

# 8 Multiplication Habits



# The 8 Habits in 5 Minutes

As an athlete with division-one aspirations I always had to ask myself, “What do I need to do to be more effective?” Maybe it’s decades of habitual thinking or maybe it’s simply aspiring to something new - see what God did to me be something God does through me. I want to see people have scales fall of their eyes and live an absolute surrendered to and deeply intimate with Jesus, and I want to see them want that for others. I have always aspired to the dream of multiplication that seems to be the Kingdom ethos from the creation of first Adam to the great commission given from the second Adam. So the question is, “What does it take for small group leaders to be more effective?” From my experience, that of many others around me, and many much more effective than me, there is a simple list of 8 habits that have commonly been shown to improve the effectiveness of group leaders. They are as follows:

1. Dream of leading a healthy, growing, multiplying group.
2. Pray for your group members daily.
3. Invite new people to visit your group weekly.
4. Contact your group members regularly.
5. Prepare for your group meeting.
6. Plan group community (fellowship) activities
7. Mentor an apprentice leader.
8. Be committed to your own personal growth.

The group leaders that adopted these 8 simple habits into their weekly schedules became highly effective and multiplied their groups while those who did not... again... did not. An important note for this was that people’s gifting and experience didn’t seem to matter as much as simply living out these 8 habits. Introverts grew and multiplied groups. People without the gift of teaching grew and multiplied groups. New Christians grew and multiplied groups. The 8 habits are doable, motivating, and challenging but not overwhelming. They can help you create a path to fruitful leadership where you can watch God do through your life what He has already done to your life.

# The 8 Habits:

## 1. Dreaming is Necessary

Many people have led small groups that stale or wither. They lead because they were asked and caught someone else's dream for the group. But without their own dream the group eventually goes through motions and many just leave, maybe even the leaders. The reality is that small groups are where leadership multiplication happens. It's where we see God do something in someone we could not do on our own and uses our group as the venue for it. It's where a church or ministry goes from 50 people to 500 people leaders who dream of seeing Jesus seen, know, honored, loved, and adored for who He really is and the ways that changes families, cultures, groups, and communities. Small group is where spiritual growth is accelerated and where deep and vulnerable community is grown.

There is a man named Will Howse that I have never met. But he discipled a man named Jordan Goodie in Houston, who discipled a man named Zac Hanson in Houston, who then discipled a man named Taylor Cruz in New Mexico, who discipled a man named Brett Jahren in Florida, and so on. AND THAT'S WITHOUT OFFSHOOTS TO OTHER PEOPLE! Will Howse has never met me or Brett and may not ever, but we are in relationship with Jesus and raising our families in light of that because of his faithfulness to God's heart for the lost.

Going through the long-love of relational discipleship rather than share-it-and-quit-it evangelism is easy when the dream of what God can do is always in your mind. My "spiritual lineage" is not a means of self-glorification - no one cares anyways. But when I look back through years of life and see Heaven on Earth in the lives of men from my small groups the weeks, months, and years were well spent. The pursuit of heaven on earth in my life was left behind in lives of others and it's the dream to see it continue in my family and still in the lives of others.

Being an effective group leader is more than just leading a group. It is raising up leaders in order to reach the world. It is creating a spiritual family and building a spiritual army. When group leaders understand this dream, they immediately raise the value of their group and each of its members.

## 2. The Power of Prayer

S.D. Gordon once said, "The greatest thing anyone can do for God and man is to pray." This must be more than head knowledge. It must be heart and lived knowledge. Prayer is the single best thing you can do for your group but it is the single most difficult thing to do consistently. We are busy, distracted, discouraged, and many other things yield visible results in our lives instantaneously whereas prayer is working something with God we can't see.

Again, experience has shown my error. As a young small group leader with little knowledge I prayed a lot because it felt like all I had. My plans were feeble but my unashamed dependence on God “do something or this will fail” was not. I had more fruit the years I prayed more and knew less than the years I’ve known exponentially more and prayed almost correspondingly less.

The most effective small group leaders pray and they pray a lot. Many surveys of small group leaders showed a correlation between prayer and multiplication. Leaders who spent 90 minutes or more in daily devotion multiplied their groups twice as often than those who spend less than half an hour. The 8 habits are easier for the one who takes this one seriously and harder for the ones who don’t.

### Recognize

God can do in seconds what you cannot do over years. God can meet with your group members 24 hours a day, you cannot. You can’t be in two places at once, but God can. Prayer brings this beyond-comprehension-amazing-God into the picture. No one has ever come to the end their life and thought, “I prayed too much.” But many come to the end and think, “I prayed too little.” It’s the same when you come to the end of each week as a small group leader. Lastly, recognize that Satan is not going to just let you plunder his kingdom because once he has truly lost one soul he cannot get it back. He will not passively allow you grow, multiply, and equip your groups. Prayer is how you keep from going backward and how you keep pushing forward.

## **3. Invite Them and They will Come.**

As a leader, you have to follow the principle that if you invite them, they will come because the reality is that they’re not coming anyways. So if you don’t invite them, they’re still not coming. Statistically, you usually have to invite 25 people for 15 to say they will attend. Of those 15 only 8 show up, and only 5-7 will be regular members of the community after a month or so. When you start a group, ask 2-5 times the amount of people you expect to have at the first meeting.

### Where do I find people?

- family in town
- Friends nearby
- Coworkers or fellow students
- Neighbors on the street

### Tactics for Inviting

Yes, we can have tact in developing friendships. Intentionality does not equal inauthentic. We deeply believe knowing and surrendering to Jesus is the greatest thing that can happen in someone’s life (if you’re not sure of that, that’s okay. Firmly establish your thoughts on this) and I believe the can happen in small group. So I will be intentional.

First, pray. God knows the who, when, where of each invitation. Ask God daily to share his heart for the people you are going to invite and He will make clear the best first contexts for invites.

Second, shoot for the likely 'yes' then build a bridge of 'yeses' till they're at the group. For example, someone might not say yes to coming to a group night first but they might be more likely to say 'yes' to going to the pool together, to a sporting event, or to coffee. Then build on the 'yeses' till they are ready for a 'yes' to small group.

Third, persevere. We have to ask more than once. I have found that people come after the third or fourth invitation IF I have continued building a caring relationship with them. If we are not willing to spend time with someone relationally, don't expect to have any weight in their lives spiritually.

Lastly, use your team. Your group should be a team you all can utilize. For example, one guy (Jake) in my small group was a rancher and gun enthusiast. I am none of those things but when I met someone who was like that I set up a time for me and Jake to go shoot clays and invited the new guy to come with us and connect them. Often at small group he would gravitate towards Jake which was a great opportunity to disciple Jake in discipling someone else.

## 4. Connect Often

One of my professors started a church with 11 adults in his basement. He called them each week. After 6 months the church was 100 - he called every family every week. After 18 months it was 200 - he called almost every family every week. So he and 5 key leaders divided up the calls. Even in youth settings, when student leaders would message or call members in small group each week attendance was up but if they got busy and forget to send messages or call to develop relationship then attendance would correspondingly drop.

Connecting often increases weekly average of attendance. The most important questions for a leader to ask themselves before trying to connect often is, "Do I really think my group is worth attending?" If not, we won't invite or connect with anyone to keep them present. For me, the more someone is part of our community the more times God can work in and through the small group to change them and give them direction and community.

Remember that "you can't grow them if you don't know them." The better you know them the better you can lead them. They may only share things with you when you call because they're not ready to share with the whole group yet. Connecting with them communicates that you really do care because you sacrificed free time to talk with them.

### Suggestions for Connecting

Powerful:

- how can I pray for you?

- What does God want you to do about this? Or What do you want God to do about this?
- Let's pray right now (then pray for them aloud)
- Do you want to pray?

Regular Conversation:

- Is there anything special in your life going on this week?
- How are your kids doing?
- Do you like your job?
- On a scale of one to ten, how stressful was your week?
- Where did you grow up?
- How did you choose to follow Jesus?
- What do you like most about the church?
- What do you like best about the D-group?
- What area do you think God wants you to grow in this month?
- Have you ever thought of leading a group?

## 5. Preparation for Group

My professor shared the following anecdote:

"Preparation is not my strong suit," Bill explains. Bill usually "flies by the seat of his pants" when it comes to facilitating his group meetings. He says that he likes his group to be "free and spontaneous." But lately, attendance has dropped off. No one has invited any guests in a while. The people in his group are grumbling, saying the group has turned into a time where "Bill just shares his pet peeves." On the other hand, Dan and his apprentice Doug spend time on Monday nights getting ready for their Tuesday night group meeting.

The time they spend praying and preparing makes the small group meeting successful. Their group has grown. The group members look forward to coming every week and are not ashamed to invite guests.

Dan and Doug have learned that a successful small group meeting does not fall together haphazardly. It is the product of planning, prayer and preparation."

We have to know where we are going to lead well. If you spend as much time in preparation for group as your group lasts it will be worth it. Preparation means there are less distractions and because the group flows Jesus can be the focus rather than the mechanics of questions and activities. Preparation gives you confidence and allows you to enjoy the group as it's happening. You want the group to be something people in it want to invite others to also. Preparation can be different depending on what the group is doing that week (see the Monthly Rhythms that could be possible for the D-Group).

3 Keys for Preparation:

- Prepare yourself through prayer, fasting, repentance, rest, or anything necessary.
- Prepare the atmosphere where people are being hosted ensuring it's clean and has enough room.
- Prepare your agenda. Ensure you have enough time for each segment like Welcome, Worship, Word, Welcome or whatever variation for which the evening calls.

## 6. Community Outside of Group

Love and laughter plows through hard hearts. Love and laughter often happen during time together just being friends and having fun. Strategically, group sizes usually double with unchurched friends if the group members invited them to a hang-out or two first. Whether it's the feasts in the Old Testament, Jesus' presence at multiple parties, or the imagery of banquet parties in the Kingdom of Heaven, there is power in time together.

Many people have a relational void or hole in their heart. Some people go to group to fill that whole - let it happen. Make community part of your monthly group rhythm. It shows unchurched friends firsthand that Christians can actually have fun. This context allows people to see a normal side of everyone and deepens relationships. Some of Jesus' greatest moments were not in formal settings but in social gatherings. You can have intentional and purposeful one on one conversations during social events.

### Community Suggestions

- Board game nights
- Movie nights in the house or out
- Park nights (for people with kids)
- Baseball games (outfield grass section for families)
- Playing in local sports leagues together
- Cookouts
- Eating at a nice restaurant
- Camping
- Mountain Biking
- Museums
- Etc.

## 7. Mentor and Apprentice

When Moses watched the nation of Israel go off to take the promised-land he knew Joshua had been raised up to go with them. The nation served God all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua but no one else was raised up to lead the nation. The result was

that there was a generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel (Judges 2:7-10).

Small groups have come and gone in the same way after Joshua while others have continued on like Israel did after Moses. The difference the dream for and intentionality in finding an apprentice. Mentoring is all about reaching more through others than we could ever reach alone. It's about letting go of our position so others can sit in it and minister as well. It's about keeping leadership and group multiplication a priority.

Ultimately, I don't look back on the small group I've led but on the leaders/disciple-makers that have come out of those small groups.

### **Mentoring Suggestions**

- Never do ministry alone. Bring a small group member with you whenever possible.
- Take advantage of all the training opportunities your church offers, bringing a potential leader with you to each event.
- Constantly look for new leaders. They're all around you and you'll see them if you are praying each day in this regard.
- Talk of leadership as a privilege, not a burden. Let God carry the big problems you may face as you lead your small group.
- Don't put yourself on a pedestal or good people will shy away from leadership.
- Give a potential leader responsibilities before you ask the person to consider leadership in your group.
- Always consult with those above you before you give a member the title of "apprentice" or "intern." Your coach or pastor may ask you to wait or choose a different person for the role.
- Realize that failing to mentor will always mean failing to multiply your personal ministry as a small group leader and the group itself.
- Don't release leaders until they have a good chance of succeeding.
- As you move through the first six months of small group life, purposely allow your ministry role to decrease and your apprentices role to increase. This will give him or her confidence and prevent you from experiencing burnout.
- Give lavish affirmation and encouragement to your apprentices each step along the way, even when they fail. This encouragement offsets discouragement

## **8. Personal Growth**

Churches spend a lot of time on curriculum and discipleship pathways which are all good and necessary to a point. Sometimes, the result is simply creating baby birds waiting for mother church to bring more food. The greatest culture I have been part of was one where we all became avid learners and readers because we desperately want to know more of Jesus and how to help others know Him too. I hated reading my entire life and am still not the most effective reader but



I love Jesus and wanted others to love Him too so I read the Bible and tons of good men and women who came before us. This culture created an attitude of personal growth.

At the end of the day, personal growth is the well from which long-term effectiveness drinks. When someone stops growing their group grows stale and their life (physical, emotional, spiritual, marital, relational) begins to wither. But when they begin to grow again those aspects of their life fill up again.

The one thing in your control is your own self-improvement. The key to changing a group is usually changing the group leader first. Paul told Timothy, "Train yourself to be godly" (1 Tim. 4:7). This responsibility belongs to each individual. No one else can grow for us, learn for us, or improve for us. The time we spend in our personal growth will directly effect our effectiveness in leading, discipling, and mentoring others (including our families).

The best thing my aforementioned culture did for me was give me a list of authors - great men and women of God in history who finished the race well and adored Jesus all the way to end - rather than give me boat loads of curriculum. The hungry found what they needed to be satisfied while the complacent talked much about their disdain for reading/learning.

### Suggestion for Personal Growth

Write down everything you do each day in broad categories for the next few weeks. At the end of each day, take ten minutes to take inventory of the following:

- How many hours you worked and slept.
- How many minutes of TV you watched.
- How many minutes you spent with your spouse and each child.
- How much time you spent reading for pleasure or knowledge.
- What you ate at each meal.
- How much you exercised.
- How much time you prayed and spent time in the Word.
- How much time you spent with other members of your group in person or on the phone.

After a few weeks, total up the categories and determine what's lacking and make changes. Then share your plan of action with your coach or pastor so they can pray for you and hold you accountable.