

STARTING *Strong*

LEADER GUIDE



About The Creators:

Loren Pankratz is the planting Pastor of The Bridge Community, a non-denominational Christian Church in Centerville, Utah. He has received a masters degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and doctoral degrees from Talbot School of Theology and the South African Theological Seminary. Brent Petersen serves as the Ministry Engagement Director at The Bridge Community. He has earned a masters degree in educational leadership from Central Michigan University. Brent and Loren's philosophy for small groups has been significantly shaped by the North Point Groups Team. For a deeper examination of that philosophy check out Andy Stanly and Bill Witts' book, *Creating Community*. Special thanks to Stephen Morales for putting the video segments together.



Welcome

People join small groups for a variety of reasons. Some want a place to belong or to meet new people. Others are looking for a way to grow in their understanding of God and God's Word. We hope all of this will take place in your group. The key to any of this happening is creating an environment where relationships can develop as we pursue God together. Starting Strong is designed to help your group create that environment.

How To Use This Study

Starting Strong is designed for a group that is meeting weekly for 2 hours. The structure of that time together might look like this:

- 30 min – Group meet and greet
- 30 min – Pre-video questions
- 5-10 min – Video
- 30 min – Post-video questions
- 10 min – Prayer
- 10-15 min – closing fellowship as group dismisses.

Group facilitators can help keep the group on time by moving more quickly through sections. Alternatively, as time allows, the facilitator may add additional time for reflecting on questions.

You'll notice two resources used in this study. It is advisable to purchase these items ahead of time and to have them available to use. Alternative exercises are provided if you are unable to purchase these resources. **The two resources are:**

The Questions Book, by Joe Nyquist – ISBN 978-1796403930
Story Cards (North Point Resources) – ISBN 978-1943535491

It will be a good idea for the facilitator to begin formulating a plan for what the group will study **after this series of lessons**. We recommend bringing suggestions to the group on week three, and making the final decision on week four so that group members know what to expect when this series is over.

WEEK 1

Small Group Basics

INTRO

Welcome to your first small group meeting! Amazing things can happen for us spiritually when we meet together with the purpose of growing upward and outward together. This Starting Strong series will help get your group off on a trajectory that will enable you all to accomplish those two important areas of growth.

PRE-VIDEO WARM-UP (30 MIN)

1. Story Cards

Using Story Cards (If you don't have "Story Cards" use the alternative exercises below), spread cards on the floor (or table top) so they are all visible. Have each person select one picture that represents his or her last year. Once everybody has selected a card, have each person introduce themselves (name at least), and explain how their picture represents his or her last year.

Return the cards to the floor (or other surface), and have the participants select a another card that represents them at 15 years old. Have all participants tell the group where they are from originally, and explain how the picture they selected reflects how they see themselves at age 15.

After returning the cards one more time, have the participants select the card that best depicts their expectation for this group. Each participant will tell the group their first job, and then show their selected picture.

2. Alternative Warm-up

Pass out notecards (or a small slip of paper), have each person draw a picture that symbolically represents their last year. Have each person introduce themselves (name at least), and explain how the picture represents his or her last year.

Have the participants draw a picture of themselves at 15 years old. Have all participants tell the group where they are from originally and then explain how their picture reflects how they see themselves at age

Lastly, have the participants write down one word that best depicts their expectation for this group. Have group members tell the group their first job, and then tell the group the word they selected.

3. Have the group answer the following questions:

- Have you ever been in a Christian small group before?

- For those who have been in a small group previously, what did you enjoy about that experience?

TRANSITION: Before you start a project it's a great idea to get a sense of what the finished product should look like. This week, and the next three that follow, will give you a sense of what a small group can look like. Hopefully this group will be a catalyst for your own spiritual growth in this next season of your life.

SHOW VIDEO (5-10 MIN)

Notes:

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (30 MIN):

1. In Acts chapter 1, the disciples witness Jesus ascending into heaven and they are told that Jesus will return (Acts 1:9-10). Then, in Acts chapter 2, the Holy Spirit filled the disciples and they began preaching, with about 3000 receiving salvation (Acts 2:41). Acts 2:42-47 gives us a snapshot of the early Christian movement.

- Read Acts 2:42-45 and answer the question that follows.
 - What practices do you see going on in the early church?

- Read Acts 2:46-47 and answer the following questions:
 - In what two locations do we see Christians gathering?

 - Why do you think they gathered in these two locations?

 - How can each of these environments help people grow upward in intimacy with God and outward into community?

2. Peter was one of the first disciples of Jesus. Read Matthew 4:18-20. How would you describe Peter's transition to following Jesus?

3. Peter wrote letters to other Christians. Read what he says to us in 2 Peter 3:18 and answer the following questions:

- In what two ways does Peter command followers of Jesus to grow?

- How are these two things different and do you see them linked at all?

- How can being in a small group help us grow in these ways?

4. In Mark 12:28, a religious leader asked Jesus “Which commandment is the most important of all?” Read Jesus reply in Mark 12:29-31 and answer the questions that follow.

- How did Jesus reply to the religious leader’s question?

- How can participating in a small group help us grow to love God more?

- How can participating in a small group help us love our neighbor as ourself?

WRAP UP: Hopefully you’ve learned a little bit about each other and about how a small group can help you grow upward in intimacy with God and outward into community. As you dismiss, take a moment to pray for one another and for this group.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

WEEK 2

Accountability

INTRO

One of the most comforting things in the world is the presence of another person. Isolation can rob us of our strength, courage, and will. This is one of the reasons why a small group can be extraordinarily powerful. A small group can give you a predictable environment where you are known and where you know others. The key to that power comes when we make the decision to “show up.” Being accountable to one another to be present is one of the keys to making this group a success. We’ll be diving into that concept in a moment, but first, let’s take a few minutes to get to know one another.

PRE-VIDEO WARM-UP (30 MIN)

1. Use The Questions Book for this warm-up exercise (If you don’t have The Questions Book, use the alternative exercise below). Hand The Questions Book to the first person and have a random number between 1 and 300 called out (Google will provide you with a random number if you type: “random number between 1 and 300” into the search field). Have the person look up that number, introduce themselves to the group, and answer the question. Keep handing the book around until each person has had a chance to answer a question.

2. Alternative Exercise (only do this if you do not have The Questions Book). Ask each person to introduce themselves and answer one of the three following questions:

- If money was no object, where would you go on vacation and why?

- What was your best subject in school?

- What was your favorite thing about the home you grew up in?

3. Have each participant answer the following questions:

- What/where was the first church you ever attended?

- Where and when have you felt the closest to God?

- Who are two important people to you (spiritually or otherwise).

TRANSITION: While we may discover some similarities and differences between our stories, every person's spiritual journey is unique. Each small group will be a bit different from every other group as well. Yet, there are also some key ingredients that can make this small group a powerful force for spiritual growth in your life. In this week's video we'll begin exploring one of three key ingredients that we hope will define your group.

SHOW VIDEO (5-10 MIN)

Video Notes:

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (30 MIN):

1. Lifeway research has found the people in small groups report feeling closer to God, having a better understanding of the Bible, trusting God more, and becoming more loving in their relationships than Christians who are not in a small group.* Which of these effects of a small group highlights an area in which you hope to grow through this small group.
2. In the video it was suggested that those benefits of small groups don't happen magically because our name ended up on a small group roster. What do we need to do beyond signing up for a small group to enable future growth?
3. What are some obstacles that could keep you from being able to participate each week?
4. What's a bigger struggle for you, showing up mentally or physically?
5. What does it mean to be accountable and how can we help each other be accountable to show up both mentally and physically?
6. Acts 2:44 says that all who believed "were together." In what ways does being "together" regularly promote accountability?
7. Read Hebrews 10:19-25 and answer the questions that follow.
 - Where does the follower of Christ's confidence to enter into God's presence come from? (vs. 19)

*GROUPS MATTER: WHY GROUPS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR BIBLICAL TRANSFORMATION, BY BOB SMETANA (JUNE 16TH, 2014). [HTTPS://LIFEWAYRESEARCH.COM/2014/06/16/GROUPS-MATTER-WHY-GROUPS-ARE-ESSENTIAL-FOR-BIBLICAL-TRANSFORMATION](https://lifewayresearch.com/2014/06/16/groups-matter-why-groups-are-essential-for-biblical-transformation)

- What is the “new and living way” spoken of in vs. 20?
- Verses 19 and 20 speak of Jesus as both the priest who offers the sacrifice that brings forgiveness of sins and as the sacrifice that is offered. How does this promote “full assurance of faith” spoken of in vs. 21?
- What responsibilities toward one another are listed in vs. 24?
- How can a small group help us live out this calling?
- What is the “Day” drawing near in vs. 25, and what are we to keep doing until then.

WRAP UP: Hopefully you’ve learned a little bit about each other and about how a small group can provide a layer of accountability that can support you as you grow upward in intimacy with God and outward into community. As you dismiss, take a moment to pray for one another and for this group.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

WEEK 3

Belonging

INTRO

Last week we spoke about that importance of showing up. Showing up provides the context for the accountability needed that will allow this group to be a catalyst of spiritual growth. Yet, showing up is not all that is necessary in order to experience the benefits of this small group. This week we'll explore another key ingredient of effective small groups.

PRE-VIDEO WARM-UP (30 MIN)

1. Use The Questions Book for this warm-up exercise (If you don't have The Questions Book, use the alternative exercise below). Hand The Questions Book to the first person and have a random number between 1 and 300 called out (Google will provide you with a random number if you type: "random number between 1 and 300" into the search field). Have the person look up that number, introduce themselves to the group, and answer the question. Keep handing the book around until each person has had a chance to answer a question.

2. Alternative Exercise (only do this if you do not have The Questions Book). Ask each person to introduce themselves and answer one of the three following questions:

- What is your favorite book you've ever read?
- Are you a pet person? What pets do you currently own?
- What did you want to do for a job when you were a child?

3. Have each participant answer the following question:

- What are two important places to you?

TRANSITION: This week's video will direct us to focus on the second key ingredient of small groups: belonging. As we view tonight's video segment, listen for how small group can give us a sense of belonging and connection that we don't always find in a large group setting.

SHOW VIDEO (5-10 MIN)

Video Notes:

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (30 MIN):

1. Read Luke 10:38-42 and answer the following questions:

- What are Mary and Martha's response to Jesus' presence?

- How does Jesus respond to the situation?

- In what way can we act like Martha on our spiritual journey?

- How can we be more like Mary?

2. Your small group will not engender the sense of belonging possible if

each of us does not join in.

- What keeps us from joining in?

- How will each person's joining in enhance the sense of belonging among participants?

- Can you think of an example of a group where you experienced a sense of belonging? How did you "join in" that group?

3. The video highlighted how confidentiality, mutual respect and authenticity contribute to a person's ability to "join in."

- What is confidentiality and how does it aid in each person's ability to join in?

- Will each of you commit to keeping our discussions at small group confidential?

- What do you think mutual respect means?

- Can you provide an example of a situation where you felt respected and another where you felt disrespected?

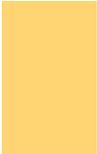
- Will each of you commit to showing respect for one another in this

group?

- What does it mean to be authentic and how might inauthenticity keep you and others from experiencing the sense of belonging a small group can offer?

WRAP UP: Hopefully you've learned a little bit about each other and about how a small group can provide each member a sense of belonging. As you dismiss, take a moment to pray for one another and for this group.

PRAYER REQUESTS:



WEEK 4

Care

INTRO

To help this small group start strong we've been introducing the ABC's of small groups. We've already discussed the "A" (accountability) and "B" (belonging). In this, our final week, we'll dive deeper into the final "C," which stands for "care." Small groups can provide participants with a layer of care that can strengthen each person as well as our community.

PRE-VIDEO WARM-UP (30 MIN)

1. Use The Questions Book for this warm-up exercise (If you don't have The Questions Book, use the alternative exercise below). Hand The Questions Book to the first person and have a random number between 1 and 300 called out (Google will provide you with a random number if you type: "random number between 1 and 300" into the search field). Have the person look up that number, introduce themselves to the group, and answer the question. Keep handing the book around until each person has had a chance to answer a question.

2. Alternative Exercise (only do this if you do not have The Questions Book). Ask each person to introduce themselves and answer one of the three following questions:

- What is one thing that you've failed at?
- Where is the farthest you've ever traveled?
- What is your favorite TV show or movie?

3. Have each person answer the following: What are two important events that have occurred in your life?

TRANSITION: We've all experienced a mix of good and bad things in life. One of the things that can help us endure trying times is the care of others. In this next video we'll start a discussion about how a small group can be a positive source of care for group members and their community.

SHOW VIDEO (5-10 MIN)

Video Notes:

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (30 MIN):

1. Discuss a time when you were cared for by another person. Is it easy or hard to ask for you to ask for help when you need it?

2. Have someone read Galatians 6:2 and then answer the following questions:

- What does it mean to fulfil the "law of Christ" and how do we do it?

- What does it mean to bear another person's burdens?

3. Have someone read Galatians 6:10 and then have the group discuss the questions that follow.

- To whom are we to “do good”?

- Why do you think the Apostle Paul (the author of Galatians) tells us to do good “especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Read what Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 5:8. Do you see any parallels?)

4. Read Luke 5:17-26 together and then discuss the questions that follow.

- What obstacles did the man have to spending time with Jesus?

- How did the man’s friends help him?

- Why did people get so upset when Jesus told the man that his sins were forgiven?

- How did people react after the man got up and walked? How do you think you would have reacted?

- How can we be like the friends in that incident?

5. What is one way you've helped others in your community outside the walls of your church?

6. Brainstorm ways your group can serve together on a service project.

Brainstorm Ideas:

7. Will you commit to finalizing plans to serve together within the next four weeks (it's fine if the date of the project is farther out than that)?

WRAP UP: Hopefully you've learned a little bit about each other and about how a small group can provide each member with the accountability, belonging and care that can make this group a success. Groups that keep the ABC's in focus will provide the environment needed for this group to be the growth catalysts it can be as you grow upward in intimacy with God and outward into community. As you dismiss, discuss what your group will study at you next meeting and take a moment to pray for one another and for this group.

PRAYER REQUESTS: