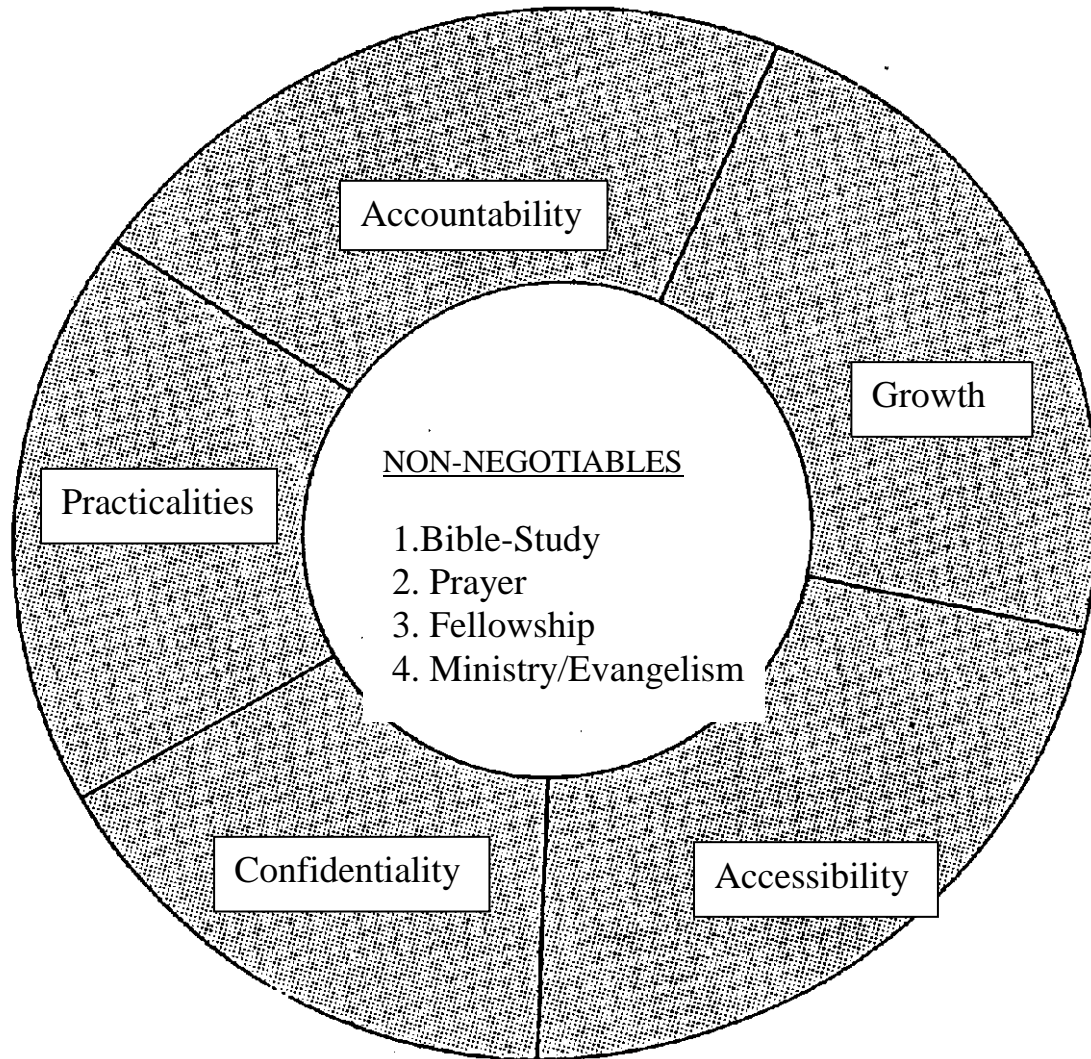


# ESTABLISHING A HOME GROUP COVENANT

*"To be a bible-based community transformed by Jesus' love, devoted to loving one another and committed to impacting our world with the love of Christ"*



## THE FOUR 'NON-NEGOTIABLES'

The goal of our groups . . . to help each other grow to maturity in Christ (Eph 4:10-12). The four non- negotiables are placed in the center because they are to be core to every Home group.

**'Bible-Study'** - so that we might grow in our knowledge and love of God and live in obedience to his will.

**'Prayer'** - as we bring before God our thanks & praise, our confession of sin and our requests for ourselves, each other and the world in which we live.

**'Fellowship'** - follow the example of Christ as we seek to love one another. We are committed to one another & 'belong' rather just 'attend' the group.

**'Ministry/Evangelism'** - refers to ministry that is performed by the group as a whole. It may be a one off project/event e.g. leading a church service, making up a Christmas hamper or it may be an ongoing ministry, e.g. supporting a World Vision child, keeping informed & praying for the local Scripture. The group will also prayerfully pursue ways of reaching their non-Christian friends/family.

While the proportion of time allocated to each of the four may vary from group to group it is important that all four exist in the life of every group.

# ESTABLISHING A HOME GROUP COVENANT (Cont.)

If you have ever seen a soccer game of five year olds you would know that they run all over the field like soldier crabs. Wherever the ball goes they go too. They have little idea of tactics and positions the only object is to kick the ball in the right direction and hopefully someone get it in the goal. As they grow up they begin to understand positional play & tactics and their skills develop. The normal behavior has changed and become more sophisticated.

In every Home Group there are patterns of acceptable behavior and expectations from the group members. These patterns can be determined deliberately by the group and the leader; or develop by default. Much like in the five year olds' soccer team, whether the leader acknowledges the norms is irrelevant, they will exist. In a Bible-study group it is important for the leader and the group to express their expectations for the group and to establish a clearly defined covenant that details how the group is to function.

## FIVE ASPECTS OF A BIBLE-STUDY COVENANT

1. **Accountability** – What is expected? What is the commitment I am making to this group? You will need to agree upon issues like: Are we making a commitment to be there on time and regularly? Is this a group where I can turn up when it fits in with my week or is the expectation that I will put a priority on being there every week? If I can't make it do I need to let someone know? Is the expectation that we will have done the study before we come? Do we give each other permission to follow-up each other during the week and to keep each other accountable? Is it okay for me to challenge you if I think you are making an unwise choice and am I open to being challenged? Is the expectation that we will pray for each other during the week? etc.
2. **Accessibility** – Is it okay to bring a visitor to the group? Do I need to let the leader know first? Is our group open to new members at the moment? What if we choose to leave the group, do we agree that we will not just fade out but we will communicate it to the group or leader? etc.
3. **Confidentiality** - We all know that confidentiality is vital to developing trust in a small group but what do we mean by keeping things confidential in the group? Are we saying that nothing that is shared in the group is to be repeated outside the group? Can I share what is said in the group with my spouse? Can I share in general terms but not specifics? etc.
4. **Practicalities** – All the details of where we are going to meet, when we are going to have supper, who is going to provide it, how long we will meet for, how do I get a Bible-study book and who from, who will be the designated 'Carer' in our group, will we have a week-end away as a group etc.
5. **Growth** - Our groups are obviously designed to foster spiritual growth but should also be concerned about numerical growth. What can we do to enable this group to grow both spiritually and numerically? Change is always difficult, so it is important from the outset to be a group that wants to grow in numbers. If this is the mindset of the group and the ongoing prayer of the group then when the group becomes so large that it needs to multiply it will be seen as something to celebrate rather than something to avoid at all costs.

# **A HOME GROUP COVENANT**

## **What is a Home Group Covenant?**

A clearly stated set of guidelines or norms that are agreed to by the group.

The covenant will:

- \* express the agreed expectations for the group. It will
- \* define the purpose of the group and how the group will function.

The word 'covenant' is deliberately chosen over 'contract' because the latter operates out of a purely legalistic framework while 'covenant' operates out of an agreement motivated by grace and love. Even if you choose not to use the word 'covenant' it is important that expectations for the group are clearly expressed & revisited each time a new member joins the group

## **Why Have A Small Group Covenant?**

1. It gives the group a purpose and an identity.
2. It allows the needs, hopes and expectations of group members to be known right at the outset.
3. It helps avoid misunderstandings due to assumptions about how a particular group should function.
4. It binds the group together as a team with well-defined commitments that deal with expectations and dreams.
5. It becomes a tool to communicate this information to new members.
6. It assists the leaders of the group in carrying out their function.
7. It becomes the basis for evaluation at the end of a given time period.
8. It sets the norms to which people can refer at times of conflict or negotiating.

## Home Group Covenant

Commitment	We will be intentional in giving a high priority to meeting together. We will be committed to reading the passage and doing the study in preparation for our meeting.
Honesty	We will be truthful and honest in our communication with each other. We are willing to share openly in a context of trust.
Accountability	We will be accountable to each other giving permission to be challenged & 'carefronted' by other members of the group.
Prayer	We will pray regularly for each other.
Accord	We will not avoid disagreement and will be willing to resolve conflict in a healthy context by following biblical principles.
Encouragement & Affirmation	We will be purposeful in stimulating each other in our commitment to learn and grow spiritually. We will affirm the value of different personalities and what each person brings to the group.
Care	We will support & care for each other. We will be aware of each other's personal pressures and family situations and seek to support one another.
Multiplication	We desire to see this group grow and multiply into two new groups

### **Helpful Reading on Bible-Study Covenants**

Growing Christians In Small Groups by John Mallison p21-36

Leading Better Bible studies by Karen & Rod Morris p119-123