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## Build your small groups around God's purposes

by Steve Gladen

You believe in small groups. You believe in small groups embracing and fulfilling the five biblical purposes. But how do you, as one pastor, implement that task within all the small groups in your church?

It doesn't matter whether your groups meet in homes, or businesses, or in your church. It doesn't matter whether your groups are large or small, or whether they're comprised of singles or couples, or all men or all women. It really doesn't matter. The five purposes apply to all groups, and all groups need a deeper understanding of those purposes.

As you read through this article, be thinking about the people in your groups whose gifts, talents and passions seem to be a good fit for each of the purposes. In order to balance the five purposes and attain spiritual health in your group, you're going to need different people within each group to take on roles of responsibility for each purpose. If you don't do this, each group will tend to gravitate towards the gifts and passions of the small group leader – not a balance of all of the purposes. For instance, if the small group leader is passionate about evangelism, the group will likely be led toward that purpose. If the leader's gift and passion is teaching, then the tendency will be to turn the group into just a Bible study, but with little or no outreach or ministry. All of us have different gifts and passions. Our groups need people to champion each of the purposes to make sure none of them are neglected.

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Steve Gladen, pastor of small groups at [Saddleback Church](#)

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### Purpose Driven Small Group Conference

Want to build a small group ministry around God's five eternal purposes? Don't miss the upcoming [Purpose Driven Small Group Conference](#), Feb. 21-23. This practical, hands-on conference will help you put together a plan for a healthy, growing small group ministry.

When you begin to instruct on this need and engage the groups in this discussion, some people will readily volunteer to help, while others may shrink down in their chairs and try to make themselves invisible. Those people need to be asked directly to consider taking one of these roles. Once they do accept the challenge, then give them a copy of the CD in [Don't Lead Alone](#) that corresponds to the role you're asking them to take. Give them a few days to listen to it, let them pray over it, and then check back with them, because the goal is to get at least one person in your group to champion each of the five purposes of God in your group life.

The concept of five biblical purposes is not something we made up at [Saddleback Church](#). In fact, these biblical purposes go all the way back to the very beginning of

the church, as found in the New Testament. Acts 2:42-47 is a great passage about what the church looked like as it began. Remember that at this time, the church didn't own a piece of property. The church didn't have any buildings. But in these early days, the church experienced explosive growth throughout the city of Jerusalem. In fact, within a matter of a few months, the church had more than 5,000 people. And all over the city, both in temple courts settings (what we would call church services) and in house-to-house meetings (small groups), they were living out these five biblical purposes.

The **first purpose** is found in verse Acts 2:42, which says, "They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching." We call that **discipleship**. Discipleship means growing to be like Christ. We're not just talking about information or education. We're talking about life transformation, the kind that takes place in a small group when a person who engages the Word of God begins to think more like Christ, act more like Christ, and start making decisions that are more reflective of who Jesus is and what the Word of God says.

The **second purpose** is stated explicitly in that passage: "They joined in the **fellowship** and they ate together with glad and sincere hearts." Pastor Rick Warren, in his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, says, "Fellowship means being committed to each other as much as we're committed to Christ." That's at the heart of fellowship. It's about building relationships, developing community, and nurturing openness and honesty in friendships. My true friends don't need to ask for my prayer requests because they already know my life, and that's the kind of fellowship you want in your small group.

The **third purpose** found in this passage is the purpose of **worship**. Verse 43 says, "Everyone was filled with awe." The sense of God's presence when they met caused them to want to express their love and adoration. It resulted in real worship. We need to work at cultivating those times of worship in our small groups as well – times when we focus on God's presence and express our love through song, prayer, and praise. Worship is a vitally important purpose of every small group experience.

### Don't Lead Alone

Want to help raise up purpose champions in your church's small groups? Check out [Don't Lead Alone](#) CD set from Purpose Driven Ministries. These six short teachings will help you gain a deeper understanding of the five purposes and ways that your church's groups can own those purposes.<>

The **fourth purpose** mentioned in this passage is **ministry**. This purpose is to those who are believers in Christ, whereas the next purpose, evangelism, is to those who don't know Christ. We are to have a ministry to the church and a mission to the world. Verse 45 says, "They gave to anyone as he had need." These Christians who had been radically transformed by the love of Christ could no longer be self-centered. As they saw the needs of people in their fellowship, they began to respond. That response is called ministry.

You don't want your small groups to be reduced down to just a meeting that happens on a Tuesday night. You want your small groups to be engaged in ministry and meeting the needs of people within the Body of Christ. Sometimes that ministry will take place right in your groups as people walk through a crisis together. It might be volunteering in your own church setting. It might even be helping out another believer in your neighborhood or community, a widow or an orphan or somebody that just needs some care and attention. Ministry is action.

The **fifth purpose** mentioned in this passage from Acts 2 is **evangelism**, which is outreach to those who don't know Christ. Verse 47 says, "The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." When all those other four purposes were being practiced – when discipleship was happening, there was authentic relationships, there was a sense of God in their midst, and they were meeting each other's needs – the natural byproduct was evangelism. People were attracted to the kind of changes they saw take place in the lives of these early Christians. What makes the purpose of evangelism special in your small group is that it is the only purpose you or your group cannot do in Heaven – so let's do it here on Earth!

We're convinced that all five of these purposes ought to be evident in the life of every small group. We've been created for five purposes, but those are not just the purposes of God for your church or for you as a pastor – they're for each individual. Through your small groups, you can help raise up people who embrace the purposes God created them for.

### Recommended resources

- [Purpose Driven Small Group Conference, Feb. 21-23](#)
- [Don't Lead Alone](#)
- [Small Group Curriculum Sampler Kit](#)
- [Building Healthy Small Groups](#)
- [250 Big Ideas for Purpose Driven Small Groups by Steve Gladen](#)

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