

Case Study (Healthy) Online Small Group



This case study is based on Saddleback Church's¹ Small Group Ministry. Saddleback maintains a very close relationship with all small groups, whether held in homes or online. I was privileged to be a member of an online small group. The size of the group varies between three and seven members at any one time. The best size seems to be five. This size facilitates forming personal relationships among members. The group celebrated baby births, birthdays, church services with those of us who held membership in a church other than Saddleback. Our weekly meetings consisted of working our way through a text that the group elects or listening to Saddleback's weekend messages and discussing the message using a document titled "Talk It Over Guide". There was always personal application and Bible study. The session ended with praise reports for answered prayer, prayer for individual requests, for Saddleback personal who facilitate the Small Group Ministry.

Periodically, the host would invite members to assume a specific role such as Worship Champion, Co-host or Women's Ministry champion. Active members are always encouraged to invite others to join in the fellowship of a small group. The group is kept healthy by monitoring individual commitment to the spiritual growth of all members. If a situation should arise where a member is unable to participate due to family commitments, time zone challenges or a very real life situation such as inappropriate behavior, the host is responsible for helping members find another group more suited to their schedules or spiritual needs.

The following is taken from an article written by Steve Gladen:² Our small-group strategy intentionally deepens the five biblical purposes of fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, and worship into every group. We are far more concerned about healthy groups than the number of groups. Groupings of people that meet around "special interests" are strategic, but are not groups that are trying to balance the five purposes for healthy individuals and groups.

I've included in this case study, copies of forms that are used to measure the health of a small group.

¹ Saddleback Church is an evangelical Christian megachurch located in Lake Forest, California, situated in southern Orange County, affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. The church was founded in 1980 by Pastor Rick Warren

² (<http://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2008/saddleback-small-group-difference.html>).

| Spiritual Growth Assessment | |
|---|----------|
| As you complete the assessment, avoid rushing. Listen for God's voice to encourage and challenge you. Consider this experience as one-on-one time with Him. Be intentional in your growth towards Christlikeness. Use the scale below to respond to each statement. | |
| Never - 1 Seldom - 2 Occasionally - 3 Frequent - 4 Always - 5 | |
| SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES | RESPONSE |
| ABIDE IN CHRIST | |
| 1. I practice a regular quiet time and look forward to that time with Christ. | |
| 2. When making choices, I seek Christ's guidance first. | |
| 3. My relationship with Christ is motivated more by love than duty or fear. | |
| 4. I experience life change as a result of my worship experiences. | |
| 5. When God makes me aware of His specific will in an area of my life, I follow His leading. | |
| 6. I believe Christ provides the only way for a relationship with God. | |
| 7. My actions demonstrate a desire to build God's kingdom rather than my own. | |
| 8. Peace, contentment, and joy characterize my life rather than worry and anxiety. | |
| 9. I trust Christ to help me through any problem or crisis I face. | |
| 10. I remain confident of God's love and provision during difficult times. | |
| Abide in Christ Total | |
| LIVE IN THE WORD | |
| 1. I regularly read and study my Bible. | |
| 2. I believe the Bible is God's Word and provides His instructions for life. | |
| 3. I evaluate cultural ideas and lifestyles by biblical standards. | |
| 4. I can answer questions about life and faith from a biblical perspective. | |
| 5. I replace impure or inappropriate thoughts with God's truth. | |
| 6. I demonstrate honesty in my actions and conversation. | |
| 7. When the Bible exposes an area of my life needing change, I respond to make things right. | |
| 8. Generally, my public and private self are the same | |
| 9. I use the Bible as the guide for the way I think and act. | |
| 10. I study the Bible for the purpose of discovering truth for daily living. | |
| Live By God's Word Total | |
| PRAY IN FAITH | |
| 1. My prayers focus on discovering God's will more than expressing my needs. | |
| 2. I trust God to answer when I pray and wait patiently on His timing. | |
| 3. My prayers include thanksgiving, praise, confession, and requests. | |
| 4. I expect to grow in my prayer life and intentionally seek help to improve. | |
| 5. I spend as much time listening to God as talking to Him. | |
| 6. I pray because I am aware of my complete dependence on God for everything in my life. | |
| 7. Regular participation in group prayer characterizes my prayer life. | |
| 8. I maintain an attitude of prayer throughout each day. | |
| 9. I believe my prayers impact my life and the lives of others. | |
| 10. I engage in a daily prayer time. | |
| Pray In Faith Total | |

Spiritual Self-Assessment Figure 1

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| FELLOWSHIP WITH BELIEVERS | |
| 1. I forgive others when their actions harm me. | |
| 2. I admit my errors in relationships and humbly seek forgiveness from the one I've hurt. | |
| 3. I allow other Christians to hold me accountable for spiritual growth. | |
| 4. I seek to live in harmony with other members of my family. | |
| 5. I place the interest of others above my self-interest. | |
| 6. I am gentle and kind in my interactions with others. | |
| 7. I encourage and listen to feedback from others to help me discover areas for relationship growth. | |
| 8. I show patience in my relationships with family and friends. | |
| 9. I encourage others by pointing out their strengths rather than criticizing their weaknesses. | |
| 10. My time commitments demonstrate that I value relationships over work/career/hobbies. | |
| Build Godly Relationships Total | |
| WITNESS TO THE WORLD | |
| 1. I share my faith in Christ with non-believers. | |
| 2. I regularly pray for non-believers I know. | |
| 3. I make my faith known to my neighbors and/or fellow employees. | |
| 4. I intentionally maintain relationships with non-believers in order to share my testimony. | |
| 5. When confronted about my faith, I remain consistent and firm in my testimony. | |
| 6. I help others understand how to effectively share a personal testimony. | |
| 7. I make sure the people I witness to get the follow-up and support needed to grow in Christ. | |
| 8. I encourage my church and friends to support mission efforts. | |
| 9. I am prepared to share my testimony at any time. | |
| 10. My actions demonstrate a belief in and commitment to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). | |
| Witness To The World Total | |
| MINISTER TO OTHERS | |
| 1. I understand my spiritual gifts and use those gifts to serve others. | |
| 2. I serve others expecting nothing in return. | |
| 3. I sacrificially contribute my finances to help others in my church and community. | |
| 4. I go out of my way to show love to people I meet. | |
| 5. Meeting the needs of others provides a sense of purpose in my life. | |
| 6. I share biblical truth with those I serve as God gives opportunity. | |
| 7. I act as if other's needs are as important as my own. | |
| 8. I expect God to use me every day in His kingdom work. | |
| 9. I regularly contribute time to a ministry at my church. | |
| 10. I help others identify ministry gifts and become involved in ministry. | |
| Minister To Others Total | |

Spiritual Self-Assessment Figure 2

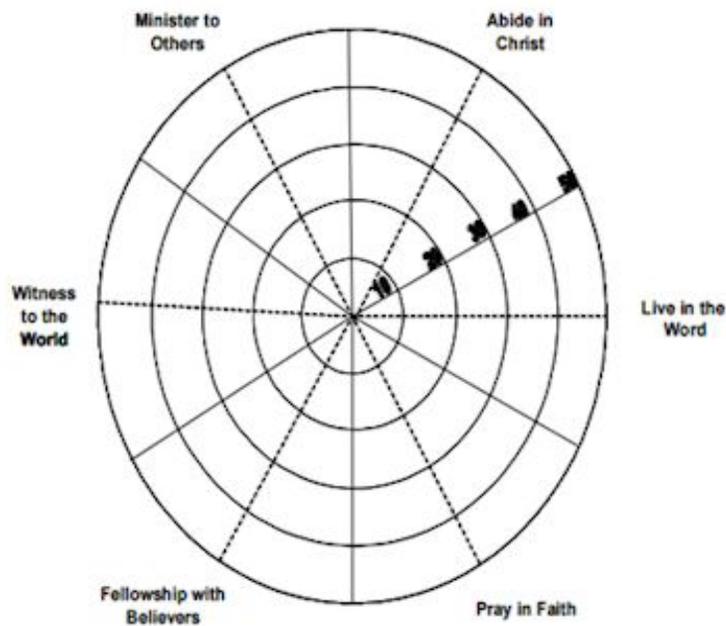
Your Discipleship Wheel

For a visual representation of your spiritual assessment complete the following steps:

Step One: On the dotted line in each discipline section of the circle plot a point corresponding to your total score for that discipline. Place similar points on the solid lines to the immediate right and left of each dotted line.

Step Two: Connect the plotted points with curved lines similar to the lines of the circle.

Step Three: Using a pencil or marker shade the areas in each section between the lines you drew and the center of the circle. The shaded areas reveal your personal discipleship wheel at this point in your spiritual journey.



Spiritual Self-Assessment Figure 3

Practice these things; be committed to them,
so that your progress may be evident to all.
1 Timothy 4:15 HCSB

Step Four: Ask yourself these questions:

1. Which areas have the most shading? At this point in your spiritual journey, you see these as the strongest elements of your spiritual growth. List below one benefit these strengths bring to
 - a. You personally: _____
 - b. Your family: _____
 - c. Your church: _____
 - d. Your community: _____

2. Which areas have the least shading? At this point in your spiritual journey you see these as the elements needing the most improvement. List below one reward growth in these disciplines would bring to:
 - a. You personally: _____
 - b. Your family: _____
 - c. Your church: _____
 - d. Your community: _____

Step Five: Make specific plans to grow spiritually this next year. Complete the **Annual Spiritual Growth Plan**.

Spiritual Self-Assessment Figure 4

One could measure the success of this ministry by the fact that I came to visit and observe in 2012 and now five years later, participation in the group has not waned and I serve as co-host on a regular basis. Prudence and ministerial respect dictates that I maintain a complete understanding with my pastor here in CT, that the first loyalties are to my home church. It is very important to bring balance to my personal life and to maximize learning opportunities.

Perhaps a more objective measure of the success of this ministry is the care that is given to clearly state the expectations of a participant. Upon acceptance into the group, the host was very prompt in sending a welcome to the group email:

Welcome! Thank you for choosing to participate in our online small group! Here are a few steps for you to take to help you get started.

1. Download, for free, Google's Chrome internet browser. www.google.com/chrome
2. Use Chrome to access the Internet for your online small group meetings.

Using Internet Explorer or other Internet browsers causes problems.

3. Go to www.onlinesmallgroup.com and click the blue button “Log Into Your Group.” Login with the email and password you use for Saddleback.com.
4. You will see two tabs near the top of the page. One reads “Home” and the other will be the name of your small group. Click the tab with the name of your small group.
5. Congratulations! You are in your small group meeting place!
6. On the right side of the page you will see “My Profile.” Click on “Edit Settings” and choose whether you want to receive email notifications of the posts from your small group leader and fellow members.
7. When it is time to meet for your small group, log in and use the Live Group chat box that you will see at the bottom right of your screen. Just click it and it will come up on your screen.

Thank you for choosing to participate in our online small group! May you be richly blessed!

The participant packet also contained Saddleback Church's tenets of faith (Our Beliefs), and the following information:

Our Purposes: We are a Purpose-Driven Church.

Purpose driven defined: Balancing the five biblical purposes.

The Great Commandment: “Jesus replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Matthew 22:37-39 (*NLT*)