

Redemption Groups Overview

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What Is a Redemption Group?

A Redemption Group is an intense small group that digs deep into difficult and seldom-discussed areas of life, such as abuse, addiction, and trials of all sorts. It is a dialogue, not a class. The objectives follow the content of the redemption book and main session teaching. Each group is led by qualified leaders (usually two per group), trained for the task by Mars Hill pastors. Group sizes are limited to preserve the small group dynamic conducive to deep, focused dialogue. Participants should expect to expose their lives to others, and be willing to engage the struggles of others. There are usually eight people per group, with two co-leaders and six participants (one of whom may be an apprentice leader).

A night of Redemption Groups includes two sessions:

Main Session: 35-45 minutes of teaching and signing in worshipful response. The teaching is based on a “redemption book” being written by Mars Hill pastors.

Group Session: 90 minutes

Redemption Groups do not provide professional counseling or therapy. They are built upon the idea that the Gospel is the power of God to redeem every wound and every deeply worn pattern of sin, and when concerned and compassionate brothers and sisters come together in Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit to share and speak into one another’s lives, God changes them as together they take one step forward at a time.

Redemption Groups are Mixed-Issue

Participants are placed in groups based on gender. They are not divided by “issue.” For example, a person who is the victim of domestic violence may be in the same group with someone who struggles with the habitual sin of pornography usage. This reflects our conviction that much of the sin and suffering we experience is common. The basis for healing and change by the Gospel is also common. Therefore, we can relate to one another and see the same Gospel themes deeply applied, even when the particulars of our experiences differ.

Addressing Marriages, Not Just Spouses

We believe that when one spouse in a marriage is facing something like addiction or the effects of abuse, it is not an issue for that spouse alone, but for the marriage as a whole. We challenge all “supporting spouses” to be engaged in the process, at least as far as attending

the general teaching sessions, reading the material, and discussing the journaling exercises together. Some supporting spouses may also be placed in a separate Redemption Group.

Redemption Group Theological Summary

Key Concepts:

- God's story defines life
- Worship is our identity, purpose, and at the core of our problems
- Redemption is in Jesus alone
- Exodus is the Bible's pattern for redemption

God's story tells the master plan of salvation, the gospel. In the Bible, we see who we really are, image bearers of God created to worship him. We find that our sin problems are ultimately worship problems. Redemption, more than mere deliverance from trouble, restores us to the very purpose for which we were created, the worship of God. The Exodus story is the Bible's pattern for redemption, illuminating and dramatizing our redemption in the death and resurrection of Christ.

God, being faithful and compassionate looks upon the suffering of his people in Egypt and knows their trouble completely. In Jesus, we see his compassion most clearly in his willingness to enter into our experience of suffering. Yet the promise of deliverance does not guarantee freedom from troubling circumstances along the way. The Israelites' circumstances worsened before getting better: for example, when Pharaoh withheld straw for their brick-making. Our own experiences attest that freedom does not come easily, and hope is inevitably threatened by daunting obstacles. Yet the power of God's mighty hand to crush Pharaoh, draw out his people, and raise Jesus from the dead is a sure hope guaranteeing our redemption.

Just as the Israelites were as guilty of idolatry as the Egyptians, we are as guilty of sin as anyone who has harmed us. God has provided through his Son, our Passover lamb, a substitute to rescue us from our death sentence. Christ's work not only secures forgiveness of sins, it also overcomes all of the effects of sin, including the shame that comes from our own sin and the damage done to us by others' sin. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and it swallowed their enemies, they passed from an old life dominated by Egypt to a new life with God, prefiguring the new creation begun by Christ, of which every Christian has been made a part.

The trials of the wilderness expose the idols that persist in our hearts. When the Israelites built a Golden Calf they made visible the latent idolatry of their grumbling hearts. We too are prone to set up idols in our hearts that become visible in many ways, such as: substance abuse, pornography addiction, disordered eating, rage, manipulation, or gluttony. Our only hope for breaking these down is repentance through the new hearts that come with our new birth in Christ.

Despite our reckless chasing of idols, God is even more reckless in his pursuit of us: slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Restored to his presence, beholding his glory, we are changed to live new lives with new desires.

In the end, the reward of freedom from slavery is not merely the stopping of some habitual sin or the comforting of some lingering wound; it is more: satisfaction and rest in God himself.

Redemption Groups within the Ground War Strategy

Air War and Ground War

Redemption Groups are part of the Ground War strategy of Mars Hill Church. The following definitions will help to put this in context.

Air War: broad proclamation and teaching of the gospel, primarily through preaching, corporate worship, conferences, seminars, blogs, books, websites, conferences, music distribution, and the like.

Ground War: dense network of many life-on-life and small group modes of ministry that exist to see the gospel applied specifically and lived out in discipleship: leadership development, Community Groups, Redemption Groups, Counseling, Sunday Post-Service Prayer, and similar ministries.

Ground War Big Picture: The Freeway

Two design principles that govern our building of a ground war strategy are:

1. Community Groups (defined below) are the primary vehicle for making disciples and pastoral care. Our long-term goal is to see 80% of Mars Hill Church attendees involved in a Community Group
2. Ministry efforts and expectations will be allocated using a 70/20/10 guideline with greater weight given to the more scalable ministries.

Given the design principles, most people most of the time should be experiencing discipleship in the most typical and scalable ministry formats, namely Community Groups. Other ministries (e.g. Redemption Groups, Counseling) will support and promote, in various ways, moving people into Community Groups for ongoing discipleship, but will not be seen as the primary form of discipleship for anyone.

A “freeway” metaphor helps us visualize this model.

The freeway is a large efficient infrastructure designed to carry the highest volume of traffic on the most direct path to the destination. On the freeway each driver is responsible for the driving and maintenance of his own car. Around the freeway are supporting infrastructures, such as rest areas, as well as other supports for emergencies, such as tow trucks.

The driver is a disciple. Driving refers to his journey through life in ongoing progressive sanctification. The allocation model loosely reflects the freeway’s design.

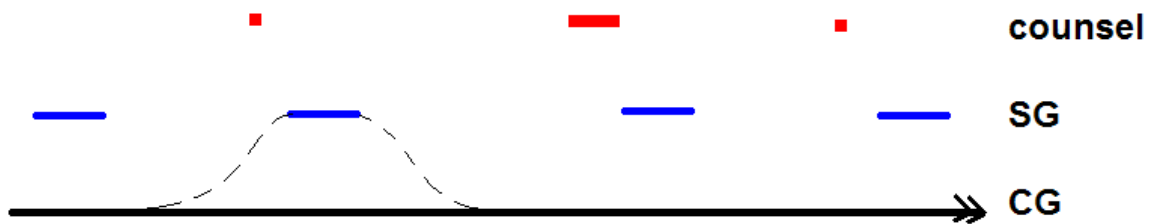
Rhythm	Allocation	Metaphor	Typical Ministry
Normal	70	Freeway (proper)	Community Groups
Supplemental	20	Rest Area	Redemption Groups
Extraordinary	10	Tow Truck	Biblical Counseling

Community Groups are our primary means for growth and discipleship. As such they best exemplify the freeway: continuous, direct to the destination, large capacity, and many of our taxes (time and talents in our case) go toward maintaining them as our primary infrastructure around which supporting structures can be built.

Redemption Groups serve as a supplement—not a replacement—for Community Groups. While we are optimistic that participating in a Redemption Group for a quarter can be used by God to bring significant growth in a believer’s life, we are also realistic; deep change can take time. Redemption Groups are not designed as long-term support groups, but as short-term “rest areas.” The goal for each group participant is to gain a solid foundation for ongoing Gospel-based, heart-focused change, and to make some significant strides while in the group. When the group concludes, participants are asked to continue growing and changing in close relationships that are built within the primary connecting points within Mars Hill, such as community groups and serving teams

Individual Counseling bears a similarity to Redemption Groups, but is more focused and individualized. Counseling could be compared to a tow truck. The tires may blow out on the freeway or the engine may overheat. The car needs towed to the next place where it can be serviced. Yet once gain, the goal is re-entry on the freeway: cars don’t travel perpetually behind a tow truck.

Visualizing Exit and Re-entry on the Freeway



What 70/20/10 Is NOT

70/20/10 is not about categorizing people by their relative level of health. It is a guideline for quantifying and allocating ministry resources. Anyone, even the relatively healthy disciple, may need a rest area or tow truck from time to time

70/20/10 is not about quantifying the severity of life’s hardships and defining the default means for addressing them. So it doesn’t mean that the 10% most severe issues will need to be dealt with in Individual Counseling. On the contrary, our hope is that more and more of the most significant hardships of life can be viably addressed at the Community Group (70%) level.

Implications of the Freeway Metaphor

Community Groups are primary. Therefore, we explicitly encourage and promote Community Group involvement for anyone who requests counseling or Redemption Group placement. We prefer to see pastoral issues addressed at the Community Group level wherever possible.

Redemption Groups are finite. You cannot live in the rest area.

Redemption are for equipping not supporting. The purpose of Counseling and Redemption Groups is to equip people to live out gospel-based change in community, walking together, even through significant hardships. Therefore “support” alone is not an objective. There is no specialized ministry whose objective is to support someone indefinitely.

Community Group leaders must be shepherds. We must continually equip them for pastoral care at increasing levels of depth, because the goal is to locate as much pastoral care as possible in the Community Group.

Community Groups must be robust. The culture of Community Groups must be pushed toward increasing levels of robustness so that they are safe, trusting, and strong places for walking with members through substantial hardship. If this does not happen, they will not seem like viable places for real issues to be dealt with.

“Redemption” is a platform for all counseling. In an effort to streamline our equipping of counselors, we use the redemption model as a platform for all kinds of counseling, both in group or individual settings. This primarily comes out in how we equip our volunteer counselors: we have them all go through the redemption teaching as part of their equipping.

Does it Work?

As of Spring 2009, we completed our fourth run through the whole sequence with Redemption Groups. The content and structure of the group system have continued to evolve, and we have pushed out groups to several of our campuses.

Anecdotally, we hear good feedback from participants on a regular basis about the whole experience. Some follow-up surveys have suggested that it is well-received and found to be helpful to those whose expectations are in line with our discipleship philosophy. Some of those who expect a typical support group are unsatisfied, and some change their minds to prefer this model.

We do not have any longitudinal data at this time to show the long term success rates measured in terms of progress in healing relationships or freedom from addiction.