

Groups  
New Leader  
Training Manual 2019



**Groups**

## Table of Contents

1. Groups, Vision, Values and “The Wins”	5
2. Leaders and Core Teams	9
3. Spiritual Formation	11
4. Missional Living	14
5. Strengthening Relationships	16
6. Leader Development	18
7. The Group Meeting	19

## Appendix

- Group Agreement
- Relational Dynamics
- Praying as a Group
- Building Community between Group Meetings

“The development of meaningful relationships where every member carries a significant sense of belonging is central to what it means to be the church. This is a God-ordained gathering of people that is so strong that even the ages of hell will not overcome it.”

Randy Frazee



## Why This Training Manual?

The truth is you don't need this manual to start and lead a group. People start groups without instructions all the time. The real issue is how do we cultivate a group environment that allows it to thrive.

Leading a group effectively over the long run is one of the most difficult yet important tasks in making and growing disciples. We find the importance of shared work expressed in Paul's writings in Ephesians 4:11-13, "It was he who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God—a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature." In Paul's words, inspired by the Holy Spirit, we see a picture of the Church, arm in arm, doing the work of the Church together. Without sustainable, caring, and meaningful small group experiences, churches will struggle to offer authentic Christian community that so many of us crave.

We are grateful that many of our leaders are gifted, experienced, and successful in so many walks of life. We love that you may have led an amazing group in your previous church or launched a start-up that turned into a Fortune 500 company. We also value that you may have never led a group before. We kept all these aspects in view as we worked on this resource for you.

So what makes this Groups Training Manual important? It will help you understand our Groups philosophy here at Grace Chapel and provide you tools to flourish as a leader and as a group. And our Groups philosophy begins with our vision and values:

**We want to be in community practicing the way of Jesus.**

Expressed in four core values:

- Spiritual Formation
- Missional Living
- Strengthening Relationships
- Leader Development

We will unpack these values in the pages that follow.

# Chapter 1 - Groups, Vision, Values and “The Wins”

## Group Life Vision - "We want to be small groups practicing the way of Jesus."

One of the challenges most groups ministry have is determining what qualifies as a group? For our purposes, we are defining a group as follows:

**A Grace Chapel Group** is a consistent gathering of about 8-20 members who are **practicing the way of Jesus** led and facilitated by lay leaders who are serving with these 4 core values:

- **Spiritual Formation**
- **Missional Living**
- **Strengthening Relationships**
- **Leader Development**

“**The way of Jesus**” casts a vision of God’s grace for us as Christ-followers in community with one another. As we see in Scripture, there was something magnificent to the way Jesus did every thing. There was the deep and profound spiritual way that Jesus interacted with the Father. Further we are inspired by this missional way that Jesus served, modeling and teaching to go the extra-mile for others. And lastly, we see the relational kindness Jesus extended to those around him, whether it be his disciples, or the hurting people in the crowds looking for him. We believe that as individual Christ-followers and in Christian community, the way of Jesus is transformative and grace-filled.

Whether you are a new believer or a life-long Christian and wherever you are now in your faith journey, practicing the way of Jesus is the hope of the Christian life described in these four values:

**1. Spiritual Formation** - Practicing the way of Jesus by prioritizing our spiritual life in a busy and demanding world. Becoming like Jesus is the objective of spiritual formation and we become more and more like Jesus when we pray, read and apply Scripture, confront our dysfunction and selfishness. We become more and more like Jesus when we become aware at our attempt in failing to become like Jesus. In our failure, we confess, we repent, and we rely on the Holy Spirit’s leading to grow spiritually. Thus we are being formed.

**2. Missional Living** - Practicing the way of Jesus by demonstrating God’s love where it is not. First, we must begin by understanding that we are joining God’s mission in bringing redemption to all that is broken. To be on mission is to live in rhythms of God’s love so that others can experience God’s grace.

**3. Strengthening Relationships** - Practicing the way of Jesus with love in all our relationships. Throughout the Gospels, we read how he showed love to

those he was near, to those he encountered in his ministry and how he taught us to love our neighbors, strangers and even our enemies.

**4. Leader Development** - Practicing the way of Jesus in our calling to lead, serve, and create communities of belonging here in God's Kingdom. We each have been uniquely gifted and have been entrusted to minister to those whom our lives intersect with and walk alongside.

**It's in growing in these core values that we can practice the way of Jesus as individual believers and in community. And so, what are we asking our Group Leaders to do?**

**Thematic Asks:**

- Be Champions of the "Way of Jesus."  
In this season of group life, we are calling upon leaders to carry the banner and own the mantra of following the way of Jesus. If leaders are not Christ-like, "Christian" then becomes just an empty adjective. If leaders are pursuing a life like Jesus, then "Christian" is a powerful pursuit capable of transforming your life and those around you.
- Group Leaders embody, model and share the vision and values of Groups.  
By the grace of God, we are all leaders humbly pursuing to live for Christ and invite others into the practicing to Christ's ways.
- Grow in your personal love for Jesus, grow in their personal spiritual formation and grow in their love for others.  
Jesus said the greatest commandments are to love God with all that they have and then to love their neighbors as themselves (Mark 12:33).
- Cultivate relationships, be the caretakers and frontline of support for your group, and nurture healthy group engagement by inviting others to share opportunities to love others well.  
This means knowing the needs, struggles and joys of group members.  
Group members have to feel a sense of safety & trust in order for this to happen.  
This happens in community when we gather.
- Be the stewards of the study time that points others to Christian growth and Christian engagement in our world.  
Take the lead in selecting and facilitating the resources and studies that will help people in your group grow in the way of our Lord.
- Identify, lead and offer opportunities for service within the church and beyond its walls to live on mission as Christ followers wherever we go.
- Grow as Leaders – Discovering and developing their gifting. And also by investing and developing a "Core Team" to share the group's ownership and maximize their spiritual gifting.

### **The Logistical Asks:**

We are asking Group Leaders for “1:2:2:20”

- 1 New Leader Groups Training (Taken once after our Model Reset).
- 2 Developmental Leader Trainings that happen on campuses each year.
- 2 Meetings (at least) with Group Coach or Campus Pastor.
- 20/40/x Group meetings  
Some groups will meet weekly, some every other week - depends on your type of group. See your Campus Pastor or a Central Pastor if you need help discerning frequency of meeting.
  
- Commit to a year of leading the group (Generally from September to June).
  
- Be a member or on the road to membership at Grace Chapel. See your Campus Pastor to get started or to get help with any questions or concerns.

In our new season of group ministry, we want to describe the “wins” of group life. What does it look like when we are getting it right? What are the wins?

### **Leader Wins:**

- Modeling the “Way of Jesus” (expressed in our Group life themes of spiritual formation, strengthening relationships, and missional living)
- Cultivating engagement and navigating the challenges of group dynamics
- Identifying what “Group wins/moments” need to be celebrated

### **Group Wins:**

- Showing up, being present, being engaged in meaningful Group life
- Celebrate life transformation, relational milestones, authentic moments (including the joy-filled and the challenging)
- Celebrate a group member’s new-found step of authenticity
- Celebrate when someone takes a step of faith or risk or responsibility
- Celebrate shared group accomplishments
- Celebrate the healthy maturation of challenging group dynamics

### **Member Wins:**

- Growing in practicing in the Way of Jesus (spiritual formation, straightening relationships, missional living)
  
- Filling the relational spaces with others who are pursuing Jesus.
  - These are the people we sojourn with
  - These are the people we trust
  - These are the people we have fun with
  - Relishing in the fruit that comes from owning our participation and continuation in the group, often discovered in the beauty of relationships, and also after conflict through forgiveness, reconciliation

## Chapter 2: Leaders and Group Core Teams

In this new season of Group Life, we want to entrust, empower and invest in you as a leader and in all those that you invite to lead your group with you. Remember, you were never meant to lead alone. Groups thrive when the responsibilities are shared. It gives everyone opportunities to be involved with the life of your group and discover giftings that bring joy and honor God.

You are a leader. And there are so many different types of leaders with a wide spectrum of gifting. Make no mistake, yours is significant, and God-given. Avoid the mistake of thinking that you don't have the "typical leader" gifting and find peace that God has blessed you. You will discover, develop, and share your gifting and as you grow as a leader, you will serve your group and beyond.

Serving as a group leader in a church has a unique context. For one, no one actually has to listen to you. Unlike the workplace where there are org charts, policies and supervisors, it's all optional in a church setting. If you choose not to listen to your leader or supervisor at work, you might get fired. However as a lay leader and a group attendee, these dynamics obviously do not apply.

Instead you have been empowered with authority as a group leader by church leadership and as a result, you will lead relationally and in a number of ways that include inspiring, modeling, imitating, learning, facilitating, teaching and among other ways, collaborating together. Again, being the leader of a group doesn't mean you have the way of Jesus figured out but a spiritual guide for your group.

When we read the New Testament, we see the disciples following Jesus. They listened to Jesus' teaching, they imitated him, they asked questions to him and to each other, and of course, they relied on the power of the Holy Spirit to do great things in them and through them. The same is true for us as leaders.

There are hundreds of qualities and attributes of a leader and we want to pay special emphasis to the following:

- Be humble - pride not only goes before the fall, but humility leads the way forward
- Be a curious, life-long learner - we never have it all figured out
- Be courageous - As Winston Churchill said, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts."
- Be Spirit-led - "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13

We as a church want to help you become the servant-leader God has called you to be. And we will pray, support, and equip you to serve your group and your world.



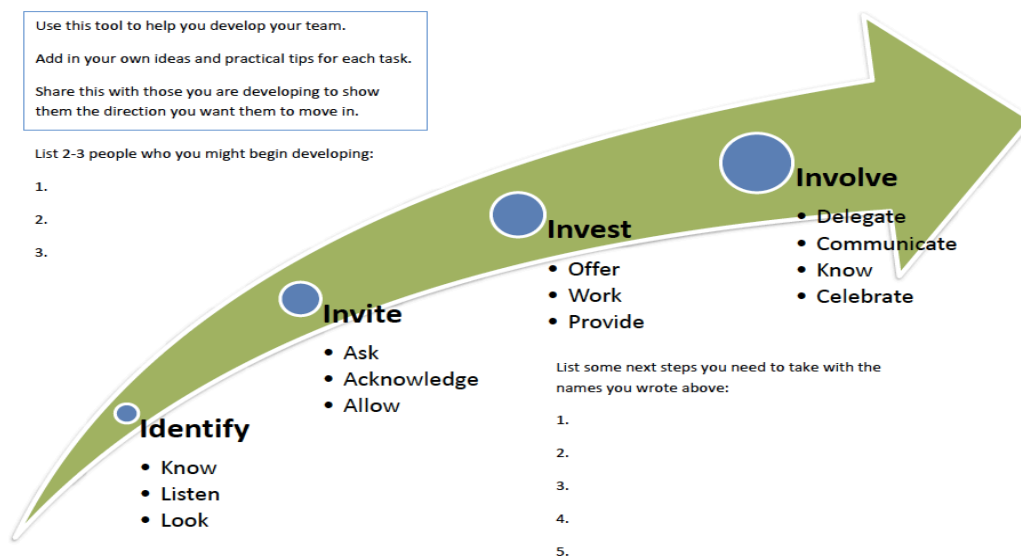
## Developing a Core Team Around You

One of the keys to success in group-life is forming a core team around you. There is no blueprint for this because every leader, gifting, and group is different. Think of it like the Apostle Paul's illustration of the body to the church in Corinth:

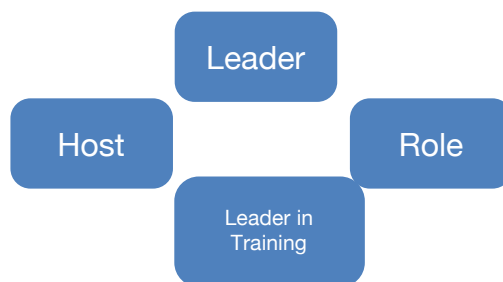
“There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body. It is the same with Christ. We were all baptized by one Holy Spirit. And so we are formed into one body. We were all given the same Spirit to drink.” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

Christian community has many parts and every part has its own function. Every group will have their own its own unique make-up. It's up to you to identify, invite, invest and involve.

### Developing Your Core Team Process Tool



Remember that every group will have a different looking Core Team as we each bring our different gifts, skills and experiences. But for sake of illustration, over time, your core team can look something like this:



Your Core Team will change in size and functionality over time depending on needs and involvement. But the key aspects are to involve and develop people around you and share the burden and joy of leadership.

# Chapter 3: Spiritual Formation

The “way of Jesus” is rooted in a growing spiritual life.

Becoming like Jesus is the objective of spiritual formation and we become more and more like Jesus when we pray, read and apply Scripture, confront our dysfunction and selfishness. We become more and more like Jesus when we become aware of our failure, in our repentance and in our reliance in the Spirit’s empowerment. Thus we are being formed.

## **Why this matters in a group context:**

To grow spiritually, you have to read Scripture and pray by yourself. If you don’t, you’ll starve. It’s also true that to grow spiritually, you have to read Scripture and pray alongside others. If you don’t, you’ll be malnourished. This is among the chief blessings of Christian community.

In fact, being in community is one of the most powerful and beautiful experiences a Christ-follower can enjoy. It’s a Spirit-filled community with fellow Spirit-filled believers that can shape us and us shape them. If you have not experienced this gift, it may be precisely what your soul is missing.

## **How we can grow in it:**

Cast a vision for spiritual formation in what you practice in your daily lives and what you practice in community together.

Encourage each other to pray, read and apply Scripture, practice disciplines like fasting (from food, from technology, from consuming, etc.), hold each other accountable, encourage through the challenges, and celebrate the wins!

In your gatherings, be intentional in your group study time, giving it enough time, adequate preparation and an abundance of passion for this hour together. If this time feels like a chore or perfunctory, the study time, regardless of topic, will always be a struggle. But when stewarded and loved, this hour will be a significant time in your group life.

**Be aware:** Over the years, the times of study can grow stale if not guarded and cared for. It will then be easier to give into the temptation to avoid studying together in favor of gathering and “fellowshipping.” While enjoying each other’s company is an important part of community life, centering the priority of spiritual formation is what makes this a Christian community and not simply a gathering of friends organized around a hobby or general interest.

## **Selecting a Study**

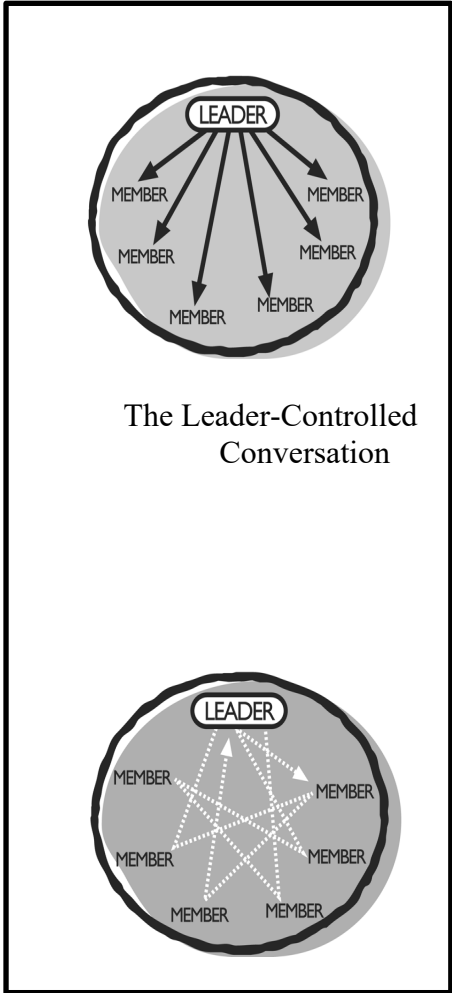
In some groups, there will be resources already prepared for you (such as groups for women meeting weekly at campus or short-term groups using Alpha or Roots or Kingdom-Living). But for those groups rotating studies throughout the year, there is an ongoing resource library to make selecting resources for your group easier and we’d like for you to start and try to select from here. It’s organized around our group values (Spiritual Formation, Missional Living, Strengthening Relationships, and Leader Development), you can expect new resources to be posted throughout the year, usually every quarter. We know that from time to time you’ll be looking for a topic that is not posted. We’re asking that you please let us know so we can help you find a great study and so that we can consider adding that resource to our curated content. This resource studies page is available at [www.grace.org/groupleaders](http://www.grace.org/groupleaders).

**Here are a few thoughts to consider when selecting a resource and leading the discussion:**

1. Many groups find it effective to change the mediums with every new study. For instance, a group may use a video series through Right Now Media for 6 meetings. Then opt to use the study guide to track with the current sermon series. Then perhaps read a book together or use a small group curriculum in physical form. You will find the change in mediums will refresh the group engagement throughout the year.
2. Gather input for what a group hopes to study, but don't make the decision by consensus. Not only is this time-consuming, it often creates an unfavorable dynamic in the group time. Tell the group you will gather input, take inventory, pray and then share your decision later.
3. Remember that groups are not seminary class environments. Groups learn best in discussing content together but also realize that content needs to be set-up by you, the leader, and the discussion needs to be facilitated well. We don't want to lecture but thoughtfully facilitate instead. Thoughtful and deeper can and must still be discussed, these are learning environments after all. Knowing this, "teaching" is more effective when the discussion is interactive and you as the leader refrain from answering every question.

**This diagram and suggestions create interaction while guiding the discussion:**

- Listen more than you talk. Resist the urge to add commentary after every question.
- Do share what you're learning. Try marking 2 or 3 questions you want to answer and make that your "sharing" boundary.
- Affirm every person after they share. (For example, "Thank you for sharing that.") In affirming people, you're not affirming every comment. Some comments may go against Scripture, so you will need to be careful. Simply invite others to share what they discovered. This creates an environment for deeper discussion and gracious conversation.
- Encourage quiet people while trying to keep the talkers from dominating. It may be easier for a person to speak up later if you call on them early in the discussion and affirm their participation. If someone has asked you not to call on them try to find out why but honor their request. Still find ways to include them in the group life.
- When appropriate, call on people by name rather than asking for random volunteers. This saves time and gives everyone a chance to answer. Also vary the order of who you call on to answer.



- Make a note of highly personal application/share questions and avoid putting anyone on the spot in a personal share question.
4. Anchor your studies in Scripture passages or solid Christian teaching from Scripture as much as possible. It's the supernatural word of God and our practical application that makes the difference.
- Consider the value of the Inductive Bible Study Method that the GC Study Guides and many of our other studies are organized this way. They are designed to facilitate a conversation that digs deeper into the passage that was preached through the Inductive principles of Observation, Interpretation and Application.
  - Consider other Bible study options or a Bible Reading Plan during a particular season (like during Advent or Lent). There are many plans available online, through Apps and keep an eye out for what GC Pastors might communicate.

\*\*We have included Guidelines for Preparing to Lead Meaningful Bible Studies in the Appendix.

5. Commit to be people of prayer again as individuals and as a group.  
The way of Jesus of spiritual formation is modeled in Scripture in the following:  
The way of Jesus is deeply committed to prayer: "Jesus went out to a mountain side to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him." (Luke 6:12-13. See also Mark 3:13)

\*\* We have included suggestions for how to guide prayer time in the Appendix.

Spend time in Scripture reading and be intentional in applying what you have read and heard. Read books, listen to podcasts, turn off devices and spend time attuning your heart to God. The Lord is always trying to invite us into grow in our spiritual formation.

## Chapter 4: Missional Living

The “way of Jesus” is missionally driven.

What is it exactly? Missional is when we show the love of God to those not experiencing it. Sometimes it looks like service, sometimes it looks like kindness to a stranger, sometimes it’s sharing the redemptive message of Jesus and sometimes it’s simply being present.

Why is it essential? It’s essential because this is how the Kingdom of God grows. It’s how the narrative of Christian love spreads and takes practical shape and form.

What Missional Isn’t:

Missional living is not merely serving in a church capacity. It’s more about moving beyond the walls of the church community. But that doesn’t mean we can’t grow missionally in church settings. In fact, it’s one of the best places to learn. It’s in Christian community that we learn about mission, use our gifting, and are inspired to serve God’s Kingdom. We are then “sent” out into our world as ambassadors for Christ to join in God’s plan of redemption for others in this broken world.

How Groups can me more missional living. Here are a few tips:

**Relationships over efficiency.** Building relationships with those you serve requires personal time investment. It’s what people can do, but organizations and systems struggle with.

**Location, location, location.** There are so many extraordinary causes, but which ones can you and your friends serve? Chances are, the ones that are closer to where you live, work, worship, and shop. Who and what do you drive past? What is nearby?

**But remember the global Church.** We must pray, support, and find expressions of care to our ministry partners. Consider how we can be faithful with the opportunities that come along the way.

**Missional living is collective and individual.** There are some opportunities that lend themselves to group participation and there are some that are best addressed one-on-one. As you build momentum, you’ll experience a swing between the personal and the group dynamic.

**Capitalize on what you and others are already doing.** The good news is that some people in your group are probably already serving missionally. Think about what deepening and/or widening that work looks like when including others. Finish this sentence: “Now that we’ve been doing this a while, we wish we had someone who....”

**Don’t wait until the whole team is on board; start with a few group members.** Not everyone in the group may be ready to jump in right away, and that’s ok. Start with a quorum of those who are ready to go – contact them, align calendars, pick a date (feel free to invite others of course), and build momentum.

**Follow-up over “once-off.”** Now that you have served in a particular capacity, a crucial step is to follow up with someone you can continue a relationship with. This is what keeps the cycle going.

**Prayer is the fuel of the missional life.** How is all of this different from general humanitarian work? We are best able to live out the redemptive message of Jesus when we are rooted in prayer and spiritual formation.

## Chapter 5: Strengthening Relationships

“God created us with a hunger for relationship - for relationship with Him and with our fellow people. At our very core we are relational beings.” Andy Stanley

The “way of Jesus” is relationship focused. Among the greatest gifts Christ-followers can give is to reflect the love of God in their relationships with those they are closest to and encounter every day. Showing God’s love was a hallmark of Jesus’ teaching and this is a foundational tenant in the way of Jesus.

Jesus taught us to love one another and said, “My command is this: **Love** each other as I have loved you (John 15:12)” and went so far as to say, “By this all people will know you are my disciples if you love one another (John 13:35).”

That’s the type of love that we need to strengthen all of our relationships – our family relationships, our deep friendships, our colleagues, neighbors, and all the various friends and acquaintances we’ve met along the way of the journey of life.

In Groups, we want people to get connected to God’s love up close and to one another. It’s in these spaces that we have the opportunity to learn and practice how to strengthen our relationships with each other and then to share that same love to those around us.

Think of Groups as a relationships lab where we learn to be in community with those similar and different from us. It’s here that we learn to listen, share, be challenged, be encouraged, and where we grow in how we show the love of Jesus to others.

In Groups, we show the love of Jesus in the following ways:

**Care** – It’s one of the marks of Christian community. It’s how we move from people who attend a service on Sunday to brothers and sisters in Christ. The Holy Spirit working through us to show kindness is a dramatic demonstration of Christian care.

Consider this quote from Andy Stanley. “People are naturally cared for best by those who know them best.” We show care when we listen and remember each other’s prayer requests and celebrations. We share grief, we share our needs, we share our joy and we share our hopes with one another.

**Commitment** – It’s essential that we resolve to be in this together. Groups that are half-committed to live out group-life do not survive long-term. Realize the commitment is not to each other, but rather with each other to pursue this vision of being a community that is practicing the way of Jesus with these values (spiritual formation, missional living, strengthening relationships, and leader development).

Lastly, not everyone will be able to make the same level of commitment to the group, namely those new to faith and perhaps those new to group life. It can be intimidating to show up and feel pressured to “sign on the dotted line” to a room full of strangers. The objective is to have a committed core, and even better, a committed majority to create a group culture that is welcoming, engaged, and devoted.

**Celebration** – In our new season of Group life, we want celebration to be a point of emphasis. In our conversations and surveying, we found that the groups that are thriving and lasting are ones that celebrate, have fun, and throw a good party. Unfortunately, we also found that groups that only gather for social interaction and do not engage in study or learning together, typically do not survive long-term. And so the key is a balance.

We see it in Scripture too, the rhythms of fasting and feasting – the idea of calling out to God in our need, and praising God for all that the Lord has provided. Groups will want to carve out a few celebrations, perhaps make them quarterly, one around the holidays (Thanksgiving, Christmas and/or Easter), one at the end of the year, but also consider having one in the middle of the dreariness of winter.

Find the balance of having a low-structure night of food and enjoyment and also find an opportunity to go around the table or the fire pit and invite one another to give a moment of thanks and celebration for what God is doing in the midst of your individual and group's life.

**A caution** when it comes to relationships and groups.

**The said truth is not everyone can function in a healthy way** in a church small group. From time to time, you will encounter someone that is disruptive and potentially worse and you will need to take a form of action. Whether the reason stems from a form of mental illness, or a personality temperament, or a previous hurt, or someone who refuses to honor the boundaries of others, realize your group may not be the right place and that there is likely a better space for them. **Please** reach out to your Groups coach and/or Campus Pastor to receive guidance along the way.

Lastly, a word of encouragement:

Likely, your group will have an interesting cast of characters from across the board. This is beautiful and by the grace of God, may you resist the urge of trying to make everyone like you or your type of friend. Instead may you all delight in the person God has called each of you to be, may you pray, discover, and sojourn through the ups and downs of life together. And in doing so, may you strengthen your relationships with each other and with those beyond.

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“A person's ability to love and connect with others lays the foundation for both psychological and physical health.” (Andy Stanley, *Creating Community*)



# Chapter 6: Leader Development

Your personal leader development is a primary Groups value in our GC ministry. While it is an enormous privilege serving Jesus' Kingdom, church leadership is also one of the most demanding roles one can have. In addition, being a group leader is unique because of all the relational dynamics, the logistical nature of groups and the need for the leader to have a healthy emotional life and growing spiritual life. This is why we as a church want to invest in all aspects of your leadership, from helping you discover and further develop your gifting, to encouraging you to develop people around you, and by filling your heart, mind, and soul.

We plan on doing this in the following ways:

- Events and Trainings with content aimed at two purposes: One to help you discover and develop your overall leadership gifting and potential and Two, to be a dynamic and effective small group leader. Twice a year we will gather as leaders, usually in the fall and in the winter.
- Coaching from a Campus Coach or a Campus or Central Pastor. Our ask is that you meet with your assigned coach at least twice a year to share your needs, challenges and joys of group life. We hope that these conversations lead to other conversations and that you will feel supported in group ministry.
- Resources we will curate and make available at [www.grace.org/groupleaders](http://www.grace.org/groupleaders). Whether it be books, videos, podcasts, developing female leaders, or other tools, we want to make these resources available for you to utilize in your own life. The more you take ownership of your leadership, the more helpful these resources will be.

When leaders stop learning, they suffer and so do those who are under their care. Because of the scarcity of time and energy, we often resort to taking short-cuts and eventually these all catch up and group life lags. Throw in a personal or group crisis, and things can unravel pretty quickly.

We want to invest in your leadership and for you to grow in all aspects of your leadership, whether you are a seasoned and pioneering entrepreneur or just beginning your journey of influence. You will be amazed at the relationship of leading small groups of people and leading in other capacities outside church group life and how they cross.

Further, we want you to be intentional about developing others. Empower people to take the lead on a group task or to take a role, or invite people into your core team and to our Groups training events. The more people capture the vision and values of Group life, the more powerful it becomes in your group.

Lastly, despite all the coaching and resourcing we want to give you, be a leader committed to the spiritual disciplines like prayer and the reading and application of Scripture, reading material to help you grow in self-awareness, and more. Be the leader who relies on the authority of the Holy Spirit to magnify their gifting and skill-set and allow the Lord to work powerfully through you.

## Chapter 7: The Group Meeting

Some groups meet in homes, others meet at coffee shops, while others meet on one of our church campuses. But what every group has in common is that people are looking to meet some kind of need.

If you're trying to get a group off the ground, a preferred way is with people you are already engaging with. You do this by finding 3 or 4 friends or couples and say, "I feel led to start a group and you came to mind. If we have a nucleus of about 5 people, we can get started and attract new members over the course of the year ...would you pray about joining our group?"

From there pick a day, place, time, and a short study (we can help you with that) and commit to meeting for at least four sessions to get started. Then be in contact with your Campus Pastor and Campus Administrator so they can onboard you and when you're ready, help you get your group info posted online so other prospective members can find you.

As you get your group started for the very first time or as you kick off a new church year in an on campus group, make sure you share the vision and values with your group (found in detail on earlier pages of this manual). This gets everyone focused and on the same page with expectations. Remind your group throughout the year too because as we alluded to earlier, everyone is there to meet a need—some want more time for social interaction, others want a hard-core Bible Study, and there are numerous other reasons. So, leaning into the vision and values creates a foundation for community, discipleship, and mission, and invites everyone on to the same page.

You'll also want to **establish a caring, welcoming, and authentic environment**. As the leader, we set the tone for our group. A few ways to do this include:

- Make sure you're prepared. Spend a few minutes for yourself with God, think through the study, and invite the Holy Spirit into your next few hours with your group.
- Ask non-threatening questions such as, "How long have you lived here?" or "Tell me a little about yourself." Some question that may considered isolating are, "Do you have kids?" or "Are you married?"
- Only mention a group member's personal issues privately, unless the group has already discussed them together.
- Be sensitive around the loaded and hot-topics of the day. Some people are coming to your group as a harbor from the chaos. Some are looking for a place to process. Each group is different so discern wisely, and root the discussion in Christian love.
- Communicate unconditional acceptance through your eyes, your manner, and the way you respond to what a group member shares.
- Be the example of authenticity. Share your own joys and struggles with the group.

**A Typical Group Meeting Might Be Structured as Follows:**

- 20-30 minutes—Gathering and Social Time. This is an opportunity for people to bring and share refreshments/food. Some groups create a “snack-schedule” with online tools like “Doodle”). This also allows people who are running late to not miss out on the organized time.
- 45-60ish minutes - Learning Time - Content from a passage in the Bible, a book video, curriculum rooted in Christian teaching (it’s a good idea to begin this portion of your group time with a short prayer).
- 20-30 minutes—Sharing and Prayer Time - It’s important to find the balance of sharing and praying. Sometimes you go around the room and ask what can be prayed for. This of course, takes time. Other gatherings, you might consider opening up the time of prayer for people to share their needs to the Lord. It’s a good idea to have a note-taker for any form of prayer. Encourage and empower every member of the group to follow-up with each other.

Try to manage the group’s time well. Don’t be too rigid— it’s especially okay to put aside the group agenda when life happens and a group member is facing a major challenge— but stick as closely as possible to the meeting agenda you’ve agreed on as a group. Some of your group members will be frustrated if, for example, social time consistently stretches on too long, stealing time from the study and prayer portions of the evening, and some will feel they can’t connect with others if the time always feels like a seminary class. Guard the sharing and prayer time to appropriate lengths as well. Be intentional about switching it up and be attentive to the verbal and non-verbal feedback. Awareness will help you find some balance to the group. There’s a balance between predictability and variety that will make a significant difference in your group.

### **In Between Group Meetings**

If your group is only interacting with each other during your meetings (and sometimes on Sunday’s), group members will have a tough time connecting to each other. Whether you meet once a week or every other week, relationships are truly strengthened when your group is not actually meeting.

So encourage each other to connect one on one via text, calls, social media, and of course, in person over coffee, meals, and walks. The more this happens, the more vibrant a group becomes.

Also, as you spend time getting to know the people in your group, observe what their spiritual gifts may be, their interests, and skills. As you get to know each other better, consider ways you can empower people to use that skill or gift within the group and in their everyday life. Encourage them with life giving words of what you see in them. When we value people for who they are, it creates a safe environment and gives freedom to step more into who God has created us to be.

We have included a resource for this in the Appendix called Creating Community In Between Meetings.



# Appendix

“The soul cannot prosper without being connected to others.”

Harry Cloud

Dear Leader,

Based on this year's teaching journey and your feedback in the survey, we felt that we should talk about **the need for commitment in our group life**.

Picture your first group meeting as a time to catch up from your respective summers and to envision **what you would each like to see and experience this year**. It may be helpful to frame the group conversation with the end in mind. For example, "When we have our end-of-year BBQ in June 2020, what do we hope to be saying? What do we hope to have experienced together?"

During your first fall group gathering, consider talking about **creating a group commitment or covenant together**.

**Please, please customize this template** to make it most natural and personal to your group. We have intentionally left blank spaces for the specifics. For instance, some will want to add specific guidelines about how you approach (or decide not to engage) particular topics. Also, some groups will want to call it a "covenant" as it reminds them of the Biblical covenants. Some will feel that's too intense of a word and will prefer "commitment" or "agreement" or another term. Try not to get lost in the semantics; more important is the heart behind it than the words on it. You can download a digital copy at [www.grace.org/groupleaders](http://www.grace.org/groupleaders)

**The objective is to commit to strong group life in Jesus.** All groups will want to avoid creating any form of legalism, or a level of intensity that creates a culture of guilt or shame. It will be good to remind each other that we are in different parts of our spiritual journey, various life stages, and have unique responsibilities within every season of life. So let us be generous, patient, and understanding with each other, and may we be committed to one another as we follow Jesus individually and in community.

As always, let us know if you have any questions and we'd love to hear how your group did in this gathering and throughout the year.

Grace and peace,  
Pastor Tim and the Group Life Team

# Group Commitment

## Group Purpose

To create and nurture a community of belonging, following Jesus together.

## Group Essentials

- We care about each other! We choose to invest in our relationships through conversations in and out of group meetings, prayer, support, and having fun together.
- We want to be more like Jesus. We challenge ourselves and one another to grow as disciples of Christ.
- We find ways to serve together and as individuals. We want God to use us to bring a bit of His kingdom to our church, community, and world.

## Group Guidelines

Do our best to show up. Without legalism, without guilt, and with plenty of grace for one another, we prioritize our schedules to meet upon agreed gatherings (every week or every other week, depending on your group).

Stay connected beyond group gatherings. We call and text and message each other to nurture our friendships.

Create a culture of healthy authenticity. We are open and transparent with each other, with appropriate boundaries. We don't have to put on a show or a religious pretense; we can be ourselves.

Provide confidentiality. Because we seek authenticity, we will create a safe space by committing to keep issues discussed within the group confidential.

Demonstrate respect. We may not always agree, but we respect each other's convictions and opinions and foster healthy discourse, remembering that we are all one in Christ.

Listen well. We want to hear from everyone, not just those who share most easily, so we make it a priority to hear from a variety of voices during times of discussion.

Transition healthily. If people decide to move on from the group, or the group stops meeting, we will help each other to take appropriate next steps to foster continued spiritual growth.

## Group Details

1. The group will meet from \_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The group will meet on \_\_\_\_\_ and begin at \_\_\_\_\_ and end at \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

# Relational Dynamics

## GROUP LIFE

Many people joining a group are involved at some level because they want to meet some type of need. Some want to study, while others want to socialize. But for all, having a safe and trusting environment is critical.

Take a moment to remember what you felt like when you joined a small group Bible study for the first time, went to your first Christian gathering at someone's home, or decided to join a committee to start a new ministry. What was it like?

### So, what do we do when challenges arise?

- First...Pray – do not underestimate the value of prayer.  
“The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with” - James 5:16 *The Message*
- Remember that this person has a need. A need to “feel” heard, a need to “be” valued, a need to “experience” love, and a need to “contribute”, etc. Do your best to *affirm* and *love* them.

## PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR NAVIGATING GROUP DISCUSSIONS:

### The Overly Talkative Person

- “Good answer, I appreciate that.” (Quickly) “Okay, now someone else.”
- (During a pause) “Okay, I need some of you that haven't answered to speak up on the next question.” (Indirectly asking that they not.)
- Ask the talker a question specifically so their need to feel included or heard is met and continue asking others specifically. “Okay, \_\_\_\_\_ (less talkative person), I'd like you to read your answer to the next question.”
- Enlist the talker's help in getting the others to participate. Talk to them privately outside of your group setting in a warm and friendly place—not usually the phone. Suggest they end their comments with a question like, “So what do the rest of you think?”
- Consider where you will sit in relation to the talker. If you sit across from them, and they are talking, it's important to break eye contact with them. This may be a clue that it's someone else's turn. You can always sit next to them so that you will not continuously be making eye contact, which can encourage them to talk.



### **The Argumentative Person**

- “I understand how you can feel that way.”
- “I have struggled with that issue.”
- “I thought that until ...”
- “What about ...?” OR “What do you do with ...?”
- “Can we save that question until we get through with the study?”
- “Let’s get together and go over that.”
- “You may want to talk to a pastor. They might have some insights to share with you about that.”
- A gentle conversation outside of your group meeting regarding what we need to accomplish in a short time frame might help.

### **The Quiet Person**

- Suggest that you can see they have something to share ...
- “I can see those wheels turning.”
- Sit next to them and observe if they have anything written down. Then ask, “Would you like to read what you’ve written?”
- “Every answer helps us to clarify what God is saying here.”
- Encourage them prior to your group’s meeting to be willing to share for the benefit of the group.
- Don’t force them. Instead—woo, encourage, or prod. Most do want to join in, but be sensitive to those who don’t.

### **Doctrinal Differences**

- “For years, theologians have disagreed on that one!”
- “I wouldn’t argue that point, but you may enjoy talking to one of our pastors.”
- “I’d love to go over that with you outside of small group.”
- “Can we save that until we have more time?”
- “Let’s see if we can find an expert on this topic to join us for lunch!”
- Remind group members at the beginning of the year that there will be different doctrinal views represented in our groups. Remind them to be gracious, loving, and respectful toward one another.

## **Emotional Disturbances**

None of us can know the depth of someone's emotional pain; we can only direct them to the reality of God's comfort. Sometimes their pain may need pastoral counseling or professional help. Always direct the person to staff that can make that evaluation.

In the meantime:

- Support. "If you need a shoulder to cry on, I'll be there."
- Encourage. "I can't fix it, but I know *Who* can help. And, I'll be here also."
- Show Christ-like love.

## PRAYING AS A GROUP

*There are parts of our calling, works of the Holy Spirit, and defeats of the darkness that will come no other way than through furious, fervent, faith-filled, unceasing prayer. –Beth Moore*  
*Apart from me you can do nothing. -- John 15:5 NIV*

Encourage your group members to share prayer requests that are specific to their own lives (rather than sharing prayer requests about people they know).

Some things to consider for your group prayer time:

- **Confidentiality:** All prayer requests shared in the group are confidential and not to be spoken of outside of the group. Use discretion and impress upon your group that it is a privilege to pray for one another and keep each other's confidences sacred. However, if you are concerned about someone because of what she or he shared, please talk with one of our pastors about the issue privately.

- **Collecting Requests:** There are many ways you can collect the prayer requests for each group member in a time-efficient way. Consider some of the following suggestions for what will work best for your group:

- Index Cards – have the women write their requests on an index card before group discussion starts.
- Post-it Notes – each week, give each woman a post-it to affix on next week's lesson. When she completes the lesson, she completes her prayer request and keeps it in her book until the next Bible study meeting.
- Group Prayer Journal – As soon as the group members begin to arrive, pass a journal around so that everyone can briefly write her prayer request.

- **Follow-up:**

Encourage your people to pray for each other during the week:

- Email – delegate one person to collect the requests and email them to the entire group each week. Please remind your group that confidentiality is important and that these requests should not be forwarded or shared with others outside the group.
- Suggestion: create a closed Facebook group.
- Consider assigning prayer partners for a week or two. Have each group member take one request and pray for it the entire week.

Be intentional with prayer concerns from your group. Some ideas are:

- Write out a prayer or Scripture relating to the person's concern and mail, email, or text it that week.
- Call the person. If they seemed particularly upset or wanted to talk more and pray together over the phone.
- Ask the person about the concern at the next week at Bible study

## Building Community Between Group Meetings

How can we help our group to love and care for one another outside of gathering times? Here are a few ideas – challenge your leadership team to try one this year, or come up with another that would work well for your group’s context.

- Any Gathering on off-weeks or off-nights – all of these provide dedicated relationship-building time.
  - Dinner or Cookout together
  - Girls and/or Guys Night Out
  - Prayer and Worship Night
  - Serve together
  - Watch a movie, go bowling, etc,
  - Game Night
  - Gather around a common hobby
- Buddy system or prayer partners – Pair people off as buddies and encourage them to check in with each other between gatherings (follow up on a prayer request, grab coffee together, send a “happy donut day” text, etc.)
- Facebook group, Slack channel, or other communication platform – share group news, encouragements, events.
- Take initiative as the leader to send a short email reflecting on how you’re putting last week’s teaching into action, mentioning what you love about this group, sending along a verse of encouragement, or anything else that will help the group to think about one another during the week.