

Small Group Leader Handbook

Small Group Purpose Statement

The purpose of our small groups is to develop disciples of Jesus Christ through group prayer, the study and application of Scripture, and relationships among the community of an intergenerational small group shepherded by a trained leader.

Leader's Commitment and Mission

- With God's help I will strive to uphold and preserve the truths of the Bible.
- Relying on God's Spirit, I commit to be faithful in my personal study, attendance, prayer, and leader preparation.
- My desire is to accept and love each woman in the group, being sensitive to their varied needs by the help of the Holy Spirit.

What is a small group leader?

The role of the small group leader is one of discipling and shepherding women in the group. Her prayer is that each woman grows spiritually and in relationship with the group.

Not a leader who dominates, she is an encourager who strives for participation from all members, knowing that her goal is not to share her knowledge, but to listen and encourage each group member, trusting the Spirit to work through peer learning.

She helps each individual walk with Christ and grow in their personal study of God's Word by viewing each group member as a contributor to the spiritual growth and discipleship of the other participants. She encourages them to seek God for answers rather than look to her as the source of answers. She helps the group as a whole provide care and love to all who commit to be part of their fellowship.

Qualities of a Small Group Leader

GROWING IN FAITH

A good leader trusts in Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior and continues to grow in trusting God in a daily relationship with him.

DEPENDENT ON GOD

A good leader knows that her strength and guidance comes through the Holy Spirit as she seeks God in daily prayer.

COMPASSIONATE

A good leader reaches out in love to the women God has called her shepherd and disciple.

TRANSPARENT

A good leader is not afraid to be vulnerable about her failures and sins when appropriate, doing so in balance so that she doesn't dominate the group.

TRUSTWORTHY

A good leader can be trusted to keep confidential information private, not given to gossip but to prayer.

HUMBLE & TEACHABLE

A good leader serves God first and foremost and is intent upon pleasing him above all others. She recognizes that she has room to grow as a disciple of Christ and as a leader.

LISTENING

A good leader listens to each person with sincere interest in what she is trying to communicate. She is thoughtful, also listening for the Spirit to prompt her before answering.

UNITY

A good leader works in unity with the larger group to pursue peace, not gossiping or complaining about the church or leadership.

Bible-based Small Group Leader Job Description

Reports to _____

Primary Function: To disciple and shepherd the group

Length of commitment: Fall-spring or summer

RESPONSIBILITIES:

- To thoroughly prepare the study lesson or reading and develop a plan for the discussion each week.
- To prepare open-type questions to guide the discussion.
- To attend the weekly leader meetings.
- To pray consistently for the women in her group.
- To attend all leadership training.
- To regularly contact the women in her group and encourage them individually.
- To encourage the group to love one another in specific and tangible ways, seeing the small group as a supportive community for its members.
- To recruit women the group to be responsible for group tasks, such as emailing prayer requests or planning food or social events.
- To shepherd the group by intentionally developing relationships with them.
- To help provide or plan practical care as needed.

Tips for Creating a Group that Grows

- Be prepared. Prioritize your own growth by completing your assignments thoroughly allowing God to speak. Develop a plan for group time.
- Adhere to the allotted time. This gives respect to those who arrive on time and to those who need to leave. Try to linger afterward in case someone wants to talk privately.
- Keep attendance records so that you remember to check on absentees and realize how many times someone misses. Call or follow up with members who are absent. Women like to know they are missed when they are unable to attend.
- Conduct a prayer time during each meeting. Follow the prayer guidelines in this manual. They are designed to make it easy for women who are not used to praying aloud to grow as praying women. They are not designed to allow lengthy prayers. Christ promised that two or more gathered has his presence in a special way that praying only at home doesn't allow for. It is encouraging for group members to actually hear someone pray for them by name.
- Lead the small group discussion, keeping group members focused on the topic in a lively and interesting way. Develop open questions and allow for silence and time to process.
- Shepherd the women as followers of Jesus Christ. Lead the group to do its best in meeting needs as they arise.
- Pray for each member of your group during the week. Let the group know that this is how you deal with problems. The group isn't there to fix one another, but to bring the concerns and burdens to God.
- Report any problems or concerns to someone in charge if you are meeting as a church supposed group.
- Have a plan in mind in case you are unable to attend a meeting at the last minute. Consider who in the group would be able to lead, and talk with her in advance.
- Let the Holy Spirit lead! Allow God to accomplish his work through you.
- Be enthusiastic! Let the group know that you love them and God.
- Remember that the most effective leader is the close follower of Christ. Nurturing your own relationship with Christ is the most critical practice in leadership.

Helpful Hints

DEVELOP A GROUP AGREEMENT OR USE GUIDELINES

Determine in your initial meeting how you want the group to work or pass out guidelines that you have written.

SEEK SOLUTIONS FROM SCRIPTURE

Encourage members to look to the Bible rather than to you for answers. Point them to Jesus as the Wonderful Counselor.

PRACTICE CONFIDENTIALITY

Stress the importance of trust among the members of your group. Women need to feel confident that what they share won't leave the group. (If the group sends out the requests via email, mention that they may go out to public places so to be cautious in wording.)

PROMOTE AN ATMOSPHERE OF SAFETY AND ACCEPTANCE

- Provide a warm, supportive atmosphere in the group to set the tone for honest and open sharing. Be honest and vulnerable yourself.
- Help the women feel safe to share anything without fear of being judged, ridiculed or discounted.
- Be accepting of each member, especially the non-Christian. Accepting participants does not necessarily mean that you agree with their values or choices. You can love a person without supporting her lifestyle. If a participant shares something that makes her feel vulnerable or ashamed, say something like: "I know your sharing took a lot of courage. I admire you for being willing to share it."
- Be truly appreciative of each member's contribution.
- Emphasize that only members who wish to respond should do so. No one is required to share. Let them know that you will never call on them, even to read. This provides safety for shy or introverted women.

MAINTAIN FLEXIBILITY

Your goal is for each woman to grow spiritually in a caring and supportive community. That requires balancing needs and content. You should develop a plan realizing that it may change as the discussion progresses. When someone expresses a deep need, stop

and truly listen. You may need to pray for her or cry with her. Let the Spirit lead.

TIME ISSUES

- Begin at the designated time, regardless of how many women are there. Show honor to those who arrive on time by valuing them and their time by starting for those who honored your request to be there.
- At the first session, discuss the need to conclude at the agreed time each week. Ask for a volunteer to help you watch the clock if you need it.
- A few minutes before end of the discussion period, help the person speaking reach a point of closure. At some point cut off the discussion and tie up loose ends. You might say something like, “I would love to hear more from all of you, but our time is up. . . .”

Discussion Help

PREPARE OPEN QUESTIONS

Ask questions that require the participants to give a full answer. No yes/no questions. No leading questions. Build on their homework and help them think through what they have studied and applied.

LET THEM RESPOND TO EACH OTHER

After a response give a chance for other women to comment before you do. If you respond immediately, you cut them off from probing more deeply into the question. Your goal is peer learning, a group conversation.

WHEN YOU GET ONLY SILENCE

- Be silent yourself. Count to 30 before speaking. Then repeat the question or ask if they understood it. If not, reword it.
- With practice you can become comfortable with silence. Use the time to ask God to move within the group as they process, and ask him for wisdom as you respond.

WHEN YOU GET OPPOSITE ANSWERS:

- Obviously we aren't all in agreement on this one; any other insights?
- Isn't it helpful for us to think through this together? Let's look at the Scriptures to see what help they give us.
- Be comfortable with some tension when the scripture isn't clear. You don't have to fix it.

FOR CONFUSING OR WRONG ANSWERS:

- Can you help me understand your answer a bit more?
- Did anyone understand this question differently?
- I'm glad that you brought that up. It's something we need to think about.
- Let's look back at our verses.

Coping with Problems

IRRELEVANT ANSWERS

Graciously interrupt and suggest that you likely didn't make the question clear. Ask it again and turn to someone else to answer or answer it yourself.

IRRELEVANT QUESTIONS

- Don't answer.
- Don't ask the group.
- Respond with a promise to talk privately with her, but that doesn't necessitate your having an answer.

BIBLICALLY WRONG ANSWERS

- Never say an answer is wrong.
- Look at the scriptures together.
- Ask, "Did someone get a different answer on this one?"
- Support the scriptural answer once it has been given.

COMPULSIVE TALKERS

- Remind the group the first meeting that your discussion will be most interesting and enjoyable if everyone participates.

- Talk privately with the dominating person and ask her to help you encourage the others to be as willing to participate as she is. Ask if she will wait for others to answer first.
- If a person is speaking at length, intervene by saying, “I so appreciate your willingness to share that, but we need to continue with our lesson or we won’t finish.”
- Turn to the rest of the group saying, “I would love to hear from some of you who haven’t said much today.”

HIGH NEEDS GROUP MEMBER

Do not allow her to become the center of attention in your group. Someone with deep emotional problems needs help outside the group. Love is our goal, but love such a woman without taking away from the group. The group is not a therapy session or a support group. Perhaps she needs some help to find that. Go to your church staff and ask for references and help. If she is going through a difficult time and needs a woman to pray with her as she walks through it, suggest the Stephen Ministry if it is available. If this is an ongoing situation, she may profit from a Christian recovery ministry.

DIVISIVE OR ARGUMENTATIVE DISCUSSION:

Sometimes people would rather discuss doctrinal differences than give attention to what really needs to happen in their own lives. Some debate in a group is productive, but Scripture should always be the final source of authority. If debate becomes counter productive, suggest that you and the participant discuss the matter later and redirect the discussion.

GROUP MEMBER WHO MAY NOT BE A CHRISTIAN:

Follow the Holy Spirit’s leadership to perhaps meet her and just talk about your own journey, sharing the gospel through your own story. Be sensitive to the truth that God must be at work and is capable of moving in her heart to draw her to Him

Leading Group Prayer Time

PROVEN PRACTICES

- Do not force anyone to pray by calling on her or praying in order around a circle, even if you tell them they don't have to pray. It is embarrassing to some and may inhibit their return and participation in the group. A group in which all participants have shown willingness to pray over time can be more flexible. But when there are guests or the women are new to one another, make it very safe.
- Minimize or eliminate time to share requests. Grow the group spiritually by having them pray their requests rather than talking about them. God is the one with answers, not the group. They will hear about the needs as each person prays.
- Teach them to pray silently in agreement with the person speaking.
- Ask them to keep their heads up and speak up as they pray. Others may not hear well when the sound is going into the speaker's lap.
- Instead of having each woman pray her own request, have everyone write their personal requests on cards which you supply. Encourage them to focus their requests on themselves rather than other people. For example, if a woman has a neighbor with cancer, rather than write a request for the neighbor's healing, she might write a prayer for opportunities to share the love of God in tangible ways with her neighbor, to be sensitive in her speech, and to be an extension of Jesus' love for her. (See kingdom prayers at the end of this handbook.)
- If you exchange cards, ask them to simply read what the card says and not add to it. That makes it easy for everyone to be comfortable praying aloud. Let them know that someone else will read and pray for the request on the card if they prefer.
- Remind the group to pray and write sentence prayers rather than long prayers. One or two sentences should suffice.
- When you pray aloud, such as at the start of the group meeting, make your prayer simple and short also. The way you pray will either help them become comfortable praying or intimidated and fearful.
- If you group is large, you can break into small groups to pray often, but ask them to pray with different women each time. Make the groups at least 3 and no more than 4.

KINGDOM PRAYERS

Help focus your prayers and those of the women in your group to the bigger issues of the kingdom, knowing the coming of his kingdom within the women in your group and their families is God's will for them: "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Move the focus from the temporal to the eternal as you pray.

Study the prayers of the New Testament and see how they involved kingdom issues: character-building in those who suffered, the glory of God in the midst of persecution, and the knowledge of Jesus in the world.

EXAMPLES OF KINGDOM PRAYERS for those in your group:

Mt. 6:33-34: Bring ____ to seek first God's kingdom in her life. (If there are monetary or physical needs involved, this is a condition necessary for God's promise to supply to kick in.)

Jas. 1:2-4, 12: Use ____ (this difficulty) to produce endurance, completion, and blessing.

Jas. 1:17-18; 4:3: Draw ____ to trust that you give good gifts, realizing that your gifts are better than those she wants.

Eph. 1:17-21: Give _____ wisdom and the revelation of you in the midst of this time.

Eph. 4:1-3: Guide _____ to walk worthy and to show forth _____ (the named qualities) to _____ (those with whom she is having difficulty).

Col. 1:9-12: Fill _____ with the knowledge of your will that she may walk worthy.

Col. 3:1-4: Give _____ the grace to set her mind on the things above rather than the circumstances.

Rom. 8:28-29: Give _____ the grace to trust that you are at work in the midst of these difficulties for her good, not for her destruction. God, use this time and situation to mold her more into the image of Jesus.