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Can You Spare a Little Grace?

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Teaching Your Small Group Leaders to Care for E.G.R.s

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In the life of any Small Group, there will come a time when the Small Group Leader will have concerns and struggles as to how to handle difficult people within their groups. With many different personalities attending a small group each week, the Small Group Leader must have a firm handle on how to identify and care for each of the personalities within their group. As the Small Group Point Person, it is your job to equip your Small Group Leaders to deal with group members who present special challenges – “E.G.R.’s (Extra Grace Required). If not handled properly, an “E.G.R.” can destroy the health (and attendance!) of a small group.

In looking at the issue of how the Small Group Leader can better care for E.G.R.’s, we find the Apostle Paul giving us three distinct E.G.R. personalities, and the remedies for getting a better handle on ministering and caring for these individuals. We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

E.G.R. Type #1 – The Unruly: “Admonish Them...”

The unruly group member seems to have a knack for drawing the life out of every group they attend. Week after week, they use the small group as a therapy couch, lamenting about all of the problems in their lives (which never seem to improve). This type of “E.G.R.” is completely unaware of how much of the small group’s time they are actually consuming. Upon closer observation, the unruly E.G.R. might be most properly labeled as “in need of attention.”

“Unruly” E.G.R. Character Traits

■ Needy

■ Loud

- Opinionated
- Controlling
- Non-repentant
- Conflict-driven

What the unruly need most is to be challenged.

- 1.Understand they are under attack from Satan.
- 2.Pray for them for what they could be.
- 3.Understand the art of confrontation (one “intensity step” above them).
- 4.Attempt to make them an ally (“Help me get others to share as you do.”)
- 5.Speak privately about their need to consume the group’s time.
- 6.Caution them that continued behavior will result in their dismissal.
- 7.Control the time given to each person to share (“All of us will have one minute to share on this issue”).

E.G.R. Type #2 – The Fainthearted: “Encourage Them...”

The fainthearted E.G.R. will most likely resemble the “church mouse” within the setting of their small group. This type of E.G.R. may have recently begun to take spiritual inventory, and are beginning to make life changes in how they think about and view God. They may spend months just attending, listening, and just “taking it all in.” The fainthearted E.G.R. may not be used to relating their faith or praying with other believers. They would feel threatened if the Small Group Leader were to put them “on the spot” to share anything.

“Fainthearted” E.G.R. Character Traits

- Quiet
  - Timid
  - Wary
  - Guarded (non-transparent)
  - Lacking Self Esteem
  - Under Construction in their Faith■Fearful
- What the fainthearted need most is to be encouraged.

1. Pray specifically that God would begin encouraging them to “open up” over time. Until then, be patient.
2. Understand that God is using the small group to help them reevaluate and draw closer in their faith.
3. Encourage tenderly that their attendance is “important” and “appreciated.”
4. Be careful not to put them on the spot during sharing time.
5. Affirm them tenderly that God is in control of their lives.
6. Find the one positive thing in their personality and character and build on it.
7. Affirm them sincerely anytime they share.

E.G.R. Type #3 – The Weak: “Help Them...”

The weak E.G.R. quite often is a person struggling to get “off the mat” in their lives. The storms of life have blown harshly. Many Christian E.G.R.’s in this category may have recently had a death in the family, lost a job, or may have lost it all due to a substance abuse problem. They come to the group bewildered, and wonder if God really cares for them. Many E.G.R.’s in this category are living day-to-day with economic and emotional pressures. If the truth could be known, these E.G.R.’s would tell you that they are just trying to survive. Another E.G.R. in this category would be the non-believer who is attempting to get closer to God, but is finding it increasingly difficult to draw closer because of an addictive, sinful lifestyle.

The “Weak” E.G.R. Character Traits (Christian & Non-Christian)

- Coming out of tragedy
- Highly sensitive
- Barely surviving
- Faithless
- In bondage to sinful lifestyle
- Non-committal
- Destructive life patterns

Caring for the “Weak” E.G.R.

What they need most is to be carried.

- 1.Extra personal touches required (letters, phone calls).
- 2.Need to be loved and affirmed.
- 3.Never ignore.
- 4.Need to be taken by the hand.
- 5.Counseled to take life one day at a time.
- 6.May need specific guidance.
- 7.Good candidate to be the recipient of grace and gifts from the small group.
- 8.Extreme levels of patience and understanding.

As the holidays approach, your small group members might be under more stress than usual. Stress can bring out E.G.R. behavior even in the best of us. It is easy to get along with those we like and find a kinship with. It is harder to love those who don't "fit". You need to prepare your Small Group Leaders to deal with these situations ahead of time. Remind them that God has set these people in all of our paths. They are "heavenly sandpaper". Most importantly, remind your leaders Christ died for them just as He died for us.