

BEST PRACTICES 101

LEADER GUIDE

LIFE IS GROUPS
BETTER
CONNECTED

CONNECTING
PEOPLE
RELATIONALLY
SO THEY CAN
GROW
SPIRITUALLY

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE:

To provide a small group environment where people can pursue **authentic community** and **spiritual growth**

Authentic Community: Being real as we grow and supporting others as they grow

Spiritual Growth: A growing faith in God expressed by a growing love for God and others

THREE PHASES OF A GROUP:

Take Off · Flight · Landing

FOUR PHASES OF A GROUP MEETING:

Connect + Learn + Apply + Pray

CONNECT

This is when you connect relationally with your group members. The first part of the meeting is not just about food. It gives people a chance to transition from thinking about family and work to being fully present with the group.

TIMING: 15–30 MINUTES

OPTIONS

- **Icebreakers:** These are usually less personal and more fun. Some examples:
 - *Well Known: A Pocket Guide for Deeper Conversation* knownproject.com/products/well-known
 - groupleaders.org/icebreakers
 - Whisper Challenge wikihow.com/Do-the-Whisper-Challenge
 - “Questions In A Box” app
- **Story Cards:** Picture cards help people identify how they feel about a particular question. This may encourage the group to talk a little more personally without the conversation feeling forced. Story Cards are available for purchase at groupleaders.org/storycards.
- **Personal/Group Check-In:** This is an opportunity for you to ask how group members are doing. Possible questions include:
 - How was your week? Did anything exciting happen?

- How are you feeling about faith? Are you currently energized or drained?
- What has been the hardest thing you’ve walked through this week?
- What were the highs and lows/wows and pows?

LEARN

This is when you discuss the purpose of your time together—whether that is a study, an activity, or a video. This should take up the bulk of the meeting time.

TIMING: 60 MINUTES

ESSENTIALS

Our group essentials are the building blocks of a great group experience. These best practices help our groups achieve authentic community and spiritual growth and help people take responsibility for their own growth.

Stay Connected: Prioritize your growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

- You can only effectively lead others down a path you’ve gone down.
- You can help others grow best when you are growing in your relationship with Jesus.
- You need to draw spiritual guidance and nourishment from Jesus personally and directly.

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.

– John 15:5

Cultivate Relationships: Connect relationally outside of group time.

- To grow spiritually, you have to be connected relationally.
- Your role as a leader is to create an environment for your group members to connect on deeper levels during and outside of group time.
- Lead the way in connecting with your group members.
- Infuse fun.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind . . . And love your neighbor as yourself.

– Matthew 22:37, 39

Share Ownership: Delegate tasks.

- Identify group members who are willing to:
 - Schedule group meetings.

- Facilitate discussions.
- Bring snacks.
- Organize socials.
- Find service projects.
- Provide care for group members.
- You are only responsible for leading the group; you are not responsible for doing it all.
- Delegating is important because it keeps you from burning out and helps group members take steps in their own growth.

Provide Care: Be aware of what's going on in people's lives.

- Take the lead as members experience pain or difficulty.
 - Follow up on prayer requests or life events.
 - Change your plans to attend a funeral.
 - Set up a meal calendar for someone who just had a baby or is ill.
- There are levels of care that go beyond the capacity of the group.
 - If a group member is navigating an issue like addiction, divorce, serious financial problems, or a loss, they may need to connect with a church staff member who can provide pastoral care or a professional counselor.
 - More information can be found at groupleaders.org/providecare.

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

– Galatians 6:10

EXPECTATIONS

Who's responsible for growth? Ultimately, God is, but we all have a role in the process.

LEADER – ENCOURAGES THE PROCESS

- Puts others first.
- Listens well and asks clarifying questions.
- Is quick to ask questions and slow to offer simple answers.
- Thinks carefully about what a group member needs in a given situation.
- Promotes group members' further engagement.

The posture of a leader is humble, teachable, curious, and intentional. Your posture can bridge the gap between what you don't know and what the group needs. **They don't expect you to know everything.** They do expect you to be **caring and empathetic.**

INDIVIDUAL – OWNS THE PROCESS

- Everyone has to own their personal spiritual growth.
- Owning means staying connected and staying engaged.

GROUP – SUPPORTS THE PROCESS

Group Agreement

- Sets expectations and can help you course-correct over time.
- Casts vision.

APPLY AND PRAY

This is when you ask the group, “What is one thing you will take away from what we discussed today?” and “How can we pray for one another?”

TIMING: 15–30 MINUTES

Application is discussing how to apply what was covered during your group time and how God may be at work in other areas of a group member's life.

Prayer is an opportunity to pray for one another individually. Not everyone has to share, but we ask that you try to keep requests focused on personal needs and/or content from the session (not open-ended). This creates intentionality around the requests and ensures that the group stays focused on building community.

MEETING LOGISTICS

Knowing the essentials and expectations of leading is the foundation for any leader, but knowing the tactical steps of leading is just as important. Below you will find information on our best practices regarding meeting frequency, weekly agendas, helpful resources, and more.

FREQUENCY

Meeting schedules can be flexible, fixed, or designed to correspond with the group's current study. We recommend that groups discuss the meeting schedule up front and that everyone is on board with the plan.

Sample Frequency:

- On for 3, off for 1
- On for 1, off for 1
- On for 2, off for 1
- On for duration of study, off for 1

Tips:

- Groups that meet for three weeks and take one week off have great success in momentum and connection.
- Many groups have found it's best to take time off during certain seasons (e.g., Thanksgiving week, December, and summer). Outside of those times, we don't recommend being off for longer than one week.
- Following the school calendar works well, but this is not a requirement.

- If you're in a Married Group, it's important to find time to occasionally split the men and women.

WEEKLY AGENDA

We typically recommend meeting for 1.5–2 hours.

Sample 2-Hour Meeting Schedule:

7:00–7:30 p.m. - Connect: Icebreaker/catch-up time

7:30–8:30 p.m. - Learn: Study/discussion (videos, discussion questions, homework)

8:30–9:00 p.m. - Apply: Prayer requests/check in with members

COMMUNICATIONS

It is helpful to touch base with your group members between meetings, especially those that have missed a week or two. Sending a note before or after your weekly meetings reminds them of the next meeting time and location, the homework, who is responsible for snacks, etc.

SOCIALS

You'll want to add in a social—a time to get together outside of the typical group format. You can choose to serve as a group, get together with spouses, or do a fun activity. Try to schedule two socials during your group cycle.

Sample Socials:

- Friendsgiving
- Movie
- Dinner
- Game Night
- Stories Night

SERVING

During the month of September, our church offers serving opportunities with Be Rich. Visit BeRich.org for more information as that time approaches. Also, we would love for you and your group to serve regularly throughout the year!

STUDY PLANS

Having a good study rhythm requires preparation. It's important to balance topical studies and Bible studies. This keeps people interested. Choose a book, workbook, or video-based study, and plan for breaks. Perhaps select a one- to two-week sermon series by Andy Stanley if you just finished a study with a lot of homework.

Balance the Following:

- Length of study
- Amount of homework/reading
- Topic

RESOURCES

- Visit groupleaders.org to access the following:
 - Leader Tips and Study Recommendations
 - Recommended Curriculum Plans
 - Anthology App
 - Group Cycle Template
 - Curriculum Cycle Template

NOTES



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NOTES

LET US NOT BECOME
WEARY IN DOING GOOD,
FOR AT THE PROPER TIME
WE WILL REAP A HARVEST
IF WE DO NOT GIVE UP.

– GALATIANS 6:9

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