

Small Groups

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE RIDLEY COMMUNITY / MISSION & MINISTRY COLLEGE

WINTER 2017

The Swiss Army Knife of Youth Ministry

When it comes to welcoming and establishing young people in the church, small groups are the Swiss Army knife of youth ministry, according to faculty member **Graham Stanton**.

YOUTH IN CHURCH



If you don't know what a Swiss Army knife is, chances are you've never been a ten-year-old boy. In one elegant package you have a knife, a can opener, a screwdriver, a pair of scissors, and a stabby-pointy-thing that you don't really know the purpose of but think is cool anyway. This is the sort of tool you'd need to survive for a month in the wilderness. In reality, the most adventurous things I ever did with my knife were to whittle a few sticks and to try (and fail) to open a tin can. Small groups are like a Swiss Army knife. A small group can do a whole stack of useful things all in the one elegant package. Yet we don't often make the most of everything that a small group has to offer.

Small groups give young people the chance to know and be known. Young people often

have plenty of contacts, but few genuine relationships. Church communities can be like that too: good at getting people in the same room at the same time, but not as good at building relationships of depth. Relationships in a small group are in your face. When there are no more than eleven other people in a group it's hard to ignore them, and it's hard to be ignored. Small groups are places where young people can learn the skills of conversation. They can learn how to show loving support to others, and learn how to be honest and open with others. In short, they can learn what it means to be in communion with others as God created us to be.

Small groups give young people the chance to know God. As young people lose interest in organised religion a common misconception

is that they are also losing interest in God and spiritual life. Many young people want to know God, but they don't want to be told, they want to discover. Small groups that open the Bible together and encourage members to explore together how God's word makes sense of their lives can be engaging places of spiritual quest and discovery for young people.

Small groups give young people the opportunity to see that coming to know God is a challenging adventure worth giving your life to. Acknowledging a teenager's desire to engage in their own spiritual quest doesn't mean they want to be left to their own spiritual wandering (and wondering). They don't want to be told, but they are open to learn from examples. Small groups give young people who are learning faith and Christian life the chance to be up close and personal with others who are mature in faith and life. Particularly as they come to the later years of high school, and certainly as they become young adults, by being involved in an inter-generational small group, or by connecting a teenage small group with a group of older adults, young people experience the rich diversity of the Christian community.

Yet, despite these opportunities, churches don't always make use of everything a small group has to offer. We might focus exclusively on Bible study so that personal relationships remain superficial enough that the group doesn't make any personal demands on its members. Or we might spend so much time eating or chatting that we never get around to the 'Bible bit'. Or we keep our small groups so stratified and separated according to age and life stage that we miss the value of learning from each other, being challenged by each other, and sharing life with one another.

Small groups can promote genuine relationships, helping to build faith and faithfulness as people from diverse backgrounds read and wrestle with the Bible together. They are the Swiss Army knife of youth ministry.



Small Groups

The Swiss Army Knife of Youth Ministry	1
From the Principal	2
Successful Small Group Leaders	3
Justification by Faith Alone	4
Book Review	5

For The 2017 Calendar

June 16 – 29

Reformation Study Tour

June 28 – July 11

Reformation Friends' Tour

July 21

Leon Morris Lecture given by Lynn Cohick

July 22

'Evangelical Women in Academia'

Day Seminar with Lynn Cohick

July 25

'A Theology of the Family of God'

Public lecture given by Amy Peeler

August 22 – 24

'By Faith Alone: Preaching Romans'

Annual Preachers' Conference with keynote speakers Ray Galea & Mike Bird

September 4

Marketplace Institute Lecture

given by Mark Stephens

October 6

Annual Dinner

Held at Melbourne Zoo

October 26 – 27

Life @ Work Conference

co-hosted by the Ridley Marketplace Institute

November 8

Gospel Coalition Lectures

by Brian Rosner and Rhys Bezzant

at Cross Culture Church, Melbourne

December 9 – 21

Israel Study Tour



From the Principal

Small groups are a unique way of connecting with other believers and sharing our lives openly and honestly in the context of **Bible study and prayer**.

EQUIPPING SMALL GROUPS

The mission of Ridley College is to equip men and women for God's mission in a rapidly changing and increasingly complex world. Whilst our main focus is on students undertaking on campus and online degree-level awards, we also offer a range of opportunities for people who can't study in this way or who have already done so. Every year we run a suite of conferences and public lectures that address topics of broad interest from the perspective of the best Christian scholarship. In addition, in recent years the Ridley Certificate, with its beautifully produced videos, has become a popular way for individuals and church groups to increase their knowledge of God and the Bible, and to improve their skills in serving God.

For some time many people have made enquiries about using the Ridley Certificate units as a resource for small groups. This is understandable, given that churches are always on the lookout for quality resources for Bible study that are both faithful to God's Word, and engaging and practical in terms of application. Up until now we've resisted the pressure, pointing out that the Ridley Certificate is designed for formal study and not for an informal small group setting. I say until now, as I am excited to announce that we have now adapted four units from the Ridley Certificate for use in small groups and are making them available at an affordable price. The new *Ridley Small Groups* offers studies in Psalms, Isaiah, 1 Corinthians and Revelation.

Speaking personally, I've always loved small group discipleship, from my university days

to the last twelve years when Natalie and I have co-led groups in our local churches. While nothing beats a sermon for proclaiming the depths of our sin, God's amazing grace, and the heights of his glory, small groups are a unique way of connecting with other believers and sharing our lives openly and honestly in the context of Bible study and prayer. A good small group leaves you nowhere to hide. In my experience it's the main place where we rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

Small groups are an ideal context for obeying the 'one another' commands: love one another, accept one another, forgive one another, confess your sins to one another, be kind and patient with one another, bear with one another, and so on. But leading a good small group is no easy task and it takes great faith and wisdom. Small groups also need solid input from the Bible. So it is our prayer that Ridley Small Groups will be a valuable resource for busy leaders.

Leading a small group is no small task and what happens in small groups is a key part of discipleship in churches in Melbourne and around Australia. Ridley sees being involved in small groups as another way in which we can contribute to the building up of the church and assist gospel workers as they help Christians grow into maturity in Christ.

Brian Rosner, Principal

Check the Ridley website for times & locations: www.ridley.edu.au/events or join our events mailing list: j.daw@ridley.edu.au

170 The Avenue, Parkville, Victoria 3052
 ph: 03 9207 4800 / email: info@ridley.edu.au

Successful Small Group Leaders

Rod and Karen Morris have been thinking about the key ingredients of a successful small group for decades, and have identified five things every leader should be clear about.



Karen and Rod Morris

LEADING BIBLE STUDY

3

Rod and Karen Morris are authors of *Leading Better Bible Studies*, a 20-year-old book, and a best seller now in its 2nd edition. It has been translated into Russian, and parts of it have been translated into Chinese and Spanish. 'People tell me it's useful', says Rod, 'although I now refer people to *Iron Sharpens Iron* by Orlando Saer, as a good starting point for Bible study leaders as it interacts well with both *Leading Better Bible Studies* and Colin Marshall's *Growth Groups*.'

When they decided to write the book, Rod was running training for churches in Sydney and people always asked him for recommendations of books on leading small groups. 'At that stage, Colin Marshall's book *Growth Groups* hadn't been published, and there was nothing to recommend', says Rod. 'The books that were around seemed to focus on social work theory or promoted one particular package. Karen and I were keen to write something that would actually equip people with the skills needed to lead a group, and in particular, the Bible study part of the group.'

Karen is now an Evangelist with the Christian Union at Monash University, and Rod is the Senior Minister of St Stephen's Greythorn, an Anglican Church in North Balwyn. They say there are five things to be clear about when leading a Bible study.

Growing spiritually by studying the Bible is actually the reason for meeting together.

1. Clarity of Purpose

Groups can meet for outreach, growth, service or social reasons. When there is not clarity of purpose, the group often reverts to the lowest common denominator, which is usually the social purpose. To have clarity of purpose, we need to discuss and agree together that growing spiritually by studying the Bible is our main reason for meeting together.

2. Clarity of Method

The Bible is at the heart of us engaging with God because we encounter God in Scripture. That is why we wrote the book. Bible study groups and churches aren't simply drawing from social work theory. Bible study groups are about wanting to study the Bible together and to grow together as a result of our studies.

3. Clarity of Contribution

Lots of small group meetings slip into a sermonette format, where the leader tells everyone what they think. In contrast, in an effective group all members participate and contribute as brothers and sisters in Christ because they want to help each other. This is a key to groups functioning well.

4. Clarity of Process

Three main processes need to happen in a small group for it to function effectively:

- Listening and responding.
- Challenge and encouragement.
Members need to be pushed, but they also need a pat on the back.
- Prayer and rejoicing.

5. Clarity of Progress

Does a group have a sense that it is getting somewhere? The group that spends a long time stuck on one thing can feel as though it is bogged. The new *Ridley Small Groups*' program offers help with this, by bringing genuine expertise that groups can interact with as peers and helping groups to make progress.

If they were to rewrite the book, Rod says 'We would include more around the process of interpretation. How do we as a group get a clear understanding of what a passage means, rather than just sharing opinions about it? We wrote the book within the Australian and the Sydney evangelical context, where people are biblically literate. Once you move beyond Australian evangelicalism, the centrality of Scripture and the centrality of Christ as the key to understanding the main story of the Bible get lost. We didn't focus on that as strongly as we would now.'

'Since writing the book, there are a couple more strategies that we have developed and used that we would add,' says Rod. 'Getting people to prepare a draft sermon works really well, and helps identify future preachers! When someone prepares a sermon they are looking at what a passage says, what it means, and how we apply it—so it works well as a group technique.'



Find out more
[ridley.edu.au/
smallgroups](http://ridley.edu.au/smallgroups)

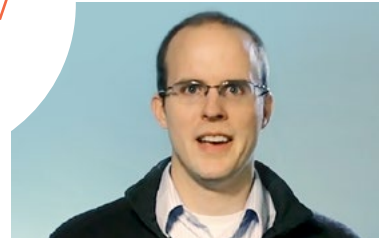
The perfect resource for your next Bible study series.

Ridley Small Groups offers short **video lectures** and **discussion questions** drawn from the biblical studies subjects of the Ridley Certificate and specially adapted for use in small groups.

STUDY SERIES

The Psalms
Isaiah
1 Corinthians
Revelation

- Each series includes 12 sessions
- \$120 per group, per series, for 26 weeks
- The material is available for the group to use at their own pace.



Book Review

Leading Better Bible Studies: Essential Skills for Effective Small Groups

by Karen and Rod Morris, Aquila Press, 2nd edition, 2016

BOOK REVIEW

5



The regular practice of meeting in small groups around God's Word is a steady and powerful means to grow us into mature disciples of Christ. Yet often churches struggle to find leaders to take on the task of leading Bible study groups. A valuable resource that assists churches to raise up Bible study leaders is Karen and Rod Morris' book *Leading Better Bible Studies*.

The strength of this book lies in the authors' commitment to train people in God's Word,

so that they can enable others to learn from the Word. Yet the book also holistically covers much more than this: what it means to be a Christian leader, adult education and how adults learn, developing group life, helping people pray, pastoral care of group members and, importantly, how to be sustained as a Christian leader.

It is a privilege to be entrusted with the task of teaching God's people his Word. I often find it much harder to know how to help people discover for themselves the truths and treasures in God's Word, than to just tell them straight out what they should learn from a passage. Yet, as a Bible study leader, I aspire and labour to do the former.

The chapters that teach the reader how to help people learn from the Bible are both insightful and practical. The book shows leaders how to construct a Bible study from scratch, explaining that a Bible study has three sections – observation (what does the text say?),

interpretation (what does the text mean?), and application (how do we respond to what the text means?). Not only do these chapters help leaders to design and implement Bible studies but they also, perhaps more importantly, give them comprehensive (but not overwhelming) methods for exegeting the Scriptures.

Karen and Rod provide worked examples of various creative methods for doing 'observation' with a group. Suggestions include paraphrasing the text, creating contrast and comparison tables, using maps, and creating logic diagrams. This section is an invaluable tool for helping youth, young adults and adults develop a hungry curiosity for the text, and encourages both new and mature Christians to notice fresh things from God's Word.

I've found this book useful as I lead Bible studies myself, as well as a great resource for training individuals and groups. Wherever you are in your journey as a Bible study leader this book will encourage you from the Scriptures and help you week by week as you teach others to learn from God's Word.

Reviewed by Sarah Creek, a current MDiv student at Ridley. Sarah works part time at St Matthew's Anglican Church, Prahran and also in aged care with HammondCare.