

# **Garden Tools for Growing Small Groups**

A Session on Cultivating, Multiplying, and Sustaining Student Ministry Discipleship

## Introduction: The Garden as a Ministry Metaphor

*"One of the greatest desires in student ministry is often couched in growth."*

Growth in student ministry is less about **\*\*managing more\*\*** and more about cultivating deeply.

Like square-foot gardening: small, intentional, high-yield. Not about size but stewardship. The Bible rhymes in garden metaphors, from Genesis to Revelation. Jesus taught in garden metaphors: Parable of the Soils, Mustard Seed, Wheat & Weeds. Let's use these images to guide our longing for growth.

## SECTION 1: Cultivate – The Foundations of Healthy Groups

### **1. Soil: Understand Your Context**

\* Where are you "planting"? Know your community, culture, and students.

\* Ask: \*Is this good soil? Are students safe to grow here?\*

Ministry Tool:

Use first-time guests or newer students to audit the soil: what do they feel when they show up?

### **2. Seed: The Gospel is Always Good**

\* The Word of God is the seed—unchanging, effective.

\* Students *are hungry* for truth, but the conditions matter for rooting.

Key Insight:

The Seed is always good. We trust it and plant it well.

### **3. Tools: How We Help Growth**

- Questions:**\*\*** Are we asking good, open-ended questions?
- Stories:**\*\*** Personal stories = identity-shaping moments.
- Habits & Rituals:**\*\*** Weekly meetings, traditions, shared culture.

*"Culture is what we celebrate and what we tolerate."*

Culture is cultivated, not mandated.

### **4. Time: Growth Takes Seasons**

Students grow unevenly, over time.

You plant in one season, water in another, reap in another.

Turn and Talk: Who is someone you are learning from?  
Growth often begins with another adult—not just students.



## SECTION 2: Multiply – From Disciples to Disciple-Makers

### 5. Propagate: Student-Led Ownership

- Students pray. Students invite. Students lead.
- A multiplying group is a growing group.

*Principle: Healthy groups have a student investment, not just attendance.*

### 6. Cultivate: What a Healthy Group Looks Like

A growing small group is:

- Known in corporate space
- Interested in personal life
- Invested in spiritual growth

Table Talk Activity:

Where do your groups reflect these?

### 7. Celebrate: Joy-Filled, Sustainable Ministry

- Fun is holy. Joy is strength. (See: Psalm 37, Philippians 4)
- Plan fun. Fun builds trust.
- Don't overprogram, get joy out of your gatherings.

*"Small is the new big—for impact's sake."*



## SECTION 3: Commit – Sustaining Ministry into Year Two and Beyond

### 8. Adapting Over Time

Till the ground! Every year needs a fresh theme, adjusted norms, and re-visioned goals.

*Principle: Growth is year over year, not years repeated.*

Importance of A Co-Leader Impact.

Inclusion starts with "us."

Discipleship is modeling. Seeing Jesus lived out in the lives of others.

## 9. Why Small Works

- You can't do deep discipleship with 20+ in one group.
- The most fruitful ministry happens in the 5–10 range.
- Great small groups reflect: relational proximity,, shared vision, and missional accountability.



## Key Values & Summary: 7 Principles for Growing Ministry

1. Community is a core value
2. Converse with your co-leader
3. Ask better questions
4. Reinforce the good culture, the good rituals
5. Train students to lead
6. Celebrate stories
7. Trust the seasons



## Scripture Anchor

“But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it.” Matthew 13:23



## Bonus: Garden Tool Inventory

Check your toolbox this week:

- \* ☐ How well do we know our soil?
- \* ☐ Are we planting the Word clearly, consistently?
- \* ☐ Are we watering with truth and care?
- \* ☐ Have we equipped students to own the group?
- \* ☐ Have we made space for joy and fun?