

How to Start a Small Group

The 90% Rule

90% of successfully leading a small group is prayer and love. If you pray regularly for the people in your group and you love them by spending time together and listening to them, you will be a great small group leader. The other 10% you can get from this website and your ministry's resources.

How Do I Start a Small Group?

Pray.

Don't skip this point! "God, please give me the people you want to bring together in my small group. Bring me the ones you want me to help get closer to you." Then, be friendly and accepting of everyone—some will be easy to connect with and others won't. You'll learn from both. Assume God answered your prayer no matter who ends up in your group. Your group members will all be in different places regarding a relationship with God. Some may not have considered having one.

Consider a purpose statement.

The overall purpose of a small group is to build meaningful friendships and deepen our relationship with God. Pray and consider how your small group will pursue those two general goals. The general goals are like ice cream; your small group is a flavor. For example: Jack's purpose statement is to learn to live as men of integrity through studying the book of James. Ellen's is to study the character of God and trust him more.

Invite.

Introduce yourself and some other people you've invited. Keep inviting. "Hi, I'm Mike. (Some get-to-know-you conversation here...) I'm leading a small group Bible study Wednesday evenings and it'd be great if you could join us. Come out to ice cream tonight and meet some of the others."

Gather at least four or more.

Then, have your first meeting. Before, build friendships with people you are gathering for your group. Hang out with them at the main meeting, social gatherings (pick them up or tell them to meet you there), or get together one-on-one. After a week or two, when four or more commit to meet as a group, have your first meeting. Keep inviting more to join.

What Do I Do the First Meeting?

Plan beforehand.

See “[Components of a Small Group](#)” for a basic plan. Choose from the “[Relationship Builders](#).” Plan the short Bible study with questions that get people to talk. See “[Build Your Own Bible Discussion](#)” and “[How to Lead an Effective Discussion](#).” You can try one of the ready-to-use “[Bible Discussions](#).”

Smile.

Be enthusiastic. (Hide your nervousness.) Greet each person warmly when he enters the room. Introduce him to the others. “Hey, John! Good to see you! John, this is Andy. Andy’s from Seattle. Where did you say you were from? (and so on....).” Welcome each person warmly like this every week.

Eat.

Food and drinks distract people from the discomfort they may initially feel when they arrive for your first few meetings.

Introduce.

While they eat, do something from “Relationship Builders: Introductions or Name Games.” LINK You as the leader go first answering relationship-building questions to model the transparency you want to happen in the group. (Note: In the Bible discussions you get the others to share first.)

Get to know each other.

Choose from “[Relationship Builders: History Telling Activities](#) or [History Telling Questions Beginning Level](#).” Again, leader leads. The more open, transparent, and accepting you are in responding to the questions, the more likely the group members will follow suit. Focus intently on each speaker and maintain consistent eye contact. Ask the others to do the same. Say something like, “As each one answers a question, let’s honor him or her with our full attention. Then when it’s your turn, we’ll do the same for you.”

Decide on group values.

Have the group discuss and come to an agreement on the things they value as a group. For example, what’s said in the group, stays in the group; keep focused attention on the speaker; etc. Write them down. If you prefer, you can use the “[Small Group Guidelines](#)” Hand each person a copy and take turns reading the points. Then, ask group members, “Which one stood out to you? How do you think it will benefit our group?”

Do a short Bible study.

For the first study, you could choose Scriptures that have formed your goals for the group. For example: Julie says, “I’ve prayed all summer for our group. My prayer, and my goal, is that our group will learn to love each other and help each other follow Jesus more closely. John 13:34-35 sums it up for me.”

Read the text aloud.

Possible questions (Notice how the questions invite conversation and life sharing around the Scripture.):

- Name someone who loved you enough to help you along your spiritual journey. How did he or she influence you?
- Look up “disciple” in the dictionary. Where do you see yourself on the journey of becoming Jesus’ disciple?
- In what area would you like to learn about or develop your relationship with God?

Pray for each other.

One idea is to give a piece of paper to each person and ask them to write down one thing they want God’s help with this week. Collect the requests. Divide them between you and a couple other people you know are comfortable praying aloud. (Ask them beforehand.) Pray a short prayer for each request.

Begin developing group ownership.

Ask someone to bring treats next week.

As you continue to meet, assign other parts of the small group meeting to members such as treat coordinator (texts a reminder to the treat-bringer during the week), information about coming events, prayer journal (records prayers and answers), history telling questions, Bible discussion (train them first), worship, outreach/service opportunity, opening prayer, closing prayer, etc. (See “[Relationship Builders](#),” “[Worship Ideas for Small Groups](#)” and “[Prayer Ideas for Small Groups](#).”)

Commit to the group for three months or a semester.

Encourage people to come a couple times to see if they want to stay in the group. Then, ask that they make the group a priority for three months or a semester. And then members can evaluate whether they want to continue in the group after that.

Bring this up again in a couple weeks. Explain that committing to building community with a group of people takes consistent showing up and intentional investment. It builds the kind of character that will stay faithful and true when other relational commitments are tested. We were meant to follow Jesus together.

Close the meeting.

Do your best to start and end the meeting on time. This respects and honors people for investing their time in the group. After the meeting, make it a point to individually thank members for coming. Communicate that you were glad they came. Do this after every meeting.

Hang out.

Talk about anything. Eat more. Go to someone’s house for a movie. Go out for ice cream. Tell stories. Help a group member. Be together. Even if everyone can’t stay, and even if you can’t hang out after every meeting.

Some Good Advice

- Your members will take their cues from you. So, it's important for you to be enthusiastic about the possibilities that lie ahead for your group. They're more likely to get excited themselves.
- Greet them individually when they arrive and thank them individually when they leave. Your simple friendliness communicates that you, and God, are glad they were born and are in your life.
- Model however you want the members to act and live and how you want them to treat each other. The apostle Paul said, Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. Philippians 4:9
- Commit to confidentiality. What's said in the group, stays in the group. If confidentiality is violated, immediately meet privately with the members involved to deal with the situation. Teach people when to keep information to themselves.
- Keep your ears open during your meetings. You may discover things about your members that give you a connecting point later. Even insignificant details may signal important issues in their lives. If you don't trust your memory, jot down some notes after the meeting. Then bring it up one-on-one with them later.
- Guide people to answer from their own personal lives and experience. Ask for specific ways they will apply the Scriptures. You can ask, "How do you specifically apply that in your own life?" or "How have you personally experienced that principle, or verse?" or "What does that look like in your own life?"
- Be OK with silence after a question. People often need time to think before they answer.
- Stay flexible enough to address a member's immediate need during the group time. This shouldn't happen every week. You'll need to decide when an issue is sufficiently critical that you need to deal with it instead of your original plan. Listen to the Holy Spirit's guidance.
- Don't allow anyone to attack people in the group.
- Make a general practice of giving any necessary correction privately.

Evaluate Yourself Regularly

From: *Talking the Walk* by Dave Bartlett & Bill Muir. Zondervan, 2000, pp.12-13.

- Is my group continuing to learn and grow?
- Are we having difficulty being authentic with each other?
- Are there some leadership tasks I can delegate to my group members for their greater ownership?
- Have I given members the opportunity to tell their spiritual journey to the group?
- Have I challenged members to adjust wrong thinking or to respond to Christ personally?
- Are we truly enjoying our time together each week?
- Have our meetings fallen into a rut?
- Am I regularly praying for my group members?
- Am I coming to the group as a co-learner?
- Am I giving advice rather than actively listening?
- Does each member have the opportunity to meet regularly for discipleship with someone one-on-one?