

Small Group Leaders Guide

First Meeting Guide

Preface:

This document is simply a guide to aid in structuring a Small Group meeting. Nothing in this guide is a rule or set in stone. Each group must be led by the Spirit of God and must be able to adjust as His Spirit leads. However, that does not alleviate the responsibility for the leader to come to every meeting with a well thought out and prepared plan and message. Always remember, as leaders we are showing and teaching what God has shown and taught us. Additional guides are available to give ideas and different methods that can be considered for each of the areas below.

KEY INSIGHT:

When it comes to open, honest dialogue, the group will rise to the level of the leader! The more open and honest we are about ourselves, our sin, our walk with God, etc. the more the rest of the group will be encouraged to share openly as well. Also, emphasize the importance of listening and discovering new things about each other. The leader must model good listening skills.

GUIDE:

In the beginning stages of a small group, it is important for people to feel welcome and accepted. During the first couple of meetings, invest time in getting to know each other. For other ideas on how to break the ice and get started, see the Small Group Leader Guide – Ice Breakers & Get-to-Knows.

First Meeting Agenda:

Greet and Eat (15 - 20 minutes):

Provide snacks or dinner at the first meeting in order to facilitate conversation, to ease uncomfortable feelings, and to create an environment of openness and safety. While everyone arrives, direct them to make a nametag (we encourage you to provide nametags the first couple of times you meet), to write down their contact information (name, phone number, email, and birthday), to get something to eat, and to begin meeting others who came. Encourage people to continue eating as you transition into the next portion of your time together.

Tell Your Story (1 hour):

To help the group get to know each other, have each person introduce themselves and share their story with the group. Begin by asking everyone to identify 1-2 key people who have played a significant role in their lives and to share how those people have influenced them. Continue by having each person share 2-3 events or 2-3 places that help tell their story. Express to the group that they are free to share as little or as much as they want (especially since some members may not be Christians or may be shy).

- As the leader, you set the tone, so plan to share your story first. Consider sharing at least one personal fear or failure as the night continues in order to help everyone feel safe to be transparent.
- If time allows, have everyone share one of their most embarrassing moments or a favorite childhood memory. This will allow the group to end on a light note.

Share the Purpose of the Small Group (5-10 minutes)

Express to the group that the Vision, Mission, and Goal of Small Groups at Westwood is to “Reach People & Make Disciples”. At Westwood, we believe that small groups are the primary avenue for disciple-making. By intentionally studying the Word together and walking together to be more Christ-like, the purpose of this small group is to help each other grow as disciples to equip each other to be disciple-makers reaching the lost both right around us and in all nations for the glory of God. Therefore, from its inception, this small group must understand that future multiplication of the small group is necessary if we are to reach all nations with the gospel of Christ.

You may want to end this section with this question, “Is the Word of God going to stop with us or multiply through us?”

Introduce Your Curriculum (15 minutes)

Explain to everyone what will be part of the teaching component of the group’s time together. If you select a study guide or series, we recommend that a shorter study for the first couple studies.

- The best approach to Bible study is to study a book of the Bible. We have guides to aide if needed:
 - Small Group Leaders Guide – How to Study the Bible
 - In the **Recommended Resources**, there is a list of resources that walk through specific books of the Bible.
- For a list of recommended studies and resources, see the **Recommended Resources** on the Small Groups website.

As others join the small group, be sure to meet with them separately to get to know them and bring them up to speed on what you have been studying as a group.

Prayer Time (15 minutes)

End the group time with prayer. However, do not simply “take prayer requests,” for there is often an uncomfortable silence when people do not know each other and feel pressured to offer an issue in order to relieve the tension. To avoid this, ask those in the group to share some things that they are currently praying for. Record these needs, and encourage the group to partner with each other in praying for what was shared. After the group meeting, email the prayer list to the group as a reminder to pray.

Official Dismissal

Although some people may linger, it is important to give everyone who needs to leave the opportunity to do so. Try to keep the official group meeting time between 1 ½ and 2 hours.

Follow-Up

Within 48 hours of the first meeting, contact everyone in the group (i.e., call, write a letter, email, etc.) to express how glad you are that they came, to ask if they have any questions, and to set up a time to get to know them one-on-one.