

Transformation Groups

Transformation groups have become increasingly popular in recent years. My first exposure to the concept came at a workshop I had attended where a leader from the Sunset Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas, gave a lecture on the topic and its benefits. At a Missional Church class taught by Gailyn VanRheenan, I received nuts and bolts information on transformation groups. The material below is as result of all of this, plus readings and projects at a church-planting lab.

It is highly recommended that you form a Transformation Group as described below. For long term, rapid, spiritual growth, there is no substitute for the elements and the dynamic that make up a Transformation Group.

The material below has three parts.

1. Survey of various methods of Spiritual Growth - This section surveys the various methods for Spiritual Growth that people use and identifies strengths and weaknesses. This is a helpful survey, especially if you have a church background.
2. Nuts and Bolts of Transformation Groups - This goes through the principles and practices of Transformation Groups, as well as possible questions or objections.
3. Bookmark - This is what each member of a transformation group will keep with them as a guide for the activity involved in the Transformation Group.

Survey of Various Methods of Spiritual Growth

I. New Christian Class or some other type of program

- A. This is the traditional way of trying to get a new Christian to mature
- B. The strength is that it covers a prescribed curriculum of information
- C. The weaknesses are as follows
 - 1. Typically focuses more on information rather than formation
 - 2. There are typically low expectations of participants
 - 3. Most of the work is done by teachers in preparation for the class
 - 4. Accountability, if there is any, is focused more on content and assignments rather than life change
 - 5. Can have a tendency to become "academic"
- D. Therefore a discipleship regimen cannot be limited to a class

II. Small Group

- A. The small group is modeled in scripture, in the ministry of Christ and Paul
- B. The strength of small groups:
 - 1. A greater level of intimacy which lends itself to exploring areas of needed growth and change
 - 2. Greater level of accountability and trust
 - 3. More personal sharing and encouragement and ministry can happen, promoting spiritual growth
 - 4. Greater focus on life change
- C. Weakness of small groups:
 - 1. In spite of the size, there still may not be the level of openness needed to promote the level of accountability and transformation needed in people's lives
 - 2. If they are mixed gender, there is a limitation on how deep the sharing of shortcoming and challenges will go
 - 3. It still may not be as sensitive as needed to an individual's stage in their spiritual growth, there is still a certain level of synchronization and regimentation
- D. Even though small groups are good, a discipleship regimen should still involve more than a class and small group.

III. Mentor/Student

- A. Paul and Timothy are usually cited as a biblical example of this
 - 1. Older person teaches a younger person
 - 2. More spiritually mature teaches one less spiritually mature
 - 3. More experienced with the less experienced
- B. Strengths
 - 1. Much greater level of accountability
 - 2. Custom tailored to the growth stage of the disciple
 - 3. Ability to debrief, ask questions, pose individual challenges, and engage in other tailor made growth activities

4. The discipler/teacher's life becomes the basis for training, and not merely academic content

C. Weaknesses

1. Discipler carries the responsibility for the student
 - a. The discipler dispenses spiritual "food" for the infant
 - b. Inherently is the pressure to have reached a certain level of spiritual knowledge and perfection to be a discipler
 - c. Discipler becomes the focal point
2. Hierarchical
 - a. The disciple is dependent on the discipler
 - b. This dependency can stifle growth that leads to the disciple doing what the discipler is doing
 - c. In this kind of relationship, many disciples cannot envision themselves being a teacher or discipler
3. Limited interchange or dialogue
 - a. It is usually more one-sided, the discipler to the student
 - b. New disciples, due to being new to the faith, may have trouble keeping a dynamic conversation going, and usually ask questions rather than contribute to dialogue.
4. Limited influence
 - a. A disciple's primary influence can wind up being one single person, his discipler
 - b. This can therefore be limited by the weaknesses and strengths of his discipler
5. Does not generally reproduce
 - a. Most disciples do not think it is possible to
 - b. As long as there is a sense that one person is over another because of his spiritual authority, most will not feel themselves qualified to disciple another.

D. The Paul/Timothy model may not have been as hierarchical as some people usually think

1. We sometimes place our own pre-conceived notions over it
2. In addition to his "child" in the faith, Paul also refers to Timothy and Titus as "partners," or "fellow workers" a peer term rather than hierarchical one (Rom 16:21; 2 Cor 8:23).

IV. Triads or Quads

A. Idea is from the Barnabas/S(P)aul or S(P)aul/Barnabas

1. Barnabas apparently took Saul in as a new Christian
2. Barnabas (the son of encouragement) did not have a hierarchical relationship with Saul
 - a. (Acts 11:19-30) - They were reunited in Antioch when Barnabas went to go get him
 - b. (Acts 13:1-2) - They labored side-by-side until the Spirit set them apart for the first missionary journey
 - c. This was clearly not a hierarchical relationship

- 1) Sometimes it was Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:1-2, 7; 14:12, 14; 15:12)
- 2) Other times it was Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:42, 46, 50; 14:1; 15:2, 22, 25)
- 3. This is basically a "peer" mentoring model
- 4. Placing the discipler in an authority position over the disciple is not necessary for discipleship to occur

B. Strengths

- 1. A shift from the discipler as the focal point to his participation
 - a. The discipler becomes a fellow participant
 - b. He and the other two become partners on the journey together
- 2. Shift from hierachal focus to a relational one
 - a. Focus can be more on Christ rather than discipler
 - b. The discipler is the convener of the triad, not the keeper of it
 - c. There is a shared responsibility for the triad
 - b. The partners see that the discipler is also having to deal with the real issues of life and is a real person
- 3. Shift from dialogue to dynamic interchange
 - a. With only two people there is limited interchange
 - b. Addition of the third person makes for greater conversation
- 4. Shift from limited input to wisdom in numbers
 - a. (Prov 15:22) -Wisdom in the abundance of counselors
 - b. Sometimes the novice can provide great and refreshing insight
 - c. Having people at various maturity levels can be a great benefit
- 5. Shift from addition to multiplication
 - a. One study observed a 75% reproduction rate through the triad model of discipleship
 - b. The peer modeling method empowers the members to begin their own triads

	Intimacy	Truth	Accountability
Preaching		✓	
Class		✓	
Small Group	✓	✓	?
Triad	✓	✓	✓

V. All of these should have a place in a plan for discipleship.

- A. Should not be either-or, but both-and
- B. Each method has its strength, but should not be stand-alone
- C. By far, the method with the greatest potential for life change is the Triad

Nuts and Bolts of Transformation Groups

I. Essential Ingredients

- A. God's Word - 2 Tim 3:16-17
- B. Prayer - Col 4:2-3; Eph 6:18
- C. Transparent Trust -
 - 1. Jer 17:9
 - 2. Since we can deceive ourselves, we need a trusting, accountable, sanctified relationship with another
- D. Mutual Confession -
 - 1. 2 Tim 2:19-22
 - 2. As long as we live a double life, we will not have fellowship with each other or God
 - 3. Since we are all "priests," one helpful and encouraging thing is to remind each other of God's promise of forgiveness after we have repented and confessed -- "in the name of Christ, you are forgiven" There is some sort of spiritual and emotional release in this.
- E. Mutual Accountability - Prov 27:17; Eccl 4:9f
- F. Flexibility - The smaller size allows for this
- G. Reproducibility - Triads have historically shown greater reproducibility

II. A simple Plan

- A. Triad made up of 3 people (if a 4th person is added, the group should prepare to multiply once the fourth person has demonstrated sufficient faithfulness)
- B. The Groups are not coed, all are the same gender in a group
- C. Meet weekly for personal accountability in spiritual growth and development
- D. There is no curriculum, workbook, or training involved. The only book and curriculum is the Bible
- E. There is no "leader" needed in the group. It is peer discipling.

F. Three Essential Disciplines are practiced

- 1. Steady, generous intake of Scripture
 - a. The group agrees on a book of the Bible to read
 - b. The group reads 25 to 30 chapters each week (which can be increased if there needs to be more)
 - c. If it is a shorter book, the group can read it several times a week, as long as they are getting 25 to 30 chapters that week
 - d. Perhaps sections of books can be read repetitively, such as the Sermon on the Mount
 - e. If someone in the group is unable to complete the reading in a given week, then the entire group does it again until everyone had read the 25-30 chapters they agreed on.
 - 1) We stay together, we learn together, and move forward together

- 2) Sanctified peer pressure
- 3) If someone does not finish the reading, maybe the Lord wants to show us something we missed - read it again.

2. Confession of Sin
 - a. Should begin meetings with this, or it can get sidetracked
 - b. It is straightforward and specific
 - c. Should meet in a safe place where participants can be honest and vulnerable
3. Prayer for others who need Christ
 - a. Each member is to identify 2 or 3 people who are the highest evangelistic priorities God has laid on their hearts
 - b. Write their names down on their cards and provided, including the names the others bring to the group
 - c. Each time the members do their Bible reading, they select one of the names and pray for them using the suggested prayer guide. (The suggested prayer guide is specific and is in harmony with Biblical principles concerning the lost)

III. Advantages

- A. Plants the seed, not a substitute
 1. Many spent more time reading books *about* the Bible or other good, helpful devotionals, studies, etc.
 - a. These are not bad, and are usually beneficial
 - b. I am not advocating avoidance of these nor am I saying these are bad
 2. There is a problem when time devoted to Bible reading is spent more on books *about* the Bible (seed substitutes) than the Bible itself
 3. Since the Spirit's primary tool for transformation is the word, then we need to major on the word
 4. If someone is frustrated due to lack of spiritual growth or transformation even though they have worked through various books and curricula on practical subjects, perhaps the problem is not enough time spent in the word itself. It is the actual seed planted in the heart that will grow, not a seed substitute.
- B. Removes the middleman, teaches people to feed themselves
 1. Too often, people are overly dependent on preachers, sermons, classes, and teachers.
 - a. They get spoon-fed a morsel at Sunday morning sermons
 - b. They get fed a tidbit at classes, if they attend
 2. With this method, people get a generous portion every day
 3. People learn not to be dependent on a preacher, teacher,

scholar, etc. to be able to read scripture

4. People learn to become masters at reading scripture
 - a. With a large daily intake, it become integrated into their lives
 - b. People learn gradually how to feed themselves spiritually
 - c. Sometimes, reading will raise more questions than answers, but that is part of the growth process
 - d. We learn by digesting even the hard parts, rather than always taking in pre-chewed and predigested food
 - e. Not always eating pre-digested food creates an insatiable appetite for more! Would you prefer fresh food, or pre-chewed and pre-digested food? (By the way, in a way, milk is "pre-digested" food we must move past)
 - f. There is a problem when we spend more time trying to teach people what to think than how to think. The word does the latter.

C. Integrates Evangelism into the formation process

1. Part of the accountability questions are geared toward being a "testimony" to someone else during the week
2. The prayer focus involved praying for lost people

D. Forms Life-Long Spiritual Disciplines

1. Regular Bible reading, Prayer, and accountability become a habit
2. As a "discipline," this creates the climate for God to transform you

E. Allows the Holy Spirit his rightful place

1. The Word is the Spirit's primary tool for transformation
2. Many believe in this only in theory
 - a. Some tend to trust more in their interpretive schemes, apologetic reasoning, hermeneutic devices, etc. than in the Holy Spirit himself
 - b. Sometimes people unwittingly create the illusion that only professionals can interpret the Bible faithfully, therefore we "need" them to know the word
3. How the Holy Spirit has a greater opportunity to lead, guide and empower growing Christians through Triads:
 - a. The Bible, rather than some man-made curriculum, is the only "curriculum"
 - b. Triads are "leaderless," allowing greater focus and dependence on the word rather than a human

F. Empowers common Christians to ministry and evangelism

1. As transformation takes place, so does a drive to serve and love those home Christ loves
2. God leads believers through the reading, prayer, and accountability questions to serve others and share the Gospel
3. As they become growing and transforming disciples, they are equipped and empowered to do the same with others

- G. Allows for spontaneous growth
 - 1. Growth occurs at the grass roots level
 - 2. Since this system is biblical and simple, it grows and reproduces spontaneously
 - 3. This does not entail complicated procedures, setting up a "program," or a huge expenditure of resources, making it simple enough for anyone to do.
- H. Allows leaders in the congregation to have more focused ministry
 - 1. Leaders can fall into the trap of being the "chief caregiver" for everyone in the flock
 - a. This is not Biblical
 - b. Leaders are called "overseers"
 - c. Acts 6, the leaders appointed people to do this
 - d. Eph 4:11-16 - The body grows with the proper working of each individual part
 - e. One another passages about caring for each other lay the responsibility at everyone's feet, not just the leaders (1 Cor 12)
 - 2. Leader's primary focus is not in being individual caregiver's for every sheep, but to oversee the flock
 - 3. Leader majors in prayer and ministry of the word
 - 4. Triads are a great benefit toward fulfillment of one-another passages

IV. Questions or objections

- 1. Too much to read, how about reducing the readings
 - a. Not recommended, people will often not read if it is not challenging enough
 - b. About a half hour reading a day will be sufficient to keep up (the time of a T.V. sitcom, or the news)
 - c. Scripture is often an acquired taste. After being stretched, people fall in love with it and want more, hungering and thirsting for it.
 - d. Example: Imagine receiving a letter from someone you are totally in love with. You don't just read a "verse" of it a day, you want all of it.
 - e. "Unfortunately, in most of our churches today we have made the Bible something to be studied or interpreted rather than something to be simply read, admired, and obeyed. Some of us are to the point that God can't speak to us through his word without a commentary, a study Bible, an exhaustive concordance, and a Bible encyclopedia. For some the Bible is not a love letter anymore, but a legal document in which every word and punctuation demands careful research. Imagine what your sweetheart would think if you treated his or her love letter with that kind of scrutiny." - Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*. p. 100.
- 2. The issue of control
 - a. There is a temptation to try and "control" these groups

- b. Control will stifle
- c. In the book of Acts, who was in control of the explosion of growth?
There was no single human leader in it all. It was a movement of the Spirit all over the world.
- d. We cannot control the power and wealth of Heaven anyway!

3. Is this a seed bed for heresy to run rampant?

- a. This is a concern no matter what you do
- b. The solution is not more control, the history of the church proves this
- c. If we truly trust in God, and truly believe that the Word is the Spirit's primary tool to transform us and guide us, then these triads are the best thing to do to reduce the threat of heresy!
- d. How do heresies and heretical movements develop?
 - 1) Ignorance of truth as a result of not feeding on God's word
 - 2) Scriptures are pulled out of context
 - 3) Controlling individuals who try to lead large numbers astray
- e. Triads eliminate each of these three!

4. Changing the Accountability Questions

- a. There is a Biblical rationale behind the questions
- b. If the questions are modified to fit your context, they still need to include confession, accountability, and an evangelistic focus.

5. Aren't the accountability questions too personal to expect people to answer?

- a. Some are worried that new Christians will be too uncomfortable with it
- b. Reality is that new Christians probably would be more comfortable with the openness than older Christians
- c. Older Christians are often the ones who wear a mask of respectability more than new Christians who don't know any better yet
- d. This sets the bar high for new Christians at the outset

6. Discussion during the meeting?

- a. Start with the accountability questions or they may get left behind. It also sets the tone for the rest of the meeting time
- b. The readings will often stimulate discussion, application, confession, etc.

7. Time Span

- a. Can multiply in a short amount of time
- b. Can last for a couple years
- c. If the group does not multiply naturally after a year, look to start another group and multiply yourself
- d. Group will either end by multiplying or dying. Ideally, it would be by multiplying.

ON THE NEXT PAGE, YOU CAN CUT OUT THE QUESTIONS AND USE THEM AS BOOKMARKS IN YOUR BIBLE.

Character Conversation Questions	Daily Strategic Prayer Focus
<p>These questions are to be asked of one another in a weekly meeting of accountability (Prov 27:17). They are to stimulate conversations of character and confession of sin in a safe environment that values honesty, vulnerability, confidentiality, and grace.</p>	<p>Each of you in the group is to identify two or three whom you feel led to pray for their salvation. List the names of all those identified in the group on each card so that all of you pray for each of the lost souls weekly. We recommend that you keep this card in your Bibles as a bookmark for your daily reading so that each time you open your Bible you are reminded to pray for these souls.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have you been a testimony this week to the greatness of Jesus Christ with both your words and actions? 2. Have you been exposed to sexually alluring material or allowed your mind to entertain inappropriate sexual thoughts about another this week? 3. Have you lacked integrity in your financial dealings or coveted something that does not belong to you? 4. Have you been honoring, understanding and generous in your important relationships this week? (or have you given priority time to your family?) 5. Have you damaged another person by your words, either behind their backs or face to face? 6. Have you given in to an addictive behavior this past week? Explain. 7. Have you continued to remain angry toward another? 8. Have you secretly wished for another's misfortune? 9. _____ (Your personalized accountability question.) 10. Did you finish the reading and hear from God? What are you going to do about it? 11. Have you been completely honest with me? 	<p><input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> _____ <input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Lord, please draw _____ to Yourself (John 6:44). 2) I pray that _____ hear and believe the Word of God for what it really is (1 Thes. 2:13). 3) I pray that _____ would seek to know You (Acts 17:27). 4) Lord, prevent Satan from blinding _____ to the truth (2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:25-26). 5) Please convict _____ of his/her sin and need for Christ's redemption (John 16:7-14). 6) Please send someone who will share the gospel with _____ (Matt. 9:37-38). 7) Please give me the opportunity, the courage and the right words to share with _____ (Col. 4:3-6; Eph 6:19-20). 8) Lord, I pray that _____ turn from his/her sin and follow Christ (Acts 17:30-31; 1 Thes. 1:9-10). 9) Lord, I pray that _____ would put all of his/her trust in Christ (John 1:12; 5:24). 10) Father, I pray that _____ confesses Jesus as Lord, obeys the Gospel, & takes root and grows in faith and bears fruit for your glory (Rom. 10:9-10; Rom 6; Col. 2:6-7; Luke 8:15).
<p><i>"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed." - James 5:16</i></p>	<p><i>"Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer for them is for their salvation." - Rom 10:1</i></p>