

The History of Small Group Bible Studies

By Doug Hamilton

Adam and Eve: The First Small Group Bible Study

Prior to the creation of the first marriage, the man Adam was given the single command of the LORD.

- Genesis 2:15-17 Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it. ¹⁶ The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”
- The man Adam was given an immediate one command to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Following that the woman was created from the rib of Adam and the first marriage was in place.
- Genesis 3:1-3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Indeed, has God said, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’?” ² The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; ³ but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.’ ”
- We discover the woman possessed the same information concerning the forbidden fruit. It was apparent from the following text in Genesis 3 that there was communication of the command to the woman from the man, for other scriptures indicate this.
- Adam was brought first brought forth to lead in the command of God. 1 Corinthians 11:8 For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man;
- In the violation of this command, Adam was not leading, but following a new teacher. Genesis 3:6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.
- The man was expected to teach, but the roles were reversed. Paul attempted to prove this very point in 1Timothy 2:12-14 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. ¹³ For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. ¹⁴ *And it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.
- The Logical Conclusion: Adam was charged in leading his wife in teaching the commandment of God. It was the smallest of small group Bible studies, a husband and wife, the first family unit. Even though there were leadership difficulties, it is clear that this was the first small group Bible study on record and the series was titled “The Forbidden Fruit”.

Noah believed in the Small Group Bible Study Program

- God told Noah that He was going to destroy the earth with a flood. Genesis 6:17 “Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish.
- God made a promise of salvation to Noah. Genesis 6:18 “I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark—you and your sons and your wife, and your sons’ wives with you.”
- In the end eight survived the Great Flood. 1 Peter 3:20 “....a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water.”

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- Noah was a proclaimer of the word of God concerning the pending deluge. 2 Peter 2:5 states that God "...did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly..."
- Logical conclusion: Noah, his wife, those sons and daughters-in-law entered the ark and were delivered because they had been educated in the home by Noah concerning the word of God. He was the leader of their small group Bible study and the topic was "Preparation for the Deluge".

The Small Group Bible Study Program was the cornerstone of the Jewish education.

- Deuteronomy 6:4-9 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."
- Notice that the basis of the educating was to be in the home, for that is where most of the living is being done. This is where your children will learn what kind of relationship you have with your Creator. Anyone can be a Christian at church, but it is in the home that this lesson is most clearly communicated.
- Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
- Every mother and father was charged with bringing up their children in a godly environment for the Lord. Life was to be an education and the location was to be in the home.

Jehoshaphat took the Small Group Bible Study program to a national level.

- 2 Chronicles 17:7-9 Then in the third year of his reign he sent his officials...and with them the Levites...and with them...the priests. ⁹ They taught in Judah, *having* the book of the law of the LORD with them; and they went throughout all the cities of Judah and taught among the people.
- Notice that he was not going to wait until the people came to Jerusalem for an education, but he took it to their homes. Jehoshaphat knew that the people would not change apart from the word of the Lord being sown in their hearts and he sought to increase the odds of it happening. They were among the people and not back at the office. They were making the difference and the result was the nation drawing closer to God for decades.

Jesus basically led a 3 ½ year small group Bible study program for His disciples.

- Jesus really did not have a regular location called home. Luke 9:58 And Jesus said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Therefore His home was where He laid His head at night, usually on the road.

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From the very beginning, His disciples desired the small group study Bible pattern.

- John 1:37-39 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸ And Jesus turned and saw them following, and said to them, “What do you seek?” They said to Him, “Rabbi (which translated means Teacher), where are You staying?” ³⁹ He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they came and saw where He was staying; and they stayed with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.
- They recognized Him as a teacher from the beginning and wanted to stay with Him for a small group home Bible study. They knew what they wanted and saw it in Jesus.

Jesus’ time with them was filled with small group Bible studies.

- Mark 9:31 states that “...He was teaching His disciples...”
- He taught His disciples to pray in Luke 11:1.
- He taught His disciples a lesson on “Water to Wine” in the home of the wedding party in John 2.
- While in a house away from the crowd, He taught His disciples a series of parables in Matthew 13, emphasizing evangelistic outreach.
- He taught the lesson that “God Loves Everyone” to a small group of sinner and tax-gatherers” in Matthew 9.
- Immediately after that He entered a blind man’s home and taught a lesson on Faith (Mt 9).
- He taught a lesson about His anointment for burial before the disciples at the home of Simon the leper in Matthew 26:6-13.
- He taught the lesson of “Faith in the Midst of the Storm” for His disciples from bow of a small vessel from which He slept in Luke 8.
- He taught the lesson of “Loving One Another” for these disciples from the large upper room of an unnamed owner in John 13.
- He spent many sessions in small groups in homes, teaching the words of God.

He sent the apostles out to do the same.

- Matthew 10:12-14 “As you enter the house, give it your greeting. ¹³ “If the house is worthy, give it your *blessing of peace*. But if it is not worthy, take back your *blessing of peace*. ⁴ “Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet.
- There is something about crossing the threshold of a doorway that makes a big difference. It is what turns outsiders into insiders. Jesus wanted them to take an active role in the conversion of others.

The Apostles continued in Jesus’ Small Home Group Bible Study Program

From the infancy of the church there was a small group home strategy.

- Acts 2:46-47 “Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart...”
- Acts 5:42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus *as* the Christ.

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- Acts 20:20-21 "...how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house²¹ solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- Without doubt they taught in different formats (the Temple, the synagogues, in the mountains), but it was the small group setup that made the greatest difference. They clearly followed the pattern of Jesus.

The Church continued in the Apostles' Small Group Bible Study Program.

- 1 Corinthians 16:19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.
- Colossians 4:15 Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house.
- Romans 16:5 "...also *greet* the church that is in their house..."
- It was clear that the small group Bible study program was active in the homes of the early Christians.

Timothy likely grew up in a Small Group Home Bible Study Environment.

- We are first introduced to Timothy in Acts 16:1 Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek,
- He was educated in the home concerning the scriptures. 2 Timothy 3:15 "...and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
- His faith was nurtured in the home by his mother and grandmother. 2 Timothy 1:5 For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that *it is* in you as well.
- They believed in the concept of the Small Group Home Bible Study Program. Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.
- Souls like Timothy do not happen by accident, but through education and nurturing of the word of God.

That is just a brief history of the Small Group Home Bible Study perspective. The point in covering it is because we often forget that there is no new thing under the sun when it comes to this topic. Small group studies have an incredible track record scanning many thousands of years. It has a track record that you can trust.