

HOST ORIENTATION HANDBOOK

Host Orientation Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! You have responded to the call to help shepherd Jesus' flock. There are few other tasks in the family of God that surpass the contribution you will be making. As you prepare to lead, whether it is one session or the entire series, there are a few things to keep in mind.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE LEADING A SMALL GROUP

We are asking that all hosts be a member of the church before opening their home to a Small Group. If you are not a member of the church, please get connected to a group.

1. What will be expected of you as a host.

Open Your Home. As the host, we are asking that you open your home to this new group for the duration of the Bible study. We encourage you to pair up with someone else (like another couple or a another person in a singles group). You can decide how you will share the role of host. It is our hope that by teaming up with someone else, you can find a way to make this an exciting and challenging adventure for both of you.

Commit for the Duration. One of the great things about the campaign is that it fits with every person's schedule. Pick the day and time that works best for you.

Plan on having the study time set aside to be with the new group of people. Aside from the group meetings and weekend services, there aren't any additional "formal" activities.

If you know up front that you will not continue with the group after the study, we ask that you let the group know this. Then, show up with the video teaching each week and help the group learn to lead itself by rotating host homes and facilitators weekly. This helps other members grow and gives you a break. Challenge someone to step up and lead the group beyond the study. We also hope that you will pray for this new group and each of the members individually.

2. The time requirement each week.

From start to finish, the average small group meeting lasts between 90 -120 minutes. As the host, you might commit a little extra time between meetings each week to review the upcoming session and the leader material as well as to pray for your group members.

The video teaching itself will be approximately 15 minutes in length. The study will be available on DVD only. The rest of the meeting will be spent using the exercises and discussion materials we will provide in the discussion guide.

3. The number of people you should expect to accommodate.

The optimum number of people to have in a small group is 8–10. This group size allows for great interactive communication while still giving people a chance to talk and share. There will be 10 chairs around each table at the Connection event.

4. How people will be connected to your group.

There are three main ways you will connect with people to attend the study in your home:

(1) **At Connection Event.** Find a table that appears unoccupied. You will find a *Table Tent Card* and magic marker at the table. Fill out the information about your group on the card and place it at the center of the table so that people can see at a glance. If you would like to form a group as a certain affinity (like couples, singles, women, men, single parents, etc.), write this information on your *Table Tent Card* in the space provided. Then, just be available at your table welcome people into your group.

(2) **Personal Invitation.** You invite neighbors, family, and friends to come to your home on the first night. You can then ask them if they know anyone who they would like to bring with them next time.

(3) **Church Provides Names.** Another way we are going to get the word out about all the homes where the study will be held is to publish a list of these homes. This list will be available for people to view at the Information Table during weekend services in the weeks leading up to the start of the study. If you do not feel comfortable with this, let us know and we will not give your name out to anyone. In this case, you would have to build your own group.

5. How you might handle childcare in your group.

Because childcare needs vary from group to group, we can only offer suggestions of what has worked for others in the past. Ultimately, each host will decide how they will address the issue of childcare. Most groups ask the members of the group to find their own babysitters and attend the group by themselves with the children left at home with the sitter. Some groups put the children together in a “bonus” room at the host home and all the members pitch in to pay a sitter or two to care for them. Other groups swap childcare with another group they

know who meets on another night. And still others create kind of a neighborhood co-op with the group. There are many creative solutions and it is a great idea to address these up front with the people you are inviting to your group.

6. How you will receive the materials for the study.

The curriculum guides will be available to Small Group Hosts at the Information Table the week before the study begins.

7. Be praying for the campaign.

We covet your prayers! Start by praying for all the hosts who will be opening their homes for the Bible study. Pray for all the people in the community who will be coming into a Bible study and may be hearing the messages of this campaign for the very first time. Lift up the curriculum. And please pray for the Senior Pastor who will be teaching at the services and caring for the people who will be involved in this awesome movement. Pray for the Campaign Team, who will be working extra hard to make sure every little detail is covered. Pray for their health and for their families. Pray that no one would get caught up in the little details and that God would take care of those things that we might miss. Finally, ask the Lord if there is anything else that He would like you to pray specifically for and then pray for that. We are so very grateful for your prayers...we need them! Thank you for partnering with us to make an eternal difference. We can't wait to see what the Lord is going to do!

WHERE TO GET HELP

We have provided several ways to prepare you to host a group. Together with this *Host Orientation Handbook*, the curriculum study guide, the Read Me First, Leader's Notes, the Watch This First, and Leader Lifter segments on the DVD provide all you need to do a great job of leading your group.

In addition, you will have a coach that you, as leader, can turn to for help as needed throughout the course of your campaign experience.

WHY SMALL GROUPS?

The phrase "one another" is used over 50 times in the New Testament to describe our relationship to other believers. We are instructed to love one

another, encourage one another, pray for one another, accept one another, bear one another's burdens, and build one another up. One way we can obey these commands is in a small group. God never meant for us to do Christian life alone.

Most people who have been a part of a small group say the greatest benefit is the close relationships that develop. They will frequently telephone each other during the week to share an urgent prayer request or an encouraging answer. People discover that their needs and problems are not unique. It helps to know that others are facing the same difficulties, or have lived through them and grown spiritually in the process. Other benefits to Small Group life are:

1. People grow in small groups!

An effective Small Group Ministry that is connected to God grows people through connection, Bible study, serving, sharing, and worship. God is already at work growing His people. Find out what God is doing. Then join Him.

2. Small groups are more than Bible study groups.

Various types of groups meet the needs of people at different life stages—physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and so on. People own the small groups they help create. Commitment to groups is strongest when leaders use their spiritual giftedness to form groups around needs, interests, passions, and life experiences of the group.

3. People can learn better in a small group.

If you've ever listened to a Bible teacher or preacher and wanted to stop them and ask, "But what about...?" or "Help me understand!" then a small group is for you. In a small group, people can ask questions, participate in discussion, and hear other insights and illustrations of truth. Applying the Bible to your own personal situations happens best in small groups.

4. Small Groups provide a support system.

Small groups provide excellent support in times of crisis, change, and stress. People have a sense of stability and security knowing there are people who really care about them and are committed to standing with them.

5. Small Groups provide a place to share Christ.

People are more open to an invitation to a casual Bible discussion in a home or office setting than attending a church service. In a small group, visitors can ask questions and express honest doubts without feeling “put on the spot.” When your visitors see the love and warmth and honesty of the group, they are more receptive to the Good News.

6. Small Groups deepen your understanding of worship.

Worship happens any time we focus on God, not just on Sunday mornings with a sermon, Christian music, a prayer, and an offering. Sometimes worship happens best in a small group.

Also, prayer becomes more meaningful. Many people are hesitant to pray in front of others, especially in a large group. In a small group of 6-12, people learn to participate in prayer by having a conversation with God. No one is pressured to pray, but as they become comfortable, they are able to pray sentence prayers and join in. In praying together with a few others, we are drawn together and we find answers to the needs in our lives.

7. You will develop leadership skills you never knew you had!

The Bible teaches that every believer is given certain talents or “gifts” to benefit others in the family of God. As you share and participate in a relaxed Small Group setting, you’ll discover your confidence and self-esteem rising. This will help you at work, at church, and in every other relationship.

HOSTING YOUR SMALL GROUP

Your role as host is to create a safe warm environment for your group. As a leader, your most important job is to create an atmosphere where people are willing to talk honestly about what the topics discussed in this study have to do with them. Be available before people arrive so you can greet them at the door. People are naturally nervous at a new group, so a hug or handshake can help put them at ease. Before you start leading your group, a little preparation will give you confidence. Remember,

1. You are not alone.

God knows everything about you, and he knew that you would be asked to lead your group. Even though you may not feel ready to lead, this is common for all good leaders. Moses, Solomon, Jeremiah, and Timothy were all reluctant to lead. God promises, *Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you* (Hebrews 13:5 NIV). Whether you are leading for one evening, for several weeks, or for a lifetime, you will be blessed as you serve.

2. Don't try to do it alone.

Pray right now for God to help you build a healthy small group. If you can enlist a co-leader to help you, you will find your experience to be much richer. Ask other members of your group to help by taking on some small role. Leading is more rewarding if you give group members opportunities to help. Besides, helping group members discover their individual gifts for serving or even leading the group, will bless all of you.

Consider asking a few people to come early to each group meeting to help set up, pray, and introduce newcomers to others. You might give people roles like setting up name tags or handing out drinks. This could be a great way to spot a co-leader.

3. Just be yourself.

If you won't be you, who will? God wants to use your unique gifts and temperament. Don't try to do things exactly like another host; do things in a way that fits you! Just admit it when you don't have an answer and apologize when you make a mistake. Your group will love you for it; and you'll sleep better at night.

4. Prepare for each meeting ahead of time.

The curriculum includes several host helps for leading your group. Take time each week to review the session and Leader's Notes in the Bible study guide, and the Leader Lifter for the session on the DVD. As you review, write down your answers to each question. Pay special attention to exercises that ask group members to do something. These exercises will help your group live out what the Bible teaches, not just talk about it. Be sure you understand how the exercises work, and bring any supplies you might need, such as paper or pens, to your meeting.

5. Pray for your group members by name.

Pray for your group members by name at least once between sessions and before each session. Use the *Prayer and Praise Report* during each meeting so you will remember the prayer requests and praises that are shared each week. Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of every person. Ask God to give you the opportunity to talk with those He wants you to encourage or challenge in a special way.

6. Facilitating discussion in your group.

When guiding the discussion, always read aloud the transitional paragraphs and the questions. Ask the group if anyone would like to read the paragraph or Bible passage. Don't call on anyone, but ask for a volunteer, and then be patient until someone begins. Be sure to thank the person who reads aloud.

When asking the questions, be patient! Someone will eventually respond. Sometimes people need a moment or two of silence to think about the question, and if silence doesn't bother you, it won't bother anyone else. After someone responds, affirm the response with a simple "thanks" or "good job." Then, to get discussion going ask, "How about somebody else?" or "Would someone who hasn't shared like to add anything?" Be sensitive to new people or reluctant members who aren't ready to say, pray, or do anything. If you give them a safe setting, they will blossom over time.

7. Break up into subgroups for discussion and prayer.

If your group has more than seven people, we strongly encourage you to form discussion circles of three or four people during the *Growing* and *Surrendering* sections of the study. Small discussion circles provide greater opportunity for everyone to talk. Consequently, people will connect more with the study, apply more quickly what they're learning, feel more loved in your group, and, ultimately, get more out of the study. A small discussion circle also encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimize the effects of a more vocal or dominant member.

Small circles are also helpful during prayer time. People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud will feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others. Share your prayer requests in the large group before breaking into subgroups. People are more willing to pray in small circles if they know that the whole group will hear all the

prayer requests. Use the *Prayer and Praise Report* during each meeting so your group members will remember the prayer requests and praises that are shared each week.

When everyone gathers in one group again at the end of the section, ask one person from each circle to summarize the highlights of their discussion.

8. Rotate host homes and facilitators weekly.

If you are leading an adult group, at the end of each meeting, ask the group for a volunteer to host the group in their home and another to lead the discussion the following week. Let the group help select your weekly host home and facilitator. If you are leading a youth group, be looking for students in your group who can facilitate discussion in the group.

You may be perfectly capable of hosting and leading your group, but you will help others grow in their faith and gifts if you give them opportunities to open their homes and to lead.

9. One final challenge.

Before your first opportunity to lead, look up each of the five Bible passages listed below. Read each one as a devotional exercise to help prepare yourself with a shepherd's heart. Trust us on this one. If you do this, you will be more than ready for your first meeting.

- Matthew 9:36
- 1 Peter 5:2,4
- Psalm 23
- Ezekiel 34:11-16
- 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8, 11-12

USING THE CURRICULUM

The Small Group curriculum developed for this campaign includes adult, youth and children's versions. Each curriculum incorporates the five purposes of the church found in the New Testament: fellowship, discipleship, ministry, evangelism, and worship.

Many groups tend to overemphasize one of the five purposes, perhaps fellowship or discipleship. Rarely is there a healthy balance that includes evangelism, ministry, and worship. To help your group balance all of God's

purposes in your meetings, we've included elements of each purpose in the curriculum so you can develop a healthy, balanced spiritual life over time.

EACH CURRICULUM CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING SECTIONS:

1. Memory Verses

The curriculum provides verses for individuals to memorize each week. Each version of the curriculum—adult, kids, and children—have the same verse for each week, so families can memorize the Scripture together. Encourage your group members to do this. Memorizing God's Word is both directed and celebrated throughout the Bible, either explicitly (*I have hidden Your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You!* Psalm 119:11 NLT), or implicitly, as in the example of our Lord (*...He departed to the mountain to pray.* Mark 6:46 NASB).

Anyone who has memorized Scripture can confirm the amazing spiritual benefits that result from this practice. Don't miss out on the opportunity to encourage your group to grow in the knowledge of God's Word through Scripture memorization.

2. Connecting (Fellowship)

The foundation for spiritual growth is an intimate connection with God and His family. A few people who really know you and who earn your trust, provide a place to experience the life Jesus invites you to live. This section of each session typically offers you an opportunity to get to know your whole group by using icebreaker questions.

Group Values. We encourage your group to take the opportunity to discuss expectations for the group. During your first meeting, review the *Group Values* so everyone understands what the group values and goals will be.

Don't skip the discussion on *Group Values*. Having group expectations clearly defined will prevent problems. Evaluating your group values up front gives everyone a chance to weigh in and feel they contributed to decisions concerning how the group will run. Building ownership in the group early keeps people coming back.

Group Roster. During the first session while the group is getting to know each other, you can pass around a copy of the 2-part NCR *Small Group Roster* to gather everyone's contact information. There is also a *Small Group Roster* in each curriculum where each group member can record the information about the people in the group.

Spiritual Partners. The adult curriculum introduces the idea of spiritual partners, which will be new for most people. The study is designed to help you grow and put into practice the things you learn. It's difficult to start new things like prayer or consistent Bible reading with no support. A friend makes a big difference. Partners can check in with each other weekly either during your group meetings or outside the meeting.

We encourage you to try this. Let people know that this partnership isn't forever; it's just for a few weeks. In the second or third week, you might want to ask the group how their partnerships are going to encourage those who are struggling to connect or accomplish their goals.

In the Appendix of the study guide you will find both a *Sample Personal Health Plan* and a blank one for recording goals for both partners. Be sure to look over the *Personal Health Plan* so you can explain it to the group.

DVD Teaching Segment. The adult curriculum includes a DVD companion to the study guide. For each study session, the DVD contains a lesson taught by Randy Alcorn. You will view the teaching segment after your *Connecting* discussion and before your Bible study (the *Growing* section).

3. Growing (Discipleship)

This section is where you come face-to-face with Scripture. In core passages, you'll explore what the Bible teaches about the topic of the study. The focus won't be on accumulating information, but on how you should live in light of the Word of God. We want to help you apply the Scriptures practically, creatively, and from your heart as well as your head.

Scripture Study. If your group prefers more study of Scripture than the *Growing* section provides, this section can be used during group meetings, if time allows. Alternatively, this can be homework each week. Have the group discuss how they want to use this section. Even if most of the group prefers to not use it, encourage everyone to look it over between sessions at home. The principles we cover here will be valuable lessons.

4. Discovering (Ministry)

Jesus trained His disciples to discover and develop their gifts to serve others. God has designed you uniquely to serve Him in a way no other person can. This section will help your group discover and use their God-given design. It will also encourage your group to discover their unique design as a community. Finally, you'll put into practice what you've learned in the Bible study by taking a step to serve others. These simple steps will take your group on a faith journey that could change your lives forever.

Rotating Leadership. In the adult curriculum, we talk about the practice of rotating leaders and host homes because people need opportunities to experiment, in a safe environment, with ways God has gifted them. If you, as leader, don't plan to continue to lead this group post-campaign, it is especially important to identify leaders within the group who can take the group forward to another study. So get group members involved in the weekly running of the group by encouraging them to volunteer to host a group meeting in their home and/or lead the group's discussion. The *Small Group Calendar* in the Appendix of the study guide is a tool for planning who will host and lead each meeting.

5. Sharing (Evangelism)

Many people skip over this aspect of the Christian life because it's scary, relationally awkward, or simply too much work for their busy schedules. But Jesus wanted all of His disciples to help outsiders connect with Him, to know Him personally. This section provides an opportunity to take your group beyond Bible study to biblical living.

Circles of Life. Cast the vision, as Jesus did, to be inclusive not exclusive. The adult curriculum provides an exercise that encourages your group to prayerfully think of people who would enjoy or benefit from the group. The *Circles of Life* is a tool that you will use to help group members identify those around them who they can invite to attend the group. Jesus came to save that which was lost and we need to be open to inviting those who will benefit from the study and from being in a small group of Christ-followers. (See a sample from the adult curriculum on page 32.)

6. Surrendering (Worship)

God is most pleased by a heart that is fully His. Each group session will give you a chance to surrender your heart to God through prayer and worship. If you have group members who have never prayed aloud in a group before, you should not pressure them.

Prayer Requests. Each of the curriculum (adult, youth, children) have a *Prayer Request Log* or *Prayer and Praise Report* to keep track of the group's prayer requests and answers to prayer each week. Your group will be strengthened and bonded by your time of sharing and experiencing answers to prayers.

Reflections. Each of the curriculum (adult, youth, children) have reflection verses to read and reflect on between group meetings. Encourage group members to use this section to seek God at home throughout the week. This time at home should begin and end with prayer.

CIRCLES OF LIFE

DISCOVER WHO YOU CAN CONNECT IN COMMUNITY

The diagram consists of five overlapping circles arranged in a pentagonal pattern. Each circle is labeled with a category and contains several horizontal lines for writing.

- Family** (immediate or extended)

- Familiar** (neighbors, kids' sports teams, school, and so forth)

- Friends**

- Fun** (gym, hobbies, hangouts)

- Firm** (work)

Follow this simple four step process:

1. **Prayerfully** list 1-2 people in each circle.
2. **Prepare** the group for them. Share a few names with your group and update your progress.
3. **Place** a call to them.
4. **Pick** them up and bring them to your next meeting.

Follow me and I will make you fishers of men. Matthew 4:19

SAMPLE PERSONAL HEALTH PLAN

This worksheet could become your single most important feature in this study. On it you can record your personal priorities before the Father. It will help you live a healthy spiritual life, balancing all five of God's purposes.

PURPOSE	PLAN
<p>CONNECT</p> 	<p>WHO are you connecting with spiritually?</p> <p><i>Bill and I will meet weekly by email or phone.</i></p>
<p>GROW</p> 	<p>WHAT is your next step for growth?</p> <p><i>Regular devotions or journaling my prayers 2x/week.</i></p>
<p>DEVELOP</p> 	<p>WHERE are you serving?</p> <p><i>Serving in Children's Ministry Going through G775 Class</i></p>
<p>SHARE</p> 	<p>WHEN are you shepherding another in Christ?</p> <p><i>Shepherding Bill at lunch or hosting a starter group in the fall</i></p>
<p>SURRENDER</p> 	<p>HOW are you surrendering your heart?</p> <p><i>Help with our teenager New job situation</i></p>

DATE	MY PROGRESS	PARTNER'S PROGRESS
3/5	Talked during our group	Figured out our goals together
3/12	Missed our time together	Missed our time together
3/26	Met for coffee and review of my goals	Met for coffee
4/10	Emailed prayer requests	Bill sent me his prayer requests
3/5	Great start on personal journaling	Read Mark 1-6 in one sitting!
3/12	Traveled and not doing well this week.	Journalled about Christ as Healer
3/26	Back on Track	Busy and distracted; asked for prayer
3/1	Need to call Children's Pastor	
3/26	Group did a serving project together	Agreed to lead group worship
3/30	Regularly rotating leadership	Led group worship—great job!
3/5	Called Jim to see if he's open to joining our group	Wanted to invite somebody but didn't
3/12	Preparing to start a group	
3/30	Group prayed for me	Told friend something he's learning about Christ
3/5	Overwhelmed but encouraged	Scared to lead worship
3/15	Felt heard and more settled	Issue with wife
3/30	Read book on teens	Glad he took on his fear

