

# Small Group Leader Orientation



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# VENTURE SMALL GROUPS

## The Purpose of Venture Small Groups

Small groups at Venture exist to help others grow to full maturity in their relationship with God and others. We call these Romans 12 Christians. When the religious leaders asked Jesus what was most important, He answered them by saying "Love God and love people." With that answer, Jesus defined spiritual maturity in relational terms. As a Small Group Leader/Host, your job is to create a relational environment where people can connect with others, belong to something meaningful, and grow in their relationship with God.

## What is a Small Group?

A small group is typically made up of six to twelve people who meet regularly during the week to share their lives, support one another, and study the Bible. Each group has a Host and a Leader (this may be the same person). Groups meet in a number of different locations around the Bay Area including: coffee shops, restaurants and workplaces, but typically they meet in homes. Usually our groups meet in the evening, but you have the freedom to pick a time that is convenient for those in your group. Our goal is to accommodate the different needs of those in our church by offering a variety of options.

## What does a Small Group look like?

Our small groups have a time of fellowship, prayer, Bible or book study, discussion, and life application. The order of these components may vary but the foundation is the same, authentic relationships around Biblical truth. Not all groups study the same thing; but at least once a year, the entire church aligns around a common curriculum.

We also encourage our small groups to be missional minded by serving the community together On Mission. Groups have fed the homeless, written letters and baked cookies for prison inmates, served neighbors in need, made hospital visits, and so much more. It's amazing what God can do through a group of people as they use their skills, gifts and resources to help those in need.

## Characteristics & Expectations of a Leader

As Leaders, we strive to grow in these characteristics:

- Consistent personal time before God
- Modeling Christ-centered lives, committed to praying for your small group
- A grace-filled heart that can relate to group members
- Transparency & genuineness lived out and modeled within your small group
- If married, commitment to marriage and family
- Regular attendance at Venture Church services

## BUILDING YOUR GROUP

### How do I get people to come to a group in my home?

- Invite your friends and neighbors!
- Meet people at church and invite them
- Meet new people at one of our “Group Connects” scheduled in the fall
- You will also receive requests from people looking to join a small group in your community via our Map Locator
- Maybe you have been looking for a way to have a spiritual impact in your workplace. Be an inviter!

In this manual, we have provided you with invitations and a sample script to use when inviting new people to your group. Above all, pray for God’s leading and be patient!

### Is it appropriate to invite non-Christians?

Yes! Our desire, and God’s, is to impact men and women for eternity, whoever they are. Work hard to fill your home and you will be a significant part of this extraordinary opportunity that will spiritually transform your community!

# INVITING 101

## Guidelines to consider when inviting people:

Keep in mind that most people like to connect with you before they come to your group. You become a familiar person to them when you meet them, enabling them to come and engage your group more easily.

- Types of people to invite:
  - Family-immediate or extended
  - Friends
  - Co-workers
  - Neighbors
  - Church contacts and those requesting your group
- Mistakes to avoid:
  - Failing to saturate the situation in prayer
  - Giving up too soon
  - Trying to be a solo inviter (encourage those who have committed to your group to invite people also)
  - Using inappropriate levels of pressure (don't twist peoples arms; instead, ask the Holy Spirit to guide)
  - Not communicating in a variety of ways (emails, postcards, phone calls)
- When should I start inviting? As soon as you feel comfortable to extend an invitation!  
Honestly, the trick is to keep on inviting in a variety of ways. It may be that a random act of kindness will speak to a person louder than words!

## How many people should I expect to be in my group?

We suggest inviting 10-20 people. Then after the first night, let those in your group invite some of their own friends. In our experience, only about half of those who say they will come actually do. An optimum number of people to have in a small group is 6-12, but if more show up, that's great! We'll show you how to "sub-group" a larger group for discussion and prayer. If you have less than six people, that's great too. Sometimes the most meaningful connection happens in groups of three to four. Expect God size opportunities.

# HOME INVITATION SCRIPT

Important points to cover when calling those who have requested a group:

- Introduce yourself by name from Venture Christian Church and ask if they have a moment to talk. (Don't talk too long if they are busy; be aware of what they say)
- Indicate that you are starting a new group and would like to invite them to participate in a 7-week Bible study in your home on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ (the day of the week that you have selected).
- If they plan to attend, provide your phone number, home address and directions to your home. Reconfirm the date and time.
- End with an inviting closing such as: "I can't wait to have you in my home", or "I'm looking forward to you joining us."
- Follow up with a reminder card or email 4-5 days before the meeting.

### Important points to cover when inviting a neighbor to your group:

- Introduce yourself by name as their neighbor on your street. Ask if they have a moment to talk.
- Indicate that you are planning to have a group of neighbors meet in your home on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_ (day of the week and time) for 7-week Bible study or spiritual discussion.
- Ask them if they would like to come check it out. If they want to know more, ask them if they think it would be great to get together with people that are so close, who share similar values. Explain to them there will be a 20-25 minute video teaching each week, followed by a group discussion time. Be creative based on who you are inviting.
  - If yes: Provide your phone number and address, with directions; reconfirm the date and time.
  - If no: Thank them and offer your telephone number just in case they change their mind.
- End with an inviting closing such as, "I can't wait to have you come over" or "I'm looking forward to joining us" or "Please feel free to come if you change your mind."

## FAQS FOR NEW SMALL GROUP LEADERS AND HOST

Can I get a friend to help me lead?

Absolutely! We encourage you to pair up with another friend or group member to lead/facilitate. Together you can pray for God to bring people to your group. It's our hope, by teaming up with someone else, to lighten the load and enhance the adventure for the whole group.

## I'll be occasionally out of town; any suggestions?

If you have to miss a group and are not co-leading with anyone, simply ask someone in your group to host and facilitate for that meeting. We find that people are willing to take on this responsibility. This also gives a potential new leader the opportunity to grow and explore the role.

## Will I have any responsibilities between the meetings?

Once you form your group, we ask that you connect with your people at least once a week outside the meeting time. This can be achieved in a variety of ways: coffee, email, phone calls, or dropping a postcard in the mail. You may even ask if someone in your group would help you take on this responsibility. We also ask that you take consistent weekly attendance.

## Will I be asked to continue leading this group after the 7 weeks are over?

We are so grateful for your gift of leadership for these seven weeks. When your commitment is over, each Leader needs to personally decide what his or her role will be with the group. It's our prayer that the Host and group members would continue meeting as a Venture small group. If that's not your plan personally, you may be instrumental in helping the group select a new Leader and find a place to meet. That's why it's a good idea to share leadership as much as possible during the course of the seven weeks.

## Who will be there to help me?

No matter if you are a seasoned veteran or first time Leader, everyone can benefit from having a coach. Coaches provide support, encouragement, prayer, resources and a sounding board for situations that you may be uncertain on how to handle. Coaches are a vital relationship to growing a healthy small group environment. During your 7-week adventure, a coach will be assigned to check in with you, get to know you and see how things are going. Their role is to help you create the best small group environment for spiritual growth to occur. We also have a Venture Prayer Team that will be praying for God's favor and the health of each small group. You may request specific prayer needs for your group.

## Top Ten Leadership Tips for New Leaders

1. **REMEMBER THAT YOU'RE NOT ALONE!** God knows everything about you, and He knew that you would be asked to help lead/facilitate this group. No matter if you're a seasoned veteran or this is your first time, God is waiting on you to ask Him for wisdom, strength and help. God promises that He'll never leave us or forsake us, so relax!

2. **BE YOURSELF.** If you won't be yourself, who will? God wants to use your unique gifts, skills and temperament. Don't try to do things exactly like another Leader; do them the way that fits you! If you don't have an answer or if you make a mistake, just apologize and find out later. Your group will love you for it—and you'll sleep better at night.

3. **PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETING AHEAD OF TIME.** Spend time in prayer, asking God to come into your group's presence. Ask God for the ability to help your group move past the surface to more important beliefs and issues in life. Be sure to pray for your group members by name. Ask God to use you and your members to touch the heart of every person collectively. You may even email this prayer list to your members so everyone can get in on what God is doing in your midst.

4. **OCCASIONALLY SUB-GROUP.** This can be very powerful, especially after the group gets comfortable with one another. Sub-grouping involves breaking up into prayer partners or triads after the session. It's easier for people to apply what they are learning if they experience a little love and support. Also, those who are unaccustomed to praying out loud will feel more comfortable trying it with just one or two others. Remind these smaller groups that they don't have to pray out loud if they feel uncomfortable!

5. **SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD.** The old adage is true, "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." That's why it's so important that you respond well to those who take the risk of answering your questions. Remember to affirm a person when they speak even if they give the wrong answer. If you disagree, take the blame for the miscommunication and then restate the question for clarity. Then ask, "How about someone else?"

6. **WHEN YOU ASK A QUESTION, BE PATIENT.** Someone will eventually respond. Sometimes people need a moment or two to think about the question, and if silence doesn't bother you, it won't bother anyone else. Validate people when they respond to a question. You may respond back with 'thank you, that was a good point' or 'that was a great observation'.

7. **ASK OTHERS WHAT THEY THINK BEFORE YOU SHARE.** Great facilitators implement the 30-70 rule. They speak 30% of the time while their group members speak 70% of the time. The only time that you may want to deviate from this rule is when you are asking for a personal application. In those cases, it may be appropriate to take the lead, especially if the application requires becoming open and vulnerable.

8. **SHOW INTEREST WITH YOUR BODY LANGUAGE.** One of the best ways to connect with people is to actively listen to them. Great listeners not only use their ears but their entire body. When thinking about listening non-verbally, remember the acronym (S.O.L.E.R.): face people **squarely**, adopt an **open** posture, **lean** slightly forward, maintain good **eye** contact and be **relaxed** and natural.

9. **BE MINDFUL OF QUIET ZONES.** It's incredibly important for facilitators to be sensitive to new people or others in their group who are a little reluctant or are not ready to add to the conversation or pray out loud. If you notice a "quiet zone" try not to put added pressure on people who are not ready to share by going "around the circle" for prayer requests or comments. Instead, encourage individuals gently by asking questions like: "How about someone else?" or "Would someone who hasn't shared like to add anything?"

10. **HANDLING THE CONSTANT TALKER.** Handling a group member who intentionally or unintentionally dominates your group time can be one of the biggest challenges for Leaders/facilitators. It's important at the outset of the group to share that it's your hope that everyone in the group gets a chance to add to the group discussion on a regular basis (see group covenant). If a group member frequently over talks and doesn't "take the hint" from your suggestion of asking people who haven't yet shared to share, then it's probably appropriate to take more direct steps. One easy way to dissuade the constant talker is to make sure you intentionally call on others to ask what they think or feel. If this behavior persists the best solution for an over talker is to speak the truth in love. This is done one-on-one by validating their passion or desire to share while letting them know that their passion can keep others from sharing. This is a great opportunity to ask them to share less so others can participate in the group. You may need to help them become more aware of how they can negatively impact the group environment by dominating. Always end with encouraging them that they are important to you and the group.

# STARTING YOUR GROUP

## Small Group Checklist:

- DVD
- Study Guides for those attending
- The name and contact information for your coach

## Creating AN Environment the First Night

The Bible is very clear on the subject of offering hospitality. 1 Peter 4:9 states: "Open your homes to each other without complaining." Or simply put, open hearts lead to open homes. For some, hospitality is as natural as breathing; for others, the practice must be acquired. Unfortunately, many Christians have confused biblical hospitality with entertaining. Entertaining can say: I want to impress you with my beautiful home, my clever decorating, and my gourmet cooking. Conversely, hospitality seeks to minister. It says, "This home is not mine. It's truly a gift from God. I just want to use what He has given me for His purposes."

## Here are some practical steps toward hospitality:

- Pray for the presence of God in your home.
- Before the meeting, dedicate your home and its contents to the Lord. Is there anything that you would be embarrassed for Jesus to see if He was coming for dinner?
- Prepare for the meeting ahead of time; make sure there are plenty of seats, and have a comfortable inviting place.
- Have your goal be to establish relationships and not just get through the curriculum. The first couple of weeks should consist of ice breakers, finding common ground among the group members, fellowship and basic vision for the group. Create an experience that people want to return to. Have fun and laugh!
- If it's possible, put the pets away so they won't be a distraction during meeting time.
- Turn on lights inside the rooms that you want your guests to have access to. Shut doors and turn off lights in places that are off limits.
- If parking is tight, it's a good idea to let your neighbors know that you'll be having a get-together once a week. Make sure your guests know where they're allowed to park.
- Make sure everyone has a name tag and spend a little time with each guest to get to know them. Don't want to use name tags? Instead, play a "name game": Have one person use alliteration or rhyming to make up a funny name for him/herself (i.e. "Candy Andy"). The person to their right goes next by introducing themselves, "Hi, I'm Jim from Jupiter. And that's Andy from Africa." The next person goes, "Hi, I'm Paul from Persia. That's Jim from Jupiter and he's Andy from Africa." The game continues around the entire circle, so everyone gets a turn to introduce themselves and have a shot at remembering group members' names.

- If you're serving food, especially on the first night, it's better to serve it first. Subsequent nights you may want to consider serving it at the end of your meetings (gives a natural time for people who have to leave a way of escape and helps keep your meetings on schedule).
- Do your best to communicate the purpose for small groups and why you are meeting (see page two).
- Make sure you provide time for people to ask questions.
- Lead the group in prayer, asking God to bring the group together in unity and purpose. Pray that your group will be a safe place to grow and establish healthy relationships.
- End the group with an upbeat invitation to come back, and remind people to be prepared to have fun and grow as God builds the group. Be at your front door to say good bye.

## Sample Small Group Study Timeline

- Your timeline will vary, depending on the individuals and connectedness of your group; adjust accordingly.
  - Arrivals & greetings 10mins.
  - Open with prayer for God's presence and blessing over your time together
  - Ice Breaker 5-10mins.
  - Bible Study 30-50mins.
  - Prayer requests & praying 15-20mins.
  - Refreshments, socializing & goodbyes
- Be sure to let everyone know your start and stop times for the group so they know what to expect.

## Healthy Boundaries for Your Small Group

Clear communication of your small group's boundaries is very important to the health of your group. Most people feel more comfortable when they understand the basic ground rules and expectations. Discussing them when you start a new group and periodically revisiting them will help your group maintain a healthy, relational culture.

### Boundaries:

- Communicate start and stop times and stick to them.
- Ensure people understand confidentiality (Proverbs 11:12-13).
- The collective group is not to be a counseling session. People want to be heard and not fixed. If people ask for suggestions, keep the responses Biblical.
- It's OK to pass during a discussion question. Knowing how people process information and communicate is important. Remember, some of us are extroverted while others are more introverted.

- Timeout called (when things get out of hand, rabbit trails, high emotions, disrespect); the Leader has the authority to end the discussion. Communicate this in a light-hearted way like... 'we can all get distracted or too passionate about a given topic. If this happens, I may signal for a time out to refocus our discussion; it's not a big deal but I want us to get back on track'.
- The group will not debate or argue non-salvation issues that lead to division. Let's remember that we unify in essential beliefs, we have diversity in non-essential beliefs and we show charity in all of our beliefs.

These boundaries are essential for a balanced, thoughtful group. As a Leader, sharing these in a non-legalistic, light-hearted way will help your people respect and appreciate the need for them as we give grace and love to one another.

# SMALL GROUP GUIDELINES

## This is a safe group

We will all do our part to create an environment where every person can be real, open, and honest with their struggles and victories.

## Confidentiality is very important

What is shared in the group remains in the group. Integrity with someone being vulnerable is key to a trusting environment.

## We will not crosstalk

Crosstalk is a conversation during discussion time that leaves others out and can be hurtful.

## We will not give advice

We are not here to fix each other. Jesus does that part. Often people just need to be heard. They will ask you if they need advice.

## We want everyone to have an opportunity to share

As a group member, be sensitive about the amount of time that you share, and encourage others to share.

## We will commit to resolving conflict Biblically

Matthew 18 addresses a sin against you. Not everything done to you is a sin issue.

## We will start and stop our group on an agreed upon time

Groups often start at 7pm and end at 8:30pm. You decide times in your group.

## We will commit to make living life in Biblical Community a priority

Consistent group attendance helps create a healthy, safe, and stable environment while positioning ourselves before God to grow spiritually.

# FACILITATING SKILLS

## Getting the Most Out of Your Time Together

A typical small group meeting lasts from one and a half to two hours, which leaves six days and twenty+ hours outside the group meeting. We all live busy, complex lives that tend to crowd out meaningful relationships. Deep friendships can't be formed with limited contact. One of the best ways to deepen your group is to simply hang out together outside of normal group time. Encourage your people to meet in between the meetings.

### some practical ways to “do life together”

- Give your group members a call to see how their week is going, get to know them better, and/or pray with them
- Invite someone over for dinner
- Baby-sit for a couple so they can go out
- Do an 'On Mission' project
- Establish a prayer chain
- Sit together at church
- Have a special time of prayer
- Set up accountability partners
- Have a “guy's night out” or a “girl's night out”

## How do we handle the childcare needs in our group?

Very carefully! Seriously, this can be a sensitive issue. We suggest that you empower the group to openly brainstorm solutions.

Venture does not supply childcare. We do have some creative ideas for you to try that can be a very positive experience. You may try something that works for some and not for others, so just keep playing with the dials. Some common solutions:

- As a group, pitch in money to hire a sitter
- If small group members live in the same neighborhood, drop the kids off at the other house with a parent or sitter.
- Rotate a parent with the kids in a different room of your house each week. (Have that parent provide a lesson, craft or teach the kids a skit on a Bible story. Have the kids present their skit or craft to the entire small group near the end of the meeting.) This idea can be an incredible blessing to you and the kids. We've done it, and it worked great!
- Another popular option is to use one home for the kids and a second home (close by or a phone call away) for the adults.

- Once or twice, do a potluck for all family members to be with their kids.

Again, the best approach is to encourage the group to dialogue openly about both the problem and the solution.

## **Who do I get help from IF I HAVE AN ISSUE IN MY GROUP THAT I DON'T KNOW HOW TO HANDLE?**

We want to help. Please connect with your coach, our Small Group coordinator Beth ([byamada@venturechristian.org](mailto:byamada@venturechristian.org)), or me (Jim) at [jblazin@venturechristian.org](mailto:jblazin@venturechristian.org)

## 7-Week Small Group Covenant

**Clear Purpose:** Small groups at VCC exist to help others grow to full maturity in their relationship with God and others.

**Group Attendance:** To give priority to the group meeting (call or email if you will be late or absent).

**Safe Environment:** To create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved. What this looks like: good listening, validation, no quick answers to struggles, snap judgments, or simple fixes.

**Group Participation:** We want everyone to have an opportunity to participate in the group. Each person is responsible for how much they share. We will address over talking in order to achieve group participation.

**Confidentiality:** To keep anything that is shared within the group confidential.

**Spiritual Health:** To give group members permission to help me live a healthy spiritual life that is pleasing to God.

**Inviting New People:** To keep the group open and invite new people along the way (all groups especially in the beginning tend to go through some amount of healthy attrition).

**Shared Ownership:** To encourage one another to share in group responsibilities.

**Spiritual Partners:** To pair up with one other group member whom I can support more diligently and grow spiritually.

We agree to the following expectations:

When we will meet (day of the week) \_\_\_\_\_

Where we will meet (place) \_\_\_\_\_

We will begin at (time) \_\_\_\_\_ and end at \_\_\_\_\_

Childcare \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_