

# ED YOUNG

RETRO



RETRO  
BACK TO THE BASICS

SMALL GROUP STUDIES

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## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Small Groups are a vital part of how we do ministry at Fellowship Church, just as they are in many churches around the world. There are a number of different theories on how small groups should work and they are all great in different ways. The book you are holding is written with our model in mind. So take a minute to read the following explanation, then feel free to adapt as necessary.

Each of our small groups practices a three part agenda in every meeting. That agenda includes a social time, a discussion time, and a prayer time. Each of these elements share equal importance, but not necessarily equal time. To help you get the most out of this book we have included an explanation of each of the parts.

The first element of every small group meeting should be a time of socializing. This phase of the meeting should be about 30% of your time together. Welcome everyone as they arrive at the host home, and make visitors feel welcome by introducing yourself and the other members of your small group. Enjoy some snacks, or if your group prefers, a meal together.

Then move on with second part of the meeting, the lesson. The lesson itself may take as much as 50% of your group's meeting time, but remember, it is not the most important element. You may want to start this phase of your meeting with a short "icebreaker" to get everyone talking. The questions in the "Start it Up" section of each chapter are what we refer to as "level the playing field" questions that everyone should be able to participate in, regardless of their level of spiritual maturity or Bible knowledge. As your group moves through the "Talk it Up" section in each chapter, remember that it is more important to finish on time than to finish each and every question. It is okay to skip some questions to be sure you allow enough time to take care of the third phase of the small group time: "Lift it Up."

The "Lift it Up" section is a vital part of every small group meeting and should be about 20% of the meeting. During this time you will be able to share with the group what God is doing in your life as well as asking the group to support you in specific prayers. To help focus this time, there are one or two questions at the end of each study that will prompt prayers based on the material you have just talked about. There is also a space for you to write down your prayer request(s) so you don't forget them and so you can communicate them clearly when it is your turn. Below that is a place to write down the prayer requests of the people in your group so you can remember and pray for each request throughout the week.

As an additional tool to assist you in your journey of spiritual development, there is a "Step it Up" section at the end of each session. This section consists of five devotional thoughts that reinforce the lesson you've just completed and are designed to help you develop a regular quiet time with God. To get the absolute most from this study, I challenge you to take five or ten minutes a day to read and apply these devotionals to your life. If your group meets twice a month or bi-weekly, choose five of the intervening days to incorporate these thoughts into your devotional life.

In select studies, we have incorporated special notes for youth groups using this material. You will notice a special icon (Y) used several times in each session. This indicates that there is a comment or question especially for youth included in the leader's guide for that part of the study. When you see that icon, simply turn to the leader's guide for that session in the back of the book and find the corresponding (Y) and letter (for instance, (Y)-a). These notes are designed to help each discussion time connect with the unique needs and issues of youth.

## RETRO

Going retro is in these days. You can see it in fashion, hear it in music and watch it on television. Going retro is alluring because we have the opportunity to go back to the best of the past without having to wade through the low points.



God wants us to go retro. Retro is all about time – a valuable commodity. If we are going to go retro it requires us to make smart decisions. "Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16).

Making the most of our opportunities starts with bridging the gap between our priorities and commitments. I have found in my life that the wider the gap between my priorities and commitments, the more bondage I live in. Conversely, the smaller the gap, the more freedom I have.

By going retro, we can examine how we allocate our time and discover if our commitments line up with God's priorities. Then we can make decisions today, based on yesterday, which will set us on a great trajectory for the future.

Don't worry. You don't need to break out your letter jacket or 1980's acid wash jeans to go retro with us. All you need is a desire to live in God's sweet spot by aligning your commitments with his priorities.

Get ready... it's time to go retro.



# WEEK ONE

## THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

# RETRO

### START IT UP

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Have you ever seen someone who has gone “retro?” Usually, it’s someone stuck in a long forgotten decade. I used to work out in a gym that had its own retro guy. He was middle-aged and stuck in 1982. He had the tube socks, the short shorts, the feathered hair, and his hat was on the back of his head with the bill sticking straight up in the air. He probably thought, “I looked good in 1982, so why change a good thing?”

It’s popular to go retro these days. Pick up a current fashion magazine and you might think you were looking at pictures from decades ago. A lot of today’s music mimics the hits of the past. There are even television shows dedicated to remembering the greatness of bygone eras.

Going retro is alluring because we have the opportunity to go back into the past. And when we travel back, we don’t remember the bad stuff. We only focus on the good. We forget the lousy songs from the past, but we remember the hits and ask ourselves why all music can’t be just as good. We forget the fashion flops and focus on bringing back our favorite styles. We block out the mundane moments, while reliving the highlights. A lot of people who live in the past focus on the positive and forget about the negative.

**1. If you could go back to any time in your life, when would you want to live? What were the fashion, music and other popular culture highlights of that era?** 📍-a

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## TALK IT UP

Retro is all about time—a valuable commodity. We have found ways to synthesize and manufacture many other valuable commodities, but we cannot do that with time. Time is a gift from God. We only have enough time on this planet to do the will of God; just enough time to live out his purposes and agenda for our lives. And because time is so valuable, we need to make the most of every moment.

*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.  
Ephesians 5:15-16*

God wants us to make the most of the time he has given us, and that requires us to make smart decisions. He does not want us to park our brains at the door when we decide to follow Christ. We need to think and to make wise choices when it comes to time. That's why it's so important to go retro.

**2. What is a missed opportunity in your life that you wish you could go back and make the most of now?**

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The word opportunity literally means “towards the port.” It's a picture of a sailing vessel led by a great captain. The tides are pushing this way and that. The winds are going here and there. Yet the captain focuses on the port and he steers the vessel into safety.

That's what it means to make the most of every opportunity. Our lives need to be sailed safely into those ports of opportunity. And this can only happen when we are led by the ultimate captain, Jesus Christ.

Once sin entered the equation of life, time was up for grabs. When that happened, our days on earth had the potential for evil. In other words, we have the opportunity to waste our lives and squander the precious gift of time. 📍-b

On the other hand, we have the opportunity to leverage time into something great. If we spend time with the Author of time, he will show us how to allocate our time for something great. And to make the most of our time, we must go retro.

When I say, “Go retro,” I'm talking about leveraging time so we can maximize this life by learning what it means to walk in sync with Christ. I can examine how I allocated my time in the past to help make present decisions that will give me a great trajectory for the future. Making great decisions is wrapped in the quality of—and commitment to—our priorities.

## PRIORITIES ARE SIMPLY SAYING “YES” TO THE BEST

The word priority has the word “prior” in it. It's advanced decision-making. It has to do with rank and order. It means saying yes to the best. That is not easy. To say yes to the best, we will have to say no to a lot of good stuff. But if we don't learn to do that, the good things in our lives can keep us from experiencing the best. 📍-c

The great news is that the right priorities are not something we have to worry about. We don't have to freak out about setting the right priorities because they have already been set for us. God talked about them years ago.

Living by the right priorities is very simple because priorities emerge from principles. God's principles will help us set the right priorities. And they are available to all of us throughout Scripture. He's placed them there so we can

discover more than just a good life. He wants us to have the best life. And when we live God's way, we can have the best possible life.

Here is where it gets rough and so many of us have problems. We've got priorities, but we also have commitments. Usually, there's a gap between what we say our priorities are and all of the daily commitments that fill our days. We say our priorities are one thing, but when we look at our day-to-day commitments, they don't reflect our priorities.

### 3. What is a priority in your life that you are struggling to line up with your commitments?

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Why the gap? Why the variance? Why the delta between our priorities and commitments? It is easy to think commitments are small and insignificant. One "yes" to this organization, another "yes" to that person and yet another "yes" to this function; and before we know it, our calendars are packed. Those little commitments combine to eat large portions of our lives. If we are not careful, we will look up and realize all those little commitments have pushed us away from our priorities.

Before we go any further in the priority problem, let's go retro for a second—back to 1967. Let's go back to beehives and bell bottoms; back to psychedelic shirts; back to Greenville Memorial auditorium where my mother took me to see *The Greatest Show on Earth: Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus*. I was mesmerized by the circus. It was sensory overload.

The ringmaster set the pace for the entire show. "Welcome to Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus. In ring one... and ring two... and ring three..." I saw the people juggling, the acrobats on the tightrope, the contortionists, the clowns and the array of animals. When I got home, I was so excited that I made a bee line to our refrigerator, pulled out three eggs and said, "Mom, watch me juggle these eggs!"

As you think about the gap between your priorities and commitments, you might be thinking, "Forget about Barnum and Bailey; *my* life is a circus!" There is the circus-like effort to juggle the carpool, kids, and work. Maybe you feel like a clown. You have a smile painted on your face, but down deep you're not really living; you're just existing. Maybe you feel like a tightrope artist trying to balance life's demands. Sometimes you feel like a contortionist, because your schedule has you stretched in unreasonable ways. If we are honest, there are times in all our lives when it feels like we are living our very own circus. 🙄-d

A lot of us are trying to be the ringmaster, but we're not wired to do it. It's a formula for frustration. The biggest decision we have to make when it comes to the circus of our lives is to give the microphone, the top hat, and the custom made suit to Jesus. Once we give our lives to the ultimate Ringmaster; once we allow him to run the show, he will help us navigate his three rings of priorities.

### RELATIONAL RING

Ring one is the relational ring. Jesus made us relational creatures. Our number one relationship has got to be our relationship with the Ringmaster, Jesus. After that, we can have right relationships with others.

If you are single, your balancing act is with family and friends. If you are married, your balancing act is inside your family. Some of you have to balance the relationship with your spouse and the relationship with your children. Remember, the number one relationship in the family is with your spouse; your kids come second. I don't have time to get into all the reasons for that in this study, but if you struggle with that or want the biblical evidence for the priority of marriage in the home, check out my book *Kid CEO*. 🙄-e

The relational ring is a priority that matched Jesus' commitment. On the night before his greatest test, Jesus entered the relational ring.

*Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."*

*Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Matthew 26:36-39*

In the moments before the most difficult point in Jesus' life, he could have done anything. He could have miraculously transported himself to a safe and secluded paradise. He could have spoken the word to gather an army of angels to fight for him. He could have spent those hours preparing a game plan for his disciples once he left. Yet, of all the things he could do, he chose the relational ring.

Jesus gathered his disciples and went to a garden. Once there, he gathered his three closest friends to keep watch with him. The Son of God wanted to be with his friends before his darkest hour. Then, Jesus stepped away from even his closest friends for the support of the only one that could get him through the torture of the coming cross. The support of Jesus' friends was important, but it could not compare with time spent in prayer with God. If the Son of God thought time with God was that important, it should signal how important it should be for all of us.

#### **4. What are some key commitments you could make to show that a relationship with God is the top priority in your life?**

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How in the world will we know how to maximize our time if we are not spending time with the One who invented time? I'm talking about a regular quiet time. Don't beat yourself up and go on some kind of guilt trip if you've missed 2-3 days of spending time with God. But I can tell in my own life, when I miss 2-3 days, I begin to feel that gap. If I say God is a priority but don't commit time to him on a regular basis, I have a priority problem.

#### **5. What are some of your greatest obstacles in spending time with God and what has helped you overcome them?**

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Y-f

Years ago, I was on a walk with my family. I had the twins in a double stroller. Lisa was jogging beside me, pushing EJ in a stroller. And our oldest daughter, LeeBeth, was riding a bike in front of us. I thought to myself, "Fifteen or twenty years from now, when I'm doing the weddings of my children, I will deeply long for times like these again with my family."

That moment helped me appreciate the importance of relationships within my family. Children grow up quickly and special moments with your spouse can pass in the blink of an eye. We have to agree with God that our family is a priority and make our commitments line up or else we will miss it. We will be left with regret, wanting desperately to go back in time with our family but by then, it will be too late.

How do we keep our family a high priority in our relational ring? For me, I made decisions early in my adult life about date night, family night, and being home at least four nights a week to eat dinner with my family. I made commitments to those priorities, so if you ask me where I'll be months from now I can tell you, "Thursday night is booked because I have a date with Lisa. Friday is booked for my family." We have to make advance commitments or else the pressure of daily decisions will create that gap between priorities and commitments.

#### **6. What are things you could do to keep your relationship with your spouse and family in ring 1? Y-g**

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## CHURCH RING

There's another ring that Jesus points us to. If you are keeping score, it's the second ring of the church. We know the church is important because it is described as the bride of Christ. The Bible says the gates of Hell will not prevail against the church. The Bible also says the manifold wisdom of Jesus will be made known in the church. Ninety percent of the time you see the word church used in the New Testament; it's talking about a specific local church.

*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:25*

### 7. The writer of Hebrews said some were in the “habit” of not going to church. What are pitfalls that can get us in the habit of not going to church?

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The Bible commands us to worship together corporately. Daily time with God is important, but we also need time where we get together to worship God with others. God wants the church to be a priority. God wants us to be connected to a specific group of believers, a local church.

Do you realize we cannot be full-court followers of Christ unless we're a vibrant part of a local church? There are many things we cannot do unless we're connected to a local church. A lot of people in our consumer culture float from church to church. Church hopping is not the connection God intended. You will not experience the deep treasures of the church if you do not make a regular commitment to a local church.

Not only do we have a *biblical reason* for being a part of a church, but also we have a *cultural reason*. Imagine you met someone who told you they were a professional football player. When you asked what team they played for, they told you they did not play for any team. That would not make sense. And

it doesn't make sense to say you are a believer but are not actively attending and serving in a local church.

There's also a *relational reason* why we should be members of a church. The relational ring is priority number one and the church is a great place to build those relationships. If you are single, there is no greater place to find a mate than the church. If you are lonely, the church is the perfect place to build friendships. You can even meet future business associates and clients. The relational opportunities are endless when you join a local church.

Don't wait until the last minute on the weekend to decide to go to church—maybe waiting to see if you “feel like it” or not. You have to make that commitment ahead of time because there are many times you won't feel like going. There are times I don't feel like going to church and I'm the pastor! 🙋-h

## WORK RING

We've got ring one—relationships; ring two—the church; and ring three—work. We're made in the image of God, and he is a working God. God gave us the ability to work before sin ever entered the equation. Work was part of God's original plan. The feeling of accomplishment that we have is a good thing. God created for six days then looked back on the seventh with a sense of accomplishment saying, “It is good.” God wants work to be a part of our lives because it does more than just give us a paycheck.

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Colossians 3:23-24*

“Whatever you do...” Preach sermons, teach children, close real estate deals, perform operations, score touchdowns, or whatever you do should be an act of service to God. Are you working for the glory of God? Do your commitments at work line up with the principles from God's Word that set our priorities?

🙋-i

For some reason, women have an easier time with this than men. As men, we are tempted to get our self-esteem from the market place. When we close

a big deal we get pats on the back, promotions and perks. Now compare those rewards and recognition to what comes from a date night or spending time with the kids. There's little to no recognition for being a model husband or a great father. It's no wonder so many men get consumed with their work and neglect the relational ring. It's tempting to put work in ring one instead of ring three, but it is not worth it.

Here's the great thing about time. Because time moves forward, we can go retro and learn how we allocated our time in the past. This helps us make better decisions right now so we can live in the future for the glory and power of God. We've got to give our life to the Ringmaster and prioritize relationships, church, and work—in that order.

**8. Regardless of whether you are a CEO or a stay at home mom, what does “working for the Lord” look like in your life?**

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You may be in a place that seems impossible to make your commitments match your priorities, but when you give your life to the Ringmaster he can make it happen.

**SUBMIT TO THE RINGMASTER**

The first way to manage your three rings is to submit every act to the Ringmaster. Give the microphone, the top hat and the custom suit to Jesus. Every time you have a decision or opportunity you ask, “Jesus, what do you say about it?” The great thing is we do not have to pray about the big priority decisions because they are already set. There is no need to pray about whether or not to put God first. There is no need to pray about a job offer that prevents you from spending with your family. God has made these big decisions easy when we submit to the Ringmaster. The key is submitting.

**9. What could you do as a reminder to submit every decision to the Ringmaster as you go through this week?**

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**BECOME A TIME LOGGER**

If you met with a nutritionist tomorrow morning, what would a nutritionist tell you? They would tell you to keep a record of every single thing you eat for at least seven days. There is something about journaling that information that gives you a fresh perspective on what you eat. It can open your eyes to nutritional blunders and help you understand where you need to make changes.

If we want to align our priorities with our commitments, we need to keep track of our time. For the next 21 days, I challenge you to keep a time log. If you are computer savvy, you could create a spreadsheet and log it that way. Or you could do it the old fashioned way. Get a notebook and pen then write it down. As you go retro and study your time, you can begin to bridge the gap between your priorities and commitments.



## STEP IT UP

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Take a step further over the next few days and spend some time reflecting on the following devotional thoughts that reinforce the previous session. Use these as reminders to take what you've learned and apply it to your everyday life.

### DAY 1

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*Ephesians 5:15-16*

Can you remember walking down the sidewalk, a street or any other paved surface being careful to step over every single crack? The saying was, "step on a crack, break your mother's back." So in the mind of an elementary school child, every step was carefully chosen. You had to choose your steps carefully so you wouldn't put your foot in the wrong place. Every step mattered.

The apostle Paul taught that every step mattered. The phrase "be very careful" carries the idea of caution and precision. Every step matters and our goal should be to take the exact step God desires in every opportunity. We choose this kind of precision because there are consequences. "The days are evil" is not just a petty threat. There are pitfalls readily available to swallow us whole if we step with anything less than exactness.

God desires us to be wise with the time we have. Our exact steps should be chosen with the goal of "making the most of every opportunity." Paul was painting the picture of being careful to take advantage of the time we've been given. To make the most of every opportunity, we should see opportunities as valuable commodities. With precision, we must do what it takes to redeem these opportunities.

***Of all the opportunities that face you on a daily basis, what percentage are you "very careful" with, and what percent do you treat as meaningless?***

***What could you do to make the most of the opportunities you encounter over the next 24 hours?***

### Notes:

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### Prayer Requests:

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DAY 3

*1 Corinthians 12:27*

The church is a priority to God because it is the body of Christ. Christ is the head, and the body (the church) carries out the desires of the head. Every believer is a part of the body so every believer has a place in the church.

*Romans 12:5*

There is a responsibility to each other as a church body. The hand is in need of the foot and the eye is in need of the ear. As parts of a body, we are responsible to each other. We belong to each other, as it says here in Romans. When church is not a priority for a believer, they are not only depriving themselves, but also they are depriving the rest of the body.

*Ephesians 4:16*

The success of the body is accomplished as “each part does its work.” The individual pieces are strengthened from interacting in the context of the body. For example, jogging does more than just exercise the legs. There are other muscle groups and organs involved in running and each of them is built up as they work together to pump blood and oxygen through the body.

If you feel stunted in your growth as a Christ-follower, it could be that you have moved the church out of the number two priority ring in your life. God placed it there because he knew how it would benefit the church as a whole, and how it would benefit you. The priority of church is a gift from God.

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Prayer Requests:

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DAY 4

*Matthew 22:34-40*

Have you ever known one of those people who knew just the right thing to say on every occasion? It seems like they have a silver tongue, poised for the perfect response to any question. No matter how uncomfortable the situation, they knew exactly what to say. No matter how puzzling the question, they have the right answer. Do you know someone like that?

The enemies of Jesus must have viewed him as a silver-tongued genius. Every time they got together to set a verbal trap for Jesus, he had just the right thing to say. It was not always the popular answer, but it was the right answer. One time Jesus' enemies tried to stump him by asking him to pick one commandment that was above all others. Jesus answered perfectly as usual.

Jesus showed the priority of relationships by choosing relational commands as the greatest. He started with the priority of a relationship with God. Not just any relationship with God, but an all-encompassing relationship with God. A relationship that touches the deepest parts of who we are and what we desire.

Then, Jesus went beyond his enemies' question and gave them the second greatest commandment. It too involved relationships. God is concerned with our relationships to others. He is so concerned that he counted it as the second greatest commandment. Jesus calls for a love of others that is rooted in our selfish nature. We should love others the way we selfishly want to be loved.

The priority was set by God and reaffirmed by Jesus. Relationships are number one to God and they are number one in our lives. We should orient our lives around our relationships.

***What role does your relationship with God play in your every day decision making?***

***What are you putting ahead of loving others?***

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Prayer Requests:

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DAY 5

Joshua 24:15

Joshua had just led God’s chosen people on a conquest of the Promised Land. They fought incredible battles and had unbelievable success with the help of God. The initial conquest was over, and now the battles moved to securing what God had already given them.

That sounds like the lives of many Christ-followers. The initial fight for their soul has already been won by God. They have prayed “the prayer” and committed to follow him. For believers, the battle turns to securing the abundant life that Christ promised. Many of the battles are focused on claiming the promises God has already given believers.

In that phase of life, it is easy to become complacent. The “major” sins that were attacked when Christ was first accepted have become pacified for the most part. There are other battles to be fought, but they are not the same as the initial conquest. It is tempting to feel safe and secure in what God has done this far.

Joshua knew that temptation so he warned Israel to stay focused. He knew they faced the loss of freedom if they did not keep their focus on God. Joshua gave Israel a bold choice. In our lives, the choice is far more subtle. Joshua told them to choose God or choose gods. Our choice is not a crossroad that faced the nation of Israel on that day. Our commitment is shown in the hundreds of decisions we make on a daily basis. Those decisions accumulate to determine whom we will serve. They determine the destiny of our stated priorities. They determine what direction our lives will go.

***In what parts of your life are you choosing “gods” instead of choosing “God?”***

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Prayer Requests:

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