

Steves Article June 2011

## Mythbuster! Our Small Groups Should Take a Summer Break

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They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:41-43

I am often asked if Saddleback's small groups continue meeting during the summer. Let me answer that question by asking a more fundamental question—"What are you trying to get from your small groups?" If the answer is just "connection", then I would give your groups specific starting and stopping points. In the case of Saddleback, we are looking for more than connection. Our groups are the source of our church's health and growth. Small groups are the center of our discipleship, the structure of our ministry, the launch pad of our evangelism, the enrichment of our worship, and the network of our fellowship. We manage our small groups not by frequency (when to stop and start), but by health. We use our Health Assessment and Planner and Leadership Developmental Pathway to help groups understand and plan for health.

Whenever you tell small groups when to meet (the day of the week or time) and when to take a break (seasonal times), you are lowering your expectations for all groups. Your groups will never rise above your expectations. If you tell groups to stop meeting during the summer, they will stop—whether that is good for them or not. Instead, we manage groups for health (macro) and let groups figure out frequency (micro).

The only ones off for summer are kids, unless they are in a year round schedule. Adults generally only have two or three week vacation. So, why would you want to tell all of your groups to take a break during the summer? Most couples groups with kids get better traction in summer than the school year. Why? Because the kids have no homework and sport schedules slow down. My small group loves meeting during the summer because the kids' schedules are easy. If we stopped during summer, that would kill our sweetest time of group life.

Do you take the summer off from your kids? How about your spouse? What about your close friends? I don't. My friends are part of my small group. I wouldn't want to miss hanging with them. If your small group isn't full of people you want to do life with, you need to change that and get together with your friends.

Summer is also a great time to make new memories whether your group is new or has been together awhile. Use activities (some ideas are listed at the close of this article) to help bond your group. This will take fellowship to a new level and encourage transparency so discipleship and accountability can deepen. Summer is also a great time to develop ministry and missions.

So, why miss the perfect time to develop your small groups to a new level?

With that in mind – summer is here! Schedules are changing, vacations are planned and summer activities may have to be arranged. While summer can be a time for some "vacation" from school and other activities, friendship and community can grow deeper. Here are some

suggestions to help encourage consistency, provide new memories, and help breathe some new life into your small groups. Pass them along to all of your small groups.

Stay consistent: continue to meet when you regularly meet. If one family, couple or member cannot make it because of vacation plans or other things, don't take it personally and get together with whoever is available. If it turns out that only a few can meet, still meet. This gives you an opportunity to fellowship in a more intimate group and it's amazing how you may grow closer just meeting with the few who can attend.

Uplift someone or a group in your area. "Mission Trips" don't have to be far away. You don't just have to think globally, you can look locally! Look for ways that your small group can uplift someone in your community. What about a Senior Home to visit? Maybe there is a widow on your block that needs comfort? Do you know an elderly person that may just need a few things done to his/her yard? Your group can also volunteer at a local orphanage, school, church summer camp, or prison.

Modify group meetings. Have a Barbeque, Date Night or Girls Night/Boys' Night out. Maybe someone has a pool, trampoline or basketball hoop in their backyard for some fun and games. Have small group at the beach, the park, or by the lake! Remember that you can meet to focus on fellowship and maybe have some worship before the event gets started. Our small group has had swim parties and barbeques with our children, as well as couples only nights for the adults to get to know one another better.

Make a plan for spiritual growth. What do you need to do to plan for personal maturity during the summer? Meeting as a small group is great, and if you are already having daily quiet time with the Lord, I recommend to keep doing it! To mature in Christ takes a plan...a plan to spend daily time with the lord in prayer, study and meditation. We've got so much information coming in, what's to protect our hearts and our minds? We need to have the armor of God protecting us daily from the bombardment of the world.

Explore Rotating leadership and homes. Commit to have a meeting even if it's just two or three people. Hosts/leaders, if you're going to be out of town, ask someone to have the group meeting at their house. This is a great way to start sharing leadership, if you aren't already.

Reassess: Summertime is a great time to discuss some of the guidelines of your small group. Is the time/day still working for everyone? Are things changing in the Fall that need to be discussed? Do you want to add more members to your group?

What kind of study do you want to do? Don't be afraid to bring some of these issues up in your group. You are part of a larger family, so don't just "not show up" if there is something on your mind.

Try a different type of study:

A. Use the "Talk it Over" or sermon discussion notes for really lively conversations.

B. Read through particular chapters in the Bible as a group. Pick a book of the Bible (like an epistle) and have everyone read a chapter a week and come ready with at least one question for the group to answer. Bring a commentary, a Serendipity Bible, or other study materials to help.

C. Share each week from a daily devotional or drive time devotions.

D. Call another small group and see what they have been studying. They may have a great suggestion for your next study.

Involve everyone in an overnight retreat together. Find a campground, plan an overnight or two-day outing, meet up around a campfire at night and eat, sing, and have a devotional. Oh yeah! One overnight retreat is worth 26 weeks of small group meetings.

Minister together, do a serve project! What a great time to help out at church, fix up a group member's home, do some yard work for someone who is not doing well, or serve one Sunday morning in a way to help your church. See your church for a list of ways to serve as a group.

Experience a night of worship. Ask each person to bring two of their favorite worship songs. Play them all and share why the songs they brought have meaning to them. If your church polity allows, have communion at the end.

Check out this verse. "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:25

So, keep going and have fun S-U-M-M-E-R-T-I-M-E. Together.