



# Small Groups Handbook

Life is meant to be shared

2018



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## Vision of Waite Park Church:

A Movement of empowered and equipped lay leaders that fulfill the Great Commission through newly formed small groups which mature into whole and holy communities that send and equip new lay leaders to do the same.

## Mission of Small Groups:

Our Small Group ministry exists to create small communities where participants acknowledge their brokenness and lovingly examine one another through weekly meetings centered on Word, Worship, and Friendship.

## Core Values of Small Groups:

### **W O R D**

We believe the Word of God is a powerful means of grace: God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness. It is essential to the life of the believer.

### **W O R S H I P**

The early church worshipped together often. And Paul instructs the churches to be filled with the Holy Spirit by speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Worship prepares our hearts to respond positively to grace (the unmerited work of God in us, for us, and through us) and ultimately we want our SG ministry to be empowered by the Spirit. Spirit gives birth to Spirit.

### **F R I E N D S H I P**

Friendship (Phileo) is spoken of often throughout the Old and New Testament. In fact, God was the first to say “It is not good for man to be alone.” We were made for community and Jesus points out that the world will know that we are His disciples if we love one another. Godly friendship is a powerful means of grace that can rebuke, encourage, challenge, and uplift us in our spiritual walk. Two keys to transformational godly friendship are: a willingness and readiness to acknowledge our brokenness AND permission to lovingly examine one another.



# Why Small Groups

## Need to Know, Need to Grow Moments

Discipleship classes and most curriculums tend to be linear in design. “Ordo Salutis” is a fancy phrase that theologians use for discussing the Order of Salvation (how things ought to happen for a sinner to come to Christ). “Via Salutis” is a fancy phrase use to discuss the Way of Salvation... the way things *actually* play out tends to be a lot more messy and complicated than we’d like them to be. One is a textbook experience and the other is real life. One is linear and the other looks more like a plate of spaghetti.

Small groups do discipleship more in line with the Way of Salvation. Every believer has “Need to Know” And “Need to Grow” moments. Something that Larry Osbourne talks about in his book, “Sticky Church.” When a believer needs to know something (a Jehovah’s Witness comes knocking at the door, they’re considering baptism, a friend is asking theological questions) they’re having a need to know moment. When a believer needs to grow (they realize they’re struggling with sin, a boss is being overbearing, a neighbor is gossiping) they’re having a need to grow moment. During either of these moments a believer doesn’t open up their Discipleship 101 binder and go to the table of contents or the index to see if the question was already answered in some class they took 5 years ago. They ask a friend. They go to the community. They call their spiritual mentors.

Small group lets someone know: We’re here for your “need to know” and “need to grow moments.”

## Word

A major component of small groups is hearing from God through Scripture. The goal isn’t just to memorize facts about the Bible. But the Bible...

...shows us who God is: The Bible is God’s revelation of his character, especially revealed in Jesus. Without it, we might only have a vague sense of God, but not really know his love for us and the lengths he went to be in relationship with us.

...shows us who we are. Hebrews 4:12 says, *“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”* We don’t just read Scripture, Scripture reads

us. As we read, study and meditate on Scripture together, we hold it up like a mirror so we can see the condition of our own heart—the good and bad. It allows us to be honest with ourselves.

...and shows us who God created us to be. We're not meant to stay the same person we are. God wants to change us and to grow us. As the Psalmist says, *God's Word is a lamp for our feet, a light on our path*. God's word is a reliable guide, showing us what we can be at our best.

The ultimate goal is spiritual growth. As we study the Word together, we grow together.

## Worship

One of the core values of our small group ministry is worship. Worship opens our hearts to God. Worship humbles us. Bonhoeffer speaks to the importance of a community in worship together "Why do we sing? The reason is quite simply because in singing together it is possible for them to speak and pray the same Word at the same time; in other words, because here they can unite in the Word... The fact that we do not speak it but sing it only expresses the fact that our spoken words are inadequate to express what we want to say, that the burden of our song goes far beyond all human words."

However we worship - whether in song or in thanksgiving or in the reciting of prayers, psalms, and creeds, it is a means of grace. It, as Paul says in Ephesians 5:19 & 20 has the potential to fill us with the Holy Spirit and he says specifically to do it together, "Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord." In a small group setting, we have the opportunity to do just that.

## Friendship

Pastor Francis Chan once recounted a story in which a former gang member had given his life to Christ, joined the church and got baptized. After a while his attendance started to wane. When leadership reached out to him he said something along the lines of "It's not your fault, I was just under the wrong impression. I thought baptism was like gang initiation and I thought once I did that – I'd become a part of the church family the way I was a part of the gang's family. I just had it wrong."

Did he have it wrong? I don't think so. Certainly baptism isn't the same as gang initiation but shouldn't we have love between us? Shouldn't we have each other's backs? The reason we choose to use the word friendship is because there's a difference between being someone you minister to, being someone you hope attends your project, program, function, and being your



friend. There's a difference between caring about whether or not I show up and actually caring about me.

Wouldn't it be nice to have a "ride or die crew"? Don't you want people in your corner who would go to bat for you, take a bullet for you, move heaven and earth for you? I need someone who cares for me spiritually because they care for me spiritually not because they're building something cool and they hope I'll be a part of it. The Bible says that, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy." Friends have permission to wound each other, to sharpen one another as iron sharpens iron (painfully), to call each other out and tell it like it is. Friendship is transformational. It's why Jesus was known for being a friend of tax collectors and sinners. In the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coins – the ones who find what they've lost go and tell their friends. Friends celebrate with us and keep us on mission. Jesus says, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." In today's language, Jesus is describing a ride or die crew.

What would it look like if you had a group of strong Christian friends that you met with regularly, prayed with, worshipped with, and studied scripture with? It's safe to assume that you'd be growing in your faith and helping others to do the same. That's why Waite Park Church is committed to small groups. For us, it's the best way to Find Life, Share Life, and Give Life.

## Faith that Lasts

When the famous evangelist George Whitfield was coming to the end of his life, he considered the work he had done, his labor, and fruit it produced. It didn't take him long to say that his "people" were "a rope of sand" compared to those who came to Christ through the ministry of John Wesley. What did he attribute the lifelong faith of Wesley's converts to? Small Groups!

In fact Pastor Joel Comiskey once observed that "John Wesley wasn't persuaded that someone had made a decision for Christ until that person became involved in a small group."

The two main ingredients of Wesley's small groups are something we'll hear often. Not only can we safely assume that they focused on Word, Worship, and Friendship but we also see rather clearly and explicitly that these groups were committed to acknowledging their brokenness and lovingly examining one another. They recognized and confessed their sin and they asked pointed questions and wanted to be held accountable.



# How New Small Groups Start, Grow, Maintain, & Succeed

## Small Group On Ramps

Small group on ramps are simply – how people join small groups and get connected to small groups. The following is a list of how our church plans to intentionally build on ramps to small groups.

- **New small groups**  
New small groups will usually be comprised of new attenders who want to join a small group but have no relational connections with people in other small groups.
- **Small Group Station**  
There will be a station in the lobby of the church in which those interested can sign up to be on a small group. This will be followed up by email, phone call, or in person meeting with the small group pastor to see which group would be a good fit for them.
- **Personal Invitations**  
Small group members are encouraged to bring their friends to small groups.
- **Online Signup**
- **Baptism**
- **Highlighting from the pulpit**
- **Membership Class**

## Small Group Off Ramps

Before every winter and summer break individuals will be given a small group survey. They'll basically give feedback about their experience and will also have the opportunity to make a decision about their future involvement. They'll have three choices:

- a) I want to continue with my small group
- b) I'd like to try another small group
- c) I'd like to take a break from small groups.

This creates a simple design for members to exit without hurting feelings, awkwardness, or feeling like they're pressured to stay. It also helps for people to not make excuses week after week for months at a time (trust me, no one likes that guy and now you don't have to be that guy). To avoid awkwardness of having to hunt people down for responses we'll assume that a non-response means participants are planning to continue on.

## Who Leads Small Groups

Small groups will be led by anyone with a desire to lead small groups who also professes faith in Jesus Christ and has approval from the Church based on that individual's giftings and their standing in the community.

## Leader Growth

We don't just want to empower our small group leaders. We also want to equip our leaders and not just for the sake of your small group but also for your own personal relationship with God which comes before all else. Here's our plan:

- **Coaching Ministry**  
We will develop coaches that can meet with our leaders on a monthly/regular basis. These coaches won't be expert small group leaders and they're not meant to teach you how to do your job well. But they can support you, encourage you, create goals with you, troubleshoot with you, and do everything they can to help you succeed as a small group leader.
- **VHS Meetings**  
We want to meet twice a month (One highly recommended meeting on Sunday morning) and another optional meeting on a Monday. This meeting will have three components:
  - (1) Vision Casting**  
We'll remind ourselves of the reasons why we do the things that we do. This time will inspire, refresh, and focus our hearts and minds.
  - (2) Huddle with your coach**  
We'll get into small groups with our coach and share as a team – what's working, what's not, and what we can do to improve. We'll also pray for one another's various needs.
  - (3) Skill Development**  
We'll come back together again for an opportunity to learn or practice a small group leader skill.
- **Training, Retreat, Celebration,**  
We'll train at the beginning of the year, have a day retreat in the winter, and have a celebration right before Summer.

- Resources

We have digital resources, hard copies, and would love to buy subscription services or single items whenever a small group leader needs material.

## Small Group Size

We don't cap the amount of small group participants that each small group can have but we do want to suggest a healthy number to aim for – 10. In our previous years of experience we've found that groups over 10 often have group members on the fringe who come occasionally, aren't pursued by other members, and don't care to let people know when they will or won't be coming. These fringe members also tend to not invest in the group when they do show up.

When a small group has 15 people and five of them are “fringe” it can be difficult and draining for the small group leaders to try and pursue – whether they're trying to pursue all five or just one of the five a small group leader will feel like they're never doing enough. When there's 9 participants and one of the 9 has missed a few weeks and hasn't been checking in, it's not difficult for a small group leader to identify and reach out to them.

We also know that the average life cycle for a group is about 2 years. There are some exceptions to this rule but for the most part if a group's dynamics don't change then the group will become stale. The way we change the dynamic of a small group is either by sending people to create new groups or by adding new members as other members will leave or move away from time to time.

## Small Group Assessments

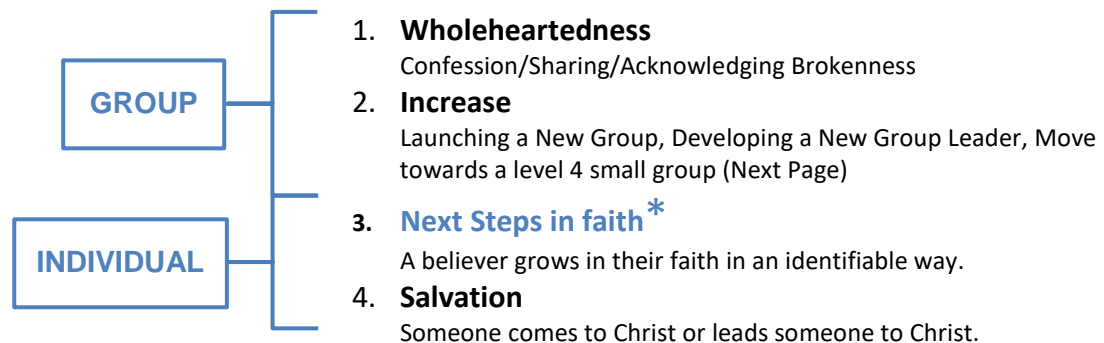
Occasionally we'll create small group assessments for our participants to fill out and hand in privately – This helps build and give ownership to the small group ministry as a whole. We'll also create small group assessments for small groups to do in person together – This helps build individual small groups and gives people ownership of their own small groups.

## Small Group WINS

Rick Howerton once said that “Great small groups celebrate success, suffer with one another, and expect God to do more than they can do themselves.” That sounds like a good group of friends doesn't it?

Sometimes we'll hear feedback from someone that their small group seems somewhat directionless. They'll say something like, “we just get together and talk but there doesn't seem to be any real point to it.” This might be true BUT it also could be an issue of not knowing how

to properly identify when your small group is winning and when it isn't. Knowing your wins is incredibly important as a small group leader because it helps you know whether or not you're being effective with your time. Here are some measurable wins for you to have on your radar:



\*The problem with measuring “Next Steps” in someone’s faith journey is that sometimes you’re arbitrarily choosing any growth or any obedience from that person’s life and claiming it as the result of your small group. It’s too vague of a category to aim for and measure.

This year, as we focus on WINS, the reason we do so is so that we can pursue a purposefully effective small group ministry. We want to make sure that we’re using our time wisely. At the beginning of our small group year, we want our participants to identify their next steps (whether that’s getting free from habitual sin, finding a way to forgive an offense, reading through the Bible during the small group year, memorizing Bible verses or finding an accountability partner).

Imagine if we were able to say at the end of the year that “80 small group participants took the next steps in their faith during this past year of small group ministry.” Now we’re able to see (as a church and as individuals) the difference that small group ministry makes in our life. Through this we also encourage accountability and loving examination.

## Attendance

In a recent Facebook poll of small group pastors – 51 had small groups that tracked weekly attendance and 8 did not. Can you guess which one we are? Our small group ministry does not take attendance weekly. We’re interested in knowing who attends our small groups and who doesn’t. We’re also interested to know how many of our people are involved in small groups. The numbers matter to us. At the same time, we also want to make your job easy and we don’t need to know how often our people come. Instead of tracking attendance we track participants. Once a month you’ll be asked to look over your participant list and update it.

# Small Group Maturity Pathway:

<b>Level 1 Group (BSG)</b>	<b>Level 2 Group</b>	<b>Level 3 Group</b>	<b>Level 4 Group</b>
Mostly Non and Nominal Believers	Mostly Immature believers	Mature believers	Whole and Holy Community
Group is hosted by the leader/event planner	Group is hosted by the leader and a few members contribute.	Group is hosted by the leader & members have varying roles and responsibilities.	The majority of the members contribute as equals.
Focused on basic questions	Focused on basic tenets/beliefs	Focused on sanctification & evangelism	Focused on sanctification, evangelism, and sending.
No Accountability	Group accountability begins (How's your faith?)	Group Accountability and some have accountability partners	Group accountability and most have accountability partners
Word and Friendship take place in group only	Word, Worship and Friendship take place in group only	Word, Worship, and Friendship take place outside of small group	Word, Worship, and friendship take place outside of small group
Don't acknowledge their brokenness	May acknowledge their brokenness	Acknowledge their brokenness	Acknowledge their brokenness
Don't lovingly examine one another	Don't lovingly examine one another	Lovingly examine one another	Lovingly examine one another
Small Group is Weekly Event Based	Small Group is Weekly Event Based	"Small Group" happens throughout the week and gathers once a week for the event.	"Small group" happens throughout the week and gathers once a week for the event.





# Anatomy of Small Group Ministry

## Small Group Seasons

WPC Small Groups will go through 3 seasons of varying intensity: Focus, Study, & Rest.

### 1. Focus

Twice a year all small groups at Waite Park Church will be studying the same topic together which will be dictated by our sermon series. This will usually take place in September or October and in January. We generally print a booklet for every individual in our church which includes a daily devotional, weekly study questions, a family devotional, and weekly action steps. This is more than just sharing a common theme – it's the pursuit of God's will for our church together. In Revelation Jesus writes a letter to each of the 7 churches and in his letters He identifies what that Church does well, what it does poorly, and what it needs to do to change. We believe Focus seasons help us to ask Jesus how we're doing as a church and to identify the things we need to do to change.

### 2. Study

If the Focus season is the church's chance to grow how God would have us grow, then the Study season is the small group's chance to do the same. The small group can choose to read a passage of scripture and discuss it, they can choose to do a book study (from a list of suggested resources or from their own research), or they can choose to do a video study. During this time small groups will be doing separate studies from one another. Small Groups should be encouraged during this time to consider what areas of their spiritual life need more attention. For example, if your entire group is lousy at evangelism or doesn't have a heart for the lost, you might strongly consider finding a study to address that rather than doing things that interest or appeal to the small group. Groups don't need to meet weekly during a Study season.

### 3. Rest

We rest during December (For Christmas and New Year's) and the summer months. There's two primary reasons that we "Rest."

- **To appreciate variety and rest.**

Have you ever played a game or sung a song or went somewhere you really loved and you ended up doing it a bit too long and it became... tiresome? Or perhaps you've played a game, sung a song, or went somewhere you really loved and it ended a little too short and left you wanting more? We'd love to leave people wanting more rather than leave them feeling exhausted and never wanting to come back. Rest is a godly

discipline. Some of us are too good at it but the majority of us probably struggle with the idea of taking a break. You have our permission. Rest.

- **To focus and avoid competition**

We consider small groups to be one of the most important activities of Waite Park Church. We also recognize that there are times when we might want to host classes like a Theology class or a Financial class. By taking a Summer Rest our church can afford to host other classes and groups that won't compete with our small group ministry.

### **What Changed? What happened to Rec?**

We used to schedule rest for other Holidays like Thanksgiving and Easter. We also used to schedule a "Rec" week at the end of every Focus season and at the end of every Study season. This rec week was a time for a small group to do something purely recreational. Now that our church has a strong foundation for understanding the small group system – we want to give our leaders and our groups more freedom.

We believe leaders and their small groups are the best people for knowing when the group needs to do something recreational and when it needs to rest.

### **Small Group Meetings**

We want our small group meeting to be 60% of a small group. In other words, small groups should be doing more together than meeting together once a week. The other 40% should be guided but organic. In other words, encourage your members to spend time together, grab coffee together, vacation together, eat meals together, run errands together, watch each other's kids, go to church together, and in general do life together.

#### **Food, Drink, Fellowship (15 mins) – FRIENDSHIP**

Encourage each other to show up 10 minutes early and eat/drink/hangout together. Allow this time to go on until 15 minutes after your start time.

#### **Worship (5 minutes) –WORSHIP**

Start with prayer but also consider another worship activity. Some groups will do worship through song and they'll do it well. That won't be the case for most small groups though. Since worship is one of our guiding values, we want each of our small groups to devote some time to worship together. We want our small group to bear Spiritual fruit and so we need to do a spiritual work and we need to ask the Spirit for help! We will have a number of options to choose from to help leaders decide which mode of worship will be most effective for their group.

### **Read, Watch, Listen, Discuss (60 mins) – WORD**

During a typical small group, participants should expect to engage in a 45 minute discussion guided by the small group leader or another facilitator but each group member should be encouraged to make eye contact with people other than the leader, to respond to one another, and to ask each other questions. Allow this to be a time of discussion.

### **Share Prayer Request and Pray (10 mins) – WORSHIP**

The group should share prayer requests and at least one person can write them down. This list of prayer requests can then be emailed to the group the next day so that members can continue to pray for one another. After sharing prayer requests, the group should pray. If time allows and discussion time went short, allow for multiple people to pray.

If Small group officially starts at 7PM then following this structure, it should be doable to wrap up around 8:30PM with some wiggle room. You don't have to force your groups into an hour and a half time frame. Do what comes easiest to all of the members of your group.

### **Hangout/Fellowship/Talk (Optional) - FRIENDSHIP**

Officially dismiss the group when the study and prayer is over. Then, depending on the group and the group leader you may consider encouraging people to stay as long as they want. Something like, "alright guys, thanks for coming, if you want to stay longer you can... if you need to leave that's okay too!"

A church must grow larger and smaller at the same time. Larger through worship and smaller through small groups. –Rick Warren

The first thing you must learn to avoid burnout as a small group leader is that God is the real leader and center of every Christian small group. –Michael C. Mack

After 25 years of leading small groups and coaching small group leaders, I have come to one clear conviction: prayer is the most important activity of the small group leader. – Dave Earley

In an article in the summer 2014 issue of *Facts & Trends*, senior writer Bob Smietana wrote the following about LifeWay Research's findings on the spiritual effect of small groups.

*Sixty-three percent of regular group attenders say they intentionally spend time with other believers in order to help them grow in their faith. Only 22 percent of those not in a group say the same. And 73 percent of group attenders say they are intentionally putting their spiritual gifts to use serving God and others, compared to 42 percent of non-attenders.*

*Churchgoers who belong to a group are more likely to go to church at least four times a month (79 percent), and to read the Bible daily (28 percent).*

*Being in a group also impacts people's daily lives. Group members feel closer to God (69 percent), understand the Bible better (74 percent), trust God more (66 percent), and become more loving in their relationships (48 percent).*

*"God has supernaturally ordained community to sanctify His people," writes Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger in their book Transformational Groups. "In other words, groups provide environments for people to grow in Christ. A call to discipleship and spiritual maturity is a call to biblical community."*

*No matter how you define groups—life groups, Sunday school, discipleship classes, or Bible study fellowships—the importance is the same, the authors say. You cannot make disciples apart from community. Although groups are not the only place transformation happens, the authors are convinced it is the primary place.*

# Your First Small Group Meeting

Your first small group meeting is important. It sets the tone for the year and teaches your people what to expect and what to hope for. We're going to do our best to make sure that you have everything you need for your first small group meeting is the best it can be.

## From Now Until Your First Meeting:

### **Pray**

Pray for your small group. Pray for the individuals who are planning on coming. Pray for those who are on the fence about coming. Pray for those who haven't responded. Pray for those who aren't planning on coming. Pray for yourself. Pray that the Holy Spirit would empower all that you do and that ultimately lives would be changed through His grace and His power.

## The Week Before You Meet:

### **Reminders**

During the days leading up to your meeting you'll want to remind your people that you're meeting. Give them the time and date. Make it super easy for them to find your house. Take out as much anxiety as possible. Some people put a sign on their lawn that says "small group" with balloons attached to it for visibility. Others take a picture of their home and send it to their people so that no one has to worry about knocking on the wrong door or not being able to find the house.

### **Answer Questions**

Consider sending out a group email the day before you meet. Work towards alleviating common fears and points of anxiety.

- What should I wear?
- Are there pets?
- Do I ring the doorbell or just walk in?
- Will I have to pray out loud?
- Will I know people?
- Do I need to bring a Bible? A journal?
- If there's food, do I eat it in the kitchen/dining room or am I allowed to bring it into the living room?
- Do I have to take my shoes off at the door?

## The Day You Meet:

### **Clean, Set Up, Plan**

Don't wait to prepare and set up right before small group. You don't want to be frantic or stressed while also trying to welcome people and be hospitable. Your small group meeting is a time to be people oriented, not task oriented. If you don't have time after work to prepare, then set up as much as you can in the morning before work or even the night before you meet.

- Make sure there is enough seating for everyone
- Clean the house if you need to but it doesn't have to look like a museum. You are sharing life together, after all.
- Clean the bathroom if it needs it.
- Turn on plenty of lights, especially outside, in the entryway, and in the meeting room.
- Run through the night in your head. What supplies will you need? Where can you put things so that they'll be easily accessible.
- What do you plan on doing with your pets?
- Considering having music in the background while people are arriving.

A note about cleaning: People feel more at home and more at ease when your home doesn't look like something out of a catalogue. You're not hosting Royalty – you're getting together with friends. Don't let the "prep work" of getting your house ready burn you out – your ministry is far too important.

## As Group Members Arrive:

### **Greeter**

Whether it's you, the host, or a particularly warm and inviting person, have someone at the door who will focus on greeting people, introducing themselves, and welcoming guests into your home. Stationing someone at the door allows everyone to chat and mingle without having to constantly go to the door when someone knocks or rings the doorbell.

## During Your Meeting:

The first meeting you have probably won't look like the deeply spiritual small group of your dreams. That's something that will take time, patience, and grace. For now, just focus on getting off to a great start and don't take anything for granted. Enjoy every moment. This could be the beginning of a Spirit filled community sharing life and love with one another.

### **Start and End On Time**

Let groups know that you value their time by starting when you're supposed to and ending when you're supposed to. After discussion is over, close in prayer, and let your people know that small group is officially over. Optionally, you can invite them to stay longer if they want to.

## Agenda

The agenda for your first meeting will be different from the rest.

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 30min | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Spend time hanging out, waiting for everyone to get there.</li><li>▪ As people come in, tell them to help themselves to snacks or beverages.</li><li>▪ Once everyone has arrived officially welcome everyone to your very first small group meeting. Let your guests know they can continue to spend some time talking and getting to know each other and tell them what time you'll start the video. (start the video 30 minutes after your small group start time)</li></ul> |
| 15min | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Play Pastor Kory's Welcome video (5 min)</li><li>▪ Do the icebreaker questions that are provided in the video. (10min)</li></ul>   |
| 25min | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Go over the Small Group Guidelines Agreement (5 min)</li><li>▪ Ask people how they feel about the guidelines and whether or not they'd like to change or add anything. You have our permission to make it your own. (10 min)</li><li>▪ Go over the Soul Training Goals Sheet &amp; Assign homework for the following week (10)</li></ul>   |
| 5min  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ End the group with a prayer, let people know that group is officially over, let them know you're looking forward to seeing them next week and invite them to stay later if they want to continue to hang out and don't have anywhere they need to be.</li></ul>  |

In the future, discussion time will be longer and most group meetings will probably be 1.5 to 2 hours long. Knowing that, do your best to read the room and don't rush the agenda.

Because this first meeting is focused more on getting to know each other and less on getting to know the Bible, make sure your snack and beverage game is on point.

## Right After Your Meeting:

### Follow Up

If you committed to follow-up with someone or get back to them about how they were interpreting a particular verse, be sure to make a note of it because once work starts the next day, you may forget all about it.

### Debrief

One of my favorite things to do with my leaders after an event is to debrief with them. What went well, what didn't go well, what should we do differently in the future? If a few people stay behind to help clean up, if you and your spouse are leading together, or if you've got some co-leaders, take the time to debrief with one another.

## The Next Few Days:

### **Contact**

After the meeting is over, keep the ball rolling. You've got good momentum, don't lose it. Contact your people, thank them for coming, or let them know you missed them if they weren't able to make it.

One way to do all of this quickly and effectively in the future is to send out an email with people's prayer requests that were made in your previous meeting. You won't take prayer requests during your first meeting so you won't be able to do that, but keep it in mind for the future.

### **Pursue**

Friend request your new members on social media, send them texts, emails, or phone calls. Most importantly, seriously, continue to pray for your group and your own spiritual health and development as you lead God's small group.

A strong small group ministry can help a church become more authentic in its relationships and far more disciplined in its spiritual disciplines. –Larry Osbourne



# How to Facilitate Well



# Be Okay With Not Knowing All the Answers

I don't want you to know all of the answers. These aren't classes, they're small groups. Great teachers usually resort to teaching during small groups and we don't want our leaders to teach, we want them to facilitate. So if you do know all of the answers, try to keep your mouth shut.

When I graduated with a BS in Christian Ministries, I asked an accounting major to take over our small group ministry on campus. He came to me once and said something along the lines of, "I don't know the Bible like you do. What if they ask me questions and I don't have the answers?"

What I told him then is the same thing I'll tell you now... sometimes it's best not to have all the answers. For one thing, I trust that God knows about our small groups, knows about our small group members, and if He wanted a question answered during small group time then He could prepare us for that question ahead of time. There are plenty of times when someone will say, "I was just reading about that!" Or there may come a time when an answer comes to your mind even though you'd never really considered it before. However, I believe there will also be plenty of times when an answer can do more harm than good. Sometimes I think God wants people to wrestle with Him on certain issues. It's part of our growth journey. And when we have stock answers for people's questions it can often times be like sewing up a festering wound. On the outside, things seem fine but on the inside the infection is spreading.

What to do when you don't have the answer:

- 1) Encourage other group members to chime in. In a small group, people shouldn't be responding to your discussion questions by looking at you and talking to you, they should be looking at each other and talking to each other. So if someone asks you a question, redirect it.
- 2) Write the question down and agree to find out the answer together after the group. You can do research at home after the group or you could also email the Pastor of Discipleship at Waite Park Church.
- 3) Don't pretend to know the answer and don't pretend that the answer can't be known. "Oh, I know I know it, but I just can't recall." Or, "That's just one of those questions that are totally unanswerable. That's when we need faith." Often times we are tempted to hit the "mystery" button too soon. The depths of Christian doctrine and Tradition are rich. Our predecessors and Church Fathers were infatuated with God and wanted to

know as much about Him as possible and often asked many of the same questions that we ask today. Chances are, you're not the first person asking and chances are, there are plenty of answers out there.

Too many small groups worry too much about doctrine and too little about building Christian community. – Rick Howerton

The 58 'one anothers' of the Bible- love one another, care for one another, help one another, encourage one another, serve one another, share with one another (etc.)- can only be done in a small group setting. –Rick Warren

The best tool I've ever seen for connecting people to one another and engaging them with the Bible for the long haul is a sermon-based small group. –Larry Osbourne

# Be Okay With Silence

Some people love silence and some people can't stand it. Maybe you're one of those people who can't fall asleep without some sort of white noise in the background. Regardless of personality or preferences every small group leader needs to learn to embrace silence.

## **Allow for Silence:**

Guess what: silence is your friend. If you're okay with silence then your group will be okay with silence too. They'll know it's nothing to worry about. It's natural and it's good at times. If you're uncomfortable with silence then it will make others uncomfortable with it too and they'll think they're doing something wrong. They're not.

## **Give People Time to Process**

When you ask a question and no one responds, it's because people are thinking. It's because people aren't firing from the hip or giving you scripted responses. They're actually considering what you said and formulating an answer. It takes time for people to process your question and it takes time for them to consider their answer and it takes time for them to consider how they want to best articulate their answer. It can take between 1-10 seconds for someone to do this.

## **Ask the Question Again in a Different Way**

After you ask a question and give plenty of time to respond, if they still haven't responded then ask the question in a different way to help your people formulate their thoughts and to give them even more time to think.

Another thing that you could do is ask your small group why it is that they're struggling to answer the question. Something like, "We're not as responsive as usual to this question, why do you think that is?" That will get them talking about the question without actually feeling like they need to have an answer for the question itself.

## **Resist the Urge to Answer the Question**

Whatever you do, don't feel like you need to answer the question. It's not what you're here for. If you feel like every question needs an answer then you're ultimately saying two things: 1) This is a class with right and wrong answers and 2) I'm the teacher with the right answers.

## **Move On**

It's totally fine to move on from a question that isn't working for your group. Allow for silence. Give people time to process questions and formulate responses. Ask the question in a different way. If all else fails, move on.



# Be Okay With Giving Direction

## **Know When to Go First**

Hey, you're the leader and as leaders, there are times when we go first. Did a question ask the group to get vulnerable and go a little deeper? This might be a great time for you to go first. Was a question kind of cumbersome and difficult to answer? Admit that and then give your best shot at answering. You have to be willing to take risks, put yourself out there, and say things that might be wrong. You're not the teacher, you're the facilitator and it has to be okay for you and others to get it wrong sometimes.

## **Know When to Ask Someone To Hold Their Answers**

If you have 10 people in your group and every person takes 5 minutes to answer one question, that's almost an hour's worth of discussion. Woah. At the same time, if you ask 10 questions and one person responds for 5 minutes to each question, he or she has just monopolized an hour's worth of your group's time together. That's not okay. It's your job as a facilitator to know when to say, "I love that you are participating so much, but I was hoping we might hear from some others in the group." After the group, pull this person to the side and let them know that you meant what you said – their participation is great, and you wish everyone were as open as they were.

## **Know When to Ask Others to Speak**

On the flip side, there are going to be times when you'll want to hear from everyone or from one person in particular. You could say, "I wonder if each of us could respond to this question in one or two sentences." If someone looks like they have something to say, you might say, "Hey Frank, you look like there's something on your mind... would you share it with us?" Or if you know someone well enough and are friends with them, you might say, "Hey Lindsey, we haven't heard from you in a while, care to share?" Some people literally have no idea when they're answering questions or not.

## **Know When to Reign in it**

If Lindsey brings up "infant baptism" and it ignites into a debate, you might allow it to go on for a minute because it's good for group members to run with a topic and respond back and forth to one another but chances are your group hasn't met to figure out the doctrine of infant baptism. So kindly remind those who are carrying the conversation too far off course that you love that they're passionate but there's more to talk about tonight and maybe that conversation can happen after small group. BAM!

### **Know When to Correct**

If Frank says to Lindsey, “Hey, that was the dumbest thing I’ve heard in a while.” It might be a great opportunity to get out the Guidelines Agreement paper and have Frank sit in the corner and think about what he’s said. In reality, when someone says something hurtful or unloving you might say something along the lines of, “Hey Frank, that was inappropriate and uncalled for, it’s not helpful to our discussion and it’s certainly not why we’re here.” Give Frank an opportunity to apologize and then move on. You might need to talk to Frank afterwards and see where he’s at.

### **Know When to Call for Back Up**

If someone’s behavior is continually disruptive or unhealthy for your small group and you’ve tried addressing it, contact Pastor Keith or your coach and arrange a meeting. It’s good to nip this sort of thing in the bud. Be sure to read through the “Extra Grace Required” portion of this handbook too.

### **Recap Don’t Reframe**

It’s awesome when a facilitator says, “Hey, here’s what I hear us saying.” Or “So Frank says this, and Lindsey thought this...” Recapping is valuable. It says, “What we’ve discussed is important and I was paying attention.” Don’t reframe. When a facilitator says, “Frank said this and I think we can say it better by saying....” When you begin to end every discussion by reframing it, people will believe that there are “right” answers and when there’s “right” answers then discussion stops. We aren’t looking for yes or no or fill in the blank responses. This isn’t a test or a quiz but it’s a discussion. Let’s trust the Holy Spirit to be at work speaking in us, to us, and through us.

“Interestingly, individuals... often come to a small group for some time before they actually choose to follow Christ. Community precedes conversion. Belonging usually comes before belief.” – Jim Egli



# Conversation Dominators

One out of every two groups will draw someone that either dominates conversation or dominates the energy, care, and needs of the group. Most conversation dominators simply need others to help them manage time and (unfortunately for Minnesotans) this means learning the art of interruption. Here are 10 tips. Feel free to use the ones that make the most sense for your context.

## **Pretalk action steps:**

- Set Up Some Ground Rules Before Every Meeting. Even something as simple as “Let’s try to hear from everyone at least once today during our discussion.”
- Sit next to the conversation dominator. Many times people look for eye contact in order to get and receive permission to speak. When we sit next to someone we decrease the amount of times that we’ll end up making eye contact with them.
- Write down the answers on a dry erase board. When you’re recording answers, people will often be more concise. This can’t work for every question but if there’s a moment for brainstorming it can certainly help keep answers shorter.

## **Non-verbal interrupters:**

- Open your mouth. This simple and small gesture is often what we use when speaking face to face – when we make eye contact with someone and suddenly open our mouths we’re saying, “I’ve got something I’m about to say.”
- Raise your hand – indicating that you’d like to speak. This is my favorite. Raising your hand recognizes that you’re asking for permission to speak. Also a raised hand is subconsciously the sign for “STOP.” It’s a gentle but effective way at taking back control.

## **Verbal Interrupter:**

- **Permission** “Can I stop you for a moment – I think we need to hear from some others.”
- **Apologize** - “I’m sorry to interrupt but...”
- **Acknowledge** - “I know you have more to say but I think we need to make sure we have time for others to have a chance to respond.”
- **Compliment and steal** - I love that – great point and I wonder if we can hear from some other people
- **Summarize and proceed** – So, what I hear you saying is... does anyone else have anything to add to that?



# Not a Support Group

When a group has a member that dominates the energy, care, needs, and time of the group – it can quickly kill a small group. How do we address this? We have several options. Sometimes there are people who aren't yet healthy enough to be a part of a small group and the best way to love them is to find the appropriate care for them until they can become healthy enough to be a part of a small group.

A word of caution: Your small group is here to care for one another. Don't be too quick to identify someone as "not healthy enough for a small group." We will all go through a crisis at some point in our life and sometimes a small group will have to rally around their wounded member for a season. That's life. That's love. Thank God for the men who rallied around me and poured into me during my time of need when I had very little to offer them.

That being said, there are people who have chronic crises in their lives or who are suffering from trauma or from a disorder or illness that most small groups simply can't compensate for and offer effective care and community. Many megachurches will have specific care groups or support groups to refer such people to.

We're praying for support groups to happen at Waite Park Church but until that time – small group leaders will need to meet with coaches and pastoral staff to develop a game plan for each individual case. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is help people find a place where they can receive the help they need rather than keeping them at a place where they cause harm.

Don't make this decision on your own – meet with a coach and develop a competent, effective, and gracious plan together.



# Christian Community is Hard but Worth it.

A pastor/friend once told me, “The church is the Bride of Christ but she sure is ugly.” The truth is, each one of us is on our own individual journey towards Christ-likeness. At one point, God will make His Bride beautiful and flawless in both position and practice. For the time being though, we’re all a masterful work in progress. So, sometimes, when you get us all in the same room, it can be hard.

We want our small groups to be a Spirit led, Christ centered community of saints who find life, share life, give life together and hopefully bring seekers into that process. It’s a powerful picture but that process can be difficult, painful, and trying.

The Holy Spirit resides in each of us and the same power that raised Christ from the dead is at work in each of us and through this Holy Spirit power, God is able to do immeasurable more than all we can ask or imagine. The fact of the matter is, if we continue to put ourselves in the means of grace and continue to seek God together, we will experience transformation. We will be surprised at who God is shaping us to be and we will look back on our past selves with utter confusion at how we’ve come so far. This takes time, it takes patience, it takes what I like to call, “embracing the grind” and it takes a lot of grace. But it is so, so worth it.

Your small group has the ability and potential to be a place where lives are forever changed for the better, where people experience salvation and sanctification, and genuine Christian love. Don’t grow weary. And when you begin to grow weary, keep going.

<sup>9</sup> Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:9)

<sup>24</sup> Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. <sup>25</sup> And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25)