

Engagement Guide: EFCA Pastor Small Groups

*Cultivating transparency, vulnerability and
grace-compelled accountability among EFCA pastors.*

Before you start: Please consider the background, context and life situation of each leader in your group. The questions provided in this study may not be relevant to everyone. Use your best discretion in how and when to ask the study questions.

PURPOSE

- Cultivate friendships where pastors can take off the “pastor hat” and receive the gospel through each other.
- To grow in Christ, receive care, sharpen each other and as a result, be faithful and enduring shepherds for God’s flock.
- To keep the “immune system” of the EFCA healthy.
- When we gather, we have two primary aims:
 1. Be the presence of Christ with each other by being a trusted space that draws out the hearts of each other.
 2. Step toward Christ through each other by vulnerably sharing and confessing with each other.

IDEAL LOGISTICS

- Group size: 4-8 pastors
- Frequency: Monthly
- Time: 2 hours (minimum)
- Setting: In-person or video call

STRUCTURE

- Each person responds to a group of questions from the guide and/or shares an update on their heart and soul (90 minutes).
- Close with prayer for each other (30 minutes).
- See question guide for leading heart-level discussion of a book.

GUIDE FOR ENGAGEMENT

- **Confidentiality**
 - What is shared in this group stays in this group unless there is explicit permission to share with others.
 - In most states, pastors are mandated reporters. We must break confidentiality out of care if there is evidence/risk of harm to self or others.
- **Being a trusted place:** We serve as vessels of the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, to draw out each other's hearts and lead each other to Christ.
 - **Listen to draw out each other's heart** (Prov 20:5; James 1:19):
 - "Tell me more about..."
 - "It sounds like you're feeling... thinking... believing..."
 - **Lead to Jesus with Scripture-inspired questions, not sermons** (1 John 1:9)
 - "How are you receiving the grace of Christ, the presence of Christ, the finished work of Jesus, the care of Christ, the justice of Christ, Christ's words about you?"
 - **Resist the impulse to fix each other.**
 - Be aware of "Have you" statements.
 - Remember that being a priest and offering prayer is the priority.
 - If your heart is burdened to help after a brother has shared his heart, ask the question, don't make the assumption: "Would you like some ideas or help with this situation?"
 - Connect before you correct. Listen to the heart first and provide accountability through questions. "Am I hearing you say...?" or "How are you addressing...?"
 - **Be aware of the impulses to compare, compete or judge.**
 - We want to be the presence of Christ with each other, entering each other's experience and so "weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice" (Rom 12:15-16).
 - Be aware of statements like, "I have had the same thing happen..." or "Let me tell you about..."
 - Responses like these can minimize others' experience, cut off the other person and put ourselves at the center of conversation.
 - Be aware of comparison leading you to withdraw out of a sense of inadequacy or inferiority or a false sense of humility. Name this struggle and diffuse its power.
 - Address offenses quickly. Make every effort to pursue unity and reconciliation. Distrust is infectious and will strangle vulnerability and gospel community.

- **Opening our hearts to each other to receive Christ from each other** (James 5:16, Heb 3:13, 1 John 1:9, Ps 32).
 - **Share your heart and press through the boundaries of shame** (fear of being known and rejected):
 - Give examples
 - Event (information level) – “This is happening... This happened...”
 - Actions – “I am doing... I did...”
 - Thoughts – “I am thinking...”
 - Experience – “I am experiencing... I have experienced...”
 - Emotions – “I feel...”
 - Attitudes/Affections – “I want...”
 - Beliefs – “I realize that I really believe...”
 - **Confession:**
 - Confession is an act of vulnerable trust in God whereby we uncover our sin, wounds or brokenness hidden in shame so that God can cover, forgive, free and heal us.
 - Confession is agreeing with God that I did, said, thought, felt, wanted, believed, etc.
 - Confession includes naming temptations or struggles before they become complicit sin – naming what is present in your heart, mind and soul to another brother so that it does not gain power and authority over you. We dismantle the power of shame by stepping toward Christ in faith and vulnerability.
 - Name sin done to you that the enemy would like you to hide in shame and, as a result, not experience healing in Jesus.
 - **Why we need confession:**
 - To experience being known, accepted and loved by the Father.
 - To break the power of sin, the shackles of shame and the accusations of Satan.
 - To see the lies in my head for what they are and believe and receive the truth.
 - To experience covering, security and forgiveness in Christ.