

awakening grace

how to lead a small group

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If you're new to leading a small group, or want to be challenged further in your experience, use this guide for ideas and encouragement.

the method

We encourage small groups to integrate these five elements:

- Gather Together
- Share Together
- Grow Together
- Worship Together
- Serve Together

what that means

Gather Together. Choose a consistent time to meet and make that time a protected priority in your week. Choose a time and place that best fits the members and mission of your group. Make sure your time is consistent and your space is conducive to engaging with the films and discussion questions.

Share Together. Small groups play a vital role in fostering community within the church. Each week, take intentional time to share and pray together. Share your joys and deep struggles. Be authentic. As the leader, pave the way and set the tone. Lead with vulnerable courage and let your group share in your burdens. Create a safe place for group members to do the same. After you offer an opportunity to share honestly, spend time praying for the specific needs mentioned. Bind your group together through prayer.

Grow Together. This small group experience is designed to spur you on toward growth in Christ within the context of community. Being together is important and meaningful. But be sure to orient your time together around the purpose of discipleship. Dig into the discussion opportunities and use these films to encourage and challenge spiritual growth.

Worship Together. Encourage your group members to stay connected to the larger church family. Engage with your church and worship together. You are on a journey with each other, walking in step with the Spirit. He is shaping you as the body of Jesus, a collective expression of the kingdom in your community. Lead your group in joining that journey.

Serve Together. We hope you grow in knowledge through this small group experience, but we pray that you will be challenged toward action. Mission is a crucial part of active discipleship, and any expression of the church that does not integrate both is not whole. We envision these small groups as micro-movements—the dream tanks and creative incubators for furthering the mission of God in your communities. In these fertile settings, ideas and ingenuity will give birth to beautiful expressions of the transforming love of Jesus. The potential here is unlimited. We want to mobilize

your group to serve the community for the sake of the kingdom. Don't just discuss the topic at hand. Find a way to put it into action.

how to create a welcoming environment

Ambiance and baked goods are great. But an *environment* that is welcoming is created by *people* who are welcoming. Here are a few tips for starters.

Set the Tone. As the group leader, people will follow what you do. Model what a welcoming group looks like. If it's uncomfortable or not natural for you, that's OK. Identify someone in your group with that gift and set them loose. They will love serving in that way.

Create Connections. You don't have to be the social shepherd for everyone. Look for ways to connect people to each other, not just you. "Oh, you're a new dad? You should meet Chris over here. He is too." "You're a journalism major? Meet Sarah. She just finished her second year in the program."

Learn Stories. Ask people to tell their stories or share about themselves. It builds a meaningful bridge into the group.

Be Aware. If you already have deep connections with some members of your group, be aware of the rest of the group. No inside jokes, no lengthy sidebar stories that cut out the other members.

how to facilitate discussion

Lead and Listen. Set the direction but don't dominate the conversation. Create intentional space for others to offer ideas, observations, or questions.

Ask Good Questions. Don't kill your chances of discussion by asking yes/no questions. Keep them open ended. Ask why/how/what questions that require thoughtful answers and spark more questions.

Embrace the Awkward. Resist the temptation to fill the awkward silence. If you really want engagement and discussion, be willing to wait for the input of others. It might help to even break the ice by joking, "I'm OK with awkward silence. I'm not afraid to wait." Chances are they will laugh, and then they will speak up.

Embrace Diversity. Don't be afraid of differing opinions. Allow for the minority voice to be heard. This isn't always easy, but it's important for the culture of openness in your group. Listen to the opposing side of the argument. If you shut down that voice and show disrespect for opinions, you undercut the opportunity for honest expression. Create a safe place for people to express their disagreement and doubt.

Speak Boldly. Embracing diversity is not the same as endorsing every opinion as equal truth. As group leader, you will need to speak boldly at times, correcting misguided interpretations, representing the views of Scripture, even speaking on behalf of your church.

Practice Discernment. The Holy Spirit will give you discernment and wisdom, and show you how to speak the truth in love. He will show you when to correct and when to just listen. He will help you. Trust where he leads you.

how to foster community

Be Real. Nothing kills community like isolation and insulation. As the leader you are not elevated above the group. You follow Jesus the Pioneer who entered our story and shared his life with us. Lead like that.

Pray for Each Other. Intercessory prayer is the art of friendship in the trenches. Carry each other. Celebrate with each other. Fight for each other.

Share a Meal. You might not do this every time, but make space to share a table. It's what you do when you want to get to know someone.

Ask Tough Questions. Refer to "Covenant Friendship Alternative" download (available at www.wphresources.com/awakeninggrace) for a list of bold questions designed to challenge and encourage.

Shared Ordeal. Once you have completed all of the film sessions, plan an event together that requires teamwork or group problem solving. Go camping or hiking or shopping for a family in need. Break the cycle of regular meetings and do something together out of the ordinary.

Serve Together. As already mentioned, this is a vital part of discipleship and an expectation of every group. But even more, it's a powerful way to bond a group. As E. Stanley Jones said, "Don't try to have fellowship—work together for great ends and fellowship will follow."

how to shepherd spiritual growth

Grow Spiritually. It's important to allow the Holy Spirit to lead you before you lead others. Allow him to cultivate an authentic relationship with Jesus. Lead out of that.

Pray for Your Group. Lift them up often. And remember that their growth will come from God's grace. Pray for the Holy Spirit to do his work in their lives. To guide them, guard them, push them, and comfort them.

Pray Together. Notice a trend? Good.

Read Scripture Together. Use the Scripture reading plan together (available at www.wphresources.com/awakeninggrace). Follow up with each other on how it is changing you. Let Scripture guide, correct, build, and inspire your group.

Ask Tough Questions. Notice another trend? Also good.