

The WHO of Small Groups

The apostles were an eclectic group of 12. My sisters and I are a diverse group of four. Who do you have among your group of Christian sisters? Do you have a lot of things in common, or are you a unique group?

A rose bush does not have all of its roses budding at the same time. Part of the beauty of the bush is the bud barely blooming next to the full-bodied rose in full bloom.

Which rose are you in your community? In our Christian community, there are people of different ages, stages, and walks of life. And therein lies the beauty. Another beautiful facet of a diverse community is that we can grow and learn from one another.

The small groups with whom I have participated, and through which I have been blessed the most, are the ones that have a diverse group of women gathering together to deepen their relationships with God and with one another. I like to call them Iron Rose Sisters.

What is an Iron Rose Sister?

An Iron Rose Sister is a Christian sister who serves as iron sharpening iron (Prov. 27:17), encouraging and inspiring others to be as beautiful as a rose in spite of a few thorns.

So, in answer to the question of WHO for small groups? The answer is anyone! We grow most when we are stretched out of our comfort zones, and when we hear the perspectives of others. We are blessed when we are given the opportunity to bless others.

Find a group of women and start a small group today!

The WHAT of Small Groups

WHAT is a small group? A group of people (women in our case) whose purpose is to meet together for encouragement, Bible study and prayer.

In order to allow for depth of discussion and opportunity to share, it is ideal for the group to be made up of no more than eight women.

Yet, it can be as few as two. When it is a small group of two, it can also be known as a mentoring relationship.

Mentoring relationships are a dying art, but Jesus himself modeled how we can invest in the lives of twelve or three to make a greater impact in the community at large. Paul highlights the same teaching to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” Teach to teach to teach—makes it easy to remember that it’s 2 Timothy 2:2, two by two by two.

The teaching and mentoring aspects of small group relationships are important.

Here are a few more clarifying **purposes of Iron Rose Sister Relationships in the Small Group context:**

- Encouragement and inspiration
- Prayer

- Understanding and affirmation
- Confidentiality
- Spiritual audit (IRS)
- Mutual call to holy living
- Spiritual friendship and conversation

Whether you are considering starting a new small group, or redefining the one you are in currently, I encourage you evaluate the purpose of your group. Is God the center of your conversation? Are you being an encouragement one to another? Is there confidentiality and accountability?

The WHEN of Small Groups

“We need to get together for a cup of coffee!” I have lost count of the times I have said that to someone. And I have learned that if I don’t put something on the calendar in that moment, even if we both have the best of intentions, the time over coffee (or tea) will never happen.

The same is true of other things that are important, but they lose their urgency in the midst of our other responsibilities and commitments. One of the prime examples of something we want to do, but that will never happen if we don’t schedule it, is a small group gathering with other women. We have to make it a priority.

There is no magical time that works for everyone. However, I do recommend that you set aside a scheduled time that is designated specifically for a small group women’s Bible study.

Here are some of the times I know that women have gathered as a small group.

- Tuesday mornings (for some, this is the sacred gathering time for women’s studies)
- Mondays on the way home from work
- Wednesday night class
- Tuesday/Thursday nights
- Sunday morning Bible class
- Twice a month/every other week

I think you get the idea: **There is no perfect schedule!**

My other recommendation for when you gather is that you allow for an hour and a half meeting time. We’re women and we like to talk, but this extended hour also allows for prayer time and depth of conversation and discussion. We could spend the entire time sharing prayer requests and updating each other on life—neither of which are bad things, but it can take away from the meat of what we know we need in order to remain strong and encouraged as a child of God: time in the Word!

So, WHEN? Anytime, but pick a time and make it happen!

The WHERE of Small Groups

The comfort of your own home, a coffee shop on the way home from work, the church building... WHERE you meet, as a small group, is the least important of all of the questions we are asking this week.

I consider Jesus to have been hospitable. Yet during His three years of ministry, He never had a home in which to lay His head.

The physical location of our small group meeting is not as important as the spirit of hospitality we create where we do gather.

There is a small group of women in Florida that gather at a local park weekly so that the children can play while the women study together (a great opportunity to meet new women, too). Another group of women meet at a coffee shop so that no one feels the pressure of cleaning their house to host. I don't know a church building that has turned women away if there is a room available for them to study.

Be creative in your location. Remember, the WHERE is the least important of all the factors we are considering.

Where does your small group meet?

The WHY of Small Groups

"Where" is the least important question, as we discussed yesterday, but today's question, WHY, is the most important. **If we know the "why," all other questions are answered without obstacle.**

How many one another verses can we put into practice when we are sitting side by side in a Sunday morning assembly? Now think about how many one another verses we can put into practice when we are engaging in deeper relationship, face to face, or around a table, in the context of small groups?

To answer the "why" of small groups, we are going to go straight to Scripture and recognize the power of small groups for realizing the teaching of these verses.

Notice the one another and each other language in the verses listed below. This is not an exhaustive list, but the top 20... I couldn't pick just one or two!

1. Galatians 6:2 - Carry *each other's* burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
2. 1 Thessalonians 4:18 - therefore encourage *each other* with these words.
3. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 - encourage *one another* and build *each other* up
4. Hebrews 10:24 - spur *one another* on to love and good deeds and encourage *one another* (by meeting together)
5. Hebrews 13:1 - keep on loving *each other* as brothers.
6. James 5:16 - therefore confess your sins to *each other* and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.
7. John 13:34-35 - love *one another* - by this you are my disciples
8. Romans 12:10 - be devoted to *one another*; honor *one another*
9. Galatians 5:13 - serve *one another* in love
10. Ephesians 4:2 - be patient, bearing with *one another* in love
11. Ephesians 4:32 - be kind and compassionate to *one another*
12. Ephesians 5:19 - speak to *one another* in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs
13. Ephesians 5:21 - submit to *one another* out of reverence for Christ

14. Colossians 3:13 – bear with *each other* and forgive... just as Christ forgave you
15. Colossians 3:16 – teach and admonish *one another*
16. Hebrews 3:13 – encourage *one another* daily
17. 1 Peter 4:8 – above all, love *each other* deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.
18. 1 Peter 4:9 – offer hospitality to *one another*
19. 1 Peter 5:5 – clothe yourselves with humility toward *one another*
20. 1 John 4:12 – if we love *one another*, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us

The HOW of Small Groups

As we conclude this lengthy blog entry on Small Groups, I want to offer some of the specific HOWs, as specifically shared in the IRSM Small Group Bible study books. *If you are interested in starting a small group using an IRSM interactive Bible study, specially designed to be done in small groups, you can order books through our [website](#), or contact us by phone or email (see our Contact page on the website).*

Suggestions for HOW to realize an IRSM small group study:

- Rotate the leading of the discussion among *each* of the women.
 - Everyone can lead!
 - Everyone will grow!
- Commit to reading the chapter ahead of time.
 - The discussion will be richer and deeper if everyone comes prepared.
 - How much you put in will be directly proportional to how much you get out.
 - You will need to do these studies with your favorite Bible in hand.

And a few more specific suggestions if you are the one facilitating the group discussion that week:

- Make it your own and allow the Spirit to lead—these studies are a resource, not a script.
 - Select which questions you would like to discuss and plan for ones you might need to skip if you are running short on time.
 - You are welcome to add questions of your own or highlight portions of the chapter that most stood out to you, whether they were designated for discussion or not.
- Leading is about facilitating the discussion, not about having all the answers.
 - When someone brings up a difficult situation or challenging question, you can always open it up to the group for answers from Scripture, not just personal advice.
 - The answer may merit further study of Scripture or the consultation of someone with more experience in the Word and/or experience regarding that type of situation. And that's okay! We're digging deeper.
- Be willing to answer the designated discussion questions first and use your own examples, but avoid the temptation to do all the talking.

- Allow for awkward silence in order to provide the opportunity for others to share.
- It's okay to call on someone and encourage them to answer a specific question.
- "Why or why not?" are good follow-up questions for discussion.
- Include additional examples from Scripture and encourage others to do the same.
 - Online Bible programs, such as BibleGateway.com, provide excellent resources: multiple versions of the Bible, concordances (to look up the occurrences of a word), Bible dictionaries, and commentaries.
- Give a practical wrap-up conclusion or "take-home" application from the week as you close with the Common Threads.
- Be sure to budget some time for prayer.
- Remember our purposes as Iron Rose Sisters, students of the Word and daughters of the King.

Do you have any other suggestions for women meeting in small groups?