

## Stop! In the Name of Love



The Supremes' lead singer, Diana Ross, pleaded with her man not to leave her and go to another woman. The lyrics of that 1965 hit cried, "Stop! In the name of love before you break my heart. Baby baby, I'm aware of where you go / Each time you leave my door / I watch you walk down the street / Knowing your other love you'll meet."



That's how a lot of small group leaders feel when some of their participants begin to miss, look around for something else, and leave. They want to do anything it seems to keep everyone showing up.

But there's something a bit more insidious lurking in some groups. An associate pastor of a church experimenting with Bible Storying said, "My group won't do anything. Nothing!" What's a small group leader to do?

Look carefully at those in your group. What if they stay and never bear fruit for the kingdom, continue living in disobedience to what Scripture commands, and even distract others from joining the group?

I shut my small group down. After 18 months of no growth, lots of socializing, growing conflicts with the home group schedule, and prayer, my wife and I canceled our group. We simply encouraged them to go to other classes in the church. One couple continues and is very active. A single lady is now engaged to another young man she met in a small group. The others are gone except for making an occasional appearance.

It bothered me for months. No spiritual fruit and we were often regressing! We were doing so many things right. But the accountability was getting irritating.

On March 22, USA Today ran an unusual-for-them article asking "Has the Sun Set On Sunday School?" The article used statistics from research by the Barna Group noting consistent decline in attendance across America. The expectations set for spiritual training in Sunday School were countered by other options ranging from racial divides in an increasingly diverse culture, other fun options, to increasingly sparse family time.

Actually getting someone to attend a small group is amazing in our culture. So, the idea of stopping a small group seems downright drastic. At least it takes thought.

But stop the small group we did and the kingdom of God has been better for it. I've invested in the lives of one couple that not only started a new young adult class using orality methods, but the teacher is also starting a Bible Storying group at the jail. And my wife and I are now mentoring a small group for three months. They are sold-out to start a new work in a community with no evangelical churches.

**JESUS EXHIBITED TOUGH LOVE.** Luke 9:57-62 notes that some with good intentions also had their own conditions that prevented them from following Jesus as they should. Jesus would not relent on the conditions to follow Him. Neither should we. Getting buy-in on the front-end seems to be vital. It sets the DNA for the group. Why was your small group started? What's its current vision? What progress for evangelizing, discipleship, missions, and making disciple-makers is being made by the participants?

A church planter in Illinois reported to the work group that I was in that he had to stop his small group. They had met for six months with no change, growth, or even sharing their faith. They were a Bible-centric social group that was content to just meet and "do life together." Ouch. Life together with Jesus requires a different set of standards.

Perhaps instead of singing Motown's lovelorn plea, **we need to raise the bar on disciple-making** and adopt the title from this country song by Bobby Harden, "All I Want from You (Is Away.)" Let's keep striving to make disciples that make disciples to the glory of the Lord – and not just cower at the thought of losing someone. It just might be the right thing to do in the name of Love.