



 FamilyLife.

# Promoting Events & Small Groups

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GLOBAL TRAINING MANUAL





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## **Promoting Events and Small Groups**

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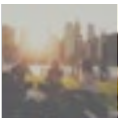
# CONTENTS



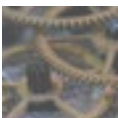
**INTRODUCTION ..... 1**



**PROMOTING EVENTS ..... 3**



**PROMOTING SMALL-GROUP PARTICIPATION ..... 15**



**SYNERGY BETWEEN EVENTS AND SMALL GROUPS.....27**



**PROMOTING EVENTS AND SMALL GROUPS  
TO NON-CHRISTIANS ..... 31**





# INTRODUCTION

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Several years ago, a FamilyLife team outside the US received speaker training. They translated the FamilyLife Weekend to Remember® manual and diligently practiced their marriage talks. The team arranged for a facility to conduct an event to share the biblical principles for marriage. Everybody on the team pitched in to arrange the room and create just the right environment. Some of the women on the team made delicious refreshments and even put together a nice bag of romantic gifts for each couple who attended. Everybody was deeply disappointed when very few couples attended the conference. The team had underestimated the work of promotion needed to bring an audience. Sadly, this scenario has happened many times to FamilyLife teams around the world. Others have committed to launching a small-group ministry but find that getting couples to join is very difficult.

Promotion is an essential aspect of a FamilyLife ministry. This guide will provide some basic tips and ideas to get couples to attend events or small groups. In the long term, the best strategy is to combine a variety of events and small groups. The events bring in new couples and provide momentum for the ministry. Small groups develop new leaders by building marriage relationships and discipling individuals to spiritual maturity.



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## KEY IDEAS

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- Promotion is an essential aspect of a FamilyLife ministry.
  - Jesus used a variety of ministry methods.
  - The most successful FamilyLife ministries use a variety of methods, the most basic of which are events and small groups.
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Jesus used a variety of ministry methods. Luke 4:15 records, “He began by teaching in their synagogues,” and Luke 4:44 says, “He kept on preaching in the synagogues.” He taught multitudes on a mountain and from a boat. From the multitudes, many became his disciples. Then Jesus chose twelve as apostles. They helped in the ministry by controlling the crowds, distributing food, and even baptizing the repentant. Jesus taught in houses and talked with individuals. He sent out 12 and later 70 to teach the Kingdom of God and rejoiced at their success. Jesus gave special instruction to the apostles. Peter, James, and John were especially close to Him. Ultimately, Jesus indicated a special role for Peter. Jesus used various approaches, from large groups all the way to one-on-one relationships.

In the same manner, the most successful FamilyLife ministries use a variety of methods, the most basic of which are events and small groups. Jesus used miracles to draw people to hear. Until God gives us signs, we must use promotion strategies to get people involved.

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## **A NOTE ON MINISTRY AS A SINGLE**

We encourage couples to do marriage and family ministry together because it provides a visible demonstration of the power of teamwork in marriage. However, we realize that some individuals (married or single) may choose to develop a ministry to families on their own. If this applies to you, we affirm and appreciate your contribution to the Kingdom of God. Although our training manuals are worded to address couples who are doing ministry together, please adapt and apply the material to fit your situation.





# PROMOTING EVENTS

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Think about a FamilyLife ministry like a train. The purpose of the train is to deliver the precious cargo carried in the cars. In our case, the cargo is the invaluable biblical message delivered to families. The speakers are like the wheels. Any train needs wheels to roll. But cargo cars and wheels aren't enough. For the train to move forward, it must also have an engine. In the context of FamilyLife, the engine that moves the train forward is the ability and effort necessary to promote events.

There are two types of FamilyLife events:

- Events FamilyLife organizes
- Events others organize with FamilyLife providing the content, including video content

These can be live events or video events using FamilyLife resources such as The Art of Marriage®. The event promotion principles are the same.



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## KEY IDEAS

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- Successful events organized by a FamilyLife team can establish the reputation that will encourage others to bring guests to future events or to organize events themselves.
  - To get a big crowd, you must conduct an “Inviter Strategy.” Inviters are those who commit with you and take the responsibility to bring couples to your event.
  - Inviters are not likely to be effective without your encouragement during the campaign.
  - The manner in which you conduct each scheduled event will affect the promotion of subsequent events.
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Successful events organized by a FamilyLife team can establish the reputation that will encourage others to bring guests to future events or organize events themselves. One FamilyLife couple organized a community-oriented event for about 300 guests in a town nearly three hours by car from where they lived. The audience came from many different churches and groups. Everybody had a good time and learned a lot. At the event, the couple told the guests that they were available to lead events organized by other groups. As a result, the couple did 12 additional events for groups in that area. These 12 events were very little work for FamilyLife and nearly all of them even donated money to the couple's ministry. Moreover, because the couple had a lot of experience in promoting events themselves, they were able to coach the sponsors in doing their own promotion. This made all of the 12 events much larger and more successful than they would have been otherwise.

Naturally, the events others organize are the least work and the most time efficient for FamilyLife leaders. A fully developed FamilyLife ministry with excellent, experienced speakers should lead to invitations to speak at events others organize. This gives the FamilyLife ministry a chance to promote small-group resources, share the gospel, and even raise money. However, these invitations will be few until you establish a reputation for conducting fun and meaningful events. Therefore, nearly all FamilyLife teams must also organize and promote events themselves, especially in the beginning.

When others organize events for FamilyLife, they are responsible for scheduling the speakers, finding a venue, collecting the fees, arranging childcare where appropriate, setting up the meeting location, collecting the registrations, and most importantly conducting the promotion. The FamilyLife team can coach the organizers in doing promotion using the ideas listed in this manual.



There are two aspects to promoting events organized by FamilyLife:

- Promotion of a scheduled, upcoming event
- Long-range promotion of all FamilyLife events

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## **PROMOTING A SCHEDULED EVENT**

Imagine yourselves pushing a heavy automobile up a hill. This is hard work. However, when the automobile passes over the crest, the pushing becomes much easier. As the automobile gains speed, you might even be able to ride in it without pushing at all. Promotion of events is like pushing the car. In the beginning, the hard work feels like pushing a car uphill. However, after others start inviting you to do events or are capable of promoting events for you, the effort you expend in promotion is like pushing downhill. But there'll be no easy ride unless you do the very difficult work to get over the top.

### **The difficulty of promotion**

The FamilyLife couple mentioned previously organized large Weekend to Remember getaways and other events for FamilyLife in the US. To get a thousand guests to pay a significant amount to attend, the couple had to work for many months. After the first event, they calculated that getting each person to attend took nearly one hour of work in promotion. Think about that. Sometimes you hear that you should recruit a team to spread the work among many. You definitely need a promotion team, as we'll see soon. But encouraging and managing the team may still require about one hour of your time per guest in the beginning.

Everybody should know that promoting an event will be hard, hard, hard work. There are two primary reasons promotion is so difficult, especially in the beginning:

- Couples aren't usually eager to come. They are nervous that the event will embarrass them, ask a lot from them, or create expectations in their partner. People are busy with other sources of activity or entertainment. They might think the event will be boring. Couples also have other priorities, especially for their money. Finally, childcare is sometimes an obstacle.

- Satan will attack. He knows biblical principles will change lives. Satan will attack you, the promotion team, and even the couples considering coming. Few people have ever experienced this type of spiritual battle, and so they are ill-equipped to handle it when it happens.

All those involved in promoting an event should expect a roller coaster ride of emotions. Typically, promoters alternate between worry that, “There won’t be enough seats for everybody coming,” to fear that, “Nobody is coming.” When these emotions occur, promoters should continue executing their plan, trusting God, and praying.

### **Conducting a successful promotion for a FamilyLife event**

Until you have a strong and well-established promotion capability and a positive reputation for excellence in events, we suggest that you temporarily forget about evangelism and discipleship and movements. Just get anyone and everyone you can to come to your event. Some international ministries have even begun by concentrating on bringing a crowd of expatriates along with just a handful of local couples. If the event does well, the locals will get a vision for bringing their countrymen to future events. Evangelism and discipleship and movements will come later if you establish a reputation for great events and if your events don’t lose money.

In the beginning, you must get your whole FamilyLife team involved. Everybody should concentrate on making your event a big success. By a success, we mean a big crowd with lots of laughs and meaningful fun. Charge enough to at least break even in all the costs from the beginning with a potential for positive margin (profit) ahead. Your ministry will not be able to grow if you are losing money at your events.

### **There are five major keys to a successful large-scale promotion**

(Exposure events are smaller and require less lead time. See the Global Outreach Strategies and Resources manual for more information).



**Preparing promotional materials** (six to nine months before the event)



**Setting up a prayer program** (six months before the event)



**Recruiting and training “inviters”** (three to six months before the event)



**Conducting the campaign**

- General awareness of the event (three months to the event)
- Collecting registrations (one or two months to the event)



**Following up with your helpers** (after the event)



**Preparing promotional materials**

You will need a brochure or other handout literature and/or online advertisements and social media graphics telling about your event. Share some of the topics, promise meaningful fun, and tell the details of time, place, and cost. A registration form or link should be included. Make handouts as nice as you can reasonably afford. You might also create posters and bulletin inserts for general publicity in churches and other venues to create awareness of the event. Some sophisticated ministries create web pages and videos telling about the event. Quality promotional materials telling about your event will help to recruit the inviters.

One incentive that will motivate first-time guests to attend is the anticipation of hearing someone “special” speak. Promotional materials will be enhanced by some explanation of the credentials or qualities of the speakers (including yourself, if applicable). You may think that you have nothing adequate to include. Just having stayed married in a rewarding relationship is a strong credential in our modern world. Working together to raise godly children is another credential. Also consider education and ministry experience. You have more credentials than you realize.

Make certain that the promotional materials emphasize statements like, “The conference will make a good marriage better.” Otherwise, couples may not attend for fear that people will think they have marriage trouble. One church conference only

attracted three couples. Afterwards, the speakers discovered a pulpit announcement had indicated, “If your marriage needs help, attend this conference.” No wonder almost nobody attended. After expressing how the conference can make a good marriage better, you can add that the conference can also give a struggling marriage hope. These words will attract some who have the greatest needs but don’t wish to be exposed.

Financial incentives can play a role in promotions. Early registrations frequently receive a discounted price. Once couples register, they are less likely to change their mind about attending later. Those who can organize a group of at least five couples to attend can be given a sixth registration for a minimal price. They can use this discount registration for themselves or someone who can’t afford to attend otherwise. Whatever financial incentives are employed should be explained clearly in the promotional materials.



### Setting up a prayer emphasis

Because of the difficulty in promoting an event, prayer is essential. In some respects, prayer will happen automatically. In the midst of the spiritual battle and the attacks by Satan previously discussed, everyone likely will be praying even without your encouragement.

However, an organized group committed to consistently pray for the event can also be very beneficial. You can let those with a heart for prayer volunteer themselves. Just publicize among your volunteers the need for a prayer team. You could also recruit a leader for the prayer team and ask him or her to recruit a team.

The prayer team should pray for:

- All five major aspects of a successful promotion
- Preparations for the event, such as the facility and the speakers
- Couples who are deciding whether to come or not
- The inviters to be courageous in their mission
- Changed lives at the event

Sometimes, prayer teams spend time in intense prayer during the event. They might actually be at the facility in a different room from where the talks are given. Or the prayer team might meet at a separate location. In either case, praying for the following can be beneficial:

- The couples attending (pray for them by name when possible)
- Stamina, concentration, and reliance on the Holy Spirit for the speakers
- Smooth logistics to prevent distractions
- The follow-up to solidify the interest and commitments



### Recruiting and training “inviters”

To get a big crowd, you must conduct a strategy using inviters. The inviters can be called by a variety of titles such as Church Reps or Group Organizers. Inviters are those who commit with you and take the responsibility to bring couples to your event. This commitment is more than informing others about your event. The inviters should not only tell couples about the conference but also help them get registered. That way couples are likely to show up.

Start an inviter strategy by asking everybody you can find who is interested in biblical families to help you bring others to the event. Orientation meetings where you talk about the event and challenge couples to get involved are very effective. Recruitment can also be done by telephone or personal appointments. In either case, prospective inviters can be motivated by the story of Andrew. Sometimes an inviter strategy is called an Andrew strategy.

Andrew was one of the 12 disciples chosen by Christ. He was faithful to Christ all the remainder of his life. But one of the most significant acts of service Andrew ever did was on the first day he met Jesus. “The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus” (John 1:41-42a). He was an inviter.



Andrew didn't have to give a speech or lead a Bible study. He simply brought his brother. Peter responded partly because of his relationship with Andrew. Likewise, if we are to be the most effective in bringing others to events, we need to have a relationship. We have relationships with many already: family, coworkers, friends, neighbors, church members. Actively working to deepen relationships and establish new ones will make it possible for us to bring friends and family to events where the gospel is shared. God can use inviters to change lives.

Inviters should include everyone on the FamilyLife team, including staff and all the key volunteers. FamilyLife small groups are the best place to find inviters to help promote the event. Also, willing alumni from previous events, friends of the ministry, or church leaders can be effective inviters. Some enthusiastic pastors make good inviters, but they are usually too busy. Generally, it is best to ask a lay person in a church to do the work of the inviter under the authority of the pastor.

Training for inviters can be conducted in meetings or person-to-person. The best training tells inviters more than techniques on how to bring others to the event. The best training gives the team and volunteer inviters a vision and confidence that bringing others will result in changed lives. We sometimes tell inviter trainees the following story: We invited some close friends to a marriage event. Afterwards, the wife brought her comment card to us rather than turning it in. "I wanted you to see this," she said. There on her card was an indication that she had prayed to receive Christ. And all we had to do was bring her to the event.

Regardless of how you do it, the team and volunteer inviters must understand the importance of their job. If key team members do not follow through on their jobs, then the event promotion is unlikely to be successful. Therefore, reserve the most key positions to the staff or fully committed and experienced volunteers. Then make sure all the inviters know about the proven methods that are successful to conduct a campaign.



### **Conducting the campaign**

General awareness of the event can greatly increase the responsiveness of those who are invited. We have found that the average couple attending an event has been made aware of it by three different methods. Some of the methods of general publicity for the promoters and inviters to use can include:



In churches:

- pulpit announcements
- information and sign-up table
- bulletin inserts
- alumni testimonies
- posters
- video clips
- skits
- promotion within small groups
- church newsletter
- church marquee
- church Facebook group

A demonstration can be effective to encourage people to attend. For example, if excellent speakers are available and the pastor is willing, a talk given during a church service frequently doubles the attendance from that church. Another important factor could be childcare organized by the church for parents attending the FamilyLife event. That also can double attendance.

The community publicity should be conducted by the staff or FamilyLife team. This community awareness will both motivate the inviters and make their job easier.

In the community:

- social media
- sign boards
- radio/TV spots or interviews
- community calendar
- e-mail campaign
- website
- bulletin boards
- mailed literature
- newspaper

Demonstrations can also enhance attendance from the community. Speakers can conduct sample talks for community groups as well as churches. Even convincing groups of senior citizens, many of whom may not be married, about the merits of the event are worthwhile. They may sponsor their children or nieces and nephews or provide childcare for couples to attend.

Most of the general awareness methods can be had for free if you ask the right people very politely. Beware of spending a lot of money on the general awareness campaign. Rarely is purchased publicity cost effective. And public awareness alone is usually not successful. Many times ministry teams have done a tremendous job of general awareness and then been very disappointed at the response.

Inviters collecting the registrations are still necessary to get those who are aware of the event to actually attend. The most effective inviters will represent the event in their own church. Personal invitations (phone calls, visits, or approaching people at church) are best. If there has been a thorough awareness campaign in the church, a sign-up table with the inviters sitting at it and answering questions can be effective to collect registrations.

Inviters are not likely to be effective without your encouragement during the campaign. Give them a set of written instructions, and call to encourage them frequently. Coach them on how to run a church strategy and invite others. Promise your inviters that God can touch the hearts of those who come. Exhort your inviters to urge those they know to attend the event. We used to tell our inviters, “Twist their arms, if necessary. They will thank you later for having brought them.” Finally, remind your inviters to expect Satan’s attacks and to expect a roller-coaster emotional experience. Remind them that the prayer team is praying for them. Without your support, most inviters will get discouraged and quit.



### **Following up with your helpers after the event**

After the event, you are likely to want to simply rest. However, the right thing to do is to report to all of those who helped, especially the inviters. Write them a letter or e-mail thanking them and giving some of the results. Phone the ones who worked the hardest. We used to make a list of some of the very positive comments from the event (without names) to share with the inviters and helpers. This is not only the right thing to do, but it will make them more likely to help you with future events.

Finally, some of the inviters who tried very hard will not be very successful in recruiting guests to attend. They may be especially discouraged. Remind them that on a soccer team, one player may score a goal in a match. Next match, a different player may score. But the whole team receives the benefit of the goals. The unsuccessful inviters are part of the overall successful event. And you’ll see that with experience, some of the inviters who are unsuccessful at first may be very successful at future events.

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## **LONG-RANGE PROMOTION OF FAMILYLIFE EVENTS**

The manner in which you conduct each event will affect the promotion of subsequent events. A well-run and successful event will set up future events and ease the hard work of promotion. Several factors can affect your future efforts.

### **Quality of the speakers**

Good speakers will make couples want to return and bring others with them. Poor speakers are likely to discourage future participation. This is one reason that FamilyLife Global emphasizes speaker training. In particular, humor can set apart a FamilyLife event from a church preaching service. Don't be mistaken: Lives are changed by application of the biblical principles and the Holy Spirit. However, God can use engaging and entertaining speakers to bring others to future events. In the case of using video content, the skilled host or emcee can provide the personal contact that the video cannot, thereby adding to the quality of the event.

### **Event size**

Larger events create enthusiasm and momentum for a FamilyLife ministry. FamilyLife leaders are hopeful that nonbelievers will attend and hear the gospel, but shouldn't miss out on the importance of including Christians in the event as well. An event with 90 Christian couples and 10 non-Christian couples will be more effective than a purely evangelistic event with only 10 non-Christian couples. Teaching biblical principles for marriage to Christians is a form of discipleship. The larger event including Christians will also generate more funds needed to make the event successful. And the non-Christians will not feel as threatened when submerged in a larger crowd. Finally, future leaders are more likely to be found among the Christians. Most importantly, the larger events foster a sense that God is at work, leading more couples to get involved.

### **Setting up future events at the current event**

The best follow-up starts at the event itself. The speakers are likely to develop tremendous credibility among the event attendees. They can announce and endorse

future events. More importantly, they can urge couples to lead or participate in FamilyLife small groups, which will be discussed in the following session.

At the event, some sort of comment form can allow attending couples to indicate a willingness to help promote or invite others to future events.

### **Recognizing key people or organizations**

Usually it is not good to recognize an individual church at an event unless that church organized the event themselves. However, if a non-church organization such as a radio station has provided significant publicity, they should be recognized. In addition, all volunteers who played key leadership roles should be recognized.

### **Immediate follow-up**

When couples indicate an interest in leading or joining a small group or willingness to help bring others to future events, try to acknowledge their response with a note or phone call soon after the conclusion of the event. Certainly you are tired after a big event. But if you can acknowledge their willingness within a couple of weeks, you make promotion for the subsequent event easier.



# PROMOTING SMALL-GROUP PARTICIPATION

Although this session will provide some basics in promoting small groups, FamilyLife Global has a training curriculum, “Small-Group Training,” that has many more details. FamilyLife has several small-group resources available, including the Art of Marriage Connect studies (formerly known as HomeBuilders).

Promotion of small groups occurs primarily by two methods:

- Recruitment and motivation of new leaders
- Multiplication

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## RECRUITMENT AND MOTIVATION OF NEW LEADERS

The most effective promotion of small groups starts by recruitment of new leaders. Each couple who decides to start a group has a circle of friends, church members, and associates who are potential group participants. They become inviters in a similar way to Andrew.



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## KEY IDEAS

- The most effective promotion of small groups starts by recruitment of leaders.
  - A personal invitation to join a group is nearly always best.
  - Generally, organizers will need to start by inviting a lot of couples to attend to get a few to participate.
  - Frequently a small event is a good way to interest couples in a small group.
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Potential new group leaders can gain confidence that they can start and lead a group by going through some sort of training or orientation. This frequently occurs as part of an event. The most significant aspect of a small-group training is a sample session. That will show participants clearly how a group should operate. The potential leaders should be reassured that they don't need a great marriage or to be Bible teachers to lead a group. A FamilyLife small-group leader is supposed to facilitate, not teach, the group. The simplest formula for FamilyLife small-group leadership is, "Read the questions and set an example by sharing from your own life."

The most important result of the training or orientation is confidence that the potential leader can start and lead a group. Sharing more details such as the benefits of FamilyLife small-group resources and the various topics available can add to their confidence. If possible, the potential leaders should be encouraged to purchase materials for the topic of their choice at the event, training, or orientation. Surveys clearly show that couples who purchase the materials in advance are likely to follow through by starting a group. Couples who don't purchase the materials at the event or training are unlikely to start a group.

Organizers should encourage new leaders to decide what type of group to start before they invite others to join their group. The type of group affects other decisions to follow, such as whom to invite or where to meet.



The following chart explains some of the types of small groups.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FAMILYLIFE SMALL GROUPS	ADVANTAGES	WHOM TO INVITE
<p><b>Event Follow-Up</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Captures the enthusiasm from the event</li> <li>• A dynamic group with couples having different backgrounds</li> <li>• These are the best groups for later multiplication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recent alumni of a FamilyLife event</li> <li>• Alumni from previous events</li> <li>• You can also invite others who are on your heart but didn't attend the event</li> </ul>
<p><b>Church</b>            Cell groups            Sunday school            A new group            Weekend retreat</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serving the church is a high priority</li> <li>• Potentially a lot of contacts</li> <li>• Frequently childcare is available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Church members and guests</li> <li>• Ask leaders of existing groups if they could use FamilyLife small-group studies for a season</li> <li>• Outsiders may be willing to join if the church members don't pressure them to other activities</li> </ul>

**CONTINUED** →

<p><b>Neighborhood and Friends</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capitalizes on relationships you have already developed</li> <li>• Deeper friendships formed among the participants</li> <li>• Likely to meet deep needs among those you care about</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every couple you know—don't rule anybody out</li> <li>• Ask alumni of previous groups to attend and invite their friends and neighbors</li> </ul>
<p><b>Outreach or Evangelistic</b> Training is recommended to lead this type of group. (See the session titled "Using FamilyLife Small Groups for Outreach" in the Small-Group Training manual.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective to introduce others to Christ</li> <li>• You may be surprised who attends because of their needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually a prior minimal-commitment gathering is necessary</li> <li>• Coworkers, neighbors, social acquaintances, etc</li> <li>• Seed the group with a few godly and discrete Christians</li> </ul>

Encourage new leaders to consider co-leading with another couple. You can pool or combine your likely participants and divide the leadership responsibilities. This is an especially good idea if there is a couple that is willing but unsure of their leadership abilities. Don't be concerned if your prospective co-leaders have little teaching experience or Bible knowledge. These are not necessary to be effective small-group leaders. And after co-leading a group with you, they may be ready to lead their own group later. This is one of the ways FamilyLife small groups multiply.



Couples are usually the most faithful to attend if the meetings are in a home. In nice weather, meeting outside on a deck or patio is fun. You can also ask volunteers among the group members to host a session in their home. This adds a lot to building relationships within the group. Perhaps someone even has a large basement where the kids can play with a babysitter during the session. Some church groups meet at the church. Meeting at a church can also make childcare easier by using the church's facilities. However, outreach or neighborhood groups rarely work well meeting at a church. A few groups have even met at a public place like a restaurant or the YMCA.

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## **HOW SHOULD THE NEW LEADERS INVITE PEOPLE?**

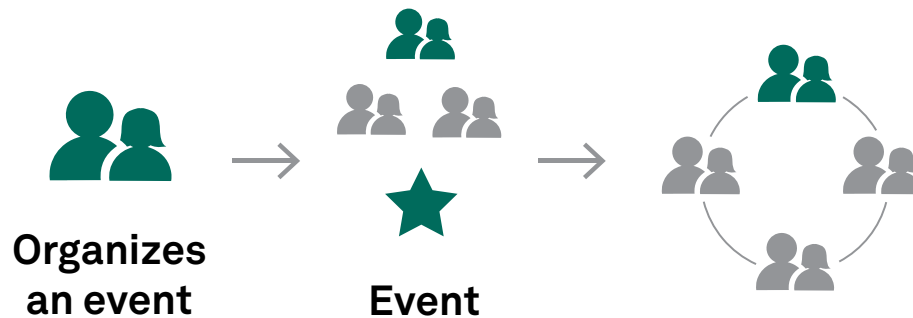
Recruiting couples (or singles to parenting studies) to participate varies somewhat depending on the type of group. But a personal invitation to join a group is nearly always best. Mailed invitations alone rarely work. For the best results, call the couples or visit them. Tell them how much these principles have meant in your lives. Show them the materials. Tell them about the discussion format and assure them that the study will help make good relationships better. Otherwise, they may think you're implying that they need help. They may need help, but they'll be unlikely to participate if they think that others will believe so.

If you are putting couples into small groups following an event, it may be beneficial to mix couples together from different denominational affiliations. This creates enthusiasm in the community and your ministry. Everybody acts excited that God is doing something in the other groups.

Generally, organizers will need to start by inviting a lot of couples to attend to get a few to participate. In the beginning, you possibly will need to invite five couples for each that joins. However, once your ministry becomes known as fun and meaningful in the community, your response rates will greatly increase.

Frequently some sort of activity or event is a good way to interest couples in FamilyLife groups, especially if the event speakers emphasize the importance of joining a small group. Many couples have hosted a cookout or potluck at their home to challenge their neighbors to join a small group. Sponsoring a romantic dinner is a lot of work but effective. One couple conducted a dinner for 60 couples from the community. To their delight, enough couples signed up at the event to start four

groups. Activities are a key element in recruiting enough couples to join for an expanding small-group ministry. Much more on using events in conjunction with small groups is included in the following sections.



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## WHAT ABOUT CHILDCARE?

Establishing childcare is a key element in creating a small-group ministry. You can let everybody get his or her own babysitter. That's the easiest for you, but may exclude some couples. Or you can bring the kids to a common location like a family room and provide a babysitter. This has the advantage that you can use an older child to take care of those who might not be old enough to be left completely alone. Some children who will quietly watch a video or play together in another room can simply be brought to the small-group session. One unusual arrangement was a summer backyard study. The children played in the other end of the yard while the parents could casually watch them during the session. Yes, there were a few interruptions. But this is a family ministry. And what could be better for the children than observing their parents discussing how to be better husbands and wives?

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## WITH WHICH STUDY SHOULD WE BEGIN?

- Choose a study that meets your needs as a couple and those who will participate with you. Visit [shop.familylife.com](http://shop.familylife.com) to see the complete list of studies available.
- You may want to select several studies of interest and let your group determine which one you do.

- Suggested studies for your first group are:
  - *Building Your Marriage to Last* (this will be familiar material for those who have participated in a Weekend to Remember)
  - *Improving Communication in Your Marriage*
  - *Resolving Conflict in Your Marriage*
  - Studies appropriate for more established groups include: *Growing Together in Christ*, *Building up Your Spouse*, *Building Teamwork in Your Marriage*, or *Mastering Money in Your Marriage*.
  - Some newer titles include *The Gospel and Your Marriage*, *The Power of Humility in Your Marriage*, and *Your Marriage Has a Mission*.

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## WHAT DAY OF THE WEEK AND HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE MEET?

- First consider your own schedule to determine when you can't participate. But the more flexible you can be, the easier the group will be to organize.
- Each session is formatted for about 60 or 90 minutes, depending on the version of the study. Plan for a total of an hour and a half to two hours to allow time for fun and refreshments before or after the session.

SCHEDULE OPTIONS	PROS	CONS
<b>Weekly</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A study can be completed in a few weeks</li> <li>• Keeps interest level high</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May create pressure on group members' schedules</li> <li>• Requires frequent childcare arrangements</li> </ul>
<b>Bi-monthly</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows more time to complete the project on the alternate week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lengthens time needed to complete study</li> <li>• Without a regular night reserved, couples forget and schedule something else that night</li> </ul>

**CONTINUED** →

<p><b>Monthly</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can work for an existing group already having a monthly meeting scheduled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rarely develops the chemistry that makes groups dynamic</li> <li>• Frequently becomes just a social group</li> </ul>
<p><b>Varied</b> Schedule sessions one at a time, depending on participants' calendars</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes everyone's schedule into account</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes more work to coordinate</li> <li>• Increases risk of not completing the study</li> <li>• Rarely successful</li> </ul>
<p><b>Weekend Retreat Option</b> A FamilyLife small-group study can be completed in a weekend in a home or at a retreat center. Most frequently used by church groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involves couples that are otherwise unlikely to make a longer-term commitment</li> <li>• Doesn't require outside speakers</li> <li>• Low-cost alternative to attending a conference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't allow as much time between sessions to apply the principles covered</li> </ul>

**HOW CAN WE USE FAMILYLIFE SMALL GROUPS IN OUR CHURCH?**

First ask the pastor. Show him the materials and volunteer to do the work required. A certain way to fail is to give the materials to the pastor and suggest that he use them. Pastors already have plenty to do. If the pastor still isn't interested, respect his wishes and start a neighborhood group instead.

An individual church can become a strong asset for the entire community by becoming an equipping center for marriages. FamilyLife has the resources to enable a church to enrich the marriages of their congregation and attract other members of the community who have personal marriage needs or appreciate the importance of biblical families.

The weekend emphasis listed in the table can be a great kick-starter for a marriage emphasis in the church. Four to seven couples willing to invest a weekend could ultimately affect an entire church and community.

### **Church promotional ideas:**

- Nothing is as effective as the pastor encouraging couples to participate.
- Use church promotional methods such as bulletin boards, bulletin inserts, pulpit announcements, monthly newsletters, flyers, social media posts, etc.
- Have a sign-up sheet in a central location.
- Contact all who have expressed interest, get commitments, and recruit additional leaders as needed.

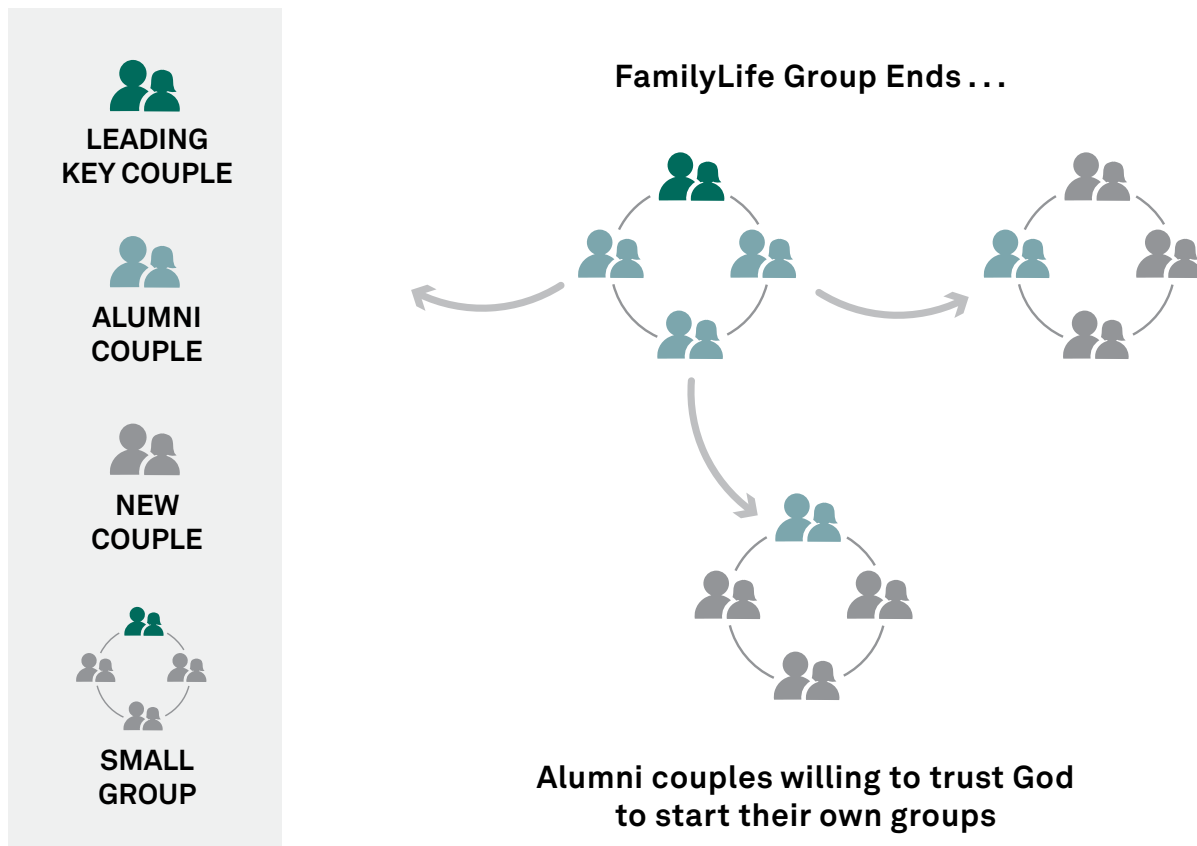
Caution: Churches sometimes try FamilyLife groups hoping to increase their membership. If used carefully, these studies are very effective as an outreach tool and can certainly get couples involved in Bible study. However, churches are sometimes disappointed when couples go elsewhere after the group ends. Even un-churched couples that get interested in spiritual things through a small group may seek a church like the one they grew up in rather than the church God used to touch them. Our advice is to be joyful in ministering to others without any expectations other than God's promise to change lives through biblical principles.

### **Promotion through multiplication**

A few couples who lead small groups and see God changing lives may become enthusiasts. They may wish to help others start and lead groups. We call these important couples "Small-Group Developers." Small-Group Developers need to understand the principle of multiplication.

Multiplication was the way Jesus planned to change the world 2,000 years ago, and multiplication is still the way we can change the world today. Some couples have seen their desire for reaching families multiplied into more than 100 groups.

Many times people think of multiplication as a group that gets larger and larger, and then divides into two groups like an amoeba. FamilyLife groups rarely multiply that way. Rather, groups generally end after most of the couples feel their immediate needs are met. A few couples, having seen the effectiveness of FamilyLife small groups to help others, may quickly start their own groups. Others may delay until they have additional needs. If no group is available to join, they frequently start a new group.



The graphic illustrates how FamilyLife small groups multiply. But don't be surprised if there is a large gap between a group ending and another beginning. Frequently, couples who really loved FamilyLife small groups and want to be leaders wait a year or more before beginning their own group. Training in small-group leadership can greatly enhance multiplication by giving couples confidence that God can work through them.

Multiplication can be dynamic. If you could fold an ordinary piece of paper just 24 times, it would be over a mile thick. Let's say you took a small group and trained just one couple from that group for leadership. Then, in six months you both start a new

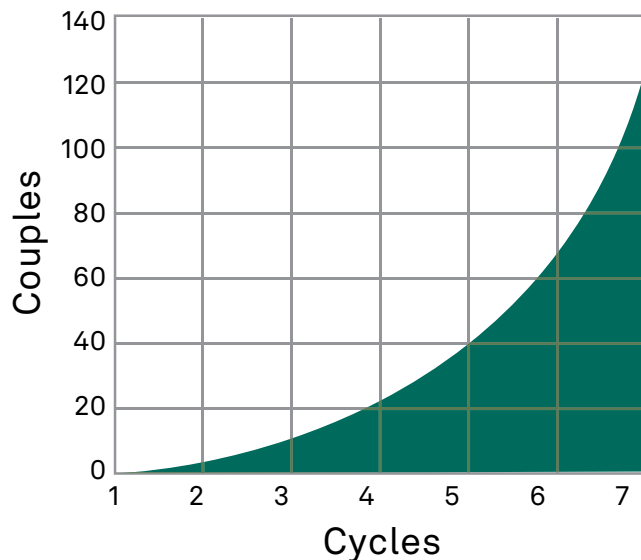
group and train another couple to do the same. If you continued this cycle for five years, you'd end up with more than 1,000 groups. Obviously this is a hypothetical and idealistic scenario, because it never works exactly that way in real life. However, multiplication is still a powerful tool for promotion and sometimes can yield miraculous results.

A couple invited to a small-group leadership conference expressed their disappointment with the group they had led. "Nobody wanted to do another one," the wife said. "We don't belong at your leadership conference." Encouraged to attend the leadership conference anyway, they did so. The surprise came when they remarked that a couple from their defunct small group was there also. The couple they indicated were then the most active FamilyLife small-group coordinators in their region. And that couple had brought another couple who had already led several groups. The original leaders, who had been so disappointed in the response of their group, discovered three generations of multiplication! They left the meeting excited about how God had used them.

Multiplication can be enhanced by giving couples participating in a group the opportunity to lead a session. With the experienced leader present and participating, the temporary leader will be successful and gain confidence that they could lead a group. In addition, the other couples, after observing the success of the temporary leaders think, "If they can do this, we can too."

Small-Group Developers can also accelerate multiplication by having periodic meetings for group leaders. These meetings can be simple like an annual Christmas party just for fun, or more involved like a leadership conference where ministry skills are taught. Prospective new group leaders can be invited too.

### Power of Multiplication









# SYNERGY BETWEEN EVENTS AND SMALL GROUPS

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Remember the wide variety of ministry methods Jesus used. A small-group ministry works best when combined with a variety of ministry methods. The previous two sections have dealt with promoting events and promoting participation in small groups. In truth, for the most effective ministry, the two should be operated in tandem. Tremendous synergy is possible as events and small groups augment each other.

Events are especially effective at promoting small groups when the speakers emphasize small groups. Small groups can greatly enhance the promotion of an event when the group members become inviters for the event.

People like to attend events or groups that contain some entertainment value and require little effort on their part. Thousands came to hear Jesus, partly out of curiosity and hoping to see miracles. Jesus used those motivations to teach them and create a desire to change. Regardless of people's motivations to attend FamilyLife events, biblical principles



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## KEY IDEAS

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- Tremendous synergy is possible as events and small groups augment each other.
  - Events attract a crowd and provide opportunities to expand a small-group ministry.
  - FamilyLife small groups customize themselves to the needs of each specific group.
  - Small group leaders and participants make the very best inviters to help promote events.
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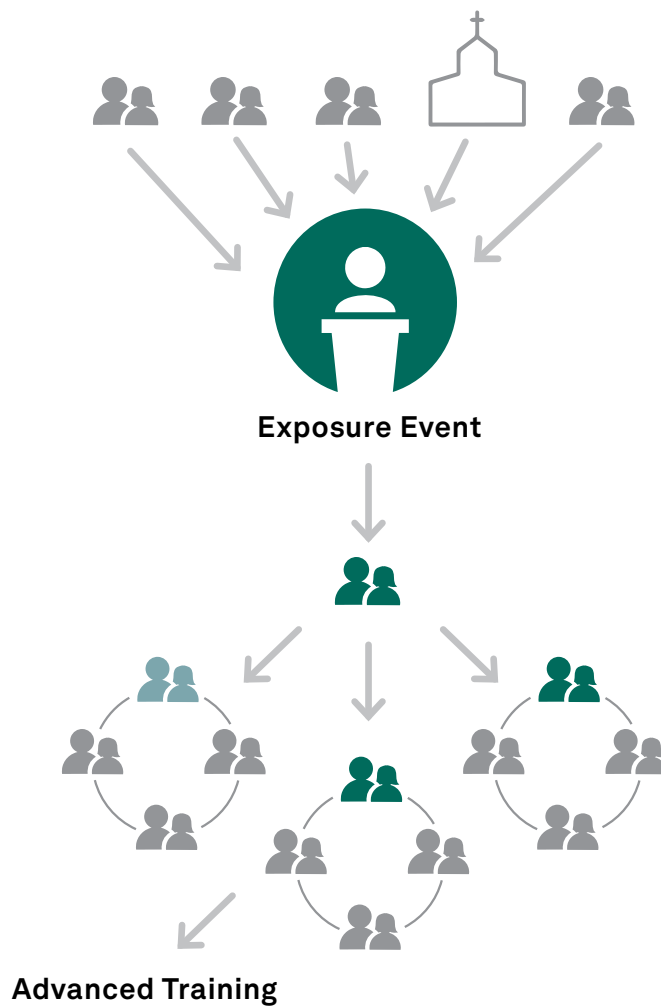
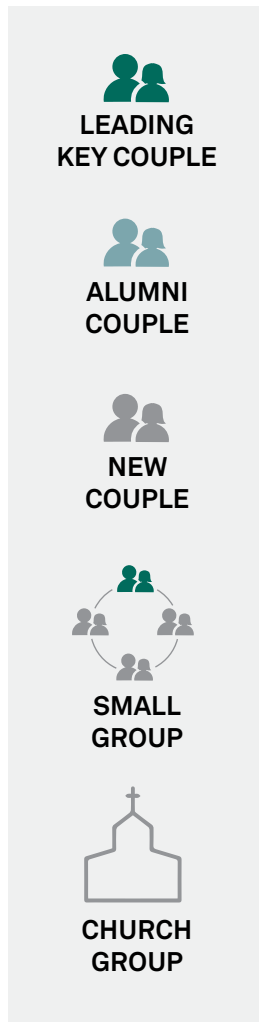
can teach and create a desire to change. Events attract a crowd and provide opportunities to expand a small-group ministry. Events create a sense of momentum and of God at work. Events give couples hope for change.

The most profound life changes occur when couples meet together in small groups with open Bibles. The life change takes place because couples actively apply the biblical principles to their own situation. Attempting to put into practice all that one might hear at an event can be overwhelming, like trying to swallow an elephant. But small-group studies can cut that elephant into bite-sized pieces. In addition, different groups using exactly the same FamilyLife study can look very different. That's because the couples discuss the issues pertinent to their own situations. In this manner, FamilyLife small groups customize themselves to the needs of that specific group. This is especially important in international situations where cultures are different from American culture.

Small-Group Developers may wish to host a low-commitment FamilyLife event to generate more interest. The alumni of their previous groups are indispensable in helping with the event, especially by bringing others. Indeed, small-group leaders and participants make the very best inviters to help promote events. If FamilyLife studies are carefully promoted at the event, afterwards multiple groups are likely to form. This greatly accelerates a multiplying ministry. As this ministry grows using both events and small groups, no person really runs or directs it, or even knows all that is going on. The multiplying ministry belongs to God.

A key couple went to speak to a group of couples about attending FamilyLife's Weekend to Remember getaway. The group's response was, "That sounds pretty good. But have you guys heard about FamilyLife's small-group studies? They're really terrific." The key couple assured them that they knew the FamilyLife small-group resources were great, and politely left. In the car, they burst out laughing. The key couple knew that group was their fifth generation disciples through the combination of small groups and events. Those couples didn't know who the key couple was. That is a great joy in ministry—meeting couples God has touched through your ministry, who don't even know who you are.

One very effective way to combine the benefits of events and small groups is to offer small-group leader training as a follow-up to the event. The first invitation should be at the event itself. This can be particularly effective when the event speakers promise to personally conduct the small-group training. If they have established a relationship with the audience and spoken well, the response to this leadership meeting is likely to be strong.



When a ministry accelerates through events and small groups working in tandem, there are secondary effects that benefit couples who haven't even participated directly. The ministry starts to raise the standards for godly marriages in churches. The general community awareness of the importance of the family is increased. Many role models are generated for the community. And others start to imitate your success. Churches do sermons, marriage retreats, or seminars, frequently using FamilyLife resources.





# PROMOTING EVENTS AND SMALL GROUPS TO NON-CHRISTIANS

As important as a good marriage is, it isn't as important as having a relationship with Jesus Christ. God's number one priority is that each person has a saving relationship with Christ. In addition, men and women must have that relationship with God to realize all that He can do for their marriage. The context of marriage is an excellent manner in which to introduce others to Christ.

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## EVENTS

Non-Christians and un-churched couples will attend events or join small groups because they have needs in their lives. At a FamilyLife event, the speakers have hopefully built a trust relationship with the attendees. Non-Christian individuals are likely to respond positively to a clear gospel message.



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## KEY IDEAS

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- The context of marriage is an excellent manner in which to introduce others to Christ.
- Leaders can increase the proportion of non-Christians by deliberately cultivating relationships with organizations with high numbers of non-Christians.
- When using events for outreach and evangelism, the event should be conducted in a non-religious manner.
- FamilyLife small-group resources build credibility for the Bible as non-Christians or un-churched couples see that the principles improve their lives.

Almost every event publicly promoted will have non-Christians in attendance. Leaders can increase the proportion of non-Christians by deliberately cultivating relationships with organizations with high numbers of non-Christians. If the organization promotes your event as positive for marriages, the couples who attend that organization are likely to attend your event and may respond to the gospel.

FamilyLife leaders can even join non-religious organizations in which they have interest. There they can cultivate relationships with couples who may respond to an invitation to a FamilyLife event based on that personal relationship. One couple involved in the ministry joined a tennis league where they made many new friends. Some of these attended events and came to know Christ.

Inviters may also be encouraged to invite non-Christians to FamilyLife events. Church promotions can challenge individuals, especially older ones, to send their un-churched relatives or neighbors. Some Christian businessmen provide conference attendance to all of their employees, including non-Christians, as a voluntary perk.

When using events for outreach and evangelism, the event should be conducted in a non-religious manner. The event should be non-threatening and fun. If the event is fun and meaningful, the guests will tell others. Many people who declined may respond to an invitation to the next event. As you plan your event, remember how important each person is to God. Making the occasion first-class can communicate to your guests that you value them. And they should be important to us! Jesus died for them. Building relationships before and during the event is a key to positive response. Pray ahead of time, then relax and enjoy the event. Tension in the host will be evident and will reduce the effectiveness of the event.

Avoid political issues, religious jargon, and symbolism. When you're seeking to involve un-churched couples or those who are unsure of their relationship with God, it is important to speak their language. Don't talk about divisive issues that would take the focus off of marriages. And be sure to avoid religious words or phrases that they would not understand. Even prayer, except to receive Christ, may not be appropriate at some outreach events. Typically, FamilyLife events don't include prayer until the gospel presentation.

People are surprisingly ready to make friends with dedicated Christians and are often open to learning things that work. The guests should know ahead of time if there will be a speaker or emphasis on biblical marriage; otherwise they may feel tricked into coming.

Many more details about conducting FamilyLife events at which non-Christians are likely to respond to Christ are included in FamilyLife Global's "Speaker Training."

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## SMALL GROUPS

Frequently, some sort of activity requiring minimal initial commitment is most effective to get couples with the greatest needs involved in small groups. Invitations, phone calls, or personal visits to neighbors, workplace associates, or social friends will get couples to attend. Leaders can enlist helpers who have been in small groups to assist you by inviting their own friends who may need to know Christ. Those whom God has touched will be your best source for encouraging others to participate. But they should expect only one person out of five or ten to respond the first time.

### Some outreach activity ideas

- Cookout (backyard, park, lake)
- Christmas coffee
- Christmas cookie exchange
- Luncheon (or breakfast) with a speaker
- Home dessert with a testimony or challenge
- Super Bowl or other sports event party
- Easter egg hunt
- Volleyball or other sports activity
- Houseboat party with a Bible study
- Craft demonstration
- Neighborhood project
- Home dinner party with a testimony
- Catered dinner with a speaker
- Fashion show with a testimony
- Valentine party or banquet
- Costume ball with a speaker
- Seminar for engaged couples
- Marriage or parenting seminar

At the outreach activity, you can offer a chance to express interest in FamilyLife small-group resources with a response card. Women are usually more receptive, especially among non-Christians. If a husband isn't ready to join a small group, try forming a women's group first. The women can organize periodic socials to which the husbands are invited. Frequently, after the men get to know you through their wives, they will be willing to try a small group.

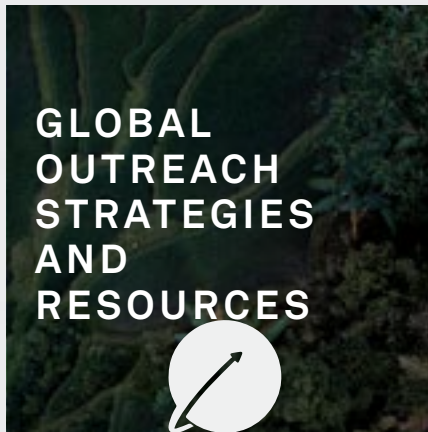
Be persistent as you begin your ministry, and don't allow failure to discourage you. The most mature faith, the faith God uses, is prepared for failures. Perhaps one of the best-known success stories from the Bible is when the shepherd boy David fought the giant Goliath. 1 Samuel 17:40 records that David took five stones with him to face the giant. Most assume David hit Goliath on the first shot. But Scripture does not say it was the first stone. David was prepared to fire until he brought the giant down. So it is with us, using FamilyLife small-group studies to reach out to our communities. We need to be prepared to make several attempts at starting a group or organizing events. God seems to require that type of faith to work the greatest miracles.

Within a FamilyLife small group, the participants develop strong, trusting relationships. FamilyLife small-group resources build credibility for the Bible as non-Christians or un-churched couples see that the principles improve their lives. When needs are met, hearts become open to Christ. In this context, sharing God's full plan for life is the most meaningful. Many who indicate a decision for Christ through other methods of evangelism never get involved in a church or another follow-up. But when a person comes to Christ in the context of a FamilyLife small group, they are already involved in a Bible study.

Leaders wishing to use FamilyLife small-group resources for outreach to couples with the greatest needs would benefit from some special training. FamilyLife Global can provide this training.



# FamilyLife Global **TRAINING MANUALS**



Global Outreach Strategies and Resources (GOSAR): This manual provides an overview of Global's FamilyLife strategy and is the foundational training document for developing an international FamilyLife ministry.

The following how-to manuals build upon the strategies and resources given in the GOSAR:

