

## **LIFE Group Leader Handout**

January 19, 2020

### ***The Increase/Decrease Proposition***

Pastor Joe Garofalo

**Scripture**— John 3:22-36 (22-30 shown here)

After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing. **23** John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized **24** (for John had not yet been put in prison). **25** Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. **26** And they came to John and said to him, “Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” **27** John answered, “A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. **28** You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, ‘I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.’ **29** The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. **30** He must increase, but I must decrease.”

**Main Idea**—As Christ increases in us, we give him the rightful place in our lives.

**Why He must Increase—5 Reasons** (John 3:31-36)

1. That Christ had a heavenly origin (v.31)
2. That Christ's testimony always agrees with God (v.33)
3. That Christ receives the Spirit without measure (v.34)
4. That Christ has received all authority from the Father (v. 35)
5. That it's always about belief in Christ (v.36)

**For Discussion**—

If Christ increases in us, that means we must decrease. What in your life needs to decrease? Are they “things” or is a mindset or both?

Which one of the 5 reasons spoke to you the loudest? How will you proceed from here? Share with your life group so they can pray and keep you accountable.

## Adapted from 'How to Increase Regular Commitment to Small Groups'

4 principles we can learn from the early church

By Andrew Wheeler

"I can't come tonight, I have to take my daughter to soccer practice."; "We're out of town this weekend for our son's travelling baseball team."; "We won't be there next week, we're celebrating our anniversary." And so it goes. Week after week, group members miss due to some conflict—and in any conflict, small group seems to lose out. Life happens, conflicts do arise, and small group is not the only priority for our members. But what if we could make our group's time together so valuable, members would schedule other activities around it? What if small group was so important to members, they would turn down conflicting invitations and events? What if small group could move up on our members' lists of priorities? To do so, we must look to the early church.

### **Faithful to the Word**

Early church members devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings (Acts 2:42–47). Similarly, our small groups need to be faithful to the Word. If you are not following the pulpit curriculum, keep your study based on the Bible and grounded in the Word. A good inductive study helps group members learn to feed themselves from the Word. Occasionally reading a book together can add variety, but remember that a steady diet of other people's teachings can reduce the central focus on God's Word and limit the growth of group members in their ability to study the Word on their own.

**Focus on Becoming and Making Disciples** - our small groups must be faithful to Jesus' Great Commission to make disciples, starting with the group members. As we learn, we should find ourselves becoming less like the world and more like Jesus. Faithfulness to the group increases radically as the group produces life transformation in its members.

### **Faithful to the Community**

The early church devoted themselves to fellowship in several ways, all of which you can incorporate into your group:

- **They ate together** - *"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."* Acts 2:42. The act of taking meals together helps to connect people in a disconnected world. Sharing a meal together allows for relaxed and meaningful conversation that strengthens the loyalty of group members to each other.
- **They met together** - publicly in the temple courts, privately in believers' homes—the early church gathered often (Acts 2:46). Their time together was a high priority.
- **They took care of each other.** - *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth"* (1 John 3:16–18; see also James 2:14–17).

Eating together, meeting together, and taking care of each other—carried out consistently—will build strong relationships and increase commitment within the group. Obviously, there are challenges. Geographical distance, family activities, seasons of life, and other situations contrive to keep us from building deep, interdependent relationships. As small-group leaders, we must be sensitive to these challenges while still finding ways to raise the value of the group in the eyes of our members.

### **Faithful to the Mission**

Prior to the day of Pentecost, Jesus outlined the mission of the church: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8)*. The church carried out this mission. Meeting together in the temple courts, they publicly proclaimed the gospel first in Jerusalem (Acts 2:46). As the persecution worsened, the church scattered beyond Jerusalem—first to Samaria (Acts 8) and then to the nations beyond (the rest of Acts). Our small groups may not have quite so ambitious a mission. But as part of the body, we’re also part of that mission force. A group having a focus beyond just the group members themselves creates a purpose that inspires commitment.

### **Faithful in Prayer**

*“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers” (Acts 1:14)*. Jesus had commanded the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). They waited in prayer, and God answered powerfully on the day of Pentecost. From this point, one of the main themes of the book of Acts is God’s work in response to prayer. Praying together—and seeing God respond to those prayers—was one of the highlights for the early church.

Undoubtedly, the early church prayed for the needs of members as part of how they cared for each other within the community. Most of the recorded prayers in Acts, however, aren’t about this—they are focused more on the mission of the church and on God’s glory. These effectual fervent prayers energized the church by fixing their attention more vertically than horizontally. Both are important, but the typical prayer time of many of our small groups tends to focus more on the horizontal than on the vertical. As we shift the balance of our prayer times more toward the vertical, we enable our members to more fully experience God’s presence—and as the group becomes accustomed to sensing God’s presence among them, the level of commitment within the group increases.

Increasing members’ dedication to our small groups is not a matter of “guilting” our members into coming to meetings. Growing the level of dedication in our groups is more a matter of creating a group environment members find valuable enough to make a priority—not just in meeting times, but in caring for each other, upholding each other in prayer, and more. As we devote ourselves to the foundational priorities of the early church, we will create groups that promote life transformation, community, interdependence, and commitment.