

# Leading Effective

SMALL  
GROUPS



Officers' Christian Fellowship

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# Leading Effective Small Groups

From the beginning of Officers' Christian Fellowship (OCF), the small-group Bible study has been the most visible element of the OCF local fellowship. While OCF today encompasses much more than Bible studies, these groups still serve as the backbone of our ministry. This booklet explores the concept of the OCF small group, the role it plays in OCF, the dynamics involved, and how to lead one at your installation.

## THE SMALL GROUP

### The Small Group and the OCF Ministry

It is not uncommon to hear a person say, upon arriving at a location where no OCF exists, "I want to start OCF here." Immediately, the person goes to work to establish an OCF Bible study. Organizing and launching a study is certainly a logical place to begin. Soon after that happens, however, it will be important to take a broader look at what constitutes an OCF ministry at the local level and to determine how the Bible study fits into that overall picture.

*The Bible study is neither a stand-alone event nor an end in itself. It should be seen, rather, as an activity carefully designed to meet the objectives of the national and local fellowship.*

The logical starting point for an OCF small group is an understanding of the national purpose and vision of our organization.

#### **Our Purpose:**

*To glorify God by uniting Christian officers for biblical fellowship and outreach, equipping and encouraging them to minister effectively in the military society.*

#### **Our Vision:**

*To be a dynamic community of Christian military leaders, integrating faith and profession, serving with a passion for God and a calling to the military.*

In addition to these two statements, it is important to understand two other aspects of the OCF ministry. The first aspect deals with those elements of ministry that have historically formed our core values. We refer to these as our "pillars." There are eight of them. We use the acronym CUE LINES as a memory aid. They are:

Centering on Scripture	Lay-led, Indigenous Ministry
Uniting for Fellowship	Integrating Faith and Profession
Engaging in Prayer	Nurturing the Family
	Equipping to Serve
	Supporting the Chaplaincy

The second aspect is to know and appreciate our ministry philosophy.

*We are a lay-led indigenous ministry within the military society in general with a specific focus on the officer corps. Our model of ministry is defined generally by our Purpose, Vision, and Pillars and discovered specifically at each installation or school through the application of the Pray, Discover, and Obey principle/process.*

Together, these characteristics (purpose, vision, pillars) serve as the guidelines we give to our largely autonomous local fellowships. The activities they associate with OCF should reflect these characteristics.

The first implication we would draw, therefore, relative to OCF small groups, should be obvious. **The small group does not exist as an entity unto itself, but as an application of the national and local Pray, Discover, and Obey.** (For an understanding of the Pray, Discover, and Obey process, please review our booklet by that name.)

### A Biblical Model for Small Groups

Before looking at the specifics of the small group, we need to establish a biblical mandate. One passage that is particularly helpful in understanding the nature of the OCF small group is Hebrews 10:22-25 (NASB). On the basis of Christ's finished work on our behalf,

*Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*



*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.*

*And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.*

The three exhortations to let us draw near to God, hold fast our confession of hope, and stimulate one another to love and good deeds form a beautiful outline for the nature of OCF small groups. The first exhortation encompasses worship and prayer and the enjoyment of being in God's presence, the second encompasses our grounding in the Word of God and in our faith, while the third addresses application and action, especially ministry to others.

This seems like an appropriate place to make another point. We have been encouraging a slight shift in thinking over the past few years with regard to the OCF Bible study. We are encouraging leaders to think slightly more broadly about this event by referring to it simply as a "small group." We still desire this activity to be centered on God's Word (which is one of the core pillars), but the name change gives more flexibility to the local fellowship. While a typical weekly small group will incorporate all three exhortations, there may be times during the year when the activity of the group is centered on only one aspect—prayer, outreach, service, or worship. It is not an attempt to move away from the study of the Bible. In fact, as we will discuss later, we will use this emphasis to also call our local fellowships back to a renewed commitment to study God's Word in a more pure fashion, rather than to study it indirectly through Christian books and video—which has been a growing trend in recent years.

It is this breadth of function that underlies our decision to move away from referring to our groups as "Bible studies." As mentioned above, the study of and obedience to God's Word must always be central to our assembling together, but there will be times when that obedience will cause us to spend the whole evening, if not an even more extended time, in worship and prayer. At other times, that obedience will yearn to find expression in active ministry (such as being people resources for a chapel event), some of which can take place in the very time frame allotted for the small group, while at other times



it will necessitate different or additional times.

With this in mind, let us look at each aspect of the biblical mandate as it pertains to the OCF small group.

### **The Small Group and Prayer**

The Hebrews passage exhorts us first to "draw near to God." This is an amazing thought, that God desires for us to have a warm, loving relationship with Him, not simply a judicial relationship of being found "not guilty." While the idea of a relationship encompasses more than prayer, it certainly includes prayer and a prayerful attitude and spirit. There are three types of prayer that are important to a small group.

The first is the "**drawing-near prayer.**" This can extend over a short period of time, even a few minutes, to a more extended time frame. For a weekly Bible study, this is the "pause" from the busyness of the day to invite God to meet with you as you look into His Word. Even briefly, it encompasses those elements that make us teachable—acknowledging God, confessing sin, and laying aside our cares and agendas. It may include singing. It is relational, rather than the asking and praying for specific personal requests. When a whole evening is given to prayer, this will likely be more extended and will include, either by song or Scripture, the broader elements of worship. Plan carefully to include the "drawing-near" aspect of the small group during your weekly times of Bible study. A receptive heart is necessary if one is to learn and apply the truths of God's Word. Remember, God desires this as much, if not more, for the relationship as for the discipline and knowledge that it brings. He enjoys our company. Do we enjoy His?

The second type of prayer is the "**application prayer.**" This is appropriate as the concluding element of the actual Bible study. Rather than abruptly ending the study and shifting gears to prayer requests, this involves talking with God about what was just learned from His Word and personalizing it into one's individual life. It will also let those in the group know how to continue to pray for others throughout the week in the spiritual dimension of their lives.

The third type of prayer needs little introduction or explanation. It is the most common type of praying done by people in small groups. It could be called the "**personal-needs prayer.**" Usually, but



not necessarily, this involves taking prayer requests for health, friends, and activities of the week and then praying for them. Sometimes for the sake of time efficiency, there is little discussion of the prayer requests—simply a listing of them, followed immediately by a time of prayer. At other times, more discussion (although problem solving should be minimized) is desired. In these cases, some have chosen to serve the refreshments while they share prayer requests, and then wrap up the evening with a short time of prayer. The needs of the members of the group with regard to time commitments will often dictate the format.

Be open to occasionally using your small group meeting for an extended season of prayer. This could be what used to be called “a half-night of prayer,” or in more recent times is referred to as a “concert of prayer”—three to perhaps four hours of prayer. If you want to allow more time, an entire day may be given to prayer. In OCF, this is called, “Sound the Trumpet” (for a fuller treatment of “Sound the Trumpet” you may request a collection of articles and guidelines from the OCF Home Office). The format can be as varied as the person leading the prayer event, but it usually follows something close to an ACTS format—Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. The format can be free flowing, that is, times of singing, Scripture reading, and prayer (both individual and public) interspersed throughout. Fasting, for those who so desire, can be accomplished by individuals in any of the formats if it is helpful in focusing one’s attention. In the longer seasons of prayer, breaks can either be scheduled, or individuals may simply take breaks whenever necessary.

### **The Small Group and Bible Study**

The passage in Hebrews 10 exhorts us to “hold fast the confession of our hope...” While we may be accustomed to defining the essence of our Christian faith in other ways, Christianity involves not only a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, but also an entirely different outlook on life that is grounded in the hope we have for all that God has promised. That outlook on life is so contrary to the world that believers need to give careful attention to ensure their anchor is well grounded. The currents working in our society and the winds of worldly thinking can get pretty strong at times. To secure that “anchor,” God has provided the Church in all its various expressions, of which

the local OCF fellowship is one. In the Church, He intends His followers to meet together for fellowship and encouragement, centered around the truth and promises of His Word.

Historically, OCF has encouraged the leading of a Bible study from “scratch” rather than simply studying a Christian book or being taught by a video. A study of God’s Word itself is usually more profitable than the study of another book, video or other tape about God’s Word. As in most secular studies, the closer one gets to the original source, the more accurate and authentic the work is perceived. This is the case in Bible study. Use Christian books and videos as exceptions and variations rather than the regular weekly diet.

### **The Small Group and Ministry**

The third exhortation in the passage from Hebrews 10 has to do with ministry—“stir up one another to love and good deeds.” Another function of a small group is to serve as people resources for ministry. This should happen individually. It may also happen collectively as a group. You can think of it as burning those spiritual calories gained by feasting on the riches of God’s Word. God never intended us to get fat on His Word, rather, to receive the spiritual nourishment necessary to go out and serve Him. Often a small group of believers will realize a synergy whereby the total effect is much greater than the sum of the individual parts.

What a great opportunity to discuss group ministry possibilities with the local installation chaplain and prayerfully select a “ministry project” that the OCF small group can own. Just as in the rearing of our children, unity of heart and spirit occurs not only in the “fun” activities of life but in the “work” activities as well. In group settings such as these, the work becomes fun!

### **The Small Group and Relationships**

The presence of the term and concept of “one another(ing)” in the Hebrews passage clearly suggests the relational aspect of these small groups, not simply a stimulation of the cognitive side of our being. Most everyone who has ever participated in small groups can bear testimony to a particular small group that was their favorite. Usually, they state there was a “chemistry” that made that one group special. While that “chemistry” can neither be captured and marketed nor

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reduced to a formula, it seems likely that those groups incorporated many, if not all, of the elements listed above. In addition, there was likely an element of healthy, meaningful relationships.

In his book *Margins* (NAV PRESS), Dr. Richard Swenson explains “margin” essentially as the space between where we are operating and our limits. He makes a strong case that we need margin in four areas of our lives: time, finances, physical energy, and emotional energy. This latter area—emotional energy—is one of the most difficult to restore. In the practical tips he offers for each area, one of the most significant ways to restore emotional energy is through healthy relationships.

Where better to see this happen than in a Christian small group? Many OCF folks can testify to this truth. On “Bible study night” emotionally weary officers often come home from duty with the thought of skipping the study. But on those nights when the officers decide to go rather than stay home, something interesting usually happens. Even though they add another activity to their day, they end it more refreshed. **Healthy, small-group relationships—and small groups designed to foster healthy relationships—restore emotional energy.** It is a fact!

Relationships are important for another reason. Larry Crabb, the Christian author and psychologist, in responding to a question asking what it was that produced change in people’s lives, stated: “Truth presented in the context of relationships changes lives.” If one goal of small-group Bible study is to change lives by bringing them into conformity with God’s Word, then Crabb’s comment should be instructive for us. It says that the simple imparting of knowledge usually doesn’t bring about change. However, when the relational element is added—in the form of friendship, caring for one another, accountability, etc.—change is much more likely to occur. This means the leader of a small group must give attention to relational aspects during the time together. This can be accomplished through “sharing times” and even social times. This may be facilitated with an activity of five to ten minutes in the study. Occasionally, the entire evening may be set aside for cultivating these relationships. Prayerful, conscious attention to this aspect will produce significant dividends.

The leader should routinely incorporate into a small group the elements of worship, corporate group prayer, and building relationships. However, the core element of the OCF small group is the study of the Bible. Whether the format includes a recognized teacher, a classic Bible study, or a devotional, the desire is for God’s Word to be central to the gathering. Historically, the OCF Bible study has been defined as an inductive Bible study. Most have understood this as a “discover for yourself” format in which the leader, through the use of appropriate questions, guides the group to explore and discover the meaning of the passage under consideration. The leader is expected to come prepared through prior, personal study, while the others may or may not have come so prepared.

With this concept in mind, our discussion separates itself into two parts:

- 1) personal preparation for the Bible study, and
- 2) preparing to lead the small-group Bible study.

### Personal Bible Study Preparation

Small groups and Bible study may take place in a variety of settings, from foxholes to comfortable homes. Only one book is essential to the study—the Bible. However, as we develop the skills needed to lead a successful study we recommend using other references. These are nice to have, but should never be considered essential, and that fact must be remembered as we proceed.

The most important step in preparing to lead a Bible study is simply to read the passage under consideration. Read it several times, and, if you have them available, in different translations. Read the passage as soon as possible after you know you will be leading the study. This both helps you understand the passage and puts it in your mind so that the Holy Spirit can work with you even when you are not able to study it in the formal sense of the word.

Do not rush to consult a commentary right away. While the passage most likely means one thing, there are several ways to consider the passage. A commentary will often lead you in one particular direction,

while the situation in which you find yourself or the group may cause you to approach the passage differently.

The next step is to understand the setting in which the passage was written. Usually the passage or the particular book of the Bible will give you some clues. Often you will need to read the chapters before or after the passage under consideration to pick up the setting. If you have a study Bible, there may be some short notes preceding the text that will help you with the setting. Who was the author? To whom was the passage directed? Were there certain situations that prompted the writing? If chronology seems important, try to understand where the events of this passage fit in. What was the spiritual climate at the time, for the recipients as well as society at large? Thinking through the setting will help keep you from reading back into the passage thoughts and attitudes from the present time, which might be inappropriate.

As you proceed with your study, resist the temptation at this point to ask, “What is this saying to me?” There will be adequate time to make application after you first understand the passage.

The remainder of the personal study process can be thought of in terms of three basic questions you will ask. First, ask yourself, “**What does the passage say?**” then, “**What does it mean?**” and finally, “**What does it mean to me?**” Under each of these question headings, you will likely employ other questions of a similar nature.

In considering what a passage says, you are playing the role of an *observer*. The first thing you might try to observe is the main theme. Seek to find that theme so that you do not get so bogged down in details that you miss it. You might fine tune or modify your perception of the main theme later as you study the passage in more detail, but for starting it is sufficient. Next, begin noticing the details—repetition of words or phrases, synonyms or word/idea clusters, or unusual words. If the passage suggests action, you might note the verbs; if the passage is descriptive, nouns and adjectives will be worth noting. If the passage seems to be developing a thought, pay special attention to small connecting words such as “and,” “but,” “because,” “therefore,” “if...then,” “since...therefore,” and “so that.” Each of these is used for a purpose and will be helpful in your understanding of the passage. You might even find a natural outline of the passage (as we did in Hebrews 10:22-25).

In this observation phase, make a note of the things you do not

understand and return to find the meaning at the appropriate time. As you practice this discipline, you will find yourself noting more and more details. Some will not prove to be particularly helpful; others will cause a light to go on.

As you move to the next phase—considering what the passage means—you will play the role of *interpreter*. If there are meanings of words that are unclear, look them up. Perhaps there are even words that you are comfortable using in everyday conversation but would be hard pressed to define. Look these up as well. A good English language dictionary is extremely useful. For words that seem to have a theological meaning, try to understand them in that context. At this point, it is helpful if you have some Bible reference works available to you. (A Bible dictionary is a very useful tool. It really corresponds to what we normally think of as an encyclopedia. It gives more than a definition, usually developing the thought historically or relating it to other doctrines.)

In this interpretive stage, you will also want to play the role of a detective. Ask some questions that look for consistencies or seeming inconsistencies. Here, the entire Bible can serve as a context. If you detect a different thought or perspective, make sure you can reconcile it with other passages that come to mind. Perhaps you will see an attribute of God that you will want to harmonize with others. It is here that you will want to find shades of meaning that distinguish one word from another. You may not find all the answers in the time you have to prepare. You may find that others in the group will be able to give some insight as a result of previous study they have done. Relax! By agreeing to lead a study, you are not claiming to understand everything. We are all learning more and more as we grow in maturity.

As you conclude this phase, ask yourself what you have learned and how you would put it all together. Try to put into your own words what the passage is saying.

Now is the appropriate time to ask the last question, “What does it mean to me?” In this phase, you are playing the role of a *servant* who is trying to please his master through obedience. You are seeking to be obedient to what you learned. If an application does not jump out at you, try to discover an application through the use of the following questions: (Note the acronym—SPACE A—to help remember the questions.)

- Is there a *sin* to avoid?
- Is there a *promise* to claim?
- Is there an *attitude* to change?
- Is there a *command* to obey?
- Is there an *example* to follow?
- Is there an *attribute* of God for praise?

Prayerfully consider these questions in your personal “application praying” and try to be specific with regard to an application. Using whatever memory device you need to incorporate, stick with this application (and perhaps associate it with the passage being studied) until it is a regular part of your life. In Ezra 7:10 (NASB), we read:

*For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.*

Having studied God’s Word and having made application to your own life, you are now almost ready to guide your group in discovering these truths for themselves. There is one more element of preparation needed. You need to formulate discussion questions before the meeting. We suggest some of those in the next section on the actual leading of the group, and they should be considered ahead of time.

Finally, before you lead, pray!

### **Preparing to Lead the Bible Study**

As mentioned earlier, the type of Bible study that OCF seeks to encourage is one where people approach God’s Word and discover for themselves the truths contained in it. Researchers continually point out that people retain truth and information that they discovered themselves at a much higher rate than if they had simply been told that same truth or information. Therefore, the leader needs to see himself or herself as a facilitator, not as a lecturer.

The crucial question the leader needs to consider in the shift from personal study to leading the group is this: “Of the things learned, what should be told to the people and what should they discover for themselves?” As Bible study leader for the week, take the time to formulate questions that result in self-discovery. Consider telling the group only those facts—from your study or reference books—they could not be expected to uncover simply with their Bibles, such as background information or a specific meaning you uncovered in a

dictionary you want to use as a springboard for the discussion. It might even include a statement regarding the approach you will be taking, perhaps stating the main point of the passage and the truth you are extracting (if the purpose of the study is to understand the rationale behind the truth).

Your series of group discussion questions should follow the same pattern you used in your personal study: observation, interpretation, and application. As you ask the observation questions, direct the people to first give responses right from the text, using the very words of the text. These questions should be relatively easy to answer and will serve the purpose of getting people to engage in the self-discovery process of talking. Questions and calls for responses in this category might look like this:

- Who are the people involved in the story?
- What are the action verbs in verses 4-7?
- Put the story into your own words.
- What attributes of God are mentioned here?
- What is the definition of faith given in verse 1?

After you have had the group discover all the pertinent points, move on to the second set of questions, those designed to understand the meaning of the things observed. Questions you use might sound like this:

- What did Jesus mean when he said, “You must be born again?”
- Why was it significant for the writer to use the word, \_\_\_\_\_?
- What is the difference between mercy and grace?
- What is the connection between faith and hope?
- How do you reconcile a God of wrath and a God of love?

When you ask questions, avoid asking those that can be answered with a “yes” or “no.” Those questions usually don’t generate discussion. As you logically develop your thought, you might find yourself going back and forth between observation and interpretive questions. That is acceptable if it fits the progression you desire. You may also have to field interpretive and application responses and hold them for

later if you are not finished with the observation responses. It is not uncommon for people to try to jump ahead of you. When they lead you at just the right pace to affect a good transition, use the response to your benefit. If it is premature, you have the right as the leader to not let them move ahead too fast.

One potential problem of a self-discovery-type Bible study is that people may make wrong statements, and the study may turn into a “share your ignorance” study. As the leader, you are in the position to prevent this through your personal study. You can also nicely challenge a wrong response by asking the responder to point out the portion of the text that prompted the response. You can also ask others to give their understanding of that portion. Where there is room for differing thoughts, allow for it. When the response is obviously wrong, you as the leader will need to ensure that the correct response is achieved before moving forward. But as the leader, you do not always need to give the correct response.

When the correct response to an obvious observation question is given, you will likely move on. When you are into interpretive questions and responses, don't simply move on when you get the desired response. Allow others to comment. This will usually result in a more complete answer as others join in the satisfaction of discovery and build upon the response.

As mentioned earlier, work your way through the passage alternating between observation and interpretive questions as necessary. You will likely have some of those questions written out ahead of time. This allows you to listen to the responses without worrying about formulating your next question. You should, however, learn to ask additional questions based upon what you hear. These may be questions that merely clarify the response. At other times you will hear a good thought and want to explore it. As long as this is helpful to understanding the passage, feel free to pursue those areas. If they look like they will distract you from the direction you are leading the group, don't chase those “bunny trails.” Remember, you are the leader facilitator and are expected to properly direct the group.

In the interpretive and application portions of the study, be aware of the flow of questions and responses. If a pattern is being established where there is one response to every question and all responses are being directed back to the leader, seek to get out of that pattern. Ask

others to respond to a response, or whether they agree, or to clarify a term or its usage. With just a little bit of practice, this will become easy to do and eventually cause the group to do this naturally.

As you conclude this section, have a summary question ready. It may sound like this:

- What is the main point of this passage?
- Would someone summarize this passage for us?
- Let's take a moment and each of us formulate a statement of truth derived from our discussions tonight.

The final phase of leading the study is to draw people to a place of application. You can do this by simply asking the basic question, “What are we going to take away from this passage and apply to our lives?” Or you may want to direct the application in a certain way based upon some of the summary statements that were made.

If the study went well in the interpretive phase(s) and truth was discovered, most of the applications will be proper. You may need to press a little if the applications are not direct enough. Often people will state implications instead of applications. Implications will involve statements like “we should...” instead of “I will... .” If you hear those kinds of responses, press a little deeper to see if the people are willing to make direct, personal application. Be ready to model it yourself.

## SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

Leading small groups is an art, not a science. The old adage “practice makes perfect” is only partially true. Even after much practice, the study will rarely ever be “perfect” and usually will not go as planned. But as a leader gains more experience, better group results will follow.

Remember, God's Word is good seed. The leader's responsibility is to handle the Word of God properly (2 Tim. 2:15) and to help make the study of it a positive experience. It is the Holy Spirit's responsibility to take that seed planted in a person's mind and cause it to grow so that it will bear much fruit and bring each individual into conformity with God's Son, Jesus of Nazareth, with whom He is very pleased.

As a small-group leader, commit yourself to become a modern-day Ezra. Set your heart to study the Bible and obediently apply its



teachings to your life. With skill, humility, and compassion, you will lead others to biblical truths.

It truly is a rewarding experience.

## APPENDIX A

### Practical Tips for Leading the Small Group

1. **Start and end on time.** Starting on time will establish a practice of people coming on time. Timeliness on both ends shows respect for people.
2. **Make sure the room setup is such that everyone can see everyone else.** In most homes, this will be a limiting factor as to the number of people in the small group. Having people sit on a stairway or in an alcove usually inhibits them from participating.
3. **Design the room setup and rules of engagement so that there is a minimum of distractions.** Have a policy regarding phone calls and childcare so that these and other issues will not be disruptive for others.
4. **If your group is young in the faith, consider having multiple copies of the same translation of the Bible.** This is also wise if you have Internationals. Your chaplain may be able to help you obtain these copies for a reasonable price. This also allows you to refer to passages by page number for those not familiar with the Bible. If you have more mature believers, you as the leader might want to provide additional translations if you found those translations to be helpful in your study.
5. **Avoid praying or reading around in a circle.** While most of our target audience, the officer corps, is comfortable reading, there are exceptions. The same goes for praying. Take volunteers for these tasks rather than risk losing someone because they felt pressure to read or pray. If you detect an unplanned pattern of going from person to person, jump in and break the pattern.
6. **Include a short review of previous weeks if the flow of thought is important.** With the increased frequency of TDY/TAD and deployed assignments, help those who were absent feel part of the group.
7. **Start with easy questions.** This serves the purpose of getting people talking. Observation questions—*What does it say?*—are a natural way to do this. You might even employ a “hook”—an observation or question about life in general—that most everyone can identify with to open your discussion if doing so sets the stage for the direction you want the study to take. (For instance,

if your theme is “God’s Discipline,” you might ask people if they have heard the phrase “tough love” and if so, what they understand it to mean.)

8. **Seek to involve everyone in the interaction.** If one or two people are monopolizing the responses, you will need to stop this. Rather than specifically calling on a person, generically ask for responses by those who have not had a chance to say anything. If this practice continues week after week, you should plan to approach the offending party and let them know you appreciate their participation but ask them to be sensitive to your goal of involving others.
9. **Don’t call on specific people to respond.** While you may be confident that some people wouldn’t mind you specifically asking them, others might be apprehensive that you could do the same to them.
10. **Don’t let all the questions and response come to you, the leader.** If you see this pattern developing, ask others to respond to a response. Keep this up until the conversation flow is naturally multi-directional.
11. **Don’t allow yourself to become the group expert.** As appropriate, you may need to encourage people out of their comfort zones to take leadership. Co-lead a study with a new leader or meet with him or her mid-week to answer questions and be a resource. Look for ways to affirm them after the study. Likewise, don’t allow people to view participating chaplains as the expert. They will appreciate it.
12. **Don’t accept a wrong answer for fear of offending.** If there is a wrong response, you can ask the person to state the verse or phrase that prompted their response. (By the way, this is a good practice even if the response is correct.) You can also ask others if they agree or if they understand it differently. If a person often gives a wrong answer and you need to have it corrected, look for an opportunity to affirm them when they give a correct answer.
13. **Don’t allow statements that denigrate another denomination.** The study is intended to be a Bible study, not a justification of one church doctrine over another. There may be a few exceptions if having a variety of responses enhances your purpose. Be careful, however, to ensure this technique will not offend anyone.

If the truth is to offend, let that truth come directly from the Scriptures.

14. **Be alert to the use of Christian/church-ese.** It doesn’t take long for people to invent or use a word or phrase that becomes an “in” expression. Newcomers may feel lost; old-timers may need to wrestle with the concept afresh. When appropriate, ask for basic definitions so that everyone is at the same place in their understanding of the term.
15. **Stick with the text being studied.** Almost every passage should have its understanding incorporated in the immediate context. Usually the recipients of one of the Apostle Paul’s letters or epistles were not required to have read a previous letter as a prerequisite for understanding the current letter. When in your personal study you find a cross-reference to be helpful, use it carefully. If you want everyone to see that passage, make a statement and direct people there together. If you observe some mature believers seeking to impress others with their knowledge of other Scriptures, request that they stay with the passage under consideration. The discipline will prove beneficial for everyone. The correlation and expanded development of a concept with other texts can be important. When that is the case, the leader should come prepared to include everyone and “level the playing field” by having text strips prepared ahead of time so that everyone considers them as “the text.”
16. **Draw the study to a conclusion.** Don’t quit without some sort of summation. Usually this is best accomplished before heading into the application phase. Discovering a bunch of interesting facts does not constitute a good study.
17. **Don’t forget to do “application praying.”** This helps draw the study to a proper conclusion. Don’t be troubled if it takes a few weeks to get everyone in the pattern of doing this.
18. **If you serve refreshments after the small group meeting, avoid the practice of “can you top this?”** Save the real special treats for a special event. Sometimes, however, the bringing of dessert is the only way a person or couple can be involved. Don’t discourage them.
19. **Structure the small group so that you encourage growth and the incorporation of new people.** Have natural entry points if

the topic is lengthy and will involve a number of weeks. Make sure newcomers feel welcome, even if it means discontinuing your conversations with close friends. A word of explanation to them should be sufficient and will likely encourage them to branch out. Look for ways to involve them in the group early on, such as inquiring if they would want to open their home for a study or bring refreshments.

- 20. As you grow, plan to divide the study.** This needs to be understood from the start so that you do not meet with resistance when the time comes. (See Appendix B for a further explanation of this idea and for helpful suggestions.)

## APPENDIX B

### Growing your Local Fellowship through Dividing the Small Group

The OCF purpose is to unite officers for fellowship and outreach, and our vision is to see a dynamic community of Christian military leaders. Since the Bible study is not an end in itself but a means in carrying out the Pray, Discover, and Obey, then a single small group hardly seems adequate to meet these objectives. One element of a dynamic community of Christians in the military society should be a network of small groups. This network provides opportunities for more people to be involved, more leaders to gain experience, and specific units to be targeted. It also lays a larger numerical foundation for other special events and establishes a “critical mass,” which serves to encourage believers.

Believe it or not, the most difficult local fellowship to lead and maintain is the single small-group fellowship. It always seems to hover on the verge of disbanding with the next set of PCS moves. Furthermore, it keeps the leadership base small so that a few people have to cover all the needs and interests. People wear out when that happens. On the other hand, people are rejuvenated when they are a part of a growing, dynamic, Christ-centered fellowship.

Don't let your lack of vision or selfish clinging to a group of close friends cause you to be shortsighted in your vision of ministry. Don't be overly concerned with whether you can lead the larger fellowship.

If you plan to grow right from the start and take the intermediate steps of developing new leaders, you can expect God to help provide the assistance you need. See this as a step of faith and be alert to see the ways God will provide. This is the kind of faith that pleases God and encourages the believer.

There are some practical issues you will need to consider as you embark on this vision. Let's list several with the hope that you will see possible solutions rather than overwhelming obstacles.

1. From the start, think in terms of two leaders per group. It is likely that the very group of which you are a part began with two key individuals.
2. As your group expands, think in terms of having and developing four key individuals. They do not need to be equally qualified, but should have basic qualifications (to include a vision) and a willingness to assume responsibility. If along the way, you took upon yourself most of the responsibilities, you will have burned a bridge in front of you. Not only will people not become trained through experience, they will think that they have to do everything. You are unique and important. But don't try to become indispensable.
3. If the two key people in your primary group are close personal friends, address this issue early on so that the closeness does not become a hindrance to dividing and multiplying. There are plenty of other opportunities for close friends to get together.
4. Avoid the temptation to move to a bigger structure (home or chapel) only to make it possible for you to grow bigger and stay together in one study. If moving to a bigger home allows you to meet together for singing and refreshments but affords the opportunity to have two separate studies in different parts of the house or building, this can be an advantage and a half step to overcoming opposition to dividing the study. Doing so still has a major drawback in that you are not expanding through the use of different nights or different geographical locations.
5. You should have a growth plan. This should come out of a Pray, Discover, and Obey. Having an overview plan for reference as you implement the plan should remove objections or reveal them for what they are—shortsightedness or selfishness.

6. Take advantage of new, experienced OCF members arriving in your area to grow the number of small groups. They may start out immediately as a new group or come to your group for a few weeks with the full intent of branching off with the parent group providing at least prayer support.
7. If you have significant people or numbers in your group who resist the division, consider finding two or three couples willing to do so and have a commissioning service for them. Send them out with your blessing.
8. As you review the format of your study—day, topic, childcare, etc.—be alert to opportunities to divide along important differences. Don't view this as stubbornness on the part of some; see it as God giving you an opportunity to divide and multiply. There certainly is a biblical example in the sense of Paul and Barnabas.
9. Do plan to bring the groups together. This may be frequently at first and naturally settle into a more reasonable schedule as new relationships replace or augment old ones.
10. With multiple studies, institute team leader meetings if you haven't already done so. This will keep the plan before you, offer an opportunity to coordinate, and provide a forum to assist in the training of new leaders so that the process continues.

### **APPENDIX C Handling Disruptive People**

Traditionally, Christian small-group activities are more positive, edifying, less contentious, and less confrontational than their secular or non-Christian counterparts. Christ Himself, and the Scriptures in general, teaches civility, peace, selflessness, and concern for the feelings and welfare of others in the Christian group context. The reticence to speak out, to be assertive, or to appropriately confront may not, in fact, be a plus in the therapeutic group setting. But in the Bible-study group, the support group, the discipline group, or the fellowship group, an attitude of love and other-person-centeredness provides a Christlike atmosphere, which can assuredly facilitate the purposes of the OCF Bible study and small-group activities.

Christian small groups are not immune to the disruptive or distracting influences of individuals whose personal agendas differ from those of the organization (in this case OCF) and the group. The purpose

of this appendix is to assist the small-group leader in identifying and dealing with these individuals.

Although there are numerous types of disruptive or distracting members of small groups, this appendix will target only the two most common generally found in the Christian military arena. Let us call them Lt. B.G. Loony and his companion, Ms. I. M. Needy.

Before examining the individuals with which a small-group leader may need to deal, a disclaimer is in order. It is understood that not all Loonys are males, and not all Needys (see following discussion) are females. One look around our own world brings forth that truth. The generalized truth is that men are beings of ego and are task oriented. Women are generally more interested in security and are relationally oriented, so they are more likely than men to experience or to be aware of their needs. Thus the use of gender in this discussion.

#### **Lt. Loony**

Years ago in small-group therapeutic lore, a new patient on a psychiatric ward entered the room for his first small-group therapy session. Looking around, he asked, "Okay, who's the bull-goose loony in here?" And thus a new psychological entity was born, the bull-goose loony. The bull-goose loony is generally accepted to be the individual in a group with the capability and the desire to take the group away from the designated leadership, and to turn it in a direction 180 degrees from the organizational purposes. There is one in almost every military unit in the service.

Fortunately, we don't see that many in our Bible-study groups. Nevertheless, they do occasionally show up. After all, the military prizes the characteristics of the bull-goose loony: capability, command presence, and determination. It's just when these characteristics are running at cross-purposes with the organizational goals that they become disruptive.

Lt. Loony may appear at your small-group meeting under any number of guises. He may blatantly attempt to wrest the leadership of the group away from you. Perhaps because of prior theological training or simply because he thinks he knows more than anyone in the group, he pontificates on the passages being studied, quoting experts, stifling discussion, and limiting others' personal discovery. Or he may disagree with the topic or section of Scripture that has been chosen to

be studied, so he may turn every discussion in the direction he wants the group to go.

Harming the group even more, Lt. Loony may show up in a more subtle, passive-aggressive approach. Cracking wisecracks at every turn, he may inappropriately use humor as a defense mechanism to shield himself from the Word itself. Or he may use a misguided wit as a weapon against others in the group, giggling them with pointed jabs, and then reacting in horror that he would be accused of emotionally harming someone. “After all,” he will say, “it’s you who can’t take a joke.” Such an attitude can easily prevent the group from ever reaching the critical “application phase” of the study (perhaps his goal in the first place).

Whatever black hat Lt. Loony may wear at any particular time, it must eventually be dealt with. But how is one to go about it, other than to pray for a back-door revival (that he’s transferred or shipped out to sea) or to request that he no longer be a part of the group?

The answer is simple but not easy. Enlist him! Recruit him! Invite him to assist you in reaching the group’s goals. Acknowledge his strengths and the real contributions he has made and can make in the future. Encourage him to continue those. See if he has any additional ideas that can aid the group’s advance. But be confrontive enough to point out where he is disrupting the group’s progress. Help him to become aware of the harm he is doing. Work to turn his natural proclivity to move the group in an opposite direction around far enough so as to keep from battling him. True, the natural tendency is to fight him (since it’s apparent he is fighting you). But fighting him only plays into his struggle (often with authority; perhaps with you personally). By attempting to enlist him, you may gain in several ways.

First, you can gain the benefit of his most positive contributions, be they knowledge, wit, or others. Allowing those contributions to be aired, but keeping them reasonably reined in, can enhance the quality and atmosphere of the group.

Second, you may gain a brother. At the same time we must be aware of the needs of the larger group, we cannot ignore the reality that a bull-goose loony attitude (especially in a Christian context) is signaling some real personal problems. Without a doubt the attitude shown at the Bible study is characteristic of his professional and social approach to life. Even without professional counseling training,

someone who can acknowledge his strengths and guide him in his weaknesses may very well be able to assist his personal growth despite his know-it-all attitude.

And finally, working with such an individual and observing growth and change in him can make a vital impact upon the other members of the group. Each one is then able to realize that the power of the Spirit of God can work in his or her own areas of weakness, just as He did in Lt. Loony. That is a powerful message.

### **Ms. Needy**

Now to Lt. Loony’s girlfriend, Ms. I. M. Needy. This individual’s effect on the group will not be nearly as obvious as that of the dominating know-it-all. It will take much longer to recognize and will require much more discernment to identify. And, the prime difficulties inherent in this particular distraction to the purpose of the group are that her needs in general reflect those legitimate needs of many in the group, and those needs tap into the legitimate desires of believers to minister to a suffering brother or sister in Christ.

In truth, Ms. Needy may in fact be struggling with spiritual questions, relational problems, financial needs, or emotional battles. She may very well have had an abusive childhood, struggle with loneliness, be out of money with bills yet to pay, or may indeed be needy. But that’s not the main problem.

Where Ms. Needy becomes a distraction to the group is in her response to the efforts of the group to minister to her. All of us at one time or another have had difficulties that we could share with brothers and sisters in Christ, as they heeded the biblical injunctions in Galatians 6:5 and 2 that “...each one should bear his own load,” but that, “...we should bear one another’s ‘overload.’” We then were assisted in our present “overload.” As the crisis passed, we were thankful to those who assisted us, and then we went on our way “bearing our own load.”

But after a while, with much group effort to minister to Ms. Needy, we begin to perceive that she is incapable of “bearing her own load.” In fact, we find to our chagrin, life itself to Ms. Needy is an “overload.” Now we are in a different ballpark—and now we must make some difficult choices.

For her benefit and also the group’s, action must be taken when

Ms. Needy's neediness begins to drain the spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physical resources of the group. When the situation gets to be this desperate, then something besides her true needs is at work.

Authors of various books on the subject have addressed this concept. Gerald and Marianne Cory, in their seminal text, *Groups: Process and Practice*, caution against playing the dependent member's game by meeting his dependency needs. "The starting point for helping dependent people is to refuse to reinforce the helpless position by refusing to fill the dependency needs. At the same time, the leader should help such people realize the means they are using to keep themselves dependent" (p. 197).

Eric Berne in his excellent books on psychological transactions between people, *Games People Play* and *What Do You Say After You Say Hello*, addresses the possible genesis of neediness as something other than simply the having of real needs. In *Games People Play*, which examines transactions between people in the short term, Dr. Berne suggests that these psychological "games" or transactions always have a psychological twist at the end. One of these games is "Why don't you...yes, but..." In this game the helper (read "small group") tries everything to assist. "Why don't you do (and something is suggested)." "Yes, but I tried that and it doesn't work." This continues until the helper is ultimately defeated, realizing that nothing will help. That's the payoff for the needy one. The helper is no smarter, no more capable, no better than the needy one—and she just proved it.

In *What Do You Say After You Say Hello*, the transactions are life-long, called "Life Scripts." Often these scripts are so obvious it is as if they are messages on a sweatshirt. The front one declares the problem; the back one has the psychological kicker. Ms. Needy's sweatshirt might read on the front, "Nobody Knows The Trouble I've Seen." The back will say "But You Better Believe I'm Going To Tell You...Over and Over and Over."

Dr. Howard Halpern, in his intriguing book, *How To Break Your Addiction To A Person*, suggests five ways people attempt to control others. Number one, control through power, we've discussed briefly in our examination of Lt. Loony. Methods three through five are control through servitude, through guilt, and through jealousy. But it's the second way of controlling that is applicable here, control through weakness. He begins this section, "Some people can wield their weak-

ness as coercively as another may wield a club. Their basic manifesto is, 'I am weak, helpless, dependent, and will fall apart without you. Therefore, you must take care of me, do what I want you to do, be my reliable rock, and never leave me.'" Note the full-time, lifelong requirements of this position.

If initial and reasonable ministry to an individual just doesn't seem to have a salutary effect in meeting needs, then it's very possible that person is either playing psychological games or, even worse, they are struggling with a lifelong condition of neediness or dependency as a major part of their identity. In either case, to continue to meet the dependency needs simply feeds and amplifies the dependency.

The kindest thing that can be done in that situation is to address the dependency. If Ms. Needy is just overwhelmed by a present crisis, then addressing its effect on her and, thence, the group, may very well alert her to the broader situation. If it's not a game or a personality disorder, she will appreciate the confrontation and will want to work through it.

However, if it is a game or a disordered condition, it is likely little can be done at the level of the small group. In this case, referral to a Christian counselor or therapist who is trained in working in these areas is probably the best thing. After talking with her, Ms. Needy should be allowed to continue in the group only if she is willing to seek professional help with her struggle. The group might feel it could help take on the expense of the counseling, but other resource commitments should be avoided.

If she does agree to counseling, she still should not be allowed to dominate the group with accounts of her progress. That, in itself, is a dependency event. Should she refuse to get help, she then should be asked to leave the group.

To some this will sound hard and not very Christlike. Not true. Jesus asked the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda if he really wanted to be healed. Jesus told the woman caught in adultery to "Go and sin no more." He was very direct with the Samaritan woman at the well as to her moral condition. Can we do less than lovingly confront those who are living in their psychological or spiritual prisons?

Certainly, with both Lt. Loony and Ms. Needy we will need the guidance and power of the Spirit of God to handle a very delicate situation well.

Undoubtedly, we had rather be taken advantage of ten times than to miss a valid opportunity for ministry. In addition, we are to be very careful about our judgments of one another.

But in the love of Jesus Christ, through the guidance of the Spirit, and under the direction of God the Father, as people to whom a trust has been given, we can expect to minister appropriately and to lead lovingly. For, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 2:16, “*We have the mind of Christ.*”

*OCF thanks the Reverend Jon Harris for his insight and authorship of Appendix C. Jon is a Christian counselor, OCF member, and former naval aviator.*