

# Faith-based Growth Groups:

## Removing the barriers to community action

### Removing the barriers

We in the faith community would often like to do something personally meaningful about the injustices we see all around us. We want to take action but sometimes can't see a clear path ahead. There can be seen and unseen barriers stopping us. Much of the time we are not entirely clear what the barriers are. And even if the barriers are known, getting through them alone can be overwhelming. This program suggests that we come together as a supportive and trusted group and help each other identify and meet those barriers, to find a good path forward. What we can't do in isolation we can do in community. Sometimes the barriers are practical limitations like money and time. Sometimes there are conflicts with other demands in life like working and raising kids. There are also longstanding barriers of a more personal nature. Whatever the reason, we all need a place that we trust to talk about the issues we face and explore our options with some support.

### A Three Phase Program

One overall goal of this program is to see people grow in ways that will empower them for the road ahead. We believe that God wants to develop a strong spiritual foundation within each of us. With the right kind of support and help, who knows what progress can be made once our personally limiting barriers have been clarified and better understood? Although this is not a counseling program it is intended for support at a personal level.

### Outline

**Phase 1:** To attend a weekly 2 hour group<sup>1</sup> designed to meet the following goals:

1. To develop and strengthen a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
2. To grow in awareness of the Holy Spirit's role in healing wounds, whether individual or collective
3. To incorporate key Scriptures into our healing journey
4. To understand grace as the God-given source of empowerment for all healing needs
5. To identify and bond with a supportive group of people
6. To learn the interpersonal communication skills necessary to gain benefits from a process-oriented group
7. To identify core issues that are interfering with our lives and how we want to live life
8. To experience the healing effect of being in a closely knit and safe group of people
9. To see the power of the body of Christ in action

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<sup>1</sup> The nature of this group is intended to be a close-knit group providing a base from which members can explore the nature of their own roadblocks and barriers. Members agree that they will respect the privacy of what is shared in the group, meaning there is to be no disclosure of anyone's comments to others outside of the group. Mutual trust is the basis of the group.

**Phase 2:** To attend a 2 hour weekly closed group<sup>2</sup> designed around self-identified issues<sup>3</sup> limiting our lives for which we need support, understanding and encouragement, and oftentimes healing. Six additional goals are incorporated into this phase:

1. **Truth Telling** – Breaking the isolation, looking at personal barriers to action and growth
2. **Listening** – Listening to each other in order to create necessary support for growth and change
3. **Change** – Finding grace in community to understand barriers in our life that are potentially painful
4. **Vision** – Developing a different picture of a more empowered future
5. **Forgiveness** – For ourselves and others as we make progress moving forward beyond old barriers
6. **Community** – Common bonds in action

This phase is the heart of the program. These are the core principles found in the RPG program ([described online](#)) and are adapted here to fit this program.

**Phase 3:** To take the skills and growth gained in this program and use them in life, to find new ways to have an impact for a more just world, and to simply live a fuller life within the traditions of our own faith communities.

## Summary

Many people have unmet needs around personally painful issues that may be limiting our lives in ways that could be changed if there was some available support. Oftentimes we do not have access to a safe and structured forum to address difficult issues. This program is an attempt to provide the missing forum. *Phase 1* is designed to help people to learn to more fully rely on God and to trust others for help. *Phase 2* is designed to put the “skills” learned in Phase 1 to work on targeted issues that are limiting our lives, but to do that work in the context of trusted supportive community. *Phase 3* is a means of helping other people more effectively for having done our own work to address hindering barriers that have held us back. We want to make a difference. This is the outline for a plan of action to make that happen.

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<sup>2</sup> A “closed group” is simply a group consisting of a fixed list of members. The group maybe decide (as a group decision) to open the group to a new member if the need arises. Closed groups tend to be highly bonded groups that are trusted by the people in it. It is trust that makes the group effective for change and growth.

<sup>3</sup> This particular group is focused on the barriers that limit us from personally taking action against social injustice around us. Additional examples of other group topics this type of group format could address; grief and loss issues, trauma issues, issues related to abuse, racial prejudice and social injustices, depression, anger, addictions, etc. These other types of groups would be more of a counseling group than a support group such as this.