



How to Overcome Six Common Barriers to Spiritual Growth in Your Small Groups

As presented in a live satellite seminar on Church Communication Network (CCN)

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Small group experts Dr. Henry Cloud and Bill Donahue offer the following guidelines for identifying and eliminating six barriers that prevent spiritual growth in small groups:

Barrier #1: No Clearly Defined Purpose

Indicators:

- Tentative sharing
- Overly dependent on the leader
- Irregular attendance, lack of commitment
- Meetings are easily “hijacked”

*Action: **Clarifying the Purpose***

- Is the purpose designed by church or decided by group?
- Clarify the intentions and expectations
- Make the purpose specific enough to be followed
- Provide clear action steps

Barrier # 2: Prior Group Experience

Indicators:

- Surface-level sharing
- Members promote a personal agenda
- Fear and reluctance based on bad experience

*Action: **Discussing Desires and Wishes***

- What would a preferred future look like?
- What kind of environment do we want in this group?

Barrier #3: Fear of Self-Disclosure

Indicators:

- Superficial comments and sharing
- Prayers are always focused on others
- Spiritualization

*Action: **Story-telling & Safety***

- Begin by sharing stories
- Use sub-grouping to create safety
- Commit to confidentiality
- Leader models appropriate self-disclosure



Barrier #4: Unfamiliar With Biblical Community

Indicators:

- Cannot receive praise, gifts, or correction
- Religiosity replaces authentic community
- Unwilling to express pain

Action: **Teaching and Modeling Authenticity**

- Discuss values (love, weakness, respect, mutuality)

Barrier #5: Absence of Ground Rules

Indicators:

- Floundering, feelings of aimlessness
- Fear of sharing
- Misbehavior
- Uncertainty in decision-making

Action: **Forming a Covenant**

- Define ground rules
- Clearly express expectations (grace vs. legalism)
- Invite feedback
- Enforcement of ground rules linked to group purpose

Barrier #6: Poor Choice of Curriculum

Indicators:

- Lack of process (rigidity)
- Lack of structure (loose)
- No bridge from study to practical living
- No “moments” with God and others

Action: **Choosing and Using Curriculum Wisely**

- Choose “group-friendly” material
- Consider spiritual depth and experience
- Link to group purpose
- Recognize group limitations