had arrived. Strike 1! Strike 2! Strike 3! I hadn't even fouled the ball off and it was as if I hadn't even taken a swing at it.

So my confidence was shot and bailing seemed like the only realistic thing to do. Surely there was someone who could lead the group better than me. And there certainly had to be someone waiting in the wings who could come to the plate and at least get on base. For sure God had been mistaken when He asked me to join the team of small group leaders.

Well, the truth is that every small group leader has times when they lose confidence in their leadership. But the greatest leaders are those who stay in the game and figure out how to deal with a lack of confidence and feelings of discouragement.

Over the years I've discovered ten things leaders might consider when they begin to lose confidence in themselves.

1. Realize where the attack is coming from and fight back. The Enemy knows that a discouraged leader is an ineffective leader. He is passionate about keeping you from believing that God can do something significant through you. Why? Because every wise small group leader leads people closer to Christ. Engage in battle with Satan. Go to God's Word, pray, and ask others to pray for you. Demand that the enemy get behind you. He has no power over you if you fight back "in Jesus' name."

2. Remember what God has done through you in the past. What you have accomplished in the past is a constant reminder of what God wants to do, needs to do, and will do through you in the future. Create files for notes of thanks, cards, and letters from people whose lives have been positively affected because of your leadership. Pull these out and read them when your confidence begins to go south.

3. Embrace the fact that you are not alone. Jesus is with you and is your model of leadership. Don't try to be a better you to your group members, strive to be more like Jesus for them. If you're being Jesus to your group members, you are most likely much more effective than you realize. Remember this... He too went through times of discouragement. Was his ministry effective? Of course.

4. Remember that small groups do best when everyone does his or her part. Find out the spiritual gifts of the people in your group. Allow them to do what they were made to do, and you do what you do best. You will seldom doubt your effectiveness if you're effective at what you're doing.

5. Get together with other leaders. Ask them if they've had these feelings. I'm sure you'll find that they have. In order to remain encouraged and growing, get together often to encourage one another, speak words of wisdom to each other, and to learn from one another.

6. Set aside a group meeting for evaluation of group life. Ask your group members to voice what you're doing well and what you can do better. You'll most likely find out that you are a much better leader than you believe you are. If you find out the opposite, don't bail out. Read, attend conferences, go to www.smallgroupexchange.com, www.smallgroups.com, or www.serendipityblog.com for leadership helps.

7. Meet with the individual spearheading the small group ministry at your church. If you're not doing a good job, he or she has most likely had complaints and should be able to give you some pointers that will help you be a better leader. If you are doing good work, he or she should encourage you and build you up.

8. Remember the moment you accepted the call to lead. If God called you, He has equipped you. You'll have a learning curve but if God directed you to lead a small group, you are or will become an effective leader. God places people in the right role to accomplish His work. He realizes there is much to be learned and it takes time, wins and losses to learn how to be a great leader.

9. Don't allow difficult situations to create feelings of insecurity. All leaders find themselves dealing with issues and situations that they cannot control or that they haven't dealt with in the past. We may botch the moment. But that doesn't mean we are poor leaders, it simply means we are to learn from the experience so we'll be better prepared for the same situation in the future. Consider difficult leadership moments as learning tools that God has handed you.

10. Allow Christ to be in control of your thoughts. When a leader begins to lack confidence in his leadership, it's easy to run through a mental list of poor calls made in the past, moments during group meetings when he was less sensitive, or group members who exited the group to join another group. The Enemy will use these thoughts to discourage and devastate you. When these negative thoughts come to mind, pray and replace them with God's Word.

Before long, you'll create a pattern of doing what Paul, another discouraged leader commanded of us: "...brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things." (Philip. 4:8) When you learn to do what Paul is expecting in this verse, you will seldom need to do numbers one through nine above.

From www.smallgroupexchange.com

Life group prayer and praise

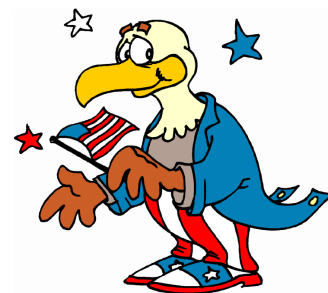
- Pray for: peace and safety in my neighbor's home, and for my niece **Kristina** that she would get into a rehab unit of God's choosing.
~ **Donna Wirt**
- Praise for the continued bone growth in **Oneita!** We had a good Dr.s report. Praise also for improvement in **Dave's** sight. (**Dave** is a friend and employee at Owenby's) ~ **Marc Owenby**
- **John Royer** says that **Linda's** MS is kicking up. She needs prayer to help her be able to walk again. Linda can't even walk into church anymore. She needs someone to give her a ride to church on Sundays. They may need to move to a place that is wheelchair accessible, please pray for that to happen. ~ **Jennifer Keep**
- Praise our Lord for all his gracious works, even in tough times, throughout our family. We can see his blessings working for us. Thank you church for all the support we have received from all of you!
~ **Chris and Amanda Green**
- **Lou and Pat Alvarez** will be in Merida, Mexico for 3 weeks, hosting a team of 14 engineers who will do surveying, topography studies, construction site planning, and architectural design for Camp John 3:16 that ACTION International is beginning. Praise God with them for His provision of this team of volunteers. Please pray for safety, health, and energy to host this team and for wisdom and discernment for **Lou, Pat, Gama Canul**, and the engineers as they make decisions related to the construction.
- Our Outreach Team is discussing the possibility of our church participating in a mobile health clinic program. Please pray with us concerning leadership and for discernment as we consider all aspects of this kind of program.
- Please pray for **Gail Downing**, she has a mass on her lungs and needs healing from several addictions. Pray also for **Jim**, he needs healing and strength and wisdom for life's struggles.
- We made a offer, due to other offers, it fell through! So we are still looking, we did, however find a place to rent, praise God!~ **Wendy Roullier**
- **Rev. Ross Lieuallen**, pastor of First Baptist Church Billings, MT, sends this praise/prayer request. He recently spoke with Pastor Pateng Makdoh who pastors First Baptist Church in Hardin, MT. Pastor Pateng was trying to start his truck and was having trouble. He got out of the truck and raised the hood and was trying to fix the problem. The engine started and the truck started moving in reverse. Pateng ran around the truck and tried to get into the drivers seat to control the vehicle but was knocked down by the door. His body was in the path of the front tire which rolled over his ankle. Then a miracle happened. The truck was lifted up and the wheel missed his torso and head just grazing his shoulder. Praise the Lord. Do pray for Pateng's minor injuries to fully heal.

Mark your Calendars: The North Puget Sound Area Fall Convention

Is coming October 10th. David T. Olson is the special guest speaker at First Baptist Des Moines.

Pray for our Military

- *Jonathan Michaels Estrella—son of Sharon Boswell.*
- *Jason Bjazevich—Megan Owenby's husband—Army Special Forces— Stationed at Fort Lewis.*
- *Joel Ellis—son of John & Midge—Serving in Iraq.*
- *Scott Harpell—son of Brian & Lynne—Stationed at Fort Bragg.*
- *Aaron Weston—nephew of Ken and Kathy—Stationed in San Diego.*
- *Eric Schmidt — son of Gene and Pat Schmidt — Camp Fallujah, Iraq.*
- *Benjamin Lagonia—dear friend of the Naylor family—stationed in Manitoba.*
- *David Coyle—son of Karen Mark—residing in Seattle, member of the National Guard.*
- *Adam Flynn—a young Marine safely home and out of military.*
- *Brett Love—grandson of Wilma—Army National Guard-Serving at home.*
- *Robin Swartz - Serving in the military - currently home in Everett.*
- *Christian Chmielewski—nephew of JoAnn Couturie' - in the Marines.*
- *ENS Andrew E. Timpner (fiancé to Christin Suthard) on deployment with USS Momsen.*
- *Devin Abbitt—nephew of Paul Abbitt - Marine, stateside.*
- *Doug Baer—a teacher at Kamiak HS heading to Iraq in the Army Reserves—thru Sept. 09.*
- *Duane Neyens—brother to Kathy Chapman—Nat. Grd. Afghanistan.*
- *Philip Ankney-LCPL Afghanistan Cousin of MaryAnn Peterson.*
- *Jeffrey Lillard—son of Barbara Lillard — Srg. In Army, Stationed in Afghanistan.*
- *Aaron Chmielewski—joined the Marines. Nephew of JoAnn Couturie.*



Life Group Happenings

All in the Family

by Florence Miller

The following note from **Fred and Anita Prinzing** states: "Thanks to everyone who participated in the Wednesday noon Bible study on Psalm 119. It was refreshing to discover the many Scriptural treasures available to those who take time to study God's Word. We were overwhelmed by the number who attended. Many thanks to those who contributed to the generous gift. Following the last study we were treated to root beer floats served by **Tony and Lois Tysseling**."

Mabel Elder is slowly recovering from her heart surgery. She is taking short walks and is sitting up. She is Bethany Rehab, room 313 and can have visitors. It is difficult for her to reach the phone however, but prayers and cards are always appreciated

Doug and Terry Brundage had a good time on a short cruise to Vancouver Island this past week.

John Van Dalen's shoulder continues to do very well, although he doesn't have full range of motion yet.

SAM friends worked long and hard for **Florence Miller's** estate sale. What wonderful willing friends. **Karen Mark** was in charge and not only did she work many days but buyers remarked about the wonderfully organized display. There are many items left and if anyone wants to visit the basement at Ridgmont Drive this coming Saturday you will find ridiculously **low, low** prices. Times: 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Alan Carter's family keeps everyone updated on his progress. Here are some excerpts: ""We've prayed many times and have asked you all to pray for quicker progress so he can get off the trach, and the Lord is helping Dad make that happen" He has come such a long way and although the Dr. wants to wait a few weeks to take the trach out, Dad is doing really well at managing his secretions...Dad also had some new movement yesterday. Every new bit of movement is an answer to prayer and keeps us feeling encouraged that the Lord is going to heal Dad. Thank you for all your prayers, and please continue to pray for more movement and strengthening of Dad's muscles. Please also continue to pray for the financial situation."

CONNECTING CLASS : Want to explore membership—ask questions, meet pastoral staff and join others in this opportunity to explore what it means to be part of a Biblically-functioning community of faith? Next offering is Sunday Sept 27th at 9 am in Rm. B56 in the Community Center. Sign up using your yellow communication card or stop by the church office.

Preschool ministry is in need of two or three radio/CD players to use on Sunday mornings with their curriculum.

They also need a baby gate for a doorway.

If you would like to donate, please contact Christen Weller

Friday Nite Update

We fed 111 hungry people last night a wonderful casserole compliments of the Ladies Bible Study. Thank you to all who are so faithful, week in and week out in providing from your talents and pocketbook to this ministry! You are AMAZING. I can't tell you how much it blesses my heart to know how many are working often behind the scenes to reach out to a community of people that our society tends to ignore. I appreciate you so very much!!

Prayer requests begin this week with prayer for **Jody**, one of our regular guests who took a tumble in front of the community center Friday before the meal and ended up at the hospital. When we visited her at the hospital later she was to be stitched up for injuries to her elbow and a cut above her eye. **AF** - A friend had a bad stroke. Her name is **D** and she was not looking good; **J** - that the Lord would heal injuries from a fall; **JC** - I want to move my mother to Everett. She's in an assisted living home and I can't see her. She is in Oregon. **LC** - Pray for my brother **JM**. He is in jail; **FW** - **Dad** is dying from cancer and life; **MB** - Pray for **JL**. She is all I have and I want her forgiveness for hurting her.

Have a Blessed week - Chris

