

An Exciting Way to Be Part of God's Work



SABBATH—AUGUST 29

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 1:1, 2, 26; Exodus 18:21–25; 1 Corinthians 12:12–25; Acts 18:1–5; Acts 4:31.

MEMORY VERSE: “Then He said to His followers, ‘There is much grain ready to gather [pick; collect]. But the workmen are few. Pray then to the Lord Who is the Owner of the grain fields that He will send workmen to gather His grain’ ” (Matthew 9:37, 38, NLV).



Small groups are part of God's plan for making our faith grow stronger.

SOMEONE SAID, “There is strength in numbers.” What does that mean? It means that when we work together as a group, we have more success. You exercise more if you do it with a group than if you exercise alone each day. That is why many people join health clubs and gyms. They believe they will exercise more and enjoy it better if they exercise with other people. In the same way, God made us for friendship. We do better if we have a group of friends who support us. This is very true with our spiritual life too.

Small groups are part of God's plan for making our faith grow stronger. Small groups help us learn more about the Bible. Small groups deepen our prayer life and help us share Bible truth. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were a small group when They made the earth. Moses was a small-group leader. Jesus started a small group of followers. Paul traveled the kingdom of Rome with his small group of friends. They shared the Good News about Jesus everywhere.

During this week's study, we will look at what the Bible says about small groups. We will discover exciting ways to be a part of them.

SMALL GROUPS: GOD’S IDEA FIRST (Genesis 1:1, 2, 26)

Read Genesis 1:1, 2, 26; Hebrews 1:1, 2; and Ephesians 3:8, 9. How do these verses show us that God the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit are in agreement with each other?

God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit worked together to make this earth. Each One had a different job to do. But They all worked together as One. The Father was in charge of how everything should look. He came up with the plan for the earth. Jesus carried out the Father’s plan with the help of the Holy Spirit. Wow! It is hard for us to even understand how They worked together to make this earth. But we can understand that God made this earth, the sky above, and outer space with everything in it (read Romans 1:18–20).

God invented small groups. We need to be careful when we talk about the mystery of God. At the same time, we can say safely that God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit were the first “small group” in history. They worked together to make humans. And They worked together to make a plan to save humans after they sinned.

Compare John 10:17, 18 with Romans 8:11 and 1 Corinthians 15:15. How does Jesus’ waking up from the dead show the agreement of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit in their plan to save humans?

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit worked together as a “small group” to save humans. “God’s plan to save humans was in place before time began.”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, page 186, adapted. Nothing is more important to God than saving as many people as possible (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Small groups can have many jobs. We will look at some of those different jobs this week. But the most important work that small groups can do is win souls to Jesus. When we work together in small groups, we help ourselves and other people too.

Think some more about the agreement between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is hard to understand fully. But we can believe and trust in what we do not fully understand anyway, right? Why is this rule so important for us to follow when it comes to faith?



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SMALL GROUPS IN THE BIBLE (Exodus 18:21–25)

The Bible shows us many examples of small groups. The people in these groups spend time together. They pray, encourage each other, and work together for Jesus. Small groups give us the chance to share God's work and fully use our different spiritual gifts.



Small groups give us the chance for warm, caring friendship, spiritual growth, and problem solving.

Read Exodus 18:21–25. What good advice does Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, give that helps Moses in a big way? Why is this plan so important?

Every person in the camp of Israel became part of a group of ten people. A leader was put in charge of each group. The leaders of these small groups helped solve problems. The small groups offered their members friendship. These small groups helped spiritual life to grow. People in the groups talked about God's plans for Israel. They built strong, caring friendships. People had problems that other people helped them with. It is the same for us today. Small groups give us the chance for warm, caring friendship, spiritual growth, and problem-solving.

Do you want to know something interesting? Small-group experts tell us that the best size for small groups is between six and twelve people. This is the exact size that both Moses and Jesus used when they made their small groups.

Read Luke 6:12, 13; Matthew 10:1; and Mark 3:13–15. Jesus has two reasons for choosing His followers to be part of His small group. What are these reasons?

Jesus used small groups to train His followers to do God's work on earth. Their friendship with Jesus helped their spiritual lives to grow. In their small-group meetings, Jesus' followers learned how to work and serve in better ways. Day by day, they saw Jesus take care of the needs of the people around Him. This taught them how to use their own gifts to serve God. Jesus used small groups to teach His followers how to share the truth with people.

Think about a time when you were part of a small group that cared about each other. What did you learn from that experience that can help you understand why small groups should be an important part of our faith?

COMING TOGETHER TO SERVE GOD (1 Corinthians 12:12–25)

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12–25. How is the human body an excellent word picture for the way that people work together in small groups?

Paul shows us why spiritual gifts are important in the life of the church. He also gives us a list of the most important gifts.

When we study the body, we see that the organs of the body are put into different groups. Spiritual gifts are much the same as the different parts of the body. These spiritual gifts work best when they are put into groups. Most parts of the body cannot work alone. Each job that the body does is part of a larger job. All the different parts of the body work together to keep us alive and healthy.

The body's different parts teach us something about what we need so that we can best use our spiritual gifts. It is easy to lose hope when we work alone. But when we are part of a small group, we work much better. We are part of a group of people who are interested in the same things we are interested in. These people want the same things we want. That helps us work better and do more.

Small groups give us the best place to use our spiritual gifts. Small groups can become the center of a church's efforts to share the Good News with other people.

Ellen G. White talks about the worth of small groups: "God does not make mistakes. He has shown me that it is important for Christians to work in small groups. If there is a large number of people in a church, the members should meet in small groups. They should work for church members and for people who do not believe. Let us say there is a place where only two or three people know Bible truth. Then they should join together in a small group of workers. They should join together and not break apart. They should come together in love and agreement. They can encourage each other to move forward in God's work. Then they will get courage and strength from each other."—*Testimonies for the Church*, volume 7, pages 21, 22, adapted.

God accepts the work done by small groups. These groups help each church member's spiritual life to grow stronger. Small groups also help members to build strong friendships. In small groups, members can use their God-given gifts to serve Him.



**It is easy to lose hope
when we work alone.**

NEW TESTAMENT SMALL GROUPS (Acts 18:1–5)



Paul and his friends help each other in their work for God.

The New Testament church grew big fast. In a few short years, it grew from a small group of believers to tens of thousands of worshipers. There are many reasons for this fast growth. (1) Jesus' work on earth helped get people ready to accept the preaching of His followers. (2) After Jesus went back to heaven, God poured His Spirit on Jesus' followers. (3) The New Testament church grew so fast because it was divided into small groups.

Read Acts 18:1–5 and Acts 20:1–4. Why do you think that Luke tells us in these verses the names of some of the people that Paul worked with closely?

It is interesting to see that Luke tells us the names of some of the people that Paul works with. Each person is important to Paul. He knows them by name. Paul and his friends help each other in their work for God. Luke does not tell us the names of every person that Paul worked with. But the names that Luke does tell us show that it was important to Paul to work closely with his friends, even in small groups.

Each of the people in Acts 18:1–5 and Acts 20:1–4 has different gifts. They all come from different countries with their own culture or ways of life. So, they do not always look at things in the same way. At the same time, each person has some special work to do for God. Each one has a personal experience with Jesus. Their different gifts and experiences help the New Testament church to grow.

Compare Acts 16:11–15, 40 and Acts 12:11, 12. As we see in these verses, what invitation does Lydia give to Paul right after she becomes a Christian? Where do both Paul and Peter go after God makes them free from prison?

The New Testament believers met in homes. Christian homes became important places for sharing God's truth. They also became the centers for the work that small groups did for God.

Have you thought about starting a small group in your home? Maybe you already belong to one. If yes, how have small groups been a blessing to your spiritual life?

THE WAY SMALL GROUPS WORK (Acts 4:31)

God uses small groups to grow His church. Small groups are safe places for people to share their problems and the things they are interested in or worried about. Small groups give people the chance for spiritual growth. Friendships and caring also are part of the small-group experience. Many non-Christians feel more comfortable going to a small-group meeting in a home than going to a church for the first time.

Read Acts 4:31; Acts 12:12; and Acts 20:17–19, 27–32. Make a list of all the different things that these New Testament groups did. What did they do?

The New Testament Christians met together to pray for people. They also prayed about things they were worried about. They shared warm friendships, studied the Bible, learned how to serve God better, protected each other against false teachers, and witnessed together.

Small groups make life better. People in small groups join their gifts to serve God together. They let the Holy Spirit use them to share the Good News with people. Small groups are powerful “tools” in God’s hands.

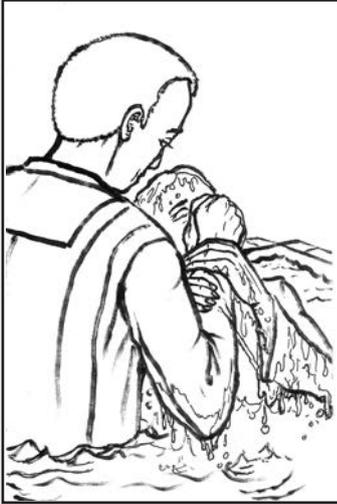
Read Matthew 9:37, 38. As we see in these verses, what does Jesus say about the big “crop” of people that needs to be brought into God’s kingdom? How does Jesus say that the problem can be solved?

Jesus’ followers saw very little hope for the Good News to be shared with people. But Jesus saw great chances for success. Jesus told His followers the wonderful news that “there is such a big harvest [crop] of people to bring in” (Matthew 9:37, ERV). Then Jesus told His followers that there was a problem. “But there are only a few workers to help harvest [collect] them” (Matthew 9:37, ERV). Jesus’ answer to the problem was prayer. “Pray then to the Lord Who is the Owner of the grain fields that He will send workmen to gather His grain” (Matthew 9:38, NLV). Small groups are an answer to Jesus’ prayer. Small groups help the number of workers to grow.

The most important work that small groups have is serving God and telling people about Jesus. Small groups must lead people to Jesus and grow their faith. Then they can become witnesses for Jesus and Bible truth.



Many non-Christians feel more comfortable going to a small-group meeting in a home than going to a church for the first time.



Small groups can make big changes happen!

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Many years ago, a small church in Europe decided that it had to do something big and important for God. The church was not growing. No one had been baptized in the church in a long time. The church did not have a bright future. The pastor and the church leaders prayed. They thought about a plan to help the church.

They started to study the New Testament. As they studied, they decided to start a small group to serve God more fully. Nine church members got excited about the plan. They decided to pray together and study how to use their small group to best serve God. Soon they decided to make each of their homes a center for sharing Bible truth with other people. The members in the group learned to use their gifts in different ways. They started new groups for prayer and helping the poor and needy. They built friendships with people in their community. They showed more love to members of their own families, friends, and Adventists who no longer went to church. The nine small-group leaders started Bible studies in their homes. 40 guests came. The small-group members got excited at what the Holy Spirit did. Soon 17 of the 40 guests were baptized. What does this story show us? Small groups can make big changes happen! Small groups are one of God's ways of including many different church members in the work of the church.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In class, talk some more about Thursday's study and the important things that the small groups do. What other things can a small group be a part of? What are ways that a small group can help people with special gifts use those gifts as they have never used them before?
- ② Why is it necessary that small groups always remember that their most important work is to share the Good News with people who do not know it? Also, why is it important for small groups to always stay connected with their local church body?
- ③ Have you ever been part of a small group that died out? Why do you think this happened?
- ④ Think about the story you read in today's study about the small church in Europe. What made the small group a success? What part did their working in homes have in their success? Why are homes safer or better places to meet in than churches when you first start your work for God in your neighborhood or community?

**FORGIVEN
IN EAST TIMOR**

In 2017, a man tried to kill a Seventh-day Adventist store clerk in East Timor. But that man was not punished. The East Timor leaders accepted the store clerk's decision not to punish the man who attacked him. The story has shocked the East Timor town of Lospalos. In Lospalos, people often get even with people who hurt them. It is their way of life. Even the police were shocked that the store clerk, Edu Wachumura, chose to forgive his attacker. The attacker was named Juvinil Ananias.

The attack happened after Juvinil walked into the store, drunk. He cursed at 28-year-old Edu, who worked behind the counter. Edu had just joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church after studying the Bible with the store's owner, Zelindo João Lay. Edu kindly told Juvinil not to use bad language in the store. Juvinil then promised to kill Edu. But Juvinil backed off when he saw the other customers in the store.

"I'm going to kill you tonight!" Juvinil said. Then he headed out the door.

That night, Edu heard a knock on the double metal doors at the back of the shop. Edu went over to the doors. They were locked and chained together. Edu looked between the doors to see who was outside. Just then, a spear pierced the doors and entered the store. Edu raised his arm and blocked the spear. The top of the spear cut off the tip of his nose.

Two days later, police came to the store to ask Edu if he wanted his attacker to go to jail. Edu shook his head no. "I forgive the man," he said.

The police put Juvinil in jail for a week anyway. Then they let him go. So, two years later, Edu met Juvinil at the Lospalos police station. Police officers watched in surprise as Edu signed a paper announcing that he forgave Juvinil. Juvinil told Edu that he felt bad about his actions.

"I am sorry," Juvinil said. "Thank you."

In 2019, the judges finally announced that Juvinil was forgiven for his crime.

Zelindo, the store manager, hopes that the surprised local community will understand that God wants to forgive them just as Edu forgave Juvinil. After the attack, Edu's brother and sister were baptized. Zelindo hopes many more people will follow their example.

"Everyone is talking about Edu's decision to forgive. No one understands it," Zelindo said. "It is the power of God!"



Edu raised his arm and blocked the spear. The top of the spear cut off the tip of his nose.

