



# SMALL GROUP GUIDE



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“FOR WHERE TWO OR THREE  
ARE GATHERED IN MY NAME,  
THERE AM I AMONG THEM.”

-JESUS, MATTHEW 18:20

I.  
THE PURPOSE  
OF A SMALL GROUP



## THE PURPOSE OF A SMALL GROUP

The purpose of Salem Pres Small Groups is for those attending our worship service to explore Christian discipleship and sanctification with more depth. Small Groups are the backbone of Salem Pres. They provide the structure for our life of discipleship. This goal happens through fellowship and prayer. Presbyterians are great at study and knowledge is crucial to the faith. Our church has many avenues for edification through study. These include Sunday sermons, bible studies and the wide spread availability of books and podcasts in our society. Our Small Groups are the main laboratories for discipleship at Salem. Therefore, we recommend Small Groups complement the Presbyterian attention to study by emphasizing prayer and fellowship through intimate conversation, confession, the reading of scripture, and prayers of all kinds. They are the place God regularly works to shape our affections. In the words of James K.A. Smith,

“Worship is the heart of discipleship if and only if worship is a repertoire of Spirit-endued practices that grab hold of your gut, recalibrate your *kardia* [“heart”, or “gut” acc. Smith], and capture your imagination. Because we are liturgical animals, we need to recognize the rival liturgies that vie for our hearts and then commit ourselves to the rightly ordered liturgy of Christian worship as a recalibration and habituation project.”

## THE PURPOSE OF A SMALL GROUP

Small Groups are the place where people rehabilitate and recalibrate their lives by gathering each week with other believers to share deep convictions, questions, and to join each other in prayer. Both prayer and fellowship are indispensable to a healthy group. Placing equal emphasis on imaginative forms of prayer and deep sharing through confession can help a group to experience vitality.

By emphasizing fellowship a group cultivates intimacy and trust in their brothers and sisters. They also make room for confession of sin, which is crucial to sanctification. By emphasizing prayer, a group recognizes that no amount of sharing with other humans can transform a person's situation unless God is involved. When either of these overtakes the other, a group can become stagnant and fizzle. For example, note the difference between actual prayer and the sharing of prayer requests. The sharing of prayer requests is fellowship (and necessary), but the time spent communicating with God is prayer. Both are important, but they are different. The fellowship allows for intimacy between the brothers and sisters who then go before the Father in prayer.

## JOINING A SMALL GROUP

Joining a Salem Pres Small Group best follows a season of regular attendance at Salem Pres worship. We believe the spiritual formation of a church begins in the gathered worship, confession, preaching of the Word, and the partaking of the Lord's Table each Sunday. This is not to disregard a personal, internal relationship with God through practices of prayer and meditation. Here we are simply focused on how community functions in the Christian's faith life.

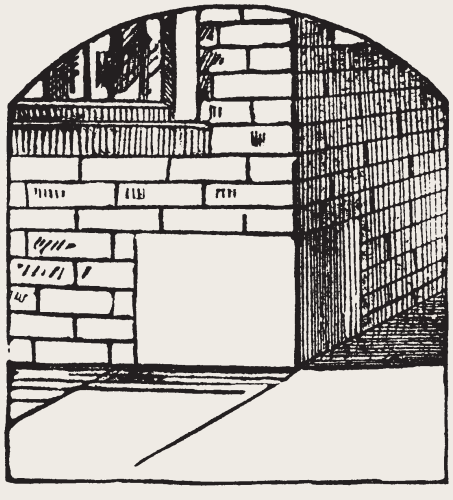
Gathered worship is the root of spiritual vitality and we believe it is the best place for new people to both encounter God and the ethos of Salem Pres. Exposure to our liturgy and preaching will help shape a person's understanding of discipleship, which sets the group up for success. Small Groups are a place to work out spiritual formation through fellowship. Our Sunday worship is like a furnace. In gathering to sing to God, proclaim the Good News, and eating of the Communion Supper we stoke the flames of faith. Small Groups are like ducts, sending the heat out into our community and hopefully directing the heat to the proper places. But the furnace provides the heat for the ducts.

## DEMOGRAPHICS IN SMALL GROUPS

While it may seem like everyone in our church has a nuclear family household, this is not as much the rule as it might seem. When one scans the room on Sunday one can see our church is full of singles, people without children, empty nesters, college kids, and more. Captivity to the family is a problem for the American Church. As Ben has said in a few sermons the American Church often collapses family and faith into one idea (i.e. Family Book Store, Focus on the Family, Family Radio means “Christian”). Marriage and children are not principal to the Christian life and thus we ought not let these things dominate our discourse at the expense of singles, divorcees, widows, empty nesters, those without children. Unfortunately, our society can often treat these circumstances as “less-than-ideal”, but the Bible does not. So we must acknowledge that while some Small Groups are full of young families, “families”, “children”, and “couples” are not the standard unit of people in our church. Even if a group is mostly young families, it is a good practice to not assume things revolve around children, marriages, etc. because these are not the dominant experience of many people in our church.



II.  
LAYING THE FOUNDATION



"CHRIST, WHO SAID  
TO THE DISCIPLES,  
'YE HAVE NOT CHOSEN ME,  
BUT I HAVE CHOSEN YOU,'  
CAN TRULY SAY TO EVERY  
GROUP OF CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,  
'YE HAVE NOT CHOSEN ONE  
ANOTHER, BUT I HAVE CHOSEN  
YOU FOR ONE ANOTHER."

-C.S. LEWIS,  
THE FOUR LOVES

## PERSONAL WORK

- **Reflect:** Before your first small group meeting, take time to sit down with the Lord, maybe journal, and personally reflect on some key questions. Instead of asking, "What am I hoping to get out of this small group?", try asking yourself: "How do I hope to grow in my relationship with God within this community? How can I stretch myself in the areas of vulnerability and prayer? What is the Lord inviting me to contribute to this group?"
- **Remember Your "Why":** Take some time to reflect on why you wanted to join a small group in the first place. Remembering your "why" is important, because you will almost certainly have an evening when you feel tired, don't want to deal with any awkward silence, don't feel like praying for people, or maybe don't feel like being vulnerable.
- **Check Your Assumptions:** What assumptions might you be making about your small group? How are any previous negative small group experiences you've had affecting your view of this one? Do you have any positive past small group experiences that are placing unreasonably high expectations on this group?
- **Engage the Process:** In joining a small group, you are invited to do the good (and sometimes challenging) work of building friendship with a group of believers. Be careful to not put unrealistic pressure on your group to immediately be comfortable and vulnerable. Have loving and compassionate expectations, knowing that it takes time to grow in trust!

## COLLECTIVE WORK

As a group, discuss and find answers to the following logistical questions. Landing on clear answers to these questions will set you up for success throughout the year. Remember that you will likely need to compromise in order to accommodate the group.

1) How long will we meet?

- Between 90 minutes - 2 hours is typical

2) Where will we meet/who will host?

- Remember that the facilitator does *not* have to host
- Alternate/rotate houses? One house?
- How does childcare affect location?

3) How will our group address childcare?

- Alternate between houses of people with kids
- Pay for one sitter for the whole group
- Pull together funds to help families pay for sitters
- Be sensitive to everyone's needs

4) What is the best method for communication?

- Group text or email?
- Strictly business or the occasional meme?

5) Identify your group's assigned elder. You should have been emailed this information.

III.

FIGHTING FOR  
CONNECTION



"THE PERSON IS RARELY  
THE PROBLEM.  
THE PROBLEM IS THE PROBLEM."

-NARRATIVE THERAPY PRINCIPLE  
BY MICHAEL WHITE



"THEREFORE ENCOURAGE ONE  
ANOTHER AND BUILD  
ONE ANOTHER UP,  
JUST AS YOU ARE DOING."

-1 THESSALONIANS 5:11



"CARRY EACH OTHER'S BURDENS,  
AND IN THIS WAY  
YOU WILL FULFILL  
THE LAW OF CHRIST."

-GALATIANS 6:2

## COMMON BARRIERS TO CONNECTION

If you find yourself feeling disconnected from your small group, or feel that your small group isn't thriving, consider these common barriers to connection:

### Negative Assumptions

- "There aren't enough people in this group in our stage of life. No one else has small children and they can't relate."
- "My group won't be able to handle my story. I don't want to be a burden, so I just won't share."
- "I'm the only single person. The married people in this group don't understand what it's like."
- "There are so many young people in this group. They can't possibly be spiritually mature."
- "Her life looks so easy. She's probably never suffered."

### Poor Structure

- Low or inconsistent attendance
- Lack of intentionality
- Lack of communication
- Location other than home

### Unmet Expectations

- "Why don't we have dinners together or go out more? I feel like we don't have enough fun."
- "Our group is so quiet. Why is no one being vulnerable?"
- "I wish I was in a small group with more of my friends. I don't feel like getting to know new people."
- "That person's story was intense. I didn't think I signed up for this."

## ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO CONNECTION

### Negative Assumptions

Some of the challenges your small group may face will require taking collective responsibility, but the issue of negative assumptions often requires personal reflection. Do not forget that Satan is "the father of lies" (John 8:44). The Enemy would love to fill your mind with lies about your group, yourself, and ultimately, God, before you even have your first meeting. Satan hates Christian community, and will try to convince you of a whole host of reasons why you should be skeptical of your brothers and sisters in Christ.

It is helpful to note that, at the core of most negative beliefs and assumptions, lives a fear. For example:

#### Assumption

"There aren't enough people in this group in our stage of life. No one else has small children and they can't relate."



#### Fear

"I won't feel understood, spiritually poured into or connected to people who are not like me."

The practice of identifying your fears is not meant to shame you or invalidate your experiences. It is meant to help you name what the Enemy is attempting to do, and identify God's truth in place of the fear. Using the example above, let's name what the Enemy is up to, and identify God's truth in the situation.

**The Enemy:** wants me to feel misunderstood and alone.

**The Truth:** "I am not alone. I can be vulnerable with this group, receive their prayers and build friendship even if they don't all have children. The family of God is diverse, and I have things to learn from everyone in the group."



## ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO CONNECTION

If you find yourself making assumptions about your group, try to bring those beliefs and fears to the Lord and process them with a friend or spouse. Ask the Father to soften your heart, to help you see your small group the way that He does, and to be open to friendship with the people He has specifically provided for you in this season. To quote C.S. Lewis in *The Four Loves*:

"Christ, who said to the disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," can truly say to every group of Christian friends, "Ye have not chosen one another, but I have chosen you for one another."

# ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO CONNECTION

## Poor Structure

The most common issues that can create barriers to connection in a small group tend to be simple, solvable problems. These issues are especially easy to correct if you communicate about them early on!

## Low or Inconsistent Attendance

- If you know you're going to miss small group, go ahead and let your group know a few days beforehand. This can mitigate conflict and speculating about commitment.
- If you find that your small group has consistently low attendance, don't be afraid to address this with the group. Diagnose the problem. Do people feel overcommitted in this season? Does the time not feel worth it? Any tension between people in the group? If you feel like you need help, you can always reach out to your assigned elder.

## Lack of Intentionality

- Although there is room for flexibility in the way you spend your time together, it is best to err on the side of structure. Structure creates a culture of intentionality and makes your time feel sacred, valuable and set apart. Make a plan!

## Lack of Communication

- When a group member asks a question over text or email, respond!
- When making group decisions, share your honest opinion! Your voice is worth being heard, and this prevents resentment from building in a group.

## Location

- Your meeting location needs to be a home. It is much harder to be vulnerable or shed tears in a public setting.

## ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO CONNECTION

### Unmet Expectations

We all have expectations, good or bad, conscious or subconscious, when we walk into a new community. If you find yourself feeling disappointed in your small group experience, you likely have some unmet expectations. For example:

#### Disappointment

"Why don't we have dinners together or go out more? I feel like we don't have enough fun."



#### Unmet Expectations

- My small group will meet my social needs.
- My small group will have time to get together outside of our regular meeting time.
- My small group will prioritize having fun.

The issue here is not so much that the desires behind the expectations are inherently bad. Socializing and having fun are good things, and things that God wants for you! However, those needs might not all get met through your small group. Adjusting your expectations early on in the year will set you up for success as you build friendship together. For example:

#### Adjusted Expectations

- My small group might be able to hang out a few times this year outside of Wednesday nights.
- I can initiate my small group and ask if they'd like to go to the pub on Saturday night. Even if they can't all make it, it'll still be fun to get together with a few of us.
- I might not become best friends with everyone in this group, but I can count on them to pray for me and walk with me spiritually.

IV.  
PRAYER



"MAKE THIS  
YOUR COMMON PRACTICE:  
CONFESS YOUR SINS  
TO EACH OTHER AND  
PRAY FOR EACH OTHER SO THAT  
YOU CAN LIVE TOGETHER  
WHOLE AND HEALED.  
THE PRAYER OF A PERSON LIVING  
RIGHT WITH GOD IS SOMETHING  
POWERFUL TO BE RECKONED WITH."

-JAMES 5:16 (MSG)

# PRAYER IS ESSENTIAL

Prayer is essential to the life of a Small Group, and yet it can be one of the most elusive and challenging parts of meeting together. Here are some keys for keeping prayer at the center of your Small Group meetings.

## 1) Prayer is essential

- Prayer is the most essential part of your small group experience. Opening and closing your time in prayer is great, but remember that communication with the living God is available to you the whole night! Be sure to pray for one another as often as possible.

## 2) Prayer acknowledges God in the room

- There are plenty of places you can vent about your life: the break room at work, the gym, and even the checkout line at Trader Joe's. What differentiates processing life with believers from the rest of the world is that we are not merely venting. We are sharing with people who acknowledge that God is in the room, and pray for us rather than commiserating or trying to fix us.

## 3) Prayer creates connection

- Do not underestimate how much connection is created by prayer! You will find that praying often bonds the group more than having dinner or going to trivia.

## 4) Prayer takes practice

- Some of you might feel uncomfortable praying aloud or spontaneously rather than following a liturgy. Do not be discouraged. Prayer takes practice!

## WAYS TO PRAY

Prayer is often more dynamic than we think. There isn't a formula! If your group needs a little direction, consider using some of these forms of prayer.

**1) Circular Prayer:** This is one of the simplest ways to pray for each other! Make space for each member of the group to share updates and prayer requests. After each person shares, have the person to the left or right pray through the prayer requests. Repeat this around the circle.

**2) Confession:** Consider meeting in smaller groups, possibly by gender, and use circular prayer to confess to God your sins. Think of it as a space to share where you have forgotten the Lord, been wayward, felt like you have ignored his ways. Often sins of omission are easier to confess with a group than commission.

**3) Intercession:** In Dane Ortland's *Gentle and Lowly*, he describes intercession as when "a third party comes between two others and makes a case to one on behalf of the other." We know that both the Spirit and Christ intercede for us (Romans 8:26, 34), but we can also intercede for one another! Bring one another's requests before God, pleading on behalf of your brothers and sisters in Christ. You can do this as a group or with partners.

**4) Adoration & Thanksgiving:** Take time to adore and thank God for who He is and what He is doing in your life, in your small group and the lives of those around you. You could also consider singing a hymn, a song of praise or the Doxology together!

**6) Liturgy & Guided Prayer:** Following a liturgy or guided prayer is a beautiful, structured way to connect with God. You can find suggestions for liturgies in the "Resources" section at the end of this guide.

V.  
KEYS TO  
A MEANINGFUL SMALL GROUP





## KEYS TO A MEANINGFUL SMALL GROUP

- **Ambiance:** The gathering of God's people is an event, so feel free to treat it as such. Light candles, play contemplative music like jazz or hymns. Hosts need not at all feel obligated to do this as an added burden. Setting a mood can be assigned to a group member looking for a way to contribute other than food or leading prayer/study. Again, don't let this be an added burden, but like a good party or worship service, creating an intentional environment can be helpful.
- **Time Management:** Setting a specific start AND end time is helpful. Groups honor each other when they honor the start by beginning on time and not lingering, which incentivizes tardiness and can fracture a group. Groups also honor each other when they honor an end time. Not everyone needs to feel obligated to share, but having an end time reminds people the time is finite and no one person ought to dominate the conversation. Every person deserves an equal opportunity for air-time. 1.5 - 2 hours seems ideal for most groups. Any less and certain parts of gathering may suffer and any longer may encourage a lack of focus. Patterns of coming late or leaving early can really disrupt the unity of a group, even if they are often for good reasons.

## KEYS TO A MEANINGFUL SMALL GROUP

- **Prayer:** Prayer is essential to the life of Salem Pres and our Small Groups. It is dangerously easy to leave out prayer, so please do not deprive yourselves of the chance to speak to God amongst each other. Beginning with prayer can set the Spiritual tone of your evening. Beginning with a reading from the Book of Common Prayer or a Psalm followed by prayers of adoration can center the group on God. Prayer forms can be diverse and are a great space for creativity. Groups might cycle through different types of prayer using scripture, prayer books, and even music. *You can find ideas and suggestions on ways to pray in the "Prayer" section.*
- **Confession:** Salem places great value on confession. In an age of loneliness and easy self-deceit, confession pushes back our sin and opens us to the freedom of grace. This can be done in a variety of ways like breaking up into smaller groups of 2-3. Experiment with breaking up into men and women, but also try breaking up into mixed-gender groups. These will dictate what kinds of things are shared, but each have their benefits.

## KEYS TO A MEANINGFUL SMALL GROUP

- **Collaboration:** Salem values communal sharing in Small Groups. These are principal places for Christians to co-labor, collaborate in the work of gathering. This is not just for the pragmatic reason of preventing the hosts from burning out. Many New Testament passages about community feature two Greek words. The first *koine*, means having things in common. The second is *allelon*, meaning “one another.” A life together means a common work shared across individuals to create a community. The Small Group is a work of creativity and everyone deserves the opportunity to make his or her own impression on the outcome. Groups should rotate where they meet, not just to ease the burden of hosts, but to give others the opportunity to show hospitality in their own way. Groups are healthiest when the hosting, cooking, teaching, praying, and even childcare are shared across the group. It gives everyone buy-in; a reason to be present, because everyone is needed. It also allows everyone to grow in their ability to foster Christian community in their own home. Small Groups are best when they are structured, when the participants are active in leading and facilitating, and when expectations on each other are low.

## KEYS TO A MEANINGFUL SMALL GROUP

- **Fellowship:** Fellowship is something we cannot program, but is also easy to underestimate. Loneliness is an epidemic in our society and the church ought to be a renowned clinic. We ought not underestimate giving people the chance to share their burdens by speaking about the circumstances of their lives. Casual hang-out may seem inconsequential, but it fosters friendships in the group. Set aside time to catch up and have casual conversation each week. Some groups may err by being too formal and leave no room for simple friendship. Without this, people may feel uncomfortable with more intimate forms of fellowship like confession and sharing prayer requests. Other groups may err by letting this dominate, which can turn a Small Group into a sort of dinner party. This is no knock on dinner parties, we just want to acknowledge that for many people Small Groups are their only intentional Christian fellowship. Recognize that convening is necessary, but recognize it as a limited part of your practices.

## KEYS TO A MEANINGFUL SMALL GROUP

- **Childcare:** The session has discussed at length the place of children in the fellowship of Salem Pres. We value two things with equal zeal. One, we cherish including children in the fellowship of the church. Two, we believe that to be spiritually healthy, parents need time to focus on being disciplined themselves. Groups can decide early how to handle childcare. Babysitters are an option, but certainly a luxury not everyone can enjoy. Groups could model their care for children after the church and rotate the people of the group watching the children. This would not necessarily mean couples doing it, but pairing two individuals who might use the time to get to know each other while playing with the kids. The group can decide collectively whether to hire a babysitter or rotate childcare through the group, but everyone in the group (whether they have children or not) should share the work. This is part of our covenant as a church to care for each other and for children living in our community.

## KEYS TO A MEANINGFUL SMALL GROUP

- **Serving:** Crisis Control and the overflow shelters offer great opportunities for groups to serve together. Your group will also periodically help with greeting and cleaning up at the Sunday worship service. Greeting, handing out bulletins and creating a culture of hospitality at the front door to the church produces more spiritual fruit than you might think! Cleaning up after the service is a way to practice stewarding our building and resources.
- **Meals & Other Activities:** Scripture offers so many examples and we can all attest that gathering for a meal brings people together. But food can often dominate a group's attention and energy. We recommend groups take some time every month or two to simply have a meal together with no agenda but fellowship. Then take the rest of the time to do the complimentary work of confession and prayer, which is a much more rare experience in our community and society.

VI.

ARC OF AN  
EVENING + YEAR



# ARC OF AN EVENING

There are several ways to connect with a group of humans on any given night in Winston-Salem: a cycling class, trivia night, a book club with friends, or pickle ball at the park, to name a few. If you're looking for community, there are plenty of ways to find it in the world. So, it's important to ask the question:

*"What can happen at small group  
that does not happen anywhere else?"*

Your answer to this question will inform the way you spend your time together and help you stay on track for the evening. Ultimately, the arc of an evening at small group should include the following:

## **1) Adoration**

- This can look like reading a psalm, praying through a liturgy, singing a worship song, giving thanks... You can get creative here! In short, take some time to adore and worship God before starting small group.

## **2) Life Story or Life Together plan**

- Directions on Life Stories and your plans afterwards are in the following pages.

## **3) Prayer**

- You can find ideas and suggestions for ways to share and pray as a group in the "Prayer" section.

## **4) Close with intention and on time**

- Being mindful of the time as you near the end of the night will ensure that you're able to wrap up praying for each other without rushing, and also honors the host by not staying too late into the evening.



# ARC OF A YEAR

While the Arc of an Evening casts a vision for the flow of your weekly small group gathering, the Arc of a Year emphasizes the fruit produced throughout your 10 months together. The year, in its simplest form, is comprised of two parts: Life Stories followed by Life Together, which are described in more detail in the following pages. If your Life Stories are executed well, and your season of Life Together is intentional and centered on the Lord, you will naturally produce good fruit! Good fruit can look like friendship with each other, intimacy with the Trinity, a richer prayer life, increased vulnerability, decreased shame, and willingness to choose community with people in both times of joy and sorrow. These 10 months have the potential to be beautiful and sanctifying if you give into the process.

## **Part I: Life Stories**

- 6-8 weeks
- Creates time for individuals to provide context for their lives
- Makes space for practicing vulnerability early on
- Allows individuals to feel seen and known

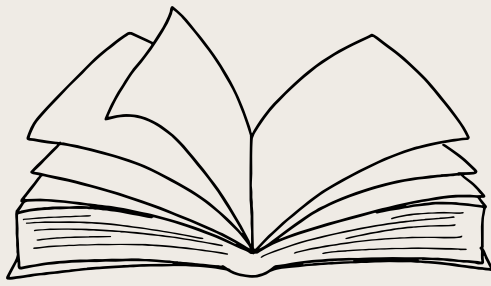
## **Part II: Life Together**

- Remainder of the year
- Emphasizes prayer in particular
- Encourages creativity in the ways that the group practices spiritual formation, prayer, vulnerability, and community building

“TO LOVE AT ALL  
IS TO BE VULNERABLE.”

-C.S. LEWIS,  
THE FOUR LOVES

VII.  
LIFE STORIES:  
STORYTELLER & LISTENER



## STORYTELLER

Although there's no right or wrong way to tell your story, it often helps to have some sort of plan or structure. The goal of sharing your Life Story is ultimately to provide context for who you are today, and to practice some vulnerability. Here are some tips to set you up for success!

### **1) Create a timeline**

- Take a few minutes to write down major life events and highlights that will help you stay on track.

### **2) Start with the basics**

- Lead with simple biographical information.
- Where you were born? Family context? Where did you go to school? Church background?

### **3) Bring photos**

- This isn't required, but fun and helpful for the group!

### **4) Reflect and pray about your level of vulnerability**

- It is easy to swing into extremes here. Some of you will find yourselves not wanting to share any tough parts of your story, and some of you may be inclined to share unprocessed trauma that the group is unable to carry.
- Take some time to reflect and pray about which parts of your story you feel ready to share. Where are you holding back out of fear that your group will judge you or feel overwhelmed by your story? Where are you putting pressure on yourself to share every detail when you don't have to?

### **5) Don't feel pressure to give your "testimony"**

- Your Life Story doesn't necessarily need to include your "testimony," but it's also good to share about your relationship with God and church over the years.

## LIFE STORY GUIDELINES

### 1) Be mindful of the length of your story

- If your small group meets for approximately 1.5 hours, aim to share your life story in 45 minutes or less. This will leave time for your group to ask questions, pray for you without feeling rushed, and ideally have some time left over for the whole group to share updates and pray for one another.

### 2) Share your individual stories if you are a couple

- Each person has a unique family context, spiritual background and story with God to tell. Although a married couple likely has overlap in their individual life stories, it is best for each person to have their own night devoted to sharing and being prayed for.

### 3) Challenge yourself to be vulnerable

- In his book *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis says, "To love at all is to be vulnerable." Part of being in a Small Group is letting yourself be seen and known. Challenge yourself to lean into vulnerability and authenticity. This allows your group to know how to come alongside you and pray for you!

### 4) Reflect on what feels appropriate to share

- Although we encourage vulnerability, there is no pressure to go into great detail about hard parts of your story when it feels more appropriate to paint broad strokes.

## LISTENER

Listening to someone's Life Story is a privilege and a sacred experience. This might be someone's first time sharing their story or being in a small group at all. You might feel super comfortable sharing your Life Story, but for the majority of people, it is stretching and vulnerable! Here are some keys for how to be an active and honoring listener.

### **1) Pray for the group member before and after**

- Take a few minutes to cover the person in prayer before they begin their story. Pray against the fear of vulnerability, for them to feel safe and loved in the group, and for telling their story to be a healing experience. Afterwards, ask the person what they would like prayer for in this season. Try to make time for the whole group to pray through these requests.

### **2) Ask questions afterwards**

- Feel free to ask appropriate follow up questions afterwards. You can ask simple, lighthearted questions about what kind of music they like, and you can also ask deeper questions, i.e. "If you feel comfortable, would you be willing to share more about your relationship with your brother?"

### **3) Express gratitude**

- Be sure to say "thank you" afterwards and express gratitude to the person for sharing their story! Silence can communicate that the group feels awkward or isn't sure how to respond.

### **4) Follow up if you aren't able to attend that night**

- If you know that you won't be there to hear someone's Life Story, ask if they would consider recording their story!

“THE PERSON WHO LOVES  
THEIR DREAM OF COMMUNITY  
WILL DESTROY COMMUNITY,  
BUT THE PERSON WHO LOVES  
THOSE AROUND THEM  
WILL CREATE COMMUNITY.”

-DIETRICH BONHOEFFER,  
LIFE TOGETHER

VIII.  
LIFE TOGETHER





## LIFE TOGETHER

After your group has finished sharing your Life Stories, you'll have approximately 7-8 months remaining to do "Life Together." This season has the potential to be full of connection to each other, spiritual formation, and fun!

To have a fruitful experience, you'll need to maintain structure, prioritize prayer and vulnerability, remember your "why" on nights when you don't feel like going, and communicate well. Although doing "Life Together" can look different for each group, there are some basic components and values that you should prioritize.

### 1) Adoration

- Take time to adore, praise and thank God for who He is and what He is doing in your life, in your small group and the lives of those around you. You can refer back to the "Arc of an Evening" section for ways to practice adoration as group.

### 2) Prayer

- It is essential that you pray together. Your group will almost certainly produce good fruit if you keep this at the center of your time together. You can refer back to the "Prayer is Essential" and "Ways to Pray" sections for more on this topic.

### 3) Vulnerability

- In theory, if you make time to share prayer requests and pray for one another, you will practice vulnerability.

### 4) Spiritual Formation

- The "Small Group in a Box" section will give you some ideas for ways to pursue spiritual formation together!

IX.  
FACILITATORS



## What is a Facilitator?

At the most basic level, we need facilitators for groups. However, we value collaboration in Small Groups. Groups thrive when they work together on most things like time, location, the selection of devotional or prayer books, as well as deciding how the group will use their time. The facilitator(s) can help serve as liaisons between the elders and the Small Groups and they can help ensure the group is evenly delegating community tasks like hosting, food, and the leading of prayer. It is good for the group when each person has an equal opportunity to host and offer ideas for how the group uses its time.

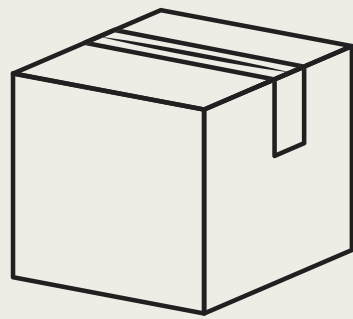
### A Facilitator **DOES**:

### A Facilitator **DOES NOT**:

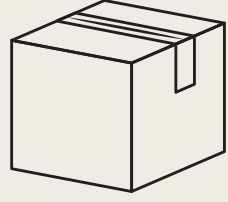
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Facilitate conversations surrounding logistics at beginning of the year</li><li>• Communicate information weekly to the group <i>or</i> assign person to do this, i.e. reminders about location, Life Story schedule</li><li>• Serve as a liaison between the elders and their small group</li><li>• Guide conversations about logistics throughout the year as needed</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have to host</li><li>• Have to provide snacks</li><li>• Make all decisions for the group</li><li>• Lead the group in prayer</li><li>• Lead the group spiritually</li><li>• Prepare material for the group</li><li>• Solve problems</li><li>• Resolve conflict between group members</li></ul>
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X.

## SMALL GROUP IN A BOX



Consider these boxes as little liturgies, guides and "lesson plans" for your small group after you've finished sharing your Life Stories. These are not prescriptive. Our hope is that they will spark creativity and help your group cast vision for meaningful ways to connect with God and each other throughout the year.



## Box No. 1

### Group Share & Prayer

#### 1) Adoration

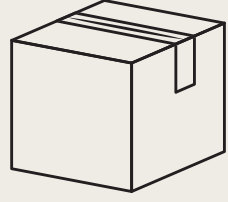
- Open with a time of adoration led by one member of the group. You can refer back to the "Ways to Pray" section to get ideas for this!

#### 2) Circular Prayer

- Make space for each member of the group to share updates, praises, challenges, sorrows and prayer requests. It is possible that some group members will have more to share than others, and that's okay!
- After each person shares, have the person to the left or right pray through the prayer requests. Repeat this around the circle, making ample time for each person to share.

#### 3) Listen

- Attentively listen to each person with compassion and empathy.



## Box No. 2

### Individual Share & Prayer

#### 1) Adoration

- Open with a time of adoration led by one member of the group. You can refer back to the "Ways to Pray" section to get ideas for this!

#### 2) Extended Time for Individual Prayer

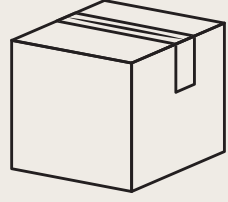
- The goal of this evening is to offer one person or couple to have an extended time of sharing about how they are doing, and allow ample time for the group to pray for through their prayer requests.
- If time allows, have each member of your group pray rather than two or three. It is rare to have a large group of people pray over us, and it can be powerful to offer that gift to your group members.

#### 3) Don't Rush

- Don't be surprised if it takes 20+ minutes to pray. It's important to not rush this time and to bless the person/couple by having a rich time of prayer.

#### 4) Share & Prayer

- Use the remaining time to share prayer requests and pray for another.



## Box No. 3

### Guided Prayer

#### 1) Choose Resource

- Find a book of prayers, liturgies or a devotional for your group.
- For suggestions, refer to the "Resources" section at the end of the guide.

#### 2) Adoration

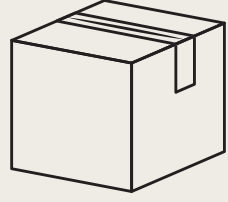
- Open with a time of adoration led by one member of the group. You can refer back to the "Ways to Pray" section to get ideas for this!

#### 3) Prayer

- Pray as a group using the chosen resource.

#### 4) Share & Prayer

- Use the remaining time to share prayer requests and pray for another.



## Box No. 4

### Guys/Girls Night

#### 1) Identify Location

- This goal of this evening is to allow men and women to meet separately and have time to practice confession and prayer together.
- Choose a location for meeting. This could be the same home in two different rooms, or two separate homes if possible. Prioritize meeting in a home rather than a public setting.

#### 2) Adoration

- Open with a time of adoration led by one member of the group. You can refer back to the "Ways to Pray" section to get ideas for this!

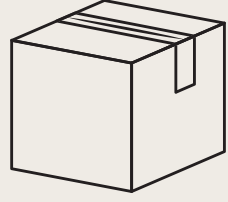
#### 3) Confession

- You can refer back to the "Confession" section found in "Ways to Pray."

#### 3) Prayer

- After each person has a time for confession, have the person to the left or right pray for them. Repeat this around the circle, making ample time for each person to be prayed for.





## Box No. 5

### Book Discussion

#### 1) Choose Book

- As a group, choose a book to read and discuss together. The book should be related to Christianity, spiritual formation or theological topics that interest the group. If you have any concerns about the theological implications of the book, you can reach out to Austin or Ben. For suggestions, refer to the "Resources" section at the end of the guide.

#### 2) Read Aloud

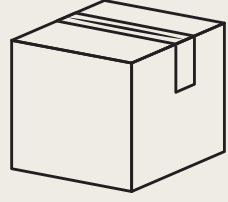
- Open with adoration and prayer before reading.
- Take turns reading aloud. Your group can read a certain number of pages, or set a timer to make sure you have time for discussion and prayer afterwards. Remember that you do *not* need to read the book outside of small group.

#### 3) Discussion

- You can stay simple here with questions like: "What stuck out to you? What is a quote that ministered to you?"

#### 4) Share & Prayer

- Use the remaining time to share prayer requests and pray for one another.



## Box No. 6

### Psalm Discussion

#### 1) Adoration

- Open with a time of adoration led by one member of the group. You can refer back to the "Ways to Pray" section to get ideas for this!

#### 2) Read Psalm Aloud

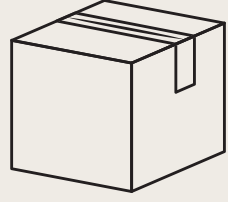
- Have someone choose a Psalm in advance to bring to Small Group.
- Have one person read the Psalm aloud twice through. Read slowly and with intention, pausing between readings for a few moments of silence.

#### 3) Discussion

- Have each member of the group write down 3 things that stood out or felt meaningful to them in the Psalm.
- Go around and discuss the group's thoughts and feelings about the Psalm.

#### 4) Share & Prayer

- Use the remaining time to share prayer requests and pray for one another.



## Box No. 7

### Topical Discussion

#### 1) Choose topic(s)

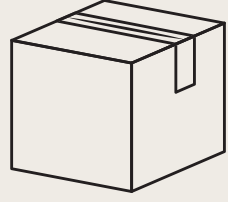
- Have a member of the group choose a topic to bring to the group for discussion. The topic should be related to faith, spiritual formation, the Bible, theological questions, etc. Some past examples are forgiveness, prayer, Christian community, and miracles.

#### 2) Discussion

- Group discussion is meant to be exploratory and a way to process spiritual topics with one another. No one is being asked to be the spiritual authority or scholarly expert here. Let the questions be simple and a way of getting to know each other's beliefs.
- Examples: What has been your experience with forgiveness? Who/what has shaped your prayer life? How do we engage in Christian community?

#### 3) Share & Prayer

- Use the remaining time to share prayer requests and pray for one another.



## Box No. 8

### Worship Night

#### 1) Adoration

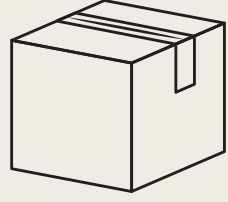
- This is especially important before singing! Spend some time adoring the Lord in silent prayer or aloud as a group. Adoring the Lord prior to worshiping Him with music will center your heart and mind. You can refer back to the "Ways to Pray" section to get ideas for this, too.

#### 2) Worship with live or recorded music

- If you have musicians in your group, ask if they would be willing to play their instruments and/or sing. Remember that you do not need to be a professional musician to play the guitar or sing! You can use some simple chord charts provided in the "Worship" section of this guide, or choose your own.
- You're welcome to sing with recordings, too!

#### 3) Close in Prayer

- Close your time of worship in prayer. You can spend time adoring the Lord again together, or pray for each other if time allows.



## Box No. 9

### Encouragement Night

#### 1) Assign encouragers

- This is a plan that works especially well at the end of the year! At the small group prior to Encouragement Night, go around the circle and assign encouragers. A simple way to do this is to encourage the person to the right of you in the circle.

#### 2) Reflect

- Before the next small group, jot down some ways that you want to encourage your assigned person. Reflect on ways you have seen them grow this year, aspects of their faith that inspire you, or any other words of encouragement! Bring this list to small group next time.

#### 3) Encourage

- On Encouragement Night, go around the circle and share your words of encouragement to each member. You might consider recording a voice memo of your personal encouragements!

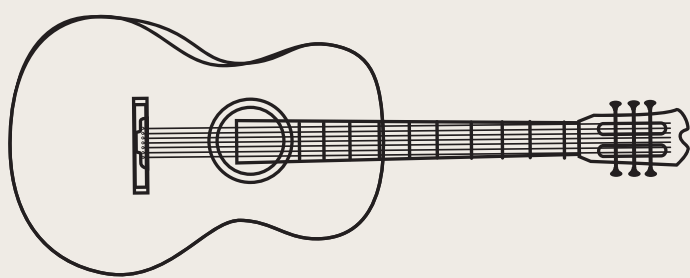
#### 4) Prayer

- If time allows, you can briefly pray for each person, or close in prayer as a group.

"...BUT BE FILLED WITH THE  
SPIRIT, ADDRESSING ONE  
ANOTHER IN PSALMS AND  
HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS,  
SINGING AND MAKING MELODY  
TO THE LORD  
WITH YOUR HEART..."

-EPHESIANS 5:19

XI.  
WORSHIP



## Come Thou Fount

D A

1. Come Thou Fount of every blessing

G A D

Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;

D A

Streams of mercy, never ceasing,

G A D

Call for songs of loudest praise

D A G D

Teach me some melodious sonnet,

D A G D

Sung by flaming tongues above.

D A

Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,

G A D

Mount of God's unchanging love.

2. Here I raise my Ebenezer;

Hither by Thy help I'm come;

And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,

Safely to arrive at home.

Jesus sought me when a stranger,

Wandering from the fold of God;

He, to rescue me from danger,

Interposed His precious blood.

3. O to grace how great a debtor

Daily I'm constrained to be!

Let that grace now like a fetter,

Bind my wandering heart to Thee.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,

Prone to leave the God I love;

Here's my heart, O take and seal it,

Seal it for Thy courts above.



## Be Thou My Vision

D            A Bm            G            A            D  
1. Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  
A                    A                    G                    Asus A  
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art  
Bm            A            G            A D            A Bm A  
Thou my best thought, by day or by night,  
D            A Bm            G            A            D  
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.

2. Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true Word;  
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;  
Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son;  
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

3. Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,  
Thou mine inheritance, now and always:  
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,  
High king of heaven, my treasure Thou art.

4. High king of heaven, my victory won,  
May I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun!  
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
Still be my vision, O ruler of all.

## Abide With Me

C

F C G

1. Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;

C

F C G

The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.

Am

F C F

When other helpers, fail and comforts flee,

C

G

C

Help of the helpless, abide with me.

2. Thou on my head, in early youth didst smile;  
And, though rebellious, and perverse meanwhile,  
Thou hast not left me, though I oft left Thee,  
On to the close Lord, abide with me.

3. I need Thy presence, every passing hour.  
What but Thy grace, can foil the tempter's power?  
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?  
Through cloud and sunshine, abide with me.

4. I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless  
Ills have no weight, tears lose their bitterness  
Where is thy sting death? Where grave thy  
victory?  
I triumph still, abide with me.

5. Hold Thou Thy cross, before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the  
skies.

Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain  
shadows flee;  
In life, in death, Lord, abide with me.

## Goodness of God

Verse 1:

G

I love You Lord

C

G

Oh Your mercy never fails me

D

Em

C

D

All my days I've been held in Your hands

Em

C

From the moment that I wake up

G D

Until I lay my head

C

D

G

I will sing of the goodness of God

Chorus:

C

G

All my life You have been faithful

C

G

D

All my life You have been so, so good

C

G

D

Em

With every breath that I am able

C

D

Em

I will sing of the goodness of God

Verse 2:

I love Your voice

You have led me through the fire

In darkest nights You are close like no other

I've known You as a father

I've known You as a friend

I have lived in the goodness of God

## Goodness of God

Bridge:

Bm                    C                    D                    G  
Your goodness is running after, it's running after me

Bm                    C                    D                    G  
Your goodness is running after, it's running after me

                  G                    C  
With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now

      D            Em  
I give You everything

Bm                    C                    D                    G  
Your goodness is running after, it's running after me

Chorus

by Ed Cash, Ben Fielding, Jason Ingram,  
Brian Johnson and Jenn Johnson

## Sing, Oh Sing (Psalm 81)

Chorus:

D G D  
Sing, oh sing, raise a song of joy and sing  
D A  
Sing, oh sing, Shout and sound the tambourine  
Bm G  
Sing, oh sing, Nothing in your hands you bring  
D A D  
Just sing, oh sing, sing

V1.

G D  
When you open your mouth, but no sound comes  
out  
G D A  
And when you cry aloud amidst a thundercloud  
Bm G  
He will fill your lungs, put honey on your tongue  
D A D  
Strike the drum, blow the horn, or just sing

Chorus

V2.

When your shoulders are low  
And your hands are full  
The baskets are heavy laden  
But the profit is not yours  
There will be a new moon  
And your toil will be removed  
The harvest will be yours to keep

## Sing, Oh Sing (Psalm 81)

Chorus

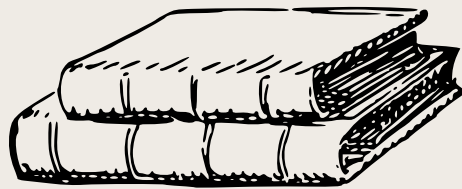
V3.

We quarrel and shout  
Until mouths dry out  
We grumble for something better  
Or just long for old chains  
Though we cry “are you even here?”  
His Spirit brings us cheer  
Dear saints, lift your chins, let’s sing!

Chorus

by L. John Bourgeois, Austin Pfeiffer,  
and Brett Taylor

XII.  
RESOURCES



## GUIDED PRAYER

- *Every Moment Holy* by Douglas Kaine McKelvey and Ned Bustard
- *Seeking God's Face* by Philip F. Reinders
- The Book of Common Prayer
- *The Songs of Jesus* by Tim and Kathy Keller
- Lectio 365 app
- Daily Prayer app from Church of England

## CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

- *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- "Spiritual Friendship" sermon by Tim Keller:  
<https://podcast.gospelinlife.com/e/spiritual-friendship/>

## SPIRITUAL FORMATION

- *Hearing God* by Dallas Willard
- *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* by Tim Keller
- *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Pete Scazzero
- *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* by James K. A. Smith
- *Gentle and Lowly* by Dane Ortlund

## BIBLE STUDIES

- Tim Keller studies: [https://gospelinlife.com/?fwp\\_categories=studies&fwp\\_paged=2](https://gospelinlife.com/?fwp_categories=studies&fwp_paged=2)
- *Exploring the Psalms* with Sandra McCracken:  
<https://courses.smallgroups.com/p/exploring-the-psalms>



## ADDITIONAL CHORD CHARTS

- Indelible Grace Hymnbook:  
<http://hymnbook.igracemusic.com/>
- The Porter's Gate Songbook:  
[https://jeffhaanen.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/VCG-FV-Songbook\\_Draft-1.pdf](https://jeffhaanen.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/VCG-FV-Songbook_Draft-1.pdf)
- Bethel Music: <https://bethelmusic.com/resources>