



# Beginning & Leading a Small Group

*A Practical Primer for Mapping Out Your Strategy*

THIS TOOL IS TO HELP YOU LAUNCH AND LEAD a small group. If you have never led a small group, or you have been leading one for years, this practical booklet is for you. Small groups offer biblical content, challenge, camaraderie and character change. May this tool help you on your way!

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## Lead a Small Group? (Me?!?)

Think about how you came to know Christ, or how you have grown in your faith. You are who you are today because someone knew you by name and invested in you personally. Whether it was your parents, friends, or perhaps a pastor or small group leader, more than likely God has used one or more people to make a tremendous difference in your life.

And leading a small group gives you the opportunity to invest—and perhaps make the same sort of impact—in someone else’s life!

While most churches hold large-group worship services, these events aren’t designed for personal interaction, and it can be difficult to develop close personal relationships. Which is why small groups can be so valuable. Remember Jesus’ words:

*“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age”*  
– Matthew 28:18-20

The focus of the Great Commission is to make disciples, or followers of Jesus. How does one do this? By teaching them to observe (or obey) everything that He had taught. And often, one of the best ways to do this is through a small group!

### *Who can lead a small group? (And what if I don’t have a seminary degree?)*

All types of people can be effective small group leaders. God has an amazing way of using a variety of people to accomplish His goals. We often think it takes a great teacher or dynamic leader to lead a small group. While this sort of person may indeed be a good leader, the old adage that God is more interested in availability than ability remains true. And as you trust Him to work through you, (focusing on His power as opposed to your weaknesses) you will see fruit.

And be careful not to fall into the trap of thinking you need to be a Biblical scholar to lead a small group. You may wonder, “But what if they ask me a question and I don’t know the answer . . .?” When (not if) that does happen, simply reply that you don’t know, and that you will ask somebody that does. It is that simple.

**Important Note:** Students who regularly communicate their faith in Christ to others often see their groups grow quickly. You’ll have Christians in your group, but look for lost students as well. They can be an integral part of your small group.

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*Use the wide margins on the right side of these pages to record your ideas and thoughts about leading your small group as you read through this guide.*



## Preparing Yourself for Leadership

Remember, the goal is *not* to the small group in and of itself. The ultimate objective is to trust God to change peoples' lives. In Colossians 1:28-29 Paul emphatically stated: "And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me."

### *Prayer: the core of leadership*

It is foolishness to lead a small group apart from divine assistance. God is the One who changes lives, so obviously He must lead in the process. Only God can bring the people to your small group, develop character, and knit hearts together. Prayer is the starting point for such work, for it is God who chisels away and causes us to grow. Paul wrote, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God makes it grow" (I Cor. 3:6).

Too often, prayer is the last thing we consider when planning and preparing for our small group. We tack on a last minute, all-encompassing prayer asking God to bless well-made plans. Instead, we need to declare our dependence upon the Most High God at the onset and seek His will every step of the way.

In an article for *Discipleship Journal* entitled "Engaging the Unseen Foe," Jerry Bridges describes prayer as warfare with a defeated but still powerful enemy. He goes on to say:

*"There are three military terms that I feel illustrate various types of prayer: strategic, tactical, and logistical. Strategic refers to the ultimate objective—to defeat the enemy—and the overall plan, or strategy, to bring him into submission. Tactical means the specific battles necessary to achieve the ultimate objective. Logistical is simply supplying the physical needs of the army fighting the battle..."*

*"I believe that 75 to 80 percent of our prayer is for logistical items. For that sick person in the hospital. For the one who lost his job. But those things are almost all we pray about. "I would guess that 15 to 20 percent of our prayer effort is tactical, related to specific engagement with the enemy... [ed. note: For example, praying for the results of your small group is a tactical prayer.]"*

*"Very little of our prayer effort is strategic, or focused on our ultimate objective—the battle that God is really interested in. We need to remember that when we pray, we are entering into spiritual warfare. We are engaging a defeated but still powerful enemy: Satan, our unseen foe."*

Spiritual leadership requires different qualifications than does leadership in the marketplace. God’s Word to help us define and understand these differences. “It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer (leader), it is a fine work he desires to do” ( I Tim 3:1). Below are five attitudes that will help you evaluate your qualifications to function as a spiritual leader.

Do you have to be on the same maturity level as Christ to lead? No! Perfection is not a requirement. If it were, none of us could lead a small group. Growing into maturity is a continual process. The following five Heart attitudes will help keep your attitudes in check as a leader. Do you have them? Do you have the desire to ...

- Give and receive scriptural correction? Prov. 19:20-21
- Serve rather than be served? Phil. 2:3-11
- Follow spiritual leadership within scriptural guidelines? Heb. 13:17
- Initiate reconciliation? Matt. 5:21-26
- Honor your word? Matt. 12:33-37



## **Building Your Group: The Critical Role of Relationships and Evangelism**

Tom Wolf, in his article “*Oikos Evangelism: A Biblical Pattern*,” describes the New Testament pattern for evangelism and growth of the church. Oikos is the Greek word translated ‘household’ throughout the book of Acts (Acts 10:2, 24, 27; 11:14; 16:31), and is defined as “one’s circle of influence composed of family, neighbors, co-workers, and friends.” Everyone has an oikos, and it is the natural pathway through which the Gospel will spread.

Take a few minutes to analyze your oikos. If most of your relationships are with co-workers, start there. The fundamental idea is to start with your most significant relationships.

Use the space below to write down the people who make up your oikos. Ask God to help you talk about Christ to those most appropriate for you to initiate with. Identify three people in each of these areas of your oikos:

### *Family*

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### *Neighbors*

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*Co-workers / Classmates*

*Friends*

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As you pray for people in your oikos, and initiate conversations with them, you will see God use you in new ways. Some of the people listed above should be the first ones you invite to be a part of your small group. You may also want to ask members of your group to do this exercise to help them identify whom they can bring with them.

***Focus on meeting the needs of people***

Many small group leaders fail to recognize that the purpose of meeting together is not to simply exchange information. The goal is to live the Christian faith, not just talk about the Christian faith. As you get together in your group, look for things that will alert you to their individual needs, so you will be able to better serve them.

Use the following questions to help you determine what you will cover during your small group meetings:

1. What strengths do they have? Where do they need growth? What do they not understand?
2. What principles, or topics, would benefit them most at this stage in their Christian walk? (If you are not sure, ask your pastor, Crusade Staff Member, key leader or StudentLINC consultant for some suggestions. Also check out the “Discovery Questions” in Appendix B.)
3. What are their crucial needs? Do they comprehend the foundations of their faith (e.g., salvation, forgiveness, the Spirit-filled life, and how to study God’s Word). Are they sharing Christ with others?
4. How many weeks should the group run? You will want to make it long enough for the relationships to gel and yet short enough so non-Christians, coming to investigate the study, won’t feel overwhelmed. Try six weeks and evaluate, making any needed adjustments after three weeks.

Don’t “wing” your small group meetings. Leaders who don’t plan give themselves more stress and hinder the group’s growth. A leader may stimulate a great discussion, but he or she needs a deliberate plan to discuss and apply Biblical content. Take time to plan. The result will be a more focused small group, and students moving toward maturity in Christ.

***Evangelism***

Sometimes we make the mistake of simply wanting our small group to grow because larger numbers seem better. But a group can grow and still never see a single person come to Christ. And often, Christians only invite other Christians, never considering bringing their non-Christian friends. Beware of this trap, and be sure to consider those who have yet to know Christ yet as you invite others.

### *The size range for an effective small group*

A small group needs to have at least three people in it. But when does a small group become a large one? The answer to that varies, but here are some important characteristics of a small group:

- Everyone is able to participate
- Teaching is usually done through a dialogue
- People listen and help each other.

When a group involves ten or more students it becomes difficult to manage effectively. So what do you do if your group gets this large? Read on.

### *Multiplication, Apprentices, and Co-leaders*

The Apostle Paul was skilled at developing leaders to continue the work of ministry. His words reveal the priority he placed on developing other leaders: “And these things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others.” II Timothy 2:2

In light of this verse, it is wise to have a co-leader that you work with, or an apprentice who can learn from you.

Your prayer should be that your small group would grow to the point that you need to divide into two groups, with your co-leader or apprentice taking on the new group. Remember this key point: as your group stop growing on all fronts, it moves closer to reaching the point of ending.



## **Details, Details, Details (Food for Thought as You Plan)**

### *Where should you meet? How long should it last?*

Ask yourself a crucial question: Do I want this small group to meet on my turf or their turf? We often want others to come to us, adapt to our likes and dislikes. Consider the impact you'd make if you held your group meet in a non-Christian's room. How would things differ if you always met on an unbeliever's turf?

In general, aim to meet for at least an hour but for no more than two. Honor your time commitments about when you will end. Students have other things to do, and you should avoid (at all costs) becoming the 'on-and-on-and-on group.'

### *Inviting people to the first meeting*

First impressions are critical. When people walk into a small group setting for the first time, they often ask three questions (usually subconsciously): Do I like these people? Do these people like me? and Do I like what this group is about? Work hard to ensure they will have a positive response to at least the last two questions (the first one is beyond your control).

If you are inviting people from your oikos, be clear about what you will be discussing. Do not mislead them into thinking that you will just be hanging out and

then out of the blue pull out a Bible and say, 'Hey let's all look at the Bible...' It will probably be the last time you see them there.

If you are inviting people that you do not personally know (like from contact cards from a survey), drop by their place to personally meet and invite them. Introduce yourself and let them know how you got their name and number. Don't jump into the business of the small group too quickly.

Get to know them as a person and share about yourself. Ask about their spiritual background. When you invite them to your group, get their phone number and schedule. Tell them you will be calling them back in a couple of days to let them know the specific time for the group. Finally, give them your phone number and name a second time to make sure they have it so that they can reach you if something changes.

Call them back within the next 48 hours giving them a specific time and location of the study. You may want to say, 'We will be meeting in the lounge of Marks Hall at 7 P.M. Wednesday night. Is that still a good time for you? Should I call the night before to remind you? Good! If you have a Bible you can bring it. We will be wrapping up at 8:30 P.M. sharp.'



## **Time to Prepare... (What Are We Going to DO??)**

### *Preparing the Content*

1. Select something that has one primary passage. Jumping around to different passages in the Bible can be frustrating and confusing, especially to a new believer. Be sensitive if they need help finding the specific passage.
2. Make it a self-discovery study. As students mine the gold themselves the truth becomes more priceless to them. The best teachers use numerous basic observation questions like, "What did you like best and least about the passage? What was difficult to understand? What did you learn about God? What do you personally need to do about it? Pick a phrase or verse to take with you and think about this week." Each of these questions helps someone from any background participate. See the Appendix B for a list of Discovery Questions.
3. Spend the majority of your time on observation. The most accurate interpretations and the best applications come from a passage well observed. Have fun playing Sherlock Holmes.
4. Choose a passage that is long enough to produce a good discussion, but not so long that the group gets swallowed up in it. A good length would be 10 to 20 verses.
5. Remember to keep your group's needs in mind! Don't just pick something that interests you. Think about what will help your group members take the next step towards obedience in Christ.
6. Choose content that is not so complicated that you cannot carve out the time to prepare for the study. Keep it simple!

## *Preparing everything but the content*

Sometimes we think, “I’ve prepared the passage, I’m ready to go.” Yet there is more to leading a successful small group than content alone. Your job as the leader is to cultivate an environment where relationships will grow between you, the group members, and God.

Icebreakers can help the group open up and get them in the mood to study the Word. Choose one that will lead you into your discussion in that day’s study or one just for fun. Pick one that will help the group to get to know one another. Never underestimate the value of this part of the study.

***Here are a few ideas for starters.*** (See Appendix C for more.)

- a) Describe your week using a movie title, and explain why.
- b) A personal scavenger hunt—take 5 minutes and find the following items in your wallet or purse: Something that ... 1. you have had for a long time 2. you’re proud of. 3. reveals a lot about you. 4. reminds you of a fun time. 5. concerns or worries you.
- c) The first time I left home I ...
- d) Your house is on fire, and everyone is safe. You have thirty seconds to run through the house and collect 3 or 4 articles you want to save. What would you grab? Why? After everyone has done this, the group can discuss what they learned about the things they value.

Prayer can be a barrier in a small group or it can be the glue. Intimate things are shared in a prayer time, and can draw people together. On the other hand prayer can be a hurdle for the young believer. Feeling pressure (even if it isn’t there) to pray out loud when you have never done so can cause a person to not want to return to a study. The comment here is to be sensitive, teach young believers to pray in short sentences, and don’t ever force anyone to pray.

Snacks are a nice addition to a study. Don’t let them prevent you from thoroughly preparing your content. If they become a hindrance, buy them or skip them or better yet involve others in the group in the responsibility!



## **Countdown to Kickoff...**

Here is the scenario: The small group meeting time is set for 7 p.m., Wednesday nights. Seven people are on their way to meet you. Some of them you have met face to face, others you have talked to on the phone, and at least one you have never met and is coming with his roommate.

### ***One week or more prior to the first meeting***

1. Make sure all group members have been contacted and know when, where, what time, and a little of what they can expect from the group. Is there anyone you are forgetting? Remind them to bring a Bible. (It is amazing how many can come to a small group without a Bible. Consider bringing extras for people to borrow.)

2. Prepare the content of your lesson. Do the lesson yourself. In the first meeting, focus on building relationships. That is not an excuse to minimize the Scriptures, but be sensitive to the group not knowing each other and give them the chance to find out things about one another.
3. Prepare to lead or guide the lesson. It is one thing to do the lesson yourself; it is another thing to lead it. Think about how your group might discover the truths for themselves. Write some follow up questions. Ask yourself what areas of the lesson may be new to the group members and how can you help them with anything that could seem confusing.
4. Pray for those coming. Ask God for wisdom in how He wants to work in their lives.
5. Summarize the lesson, making sure you are clear on the 'big picture.' Why are you choosing this subject? What do you want them to *know*? What do you want them to *feel*? What do you want them to *do*? A week after you have taught the lesson, what do you want them to remember? How are you going to help them to remember it? If you are clear on the answer to these questions, you are much more likely to have the group walk away focusing on the right things when the study ends.

### *Two days prior to your small group*

1. Call group members to remind them of the time and place. Be sure to let them know you are glad they are coming. Make sure they have your phone number.
2. Plan a good ice breaker. Don't just assume relationships will be built. Plan for it with good ice breakers. An ice breaker is something that gets each group member talking and sharing early on. Refer to Appendix C for some ideas.
3. Think through announcements you need to make. What are the up coming events you want them to know about: The tailgater before the football game, the 70's party in two weeks, or the fall retreat in late October.
4. Plan the specifics for your meeting. You have 90 minutes to build relationships, cover content, make announcements, and pray. What portion of the 90 minutes do you want to spend on each area? Different weeks—and different levels of spiritual maturity among members—will dictate different amounts of time. Be wise!
5. Pick up some refreshments. The first few weeks can be awkward as people get to know one another. There is nothing like a good snack to get people comfortable, loosened up and talking. Make it easy on yourself and buy something prepared. You don't want baking a batch of cookies to keep you from walking into that group ready to go.
6. Give yourself time to stop by the copy center for any hand-outs you might want to provide.

### *Thirty minutes before group time*

It is 6:30 the day of your study. What can you do to ensure a smooth start?

1. Be there early to review lesson.
2. Welcome members without being distracted.
3. Pray and seek the Lord.
4. Turn the answering machine down, as well as the phone to reduce distractions.
5. Make sure there are plenty of comfortable seats.
6. Set snacks out.

## Conducting Your First Meeting

It is 7 p.m. Time to get things started. Begin by introducing people to one another. Don't delay. Get things going. Start with your icebreaker and then transition into your study. Be sure to end promptly.

### After the First Meeting

1. Call and ask them how things are going. Ask them specifics about things they shared in the group.
2. Serve them. If someone in the group expressed a need, try to meet it. A ride to a job interview, etc.
3. Do something fun. Go to the home football game, meet them for lunch on campus, or study with them in the library and greet them with Starbucks coffee.
4. Work through the Evaluation Questions found in Appendix D. Make any changes necessary before the next week.

### Plan the First 6 Weeks

You will want your content to have continuity and yet you will want each lesson to be able to stand alone should you have a visitor. You do not want to discourage your group by making them feel lost just because they were not able to make last week's meeting. At the same time, there is nothing like having a theme or a topic for several weeks in a row, to focus and really drive home the big picture.

*Here are two possible ideas depending on the needs of your group.*

1. A study on Jesus' seven "I am" statements made in the Gospel of John. Instead of you teaching the passage and everyone else listening, why not try using Discovery Questions? These questions allow people at all levels to contribute to the conversation. A sample list of the Discovery Questions is included in Appendix B.
2. InterActa Studies, developed by Campus Crusade for Christ, are designed to be very interactive and Bible-centered. See the Appendix A for a partial list of the wide variety of topics available. These easy-to-order studies are available through Integrated Resources (800-729-4351); from the Godsquad ([www.godsquad.com](http://www.godsquad.com)); or from [www.uscm.org](http://www.uscm.org). Be sure to get the leader's guide *and* the student notes.



## One Final Thought...

Remember that the goal of leading a small group is changed lives. How does God usually do this? Memorize this verse: "Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us." I Thessalonians 2:8.

It is easy to meet simply to discuss information with others, but this is not the goal. You must impart yourself. This means getting your hands dirty in peoples' lives. For some practical ideas on loving your oikos, check out Appendix E.

May God bless your labor. May it be to His glory and His glory alone.

## Appendix A: InterActa Studies Available.

Topic (Title of Lesson)

1. Assurance of Salvation (A Sure Thing)
2. Choices (Mega-choices)
3. Compassion (Who Cares?)
4. Convictions (No Compromise)
5. Emotional Authenticity (Get Real)
6. Esther (When Opportunity Knocks)
7. Forgiveness (My Bad)
8. Gray Areas (Shades of Gray)
9. Leadership (Take Charge)
10. Dozens more available. Call 800-729-4351 for a complete list or go to either the Godsquad ([www.godsquad.com](http://www.godsquad.com)) or to [www.uscm.org](http://www.uscm.org).

## Appendix B: Discovery Questions

Discovery Questions will help guide your discussion through a passage of Scripture. They allow everyone in the group to participate. Furthermore, they help set a relational dynamic for your group, removing the need for one person to teach while others sit and listen. Feel free to write your own! (These were written by John DeVries and Carol Davis.)

1. What did you like best? a. What did you find encouraging? b. What did you find helpful? c. What was the best part (of this story) for you?
2. What did you like least? a. What was disturbing? b. What was difficult? c. What was surprising or hard?
3. What did you not understand? a. Discuss anything in which you find confusing. b. Is there anything you would like to know more about? c. Which part puzzles you?
4. What did you learn about God? a. How is God different than humans? b. How does this change or illumine your picture of God? c. What impression of God do you get from God in this reading?
5. What do you personally need to do about it? a. If this is true, what is your next move? b. Is there something you have learned about yourself that needs to change? c. What are some practical ways in which you can respond?
6. Pick a phrase or verse to take with you and think about this week. a. What nugget of truth will you take with you for a treasure this week? b. Which part of this story will make a difference and how? c. What do you most need to remember and how will you apply it?

## Appendix C: Creative Ice Breakers

1. What room was the center of warmth in your home? Describe your relationship with your parents. How would they show their love to you?
2. What is your favorite way of spending your spare time?
3. When did God become more than just a word to you?
4. Describe a time when you have felt close to God?
5. What makes you feel loved? What makes you cry?

6. What characteristic in a person irritates you and why?
7. What kind of vehicle would you like to drive if cost were not a factor?
8. What would you like to be said at your funeral?
9. What were your best and worse moments this week?
10. Chart your life. (Give each of them a piece of paper and have them “chart their life” to use as a visual aid in telling their story.)

## **Appendix D: Evaluate Your Meeting**

1. Did everyone show up? Why didn't some people come?
2. Were you prepared?
3. Did you have an attitude of expectancy? Were you prepared if you had someone extra show up?
4. Did you set a warm atmosphere?
5. What adjustments need to be made? Better lighting?

## **Appendix E: Loving Your Oikos**

1. Pray for your oikos.
2. Love your oikos.
  - a) Notes / Calls... surprise them.
  - b) Unexpected gift, candy bar, baked goods, etc.
  - c) Help according to their need — run errands, moving furniture, drive them to the store for food, invite them over for dinner, tutor a student who needs help in calculus (make sure you know what you are doing!)
  - d) Volunteer to bring your international neighbor home with you for Thanksgiving or Spring Break.
  - e) Ask how you can pray for them.
  - f) Give your phone number for emergencies.
  - g) See a need. Meet it.
  - h) Take snacks over for a study break.
  - i) Offer old magazines to them.
  - j) Let them borrow some of your CD's or videos.
  - k) Remember birthdays with cards or small gifts.
  - l) Cut out magazine/newspaper articles of oikos' interests.
  - m) Offer advice on professors, classes or majors.
  - n) Help freshmen make friends on campus.
  - o) Offer them advice on how the campus works: parking stickers, football tickets, where to find the best food, etc.
  - p) Go to the gym and work out together.
  - q) Make a midnight Ben 'n Jerry's run.
  - r) Watch a favorite TV show together.
  - s) Rent a \$.99 movie at a local video shop.
  - t) Hit the books together at the library.
  - u) Do laundry together.
  - v) Give them a call just to chat.
  - w) Play a mild practical joke on them.
  - x) Get a small group together to order pizza out.
  - y) Head to the beach after classes on Friday.
  - z) Offer to proofread their term paper.