

GRACE GROUP

LEADER MANUAL



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Group Life - The Why

Everything we do at Grace Fellowship is focused on one main goal: helping people live Jesus-centered lives. One of the ways we work to accomplish this is by moving people from rows to circles. We want to move people from simply participating in the larger church setting to becoming a member of a smaller group setting. This isn't just our goal, this is God's goal for us. God has designed us to be in relationship with others, and that happens better in circles.



MEET JESUS
EMBRACE HIS GRACE



FOLLOW JESUS
CHOOSE HIS WAYS



SHARE JESUS
MULTIPLY HIS MISSION

The ultimate vision & mission is to make disciples who make disciples

As a Group Leader, it is vitally important to shepherd and lead your group well. Your group is a significant priority for the church as well as the members. This is where the Bible is studied and people meet, follow, and share Jesus in real, authentic ways as people build lifelong relationships through group life. Being a group leader is one of the most important roles and greatest privileges we have here at Grace.

Small groups are God's demonstration of community (John 13:34-35, 17:21). God created the church to put His love for people on display. By observing and experiencing the gospel as it is practiced between Christians, non-Christians encounter Jesus in a real and tangible way. Small groups must intentionally build their gatherings in ways that are welcoming to non-Christians. We emphasize group life because Jesus and the early church did. Jesus had a distinct ministry model that we strive to model:

- He valued and served the large assembly of people
(the masses = worship)
- He was a small Group Leader
(the twelve = Grace Groups and Bible Studies)
- He invested deeply in a few
(Peter, James, and John = a few people in your group)

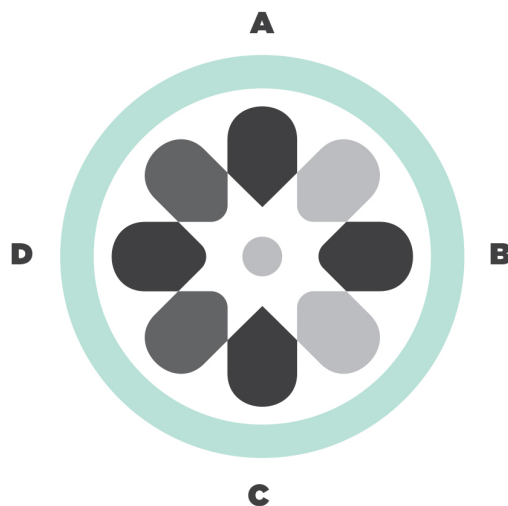


The majority of Jesus' ministry was spent in a small group setting. This is where He taught the 12 disciples and modeled how they should live and love. This environment helped them discover who Jesus really was (Mark 8:29). The early church gathered and celebrated weekly in large groups and then met in small groups throughout the week (Acts 2:42-46). This is where the early church loved, cared for, and assisted one another. They were real people, meeting real needs, and joining together to fulfill a real mission. It was key to living the abundant life Jesus wanted for His people.



Group Life - The What

The following is a diagram depicting the components of a Grace Group that we believe are the essentials to helping people live Jesus-centered lives through group participation.



A - Application to Life

Group members are given a small action step each week (which matches the action step in the weekend message) in order to apply the lesson to their lives. Life application is the means by which we grow in our relationships with Christ. Without a discussion about life application, we're only gaining knowledge. Group Leaders pay attention to the life transformation of the group members.

B - Biblical Teaching

To help group members learn the truths found in scripture, the Groups Team creates Leader Guides. This allows for questions and a discussion about the meaning and life application of the weekend messages. This also creates a unity among the group members who are learning the same things. These are excellent resources to help dig deeper into the scriptures and help in the promotion of dialogue. This also encourages weekend worship attendance.

C - Care and Prayer

The group should be intentionally seeking out ways to care for one another. Groups are the place where you are cared for and care for others. That means celebrating in seasons of joy, mourning in seasons of loss, and carrying one another's burdens. Additionally, groups take time to pray for one another. Prayer is our means to believe God's promises on behalf of one another. God has given us prayer as a means to exercise belief in, and reliance upon, Him as our good and sovereign God.



Groups should cultivate strong, Bible-rich, relational prayer lives. Group Leaders will monitor group participants concerning their care needs.

D - Development

Group Leaders will spend time and give attention to the development of the Apprentice Leader. The development of the Apprentice Leader's skills as a leader is the bulk of the multiplication strategy of group life. When the Apprentice Leader is ready to lead on their own, the group should consider multiplying. The Group Leader shall also recognize and give others the opportunity to develop their giftings and abilities within the group setting: administration, teaching, hospitality, coordination of social and outreach events, etc.

Group Leadership Team

As a leader, it would be helpful to have a team to help with different aspects of leading:

- **Groups Pastor / Campus Leadership Team** – These church staff members will provide leadership, support, training, resources, encouragement, and care for the Grace Group Leader. They are in place to help answer questions, provide best practices, and encourage the growth of the leader's abilities and personal spiritual growth. They will cover the Group Leader with prayer and take interest in the Leader's spiritual health through personalized interactions and communication.
- **Leader** - This person or couple is the primary communicator to provide engaging teaching and facilitate interactive discussions. This person or couple is also responsible for identifying and raising up the apprentice leader as Paul modeled in 2 Timothy 2:1-2 with his protege Timothy.
- **Apprentice Leader** - The Apprentice Leader is learning to become a leader in the future. The Grace Group Leader must spend time training, teaching, and modeling how a group should be led and provide opportunities for the Apprentice to put his/her newly acquired skills into practice.
- **Administrator** - This person is gifted administratively and is essential to keeping everyone connected. This person gets contact information, communicates group activities, sends out prayer requests, keeps the group roster current, and records attendance.
- **Host** - Grace Groups require a host to open their home and create a warm, inviting atmosphere.



Group Characteristics & Successes

Let's remind ourselves that the goal of group life is the following: **to move people's spiritual maturity forward**. This includes efforts on both the part of the Group Leader and the group member. Everything we do at Grace Fellowship is focused on one main goal: helping people live Jesus-centered lives.

Some indications of thriving groups...

- They are committed to growth in knowledge and life application of the Scriptures.
- They use the Bible as the baseline of their belief system.
- They are a safe place where everyone is heard.
- They are authentic.
- They are invitational and welcoming to new members.
- They are encouraging and caring toward each other.
- They are places where conflict is handled biblically.
- They are committed to each other relationally and spiritually.

Some group member practices that indicate a thriving group...

- They attend group, attend worship services and church events regularly, and make group a priority.
- They take some ownership of the group, such as leading the Bible study portion, taking leadership of the babysitting, planning an outreach, or organizing snack or prayer time.
- They grow in their love of and understanding of God.
- They grow in their love of and service to others.
- They become more Christ-like in their behavior, actions, and thought life.
- They take next steps, such as praying out loud in group, getting baptized, taking a mission's trip, participating in community outreach, joining a serving team, starting to tithe, becoming a Partner, or taking ownership in their church.
- They share their faith with others.
- They make efforts to disciple others.
- They rally around a person or family enduring hardship.
- They have fun together and build lasting relationships!



The Grace Group Leader Role

Grace Groups are an integral part of what we do as a church. We believe that sustained life change occurs as we grow in our relationship with Christ, and this happens best when we prioritize intentional relationships with others who seek this same goal. Groups provide people with the opportunity to connect with others, grow in their relationship with Jesus, and experience community. Group Leaders have the privilege of creating environments in which seeds of faith are planted in the lives of those they lead, while trusting God with the growth of those seeds.

Qualifications

- Has a personal, growing relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Recognizes the Bible as the ultimate authority and has a working knowledge of it to be able to teach it.
- Has Group Leader experience, preferably at Grace Fellowship.
- Reviews and agrees with Grace Fellowship's Statement of Basic Beliefs.
- Is a Partner with Grace Fellowship.
- Has the moral discernment, time, and emotional and relational capacity to lead a group.
- Has the knowledge, experience, and desire to lead group members through the ABCD's as listed on pages 5-6.

Responsibilities

- Commits to shepherding the group members, paying attention to their individual needs.
- Leads the group by facilitating the group meeting, monitoring its health, and promoting participation among group members. Commits to spend time in preparation and prayer for the group meetings, gatherings, and other events.
- Commits to spend time building relationships with your group members.
- Creates an invitational culture by encouraging members to invite others.
- Creates an exciting and fun environment that generates a desire for members to continue to be engaged.
- From the beginning, teaches the vision to multiply and raise up Apprentice Leaders.
- Remains aware of the size of the group. An ideal size for a group is 8-12 people. A larger group means a loss in intimacy, resulting in the Group Leader managing people instead of shepherding people.
- Is an intentional listener and makes sure everyone is heard.
- Leads with grace and compassion. Knows that people are more important than your lesson - gives grace. Allows and encourages members to wrestle with Biblical concepts and even disagree without judgment, personal attack, or dismissal.
- Is aware of what people are saying through their body language. When a person gives an opinion or insight, the Leader encourages them during or after the group.



- Celebrates the small *and* significant wins: when someone prays for the first time, shares a personal story for the first time, gets baptized, etc.
- Commits to engage in leadership development opportunities as provided by the Groups Team.
- Records weekly attendance through the Grace's electronic software (YourGraceChurch).

Group Leaders Lead By...

- **Living as examples.** Paul practiced what he preached. He could tell the Ephesian elders to remember how he lived (Acts 20:18), and he could even say, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). As Leaders, our lives ought to reflect the glorious Gospel that we proclaim. Paul commended the Ephesian elders to God and the "word of His grace" so Leaders must be students of the Word, always pointing others to the Word.
- **Serving.** Paul said he "served the Lord with all humility and with tears..." (Acts 20:19). His life was characterized by "laying down his life" in the manner of Christ, who had come "not to be served but to serve..." (Mark 10:45). So as Leaders, we lead by becoming servants.
- **Persevering.** No one said leadership would be easy. Paul experienced "conflicts without" (Acts 20:19, 23) and "conflicts within" (Acts 20:29–30), but he continued to minister faithfully to the end. Leadership is not for the faint-hearted.
- **Teaching.** Paul was faithful to teach both in public forums as well as from house to house (Acts 20:20). He was faithful to tell his disciples whatever would be profitable to them, even if he suspected it might be hard for them to accept (Acts 20:20). He was faithful in teaching "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).
- **Being missional.** Paul said, "I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry, I received from the Lord Jesus Christ, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). Paul's life showed that he lived to fulfill the calling given to him by the Lord: giving witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So, too, must we remember our own call to share the Gospel Message.
- **Protecting the flock.** Paul called the elders to pay careful attention to (Acts 20:28) and to be aware of those who would come among the flock and do them harm (Acts 20:29–30). Leaders must seek to protect their people from errant teachings and their harmful effects. These are the teachings which we consider it important to ascribe to, to teach, and to defend. These teachings can be found [Grace's Statement of Basic Beliefs](#).
- **Working hard.** As an apostle, Paul could have received his support from those whom he served, but he chose to work both day and night to meet his own needs (Acts 20:34–35). Serving others in Gospel ministry always exacts sacrifice.
- **Loving.** Paul exemplified this by loving sacrificially. He reminded his disciples of the Lord's words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Leaders who put this into practice will find that in giving, they will enrich many souls, including their own.



Group Leader Time Commitments

- Preparation for weekly meeting: 30-60 minutes/week
- Group meeting: 1-½ to 2 hours/week
- Ongoing communication with group (phone calls, emails, texts, etc): 30 minutes/week
- Helping to disciple and/or care for people outside of group time: varies
- Social event or outreach: 2-3 hours/semester
- Attend leadership gatherings: twice annually
- View and engage with leader training videos: 20-30 minutes/month
- Communication with Groups Pastor or Campus Leadership Team: ongoing



Group Life - The How

How to Shape the Group Meeting Time **most common, but not the only way*

20 minutes of hanging out / relationship building

This time can also be spent having a snack time, getting the children situated with the babysitter, introducing new group members, and catching up with friends.

55 minutes of teaching and discussion

This is the main teaching session. It may consist of a discussion related to the Leader Guide, which is a Bible study based on the scripture from the weekend message. Leader Guides also contain thoughtfully written questions which are intended to draw out personal experiences, conversation, and discussion about the meaning and application of the scriptures.

15 minutes of praying for one another

One of the greatest blessings of group life is learning to pray for one another. This speaks to God's heart while teaching group members how important it is to pray, how to pray, and why we pray.

How to Lead an Effective Group Meeting

For many Group Leaders, one of the most intimidating things we do is facilitating a group discussion. Very few of us feel like we'll have all the right answers or that we can handle whatever curve balls will be thrown our way. To make matters worse, it's challenging to gauge whether we're doing a good job or not.

But here's the good news - that's not what leading a group discussion is really about. You don't have to have all of the right answers. You don't have to lead the perfect discussion every time. You don't even have to get through all of the material in each meeting.

When you're leading your group, the main goals are to create discussion around the scripture you're studying and to foster meaningful relationships. You want to challenge people to think about the topic at hand, create a safe environment for people to share their thoughts, and help everyone feel valued about the input they've offered. That's all you've got to do. Thankfully, there are some established practices and principles that can help accomplish those goals.



Components of an Effective Group Meeting

Interaction with each other

This is relationship-building time. It should include icebreakers to facilitate sharing time and fellowship. A relationship building time is crucial for any group, even if group members know each other. The leader can use a question or icebreaker that will help everyone get to know each other better. Never underestimate the importance of creating an atmosphere where people feel at home. Icebreakers or other relational interaction are great for this, and you'll find that food always helps. It also makes people feel more comfortable. Jesus taught 90 percent of the time in the context of a meal.

Interaction with God's Word

This is when the group studies and applies God's Word together. This is the real meat of the group. Interaction with the Word is central, but sometimes the other sections of the group session make the time in the Word come alive.

Interaction with God in prayer

Spend time praying. As a group grows together, prayer increases in importance. A new group usually won't feel comfortable praying together. You can share briefly about prayer, discussing why we pray or how to pray. Give them time to warm up to group prayer. You could pray for the group meeting and maybe ask a more mature member to pray at the end of the meeting. Some groups, even though they are made up of young believers, enjoy sharing prayer requests with each other. This helps the group bond together and helps their faith grow as they see God's answers. The prayer time might become the group's favorite time.

Preparing to Interact with God's Word

Apply the lesson yourself:

You can't lead a good discussion and point a group toward life changing application if you haven't studied and applied it yourself. If you're using the Leader Guide, you will usually get that on the Thursday or Friday of the previous week. This will give you ample time to process through it. Some Leaders print it and take it with them to worship to make notes as the message is given. Study the lesson, asking God to teach you from His Word. Consider how the passage exposes our brokenness. Ask God to show you how he wants you to respond to Christ through what you are learning. If you're personally involved with the material, you'll find it easier to provide personal illustrations.



Focus on the big idea of the lesson

Go back through it and think about how to help the group discover and apply the truths of the lesson. Here are three steps that will help you prepare to lead the lesson.

1. **Pray.** No matter how confident you feel in your ability to lead a group, continually ask God to guide you in your planning and implementation. You can plant a seed and water it, but God must cause the growth. You can prepare a brilliant lesson, but God must change lives. Spend time asking God to change you and the people in your group. Ask Him for wisdom and direction as you prepare.
2. **Discover the big idea.** If you're using the Leader Guide, that will be clear. After you've spent some time studying the passage, summarize the big idea of your passage in a single sentence. In light of what this passage is saying, answer the following questions:
 - What do I want them to understand and believe?
 - What do I want them to experience?
 - How do I want them to respond to Christ?

Write down your answers to 2 and 3 at the start of the lesson. This will help you focus your questions and allocate your time around the key objectives of the study.

3. **Go through the lesson and choose good questions.** If you're not using the Leader Guide, which comes with questions, select questions that will help group members discover and apply the truths of the lesson. Think of specific examples you can share from your own life. Focus the lesson on the objectives. Keep in mind that you want them to discover and apply the truth themselves. One of the most important skills in group leadership is not having all of the right answers, but rather, asking the right questions.
 - Ask open-ended questions. Avoid the yes/no, true/false, multiple-choice questions. You want to ask questions that require people to share some actual thoughts or feelings and be self-reflective.
 - Ask follow-up questions. Many people default to staying pretty surface-level with their answers to your questions, so get in the habit of not letting them off the hook. Ask more questions that follow up on their response. Here are some examples of good follow-up questions for the short/simple answers that people often give: *What makes you say that? How do you feel about that? How do you think that has affected you?* The idea is to get at the core of what people are really trying to say.



How to Identify & Train an Apprentice Leader

Identifying an Apprentice involves discerning two key things within an individual - character and ability.

Discerning Character

Five questions to evaluate the heart and habits of a potential apprentice:

1. Will they follow? In order to be a successful leader you must know how to follow a leader.
2. Will they serve? Are they willing to pitch in to help make things happen?
3. Will they learn? Becoming a leader is an on-going learning and growing process.
4. Will they sacrifice? At the core of leadership is giving up what we want to do so we can fulfill what God is calling us to do.
5. Will they be honest? Maturity requires honesty about our own walk and what gifts and abilities God has given us.

Discerning Ability

Five qualities that help indicate potential:

1. Competence – Identify what they are good at. In what skills or areas do they excel?
2. Capacity – The ability to stretch and grow beyond their current level. Where are they currently pushing for more capacity?
3. Energy – Do they show drive, jump in, and take initiative? How do they show they are unsatisfied simply sitting in the status quo?
4. Relational Skills – To be a leader you must be able to win over and influence people. Who do they have relational influence over?
5. Intelligence – Practical wisdom and critical thinking. Emotional intelligence (the capability of individuals to recognize their own emotions and those of others, discern between different feelings and label them appropriately, use emotional information to guide thinking and behavior, and manage and/or adjust emotions to adapt to environments or achieve one's goals) is also a key quality that is very helpful when leading people.

Training & preparing an Apprentice to become a Group Leader can be simplified into a four step process.

1. “I do, You watch” – The first step in developing Apprentices is to allow them close access to see what you do as a leader. This proximity allows them to see your practices of leadership and to ask questions about the habits and thinking that guide you. While they should observe and ask questions, this should not remove them from their active participation as group members.



Action Step Idea: Create a regular time when the Apprentice can participate in your planning process for group and dialog about the previous group experience. This may be two separate meetings; planning may take up to 60 minutes (can be virtual), and debriefing can take as little as 15 minutes. Ideally, debriefing would happen directly after the group ends while everything is still fresh in everyone's mind.

2. "I do, You help" – Once the Apprentice has begun observing, it is time to give them an opportunity to carry some weight by doing tasks you would normally do.

Action Step Ideas:

- Give the Apprentice responsibility for organizing the weekly food/drinks for the group.
 - Allow the Apprentice to carry out the planning and implementation of a social outing or service experience.
 - Let the Apprentice be in charge of prayer requests/emails or challenge them to care for a specific group member.
 - Begin to give them specific pieces of the group gathering- opening questions, prayer, or exploring and application questions.
 - Give the Apprentice some responsibility for caring for the group members.
3. "You do, I help" – Giving an Apprentice tasks should lead towards giving them increasing levels of ongoing responsibility. They should begin to feel as if they are able to carry just as much leadership weight as you.

Action Step Ideas:

- Give the Apprentice one (or multiple) weeks where they are in charge of planning the group Bible study and discussion. You are there to "help," but they are actually leading.
 - Set up a regular rhythm where the Apprentice leads, and you help as needed.
 - Make sure you give appropriate feedback and encouragement concerning the Apprentice's leading.
4. "You do, I do something else" – At some point, the Apprentice is ready to jump out and lead on their own. They might be hesitant, so strongly encourage them as they take on the role of Group Leader. Typically, this signals a point when the Leader has an opportunity to go and do something new.

Action Step Idea: We recommend 1 of 3 options for group multiplication:

- The Apprentice takes over leading the current group while you start a new group.



- You continue to lead your group, and your Apprentice launches to start a new group.
- Your current group multiplies into two groups – one led by you and one by your former Apprentice.



How to Disciple Your Group Members

Begin by Having a Life Worth Imitating

If you want to share your life, you need a life that is worthy to share! We need to remember that discipleship is a contact sport; we will rub off on people, both our good and poor habits. So we need to be mindful of our good as well as our bad habits.

Spend Time with Your Disciple

Disciple-making must begin with a regular rhythm of studying the Bible. Think about beginning in one of the Gospels, like the Gospel of John or Mark and learn to ask questions as you read through it. Two basic questions could be, “what does this text say?” and “what am I going to do about it?” Please remember that the process of discipleship is going to look different with each person and that it can be as simple as getting with someone and asking them questions. You may want to attend an event that the disciple attends, like their graduation party, their business, or ballgame.

Challenge Your Disciple

Ask questions that range from what they are learning in their journey through scripture, to how they are applying what they are learning or how they are processing their particular life situation in light of the Bible. As important as questions are, the process of discipleship is one in which you show your disciple how much you care about their spiritual journey.

Correct Your Disciple

Sometimes discipling requires you to warn others about the choices they’re making. People grow when you teach them general truths, yes, but also when you correct their particular errors. Part of being a Christian is recognizing that sin deceives us, and that we need other believers to help us see the things we cannot see about ourselves. New sins become visible in the course of our discipling relationships. Ultimately, the work of correction belongs to the Holy Spirit, who is always involved with the discipleship process.

Pray with Your Disciple

Your time with your disciple should always include a time of praying with and over them. This not only shows them that you care enough to pray for them, but also teaches them how to pray for themselves and for others. Remember, this also becomes easier when we realize that God is actually with us in the discipleship process; His children are never isolated from the vine that is providing the needed fuel to engage with other people.



Love Your Disciple

To add a final angle, discipling is a form of mutual love. Yes, there's something of a teacher-student relationship, but there will also be peer-to-peer mutuality and love, such that the discipling often goes both ways. The discipler will also be blessed and encouraged in the faith by those he's/she's discipling. Even as you work to do them spiritual good, they do you spiritual good. They help you better follow Jesus. Together you learn what Paul means in Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom." Together you work to fulfill Hebrews 10:24-25: "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." In discipling, the goal is to love less mature Christians by helping them live in light of eternity.



How to Shepherd Your Group Members

One of the greatest gifts you can give to your group members (and to the ministry of Grace Fellowship) is to shepherd your group members well. As the Group Leader, you are an extension of the Pastor. The way you care for and lead your group members will have lasting and eternal implications.

- *Good shepherds lead from the heart.* They know each sheep in their care and will work hard to get them to their destination. The Group Leader's role is to help the people in their group take their next spiritual steps. A shepherd leader will work hard to make sure no one is left behind on their spiritual journey.
- *Good shepherds lead with compassion.* Jesus (the ultimate shepherd) set the example as a leader who always had compassion for His followers - even when it was most inconvenient.
- *Good shepherds lead from the front.* "When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice" (John 10:4). A leader that people will follow is a leader willing to go first. This may mean sharing a vulnerable story with the group to set the example of authenticity. The group will model the behavior you display. If you want your group to be open, open your heart first. If you want the group to serve, serve them first. Leading from the front does not mean dictating direction. It means setting the example for others to follow.
- *Good shepherds lead sacrificially.* There will be times when leading your group will be a sacrifice. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). While your sacrifices will probably not involve laying your life down for someone, leading your group weekly is a sacrifice. You have to keep up with the Leader Guides, etc. You will need occasional breaks to not burn out, but that sacrifice of time and effort will lead to a group that bonds through consistency.
- *Good shepherds lead by chasing.* There are times when your group members will begin to fall away from the group. Sometimes this is the first indication that they are falling away from the church, and maybe even away from the faith. Good shepherds recognize that right away and have the conversations that need to happen to prevent it. Remember the parable of the lost sheep. The group leader must treat each group member as the one lost sheep.



How to Host a Grace Group

The following are some great tips to create the environment which serves the group members well.

- Pick up dirty dishes, clothing, and stray pairs of shoes from the room where the group will meet. Vacuum/sweep the floors if needed.
- Pray for the meeting and the members by name as you clean up in the meeting room. Pray afterwards as well.
- Before anyone arrives, bring in chairs so everyone has a place to sit, and arrange them in a circle. Turn on exterior lights and greet each person as they arrive.
- If the meeting room is really large for the size of the group, move furniture in so everyone is sitting closer to one another.
- Turn off the tv before anyone arrives and leave it off, even if the big game isn't over or is about to begin. However, music in the background like soft jazz or instrumental may be enjoyable to your group.
- Remove pets from the room for the entire evening.
- Ask people in the group to help put the room back in order after the meeting.
- Make sure the guest bathroom has an extra roll of toilet paper in plain sight and that you remove all matches, candles, toothbrushes, and prescription medicines. People have done stupid and crazy things in my bathroom on group night.
- Expect visitors who've never been to your home. Be sure to greet them, shake their hand, show them where the kitchen and restroom are located, and make them feel at home in your home.
- When it's time for everyone to leave, tell everyone it's time to go and you look forward to seeing them next week. Don't be shy about politely running off the lonely souls who haven't a clue that it's past your bedtime.
- Don't assume your house doesn't smell like a wet dog, a fish market, or a litter box. Ask someone in the group that you know well to tell you if the house stinks so you can do something about it. Keep deodorizer on hand so you can do something about it immediately.
- Don't assume the temperature and lighting in the room is good for everyone because you're comfortable. Ask and you shall receive clear signs that the room is too cold, hot, or dark for everyone.



FAQs

How can I follow the Leader Guide and be open to the Holy Spirit?

Remember - the end goal of a group discussion is life application and relationship building, not perfect discussions or getting through all the material. So stay open to the Holy Spirit during each group meeting and follow where He leads. It's also important to spend some time in prayer before each group meeting. Ask that God would lead the discussion where He wants it to go. And get an Apprentice who can help you facilitate so that you don't have to go it alone. Remember that God is the one who does the work in people's hearts - we are not responsible for it! We are simply creating an environment for community and life change to happen.

Where can our group find other resources or Bible studies to consider?

The Groups Team has assembled a resource page for just this purpose. You can find it at www.gracefellowship.cc/groupresources. In addition to these resources, your Groups Team has secured for you a subscription to RightNowMedia (rightnow.org) which contains hundreds of Bible studies, videos, and book resources for you to use in your group and personal study. To gain access to this resource, email groups@gracefellowship.cc.

How will my group find a suitable babysitter?

The responsibility of finding a suitable babysitter is up to the group. However, the Groups Team can help by connecting your Group Leadership with the high school ministry which usually knows high school students who are trained and willing to serve in this way. The group should always chip in to pay the babysitter(s) the appropriate amount. **Note: it is ok to ask all of your group members to chip in to pay the babysitter, since the babysitter's efforts are there to benefit the entire group.*

How do I create a safe environment?

Trust is perhaps the most vital key to really making your group a place where genuine community can be formed. Group members need to be able to trust each other that the group is a safe place - a place where they can get real and know that they will not be judged, gossiped about, and so on. When someone shares in the group - no matter how much you may disagree, or how theologically incorrect they may be - make sure they feel affirmed about their answer in the moment. Later, you can (and often should) talk to them about their comments outside of group, but it should be done one-on-one.



How do I coach the conversation dominator?

This person always has plenty to say and loves to be the first person to say it. Remind everyone in the group guidelines that this is an equal participation group. So if you have 10 people in the group, you want each person to contribute their 10 percent to the discussion. If the problem continues, talk to the person outside of the group. Affirm them in what they do contribute, and tell them you need their help in getting some of the other people in the group to open up and share. Sometimes you can go as far as to ask them to commit to not being the first person to answer a question or to only answer when you call on them - or to even work out a subtle signal you can give them when they are talking too much.

How do I encourage the non-talker?

This is the quiet person in the group who never wants to share. If you think that doing so won't scare them off even more - that they just need a little prompting - try calling on them periodically to share an answer. Also, be sure to affirm them big-time when they do respond. If that doesn't work, talk to the person outside of group. Again, affirm them in what they do contribute, and let them know that you want more people to get to hear their perspective. Remind them how valuable all of the different perspectives are to the entire group.

How do I reign in the tangent talker?

This person loves to get the group way off track by starting random tangents and rabbit holes. First, don't get upset at the tangents, and feel free to go off on them once in a while. When the time comes, firmly bring the group back on track. If the problem becomes excessive, again, talk to the person outside of the group. Affirm them in what they do contribute, but let them know about the challenge you have in trying to facilitate a good group and bring across certain points each week. Let them know how the tangents make your job harder. Ask them how they can help you.

How do I coach the insensitive person?

This individual gives advice, makes fun of answers and people, cuts people off, or does a variety of other things to offend members within the group. This person is dangerous to the health of your group! He/she can keep it from being a safe group more quickly than anything else. Remind everyone of the group guidelines again, and definitely have the one-on-one conversation outside of group to let the person know how important a safe group is, along with what he/she can do to help make that happen.



How can I help my group members gel and grow in their relationships?

There are several things you can do. For example, do things outside of group time. When you take the group outside of your meeting night and outside of your living room, relationships will grow deeper, faster. People probably want to meet outside of group time, but they need you as the leader to initiate it. Have everyone go out for ice cream or meet at the park for a cookout on Saturday. You name it.

In addition to social events outside of group time, you will want to have your group serve together. One possibility is to mention your desire for your group to serve together after a couple of meetings, and solicit ideas for where you might serve. You can also look for serving options in your community and then bring your suggestions to the group. The Local Impact Team at the church can provide opportunities as well.

One issue with doing things outside of group night, in our fast-paced overly-busy society, is that people may say they want to but don't have the time. One way of overcoming that issue is to do your non-meeting get-togethers on your group night. Instead of meeting for your normal living room Bible study, maybe once or twice a semester you meet at a homeless shelter where you serve dinner together.

With serving together outside of your group time, you can start small. Instead of making an ongoing commitment, try something one time, just to give people a taste and to set the precedent for your group. Remember this phrase; the group that has supper together and sweats together, grows together!

How do I go about inviting people to my group?

First off, begin to pray that God will soften their hearts and create opportunities for the building of your friendship. Ask God to make it clear when the time is right to invite your friends to your group, or to church for that matter. Invite them into your life long before inviting them to your group, or church. Do things together. Serve them by delivering a meal when they are sick, watching their kids, and listening when they need to talk. Then, slowly introduce them to others in your group. Invite an unsaved friend over for dessert and coffee the same night you invite friends from your group. If they seem to connect well, look for ways to get them together in the future. The more "group people" your friend feels comfortable around, the less threatening an invitation to your group will be.

Start small. Invite them to "neutral" group functions - a women's luncheon, a cookout, etc. A one-day retreat or social functions that include a short devotional may be ways to ease your friends into the spiritual aspects of the group. Talk about the benefits. When the opportunity arises, casually share with them how the group has been a blessing in your life. When you sense the time



is right, simply ask your friends if they would like to attend your group the next time you meet. If they say no, don't become discouraged, and don't give up. Refuse to allow their negative response to cause an uncomfortable tension in your relationship. As you continue to be their friend, other opportunities will arise. When the timing seems right, ask again. If they say yes, prepare them for the experience - it will reduce their anxiety. Let them know what they will wear and describe the basic format of your group. If they have children, let them know what is available for the kids. Don't let them be surprised by anything.

How do I connect with people who may have stopped attending my group?

Here are some things to do when people inch toward leaving your group:

- Don't freak out. This does not stamp you with the World's Worst Small Group Leader award. Breathe. Chances are, the reason they are drifting has nothing to do with you. Work shifts get moved around, kids have music lessons and baseball games, illnesses and life crises occur. Or, they have just allowed themselves to lose sight of their priorities.
- Start talking. As the Group Leader, this is an opportunity for you to speak into their discipleship life. Remind them of the goal of group life and their participation in it. Remind them of their own journey toward Jesus-centered living. Ask them to meet you for a friendly cup of coffee or meal in a non-threatening tone and talk with them about why they have missed group meetings. Lend your support and listening ear. Is there anything you can do to encourage them to rethink their priorities? Learn what's going on in their life. Did something change? What are some steps to help them return? Be an encourager. Be supportive, but remember the goal of moving them closer to Jesus-centered living.
- If the reason they are missing has more to do with logistics, time, or content, then talk about that. If the time your group meets doesn't work anymore, can you change it? Do they feel as though they are not being heard or not being challenged? Do they dislike the topic? Remember to approach your conversation prayerfully and in humility. The most important thing is for them to feel heard, cared for, and valued, however, it shouldn't be easy for them to just walk away from group, or they may be leaving the church soon.
- Lastly, move on. Once you talk with them, maybe a couple of times, you can determine whether or not their thoughts or suggestions are valid and something you want to incorporate. Remember, you can't please everybody. Although Jesus did feed the crowd, He didn't try to please them.



How do I add/delete people from my group roster in YourGraceChurch? AND, How do I take attendance for my group?

For these and any other questions related to managing your group on YourGraceChurch, please go to www.gracefellowship.cc/groupresources.

Who are other staff member resources for me as a Leader?

Besides your Campus Pastor and his staff team, there are others who may be helpful if you have needs. The following church staff are available to you:

Pastor Jake McCullough, Discipleship Pastor, jake.mccullough@gracefellowship.cc
Jake gives leadership to all things Discipleship, Groups, Bible Studies, and also the Residency and Intern Programs.

Pastor Kevin Kellogg, Groups Pastor, kevin.kellogg@gracefellowship.cc
Kevin gives leadership to Pickerington groups and is supportive of the other campus teams.

Laura Mulligan, Care Team Coordinator, laura.mulligan@gracefellowship.cc
Laura gives leadership to all the Care, Prayer, and Financial Assistance Teams. Laura can coordinate counseling for group leaders and members should those needs arise.

Kelly Croce, Discipleship Administrator, kelly.croce@gracefellowship.cc
Kelly cares for all things administrative for the Groups and Bible Study Ministries. She is also the Groups Team expert on the use of YourGraceChurch.

Ronee de Leon, Director of Connections & Local Impact, ronee.deleon@gracefellowship.cc
Ronee gives leadership to the Local Impact Ministry, which interacts with groups for outreach projects. She can help groups plan serving projects within the community or with our Local Impact Partners.

