

groups.

**START  
HERE**



*Leader, read aloud.*

Hi, everybody.

(Go ahead and take a second to make the most awkward face you can to someone else in the group. Nicely done.)

Let's get to know each other a little bit. Go around the circle; everybody has one minute to answer these three questions:

- What is your full name?
- What three words best describe your family?  
(Active? Sneaky? Formal? You get the idea.)
- If you were stuck on a desert island and could only bring one movie to watch, what would it be?

Now that that's out of the way, let's start at the beginning. If we're going to be a group, it's important to understand *why* we're doing it. We're all busy—if we don't have a clear, compelling reason to do this, we won't. ("Because Brian told me to" isn't a good reason.) Short version: we believe that God designed people for relationships. In Genesis 2—right after he created Adam—God says, "It is not good for man to be alone." So what did he do? He made Eve. Humanity was designed for community from the very beginning.

But it didn't stop there. When God started his plan to redeem the world, He worked through a family. He then built up a nation with the intent that they would be "a blessing to the whole world." When Jesus came, one of the first things he did was gather a group of twelve dudes around Him. After Jesus left, the early followers of Jesus did the same thing--they gathered together in small communities, often in homes.

Why does this matter for us?

It matters because it's really easy to sit in a dark room, sing some songs, listen to somebody talk and think that we're getting all that God wants for us. *Nothing* could be further from the truth. Those experiences are great, but if we aren't connected to other people, we're only scratching the surface of what God has for us.

This is why groups matter. When God wants to change someone's life, he puts them in community with other people.

When Jesus came to the world, that was the first thing he did too. He grabbed 12 people that he called "disciples" (which is just a fancy word for "learner"), and he taught them to live like him. Because living like Him powerfully changes us. Living like Him alongside other people radically changes the world. Better life, better world. It's a big goal, but the people around this circle are going to help you make it happen.

Sound good? Let's unpack it a bit.

Go around the circle and give everybody a chance to answer each question.

- Describe the best friendship you've ever had. What made it so great? (Use "feeling" words if you can.)
- How has God used relationships to change your life in the past?
- What are your hopes and fears for this group? (Be as open as possible, and dream big.)

Nice job, everybody. **Here's your challenge for the week:** pick two times over the next seven days, and spend five minutes each time thinking about that verse we read earlier (Genesis 2:18). Are there places in your life right now where you're alone? What would it look like to bring other people into those places?

Leader, why don't you close us out with prayer?

Thanks.

*Leader, pick a group member to read out loud for everyone.*

Welcome back!

If you recall, we spent last time talking about how God has hard-wired us for community. If that's the case, then this group thing should be pretty simple and easy, right?

**YEAH, NOT SO MUCH.**

At last count, there's roughly 370 billion different ways to make a relationship suck. So if we want to do this group thing well, it's good for us to spend some time talking about *how* to do this. Put simply, we want to know, "What makes a good group...a *good* group?"

**We believe that there are three key components that make great groups work**—think of them like a triangle. Take any one of the three points away and what's left...well...kinda falls flat. (Ba dum tsss.)

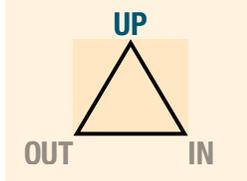
**1 The first corner is a connection with God.**

(Of course. That's always the answer in church.) In John 15:5, Jesus told his disciples, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

It's blunt, but true. Jesus was really clear about the fact that *anything* good we can do in each other or in the world ultimately comes from Him. What's more, it wasn't just talk for Jesus. He actually modeled it himself; we see multiple examples of Jesus slipping away from the disciples and crowds to spend time with God. He was constantly dependent on God, and demanded the same out of his disciples. (You can see where this is going.)

If we're going to experience the life change and world impact that God has for us, our group has to push each other toward a deeper connection with God.

You might hear this referred to from time to time as our “**UP**,” but really what we’re after is an authentic, growing relationship with God. Your leader (aren’t they doing a great job?) is there to help guide all of you in that direction, but it’s on everybody to follow well and challenge each other along the way.



So let’s kickstart that journey with an exercise. Go around the group and throw out as many examples as you can (the more specific the better) of ways to connect with God. Got it? Here’s the catch: they have to be ways that you or someone you personally know have experienced. (No random Googling or third-cousin Facebook posts.)

Once you’ve gotten out all the ideas you can think of as a group, everybody pick one that you haven’t tried before. You’re going to test-drive it this week, then report back to the group next time.

Got it? Awesome. Somebody other than the leader, wrap it up with prayer.

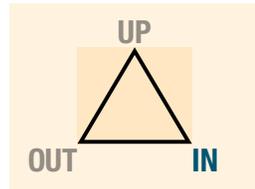
See you next week.

## WEEK THREE

*Leader, pick a group member to read out loud for everyone.*

Hey, everyone—have a good week? Let’s start by taking a few minutes to recap the challenge that we ended with last time. How did it go?

Remember, we’re trying to unpack the things that make good groups work—which brings us to **the second piece of the triangle: healthy relationships with each other**. We call this “**IN**.” You could fill libraries with the books written on this subject (often parroting the same stuff over and over), so we won’t try to capture everything here. Instead, let’s just take a minute and think about what it feels like when relationships live up to our hopes. It’s good stuff like cookouts, campfires, and amusement parks. It’s that moment when you look around the table at a great meal and realize you wouldn’t want to be anywhere else in the world at that moment. But...we’re also talking about things at the other end of the spectrum. It’s stuff nobody looks forward to—hospital visits, long sleepless nights, and moments with more bills than money. Oftentimes we only survive these moments because of the people willing to sit, wait, and weep with us. See the theme?



### ② Relationships that last often end up being the ones that matter most.

It seems simple, but just being there ends up being a shockingly consistent characteristic of successful groups. When we commit to each other, agree to be there in good times and bad, and decide that we *will* listen and endure conflict—*incredible things happen*.

Why? Because this is what love looks like.

When we love people, we show up. We’re honest and vulnerable. We challenge each other. We accept each other. We’re there, day in and day out. Jesus even said that *this* would be how people would recognize us as his followers—not our beliefs, not our political stances, not our church attendance—but how we care for one another. (Someone grab a Bible and read John 13:35).

If that's the case, then it would be a good idea to learn how to care for the people around you, right? Right. Let's do that.

Everybody take a couple of minutes and think about your answers to the following two questions:

- What is one of your favorite “friendship” moments, and what made it so great? (Could have been a trip, a conversation, a meal, an experience—whatever. The important thing is that it was special for you.)
- What are your favorite ways for people to show you that they care about you?

Got your answers? Great. Go around the circle twice—once for each question. Everybody gets to share their answer uninterrupted. Once you're done sharing, the rest of the group gets to huddle up and ask you no more than *two* follow-up questions. You don't have to ask any, but this is your chance as a group to understand what makes each other tick, how you feel cared for, and to get ideas for how to support one another in the future. (As people share, write down what your new friends are saying so you can do it later.) This is the kind of thing God means in Hebrews 10:24–25. We're hardwired to need this kind of encouragement from each other. Take a minute to read those verses as a group before we close things out.

With that in mind, **here's your challenge for the week**, and it's actually a group challenge. We've learned that groups function best when there's a defined leader (which we've talked about) and a consistent rhythm. Without those things, the chaos of life makes it way too easy to quit. Over the next week, you as a team need to decide a) how frequently do we want to meet (weekly or bi-weekly works best) and b) how long can we all commit to as a trial run? (We'd recommend three months minimum, six is even better. Relationships take time.)

Got it? Somebody wrap up with prayer, and we'll see you next week.

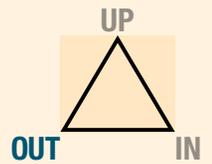
*Leader, pick a group member to read out loud for everyone.*

Nice job, everybody. Let's finish this series strong.

Back to the triangle one more time. We've got God and each other, what else do we need? If we stop and think about it, the third piece of the triangle isn't immediately obvious, is it? Oddly enough, the missing piece is *other* people.

### ③ People *outside* the group.

In short, a healthy group needs a goal. We call this our “**OUT**.” A mission to accomplish. A battle to fight. A job to do. Without some sort of mission to drive us forward, we easily become stagnant and inward focused. (Which, in turn, causes our relationships with both God and each other to get stale.)



As with the other areas, we see this kind of outward focus modeled by Jesus—and importantly, it was an outward focus that was driven by compassion for the hurts and suffering of the people around him. (Read Matthew 9:36.) That compassion resulted in a constant balancing act; sometimes He would gather the disciples around Him and build into them, and other times He would send them out to build into others.

The same should be true of us. Our connection with God and dependence on each other should all fuel the way that God wants our group to impact the world.

We used the phrase “our group” intentionally. This group of people right here—God wants to do something specific with this group, something that is specific to *this* group. See, it's easy for us to think that God wants us to do *everything*—that we're supposed to reach any person or deal with every problem we can think of.

Nope. Not. At. All.

God brought *this* group of people together for a reason. There is a specific set of skills and passions represented in this group. There are things He wants you to learn. There is something that we can accomplish because of our time together that we couldn't have done on our own.

This is how the earliest followers of Jesus worked. In fact, let's stop and read Acts 2:42–47 together as a group. (Whoever was last to arrive gets to read.) Notice how it characterizes them? They weren't pastors or Bible experts. They were just regular people: groups of strangers who became friends and grew to live as extended family. They were simply meeting in homes, eating together, doing life together, growing their relationship with God together, and being sensitive to how he led them to expand the Kingdom and eventually multiply.

And let's be clear, while these relationships may last forever, this group shouldn't. Eventually, God is going to call all of us to connect to new people and lead them to a closer relationship with Him.

This isn't about *us*.

It's about *us* being a conduit that brings other people to God.

So what does that look like for us? It might mean something individually—like inviting that neighbor you've waved "Hi" to for a year to join the group or leveraging the encouragement of your group to accomplish that thing you've always heard God prompting you to do. It also might mean something collectively—like all of us using our skills to serve a community, create something or connect with others that share our passions. It doesn't matter whether your "OUT" is with this group or not—what matters is that you have one, and that the group is challenging and encouraging you to pursue it.

So that's what we're going to do with the rest of our time today. Go around the circle, and everybody gets three minutes to finish the following statements:

The gifts that God has given me to impact the world are \_\_\_\_\_.

If God was going to use those gifts/passions to impact people in my life, it would look like \_\_\_\_\_.

Everybody take turns, then take some time to debrief similarities and encourage each other (over tasty beverages, if possible).

Well done everybody. Take a few minutes to talk about the game plan for next week. Once that's done, Leader, wrap things up with prayer.



**If you aren't sure what to do next, consider spending time just sharing stories.** Give each group member one whole week to share theirs, so you can get to know each other better. Or check out the Group Resource Page at **[crossroads.net/groups](https://crossroads.net/groups)**. If you have any questions, reach out to your coach or email [groups@crossroads.net](mailto:groups@crossroads.net).