



Leader's Manual

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§1 Introduction

Lakeside Church

We live... to glorify God by reaching up to him in worship; by reaching out to our neighbors outside the church; and by reaching in to our neighbors within the church.

We are on a mission... to transform as many people as possible into passionate and productive followers of Jesus.

We value...

Faith: We are committed to the Bible, through which God has revealed himself and called us to trust him. We are passionate about helping people trust in Jesus Christ and grow in their commitment to him.

Hope: We are convinced the gospel of Jesus Christ is filled with hope for the present and the future. We are passionate about communicating this good news with as many people as possible.

Love: We are overwhelmed with the love God displayed through Jesus Christ. We are passionate about loving God and one another.

Lakeside Church is committed to be:

Loving We are committed to fulfill the Great Commandments to love our God and to love our neighbors (Matthew 22.34-40).

Authentic We are committed to relate to others as real people, acknowledging that we are not perfect, but are ongoing works of God's grace (James 5.6; Ephesians 4.15).

Kreative We are committed to look for and use whatever methods will best communicate God's love and truth to this generation (Lamentations 3.22-23).

Encouraging We are committed to the gospel which is good news. Therefore our approach to our task will be positive and encouraging (Romans 1.16; Hebrews 10.24-25).

Sensitive We are committed to reach and openly welcome those who are curious about God, recognizing we may have to sacrifice some of our own desires, comforts and non-biblical opinions in the process (1Corinthians 14.13-25).

In-touch We are committed to be relevant and relational in a world that thinks the church is out-of-date and out-of-touch (Matthew 9.16-17; Acts 17.16-34).

Dedicated to God's Word We are committed to the Scriptures, through which God has revealed Himself and His purposes for mankind (2 Timothy 3.14-17).

Excellent We are committed to honoring God by striving to do our best work in every area of our ministry (1 Corinthians 9.24-27).

§2 Inreach Ministries

Inreach ministries are committed to the Biblical principle that the ultimate work of the church in the world is to be done by the entirety of the church, not simply by the pastor, or a few select laymen. We must never lose the impact of the Apostle Paul's statement that apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers exist for the "equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4.12) The work of the pastor is to equip the congregation for the active involvement God has called each of them to.

Every single person in the church has been called by God and has been given gifts that they are responsible to use in ministry. Each one of us is called to participate in Christ's ministry of reconciliation. As a small group leader, you are the shepherd preparing the flock to actively and passionately participate in Christ's work here in Folsom. The reality is, as pastors, we recognize that we cannot meet every need. We rely on folks such as yourselves to effectively minister to the church and to the world. We believe that having godly, gifted highly motivated leadership is the starting point to all ministry. There are three results of this philosophy.

First, we don't end up beating our heads against a wall trying to recruit people to fill a certain need. If leadership emerges to take on a particular ministry, then we are willing to consider its viability and help make sure it gets going properly. If a certain ministry begins to die because we no longer have the leadership for it, we may need to let it die until God brings along the right people to administer and lead that ministry. And if the Lord brings someone with a new vision and gifts to Lakeside, and specifically Inreach, we want to be open to that new vision.

Second, we are able to work cooperatively with para-church ministries represented within our body. Our ministry at Lakeside is not limited to what happens within our walls—the Church remember, is not a building or an institution, it is people. Some of our people will be called to serve the Lord through one of the local and effective ministries and we encourage these ministries as we build up the Body of Christ at large and our church body, as well.

Third, it allows us to encourage members to use their gifts creatively in the church. Lakeside is not limited to its existing programs. Our potential for ministry is unlimited. We are always open to new ministries if the leadership to run them is available and if they fit our general philosophy of ministry.

§3 Discipleship

Our definition of discipleship is simple: people leading other people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. The hope of our growing relationship with Jesus is full maturity in Christ. But what does it look like for a disciple to be “fully trained?” (Luke 6.40). We believe you can find evidence in four areas: knowledge, faith, character, and action.

Knowledge

A fully trained disciple has both factual and experiential spiritual knowledge. The experiential (gained from living in God’s world) is constantly interpreted and filtered by the factual (gained from Scripture), but the factual is unintelligible without the experiential. Through the Holy Spirit, the factual and experiential spiritual knowledge grow your faith.

Faith

Faith can be described as: the certainty that invisible spiritual realities are true; the “assurance of things hoped for” (Heb. 11.1); conviction of sin; reliance on Christ as one’s all-sufficient savior and provider; and reception of spiritual guidance.

Character

Your character is governed by your: affections (what you love and what you hate); desires (what you seek); will (what you choose and what you reject); thoughts; and emotions.

Action

A fully trained disciple is marked by habitual obedience—to purity in areas we must be pure, and to robust engagement in the things we are called to. Purity in the areas of: sexuality, speech, relationality, and pleasure. Engagement in: worship, relationships, spiritual disciplines, ministry (both inward and outward), stewardship and work.

§3.1 Rule of Life: Leaders setting the tone for disciple-making (Gal. 5.25)

Disciple making (and becoming, for as a follower of Christ, we are always becoming more like Him) occurs through our intentional actions to follow, imitate and participate *in* Christ. Listed are seven ways we believe this occurs.

Living in Jesus. We will have regular habits of “being with Jesus” for transformation into Christ-centered life.

- ✂ Slowing our lives down to eliminate hurry
- ✂ Paying attention to God—all the time

- ✘ Confessing our sins to one another—occurs in the safety of the small groups
- ✘ Consuming scripture
- ✘ Interceding for each other, our community and our world in prayer
- ✘ Mentoring and being mentored

Living in Transformation. We will intentionally seek to grow into the person God has created us to be. This occurs through our desire and willingness to share life together, to participate in discipleship opportunities and to take Pathway courses, and the like.

Living in Community. We will be with each other and do life together, and we will not submit to the drag of institutional isolation and the slow death of going too fast or being too busy to love each other.

Living in Mission. We will be in the world but not of it, and we will seek to serve and be served by the least and all others around us. We will consider others better than ourselves.

Living in Reconciliation. We will expect to experience conflict and uncover disorder in our relationships, but we will refuse to live in unresolved conflict and will practice “the peace of Christ” among us.

Living in Good Speech. We will always believe and speak the best of each other and not entertain rumors, gossip, demeaning talk, or slander but will bring as needed any bad report to the light of each other’s awareness for answer and response.

Living in Submission to One Another. We will submit to one another in love, believing that our community will most often have the wisdom we need, but we will not let submission to each other replace our call to submit first to God.

Remember, a significant reason for your group is the ministry of reconciliation. Achieving this purpose requires *grace, truth, and time*. Through your small group, you will bring your group members an experience of being rescued by Jesus from the wretchedness Paul describes in Romans 7.14-25. You will help one another rescue each other from knowing you need to grow but being unable to do it on your own. Your group will help to expose the *real* God—the one who is both Grace and Truth and who uses time as a redemptive season to change us.

§4 Purpose of Small Group

Sharing life. The small group is a place to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ through loving and authentic relationships with fellow Christ followers. The Greek word is *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is translated in the New Testament *partnership* or *sharing*. Sometimes it is translated *communion* or *fellowship*. Fellowship is a relationship between individuals which involves (and this is key) active participation in a common interest. And, as a result of our participation in the common interest, we have a residual interest in one another. Small groups are not an appendage; it is not a program we tack onto an existing structure. Small groups are not a secondary concern or a fad. What happens in a good small group is part of the very work of the church itself. It is primary, and should be seen that way. God is very much for the process of His people getting together to help each other grow. The small group is part of our lifestyle. We *think* groups. We organize everything with groups in mind, and everything points to group life. In many ways, group life drives what we do—and do not do—as a family, both inside and out of the church. A group is, at heart, about life changes. Most people join a group for things that will take time though, such as:

- ✂ a better relationship with God
- ✂ developing a skill(s)
- ✂ healing from a past wound
- ✂ self-control in a behavior that has the best of them
- ✂ competence in a specific area, such as parenting, marriage, living out faith
- ✂ understanding themselves or others better

All of these aforementioned topics and any others that you might tackle in your group will require time. If people could gain such benefits instantly, chances are they would not need to join a group to get them. But a group uses the process of time for its own gains and goals.

We believe sustained life change (transformation) is best manifested through authentic community. Small groups are in and of themselves “authentic communities,” but are also the means by which the entirety of the church becomes an *authentic community*. We really do believe that life change happens within the context of intentional relationships, and since our mission as a church centers on life change the central emphasis and focus on groups is essential.

§4.1 VISION FOR SMALL GROUPS

We believe that small groups are a way to build, develop, and sustain *authentic community*.

Back in the day, when life seemed simpler and commute times were nonexistent, community was the way of life. Modern day architects currently design homes intentionally to promote privacy and seclusion, not connection. Yet most people long for the days when the homes were constructed with front porches so when people took evening walks or afternoon drives they would “run into” their neighbors sitting on their porch. One thing usually would lead to another and before long you were invited to sit with them and enjoy casual conversation and a cold beverage. One writer I read wrote, “The American front porch further represented the ideal of community in America. For the front porch existed as a zone between the public and the private, an area that could be shared between the sanctity of home and the community outside. It was an area where interaction with the community could take place.”

Welcome to the 21st century. Retreating from the busyness and intensity of life, we come home, put the garage door down, and attempt to escape. Not outside to the openness of our front porch, but inside to the TV in our living room. For most, the last thing we want at the end of the day is to have one more conversation, be forced to make one more decision, or fulfill one more request. Our goal is to avoid people—and what they potentially want from us—at all cost. And cost us it does, because the avoidance approach comes with a price tag.

Small groups are meaningful because they reach in to the core of who we are. That is, small groups fulfill our need for community—or better yet, relationality, because we are created in the image of a relational God. However, the stark reality is, writes George Gallup, “Americans are among the loneliest people in the world.” In the midst of busy lives, overcommitted schedules, we feel alone. But this does not have to be our story. There is a new play being scripted and it centers its action on the One who created us in His relational image. We need small groups because they connect us; they bring people together on a personal and heart-based level. Connection is the basis of any good work in a group. For a few minutes every week or so, members receive the experience of being attached, loved, and in relationship with their “second family.” Connection, far more than the information dispensed, keeps people coming to the group. When people feel attached, they become much more invested in the process, and their hearts become more open to God, to growth, and to one another. As Paul entreated his friends, “As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also” (2Cor 6.13). Small groups are a valid expression of what the body of Christ is supposed to be doing on the earth. They are a structured expression of the doctrine of the church. They are as big a part of what the New Testament dictates as preaching and teaching.

There are many different types of small groups. Our vision is that no matter what kind of group you are leading, it can, through the guidance of the holy Spirit, prayer, and faithful leadership be a group that will see transformation and healing you never thought possible.

§4.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL GROUPS

Small Groups are both *formal* and *informal*.

Each small group possesses a formal and informal quality to it. On the one hand, small groups meet regularly for worship, learning, and encouragement. At the same time, there are many interactions that take place outside regular group meetings. BBQs, birthday parties, and conversations over coffee are just some of the informal happenings of a small group.

Small Groups are the Church *community* throughout Folsom.

Today the rediscovery of neighborhoods is a cultural opportunity for developing community. Being in community with those who attend our church but might not worship at the same gathering allows for the development of deeper and more profound relationships.

Small Groups have *seven purposes*.

- **Worship** | In small group community we worship God for who He is and what He has done. Worship encompasses all that we are and all that we do. Prayer, praise, and thanksgiving are specific activities of worship that center us on Christ, who forms us into His loving community. Ps. 117; Matt 6.9-13; 1Thess 5.17
- **Scripture** | In small group community we consume God's Word through the consumption of His word. Scripture comes to life through our action on the world's stage. God's drama is realized when our endeavors focus on the enactment of Scripture by the authentic community created in and through small groups. Ps 119.9-11; 2Tim 2.15
- **Fellowship** | In small group community we experience life together by spending time with one another, enjoying life's many blessings, and caring for one another in practical ways. Acts 2.42-44; 1Cor 1.4-9
- **Discipleship** | In small group community we seek to become hearers and doers of God's word by encouraging one another in our relationships with Christ. Our aim is not simply to learn about the Christian life together but to *do* the Christian life together. Matt 28.19-20
- **Ministry** | In small group community we purpose to make a difference in our local church by serving together. God's call on each of our lives is to participate in His ongoing "ministry of reconciliation." Small groups provide a profound avenue of accomplishing this task. Josh 24.14-15; 1 John 3.18-22; Gal 2.9-10
- **Evangelism** | In small group community we strive to spread the good news of Christ in three primary ways:
 - **International Missions** | We express our concern for the world by caring for and supporting Lakeside missionaries and other Great Commission endeavors around the world.
 - **Community Service** | We purpose to make a positive impact in the neighborhoods and cities in which we live by identifying social needs and participating in efforts of compassion.
 - **Relational Evangelism** | We commit ourselves to reaching out with the good news and caring for those who have not yet come to know Christ.

- **Stewardship** | In small group community we encourage one another to strive to be fruitful with our blessings and harvest. As 2Cor 8.3 reminds, “they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means of their own free will.” Through our fellowship we grow in our stewardship and the eruption of our faith-filled actions. Matt 25.14-30; 1 Tim 6.17-19

§5 Small Group Leadership

§5.1 Preparing for the Exciting Journey

We are excited for you as a small group leader. You have embarked on one of the most incredible journeys available to us as Christians. You are in a position to help people not only study your particular group topic but also see the big picture of getting life back to the way it was created to be. It is simple, but profound, and we believe you can do it. Here is an important principle we want you to chew on that concerns achieving transcendent goals through small group dynamics: *The more you possess something, the more you can give it away.*

As you prepare to lead, we believe it is important to keep these seven key aspects always filtering through your heart's thoughts:

- ✠ See God as the source of life and all we need
- ✠ See relationship as our primary need in life, with Him and other people
- ✠ Seek and practice grace and forgiveness
- ✠ Submit to God, taking captive all thoughts to obedience in Christ
- ✠ Seek to live more and more under the influence of being *in* Christ by the Spirit
- ✠ Develop discipline through the guidance of the Holy Spirit
- ✠ In all things, be a prayer warrior

One aspect you will not find on our list is the expectation that you will “be an expert on the subject matter.” We are more concerned that you possess love, grace, compassion, and forgiveness and share these with your group rather than expert knowledge on a biblical book, principle, or topic. In saying as much though, we want you to know that we are here as resources as well as there being an exceptional amount of good small group materials that can and should provide much of the content and knowledge. These seven concepts constitute a basic orientation toward God, people and growth that everyone can grasp as they turn to Him. That is why we are excited about these principles. You can embrace them, and when you do, they can be “caught” by others. That is how this “ministry of reconciliation” (2Cor 5.18-20) has been passed on for two thousand years. One person gives themselves over to the Spirit, has their heart ignited by His crazy insane love and becomes God’s ambassador to another. We are excited to see Folsom and Lakeside burning with passion for Jesus!

We have to humble ourselves in our own growth process first and keep practicing. *Not perfectly, but faithfully.* The Bible shows that God uses *faithful* people, not perfect people! If you faithfully practice these areas, God will bless you, making your ministry fruitful. Your participation with the Holy Spirit will become a source of spiritual growth for others always knowing that it is our blessed Lord that causes the seeds to sprout and grow (Mark 4).

§5.2 Basic Leadership Qualification

- ✠ Follower of Jesus

- ✘ Attends Lakeside Church worship
- ✘ Completed or soon to complete Lakeside 101/Membership
- ✘ Commitment to the mission of Lakeside Church
- ✘ Commitment to the small group guidelines for making disciples of Jesus Christ

§5.3 Lakeside Model of Leadership

Not to sound too cliché but for Lakeside, the answer to the model of leadership followed is simply Jesus.

There is, just as there was, a key difference between the Jesus model of leadership and the Pharisaical model. Jesus was *authoritative*, and they were *authoritarian*. In other words, Jesus displayed power from the strength of His truth, not the strength of pressuring people and lording himself over them. The authority came from His powerful word, not from taking a superior stance.

In fact, the Bible tells us that Jesus avoided that stance (Phil 2.3, 5-7). He spoke the truth so powerfully that people were drawn to His presence over-against the Pharisees. Rather than putting himself above others as the Pharisees did, Jesus sought to elevate the “other.” As Paul continuously reminds us, we are to consider the other first—we are to “consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10.24-25).

Jesus explicitly speaks of His model of leadership in the Gospel of Matthew.

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
- Matthew 20.26-28

§5.4 Practical Outpourings of the Jesus Model

As a small group leader, the practical outlook of your leadership will be both *Eucharistic* and *eschatological*. This is to say, that as leaders we are to model the reality that humanity is freely invited to participate in Christ’s self-sacrificial (Eucharistic) and self-surrendering (eschatological) performance. We are each called to enact the truth of Christ’s actions through our lives—as leaders we are called to shepherd the flock so as to encourage the actions of the “other.” Christ’s performance insists upon the church’s leaders giving our own self-sacrificial, self-giving performances (e.g. feeding of the poor, standing up for the outcast and downtrodden), while enacting the hope of tomorrow through the performances of today. The reality of such a performance by the church through her small groups manifests itself through the acceptance of our performances being ones constituted

by the past, present, and future. Because we share in Christ's performance, we must acknowledge the depth of His action upon the world's stage and this depth embraces the whole of history.

§5.4.1 The Flowing Fountain of Leadership

Crucial to your own Eucharistic and eschatological leadership acts, is the recognition of your call to shepherd your small group—you shepherd not simply by leading, but in knowing your sheep. From John 10, Jesus says that “the sheep listen to their shepherd's voice. He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. . . I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.” We can only lead if we give of ourselves—there is no greater way to serve the “other” than helping them develop a deeper love and relationship with Christ, and we do this through the deepening of relationship with one another. The following are some ways you can deepen the relational profundity within your small group:

- *Praying for your sheep – John 17*
 - That they may know the Father (v.3).
 - That the Father would protect them and provide unity by the power of the Name (v.11).
 - That they may have the full measure of the joy of their salvation (v. 13).
 - That the Father would protect them from the evil one (v. 15).
 - That God would sanctify them, set them apart for God and His holy purposes, by the truth of His word (v. 17).
 - Pray these things on a regular basis, allow yourself a place and time.
- *Leading your sheep – Weekly Contact*
 - Requires weekly contact with each group member outside of small group time.
 - This will prove challenging as our society has become increasingly busy and our families have become over scheduled. However, God, the perfect shepherd, doesn't give up on the importance of meeting with me just because I live in a fast-paced culture: why should I? Another challenge is that some of your small group won't hold that weekly contact/relationship building time in the same esteem. Give your concern, love and encouragement without any expectation of it being returned.
 - How—phone call, email, note, social media, coffee at the park, etc.
 - When – Change up time of week and type of contact, if possible.
 - What – Show interest in their life and encourage study. Sometimes you will sense that a group member needs to be challenged to be in the Word or to make attendance to small group a high priority because the busyness or challenges of life are pulling him/her away. Don't ignore this prompting even though we live in a culture of diminishing accountability; a culture that would suggest that you're merely being critical or judgmental, but always remember some of the reasons people join a small group—healing, self-control, spiritual growth.
 - Why – Every person needs to be accepted for who they are and encouraged to become all that God designed them to be. The devotional, *Streams of Living Water*, states it this way: “*The shepherd leaves the fold so the sheep will move*

on to the vitalizing mountain slopes. In the same way, laborers must be driven out into the harvest, or else the golden grain would spoil.”

- This is your time to listen, ask questions, affirm, encourage, redirect or challenge. This is *not* the time for you to share your issues or problems, doing so can burden your group member and prevent them from sharing the hard spots in their lives because you're too busy or overwhelmed with your hard spots.
- When/if a person does share a problem with you, please listen to them with the filter of a friend, not a counselor. This takes a lot of pressure off when a member of your small group unveils difficult circumstances. Listen well, offer empathy and concern and ask if he or she would like you to pray. This may seem awkward initially but as the Holy Spirit to intercede and give the right words for that moment, while still being authentic. However, if you become uncomfortable or concerned, contact your small group leadership team member.
- *Being with your sheep – Small Group Time*
 - As the small group leader knows his or her goals and how to achieve them, the result should be “planned casualness” for the group.
 - Keep a schedule. Know your start and finish time. What do you need to accomplish and when will you finish it?
 - Create a relaxed atmosphere of warmth, acceptance and eagerness to learn from one another.
 - Place enough chairs in a circle for the expected number of people.
 - Include “ice breaker” or open conversation time at beginning (approx 10 minutes) to allow for the late comers.
 - Maintain eye contact with the group.
 - Promote participation by all members.
 - Encourage group to complete all homework.
 - Gently encourage sharing on personal questions.
 - Unusual answers may be meeting the needs of the speaker and need expedient acceptance. Affirm the person not the answer.
 - Keep discussion moving at a good pace. It should be a conversation among friends. However, refrain from calling on members to answer questions as this sometimes intimidates new attendees.
 - Members who monopolize the conversation should be spoken to on the side or after the group meeting, as their “extra” participation can be a stumbling block for the other members.
 - Ask for somebody else to share with “Can we hear from someone who hasn’t shared yet?”
 - Let them know their “added” contribution is denying the opportunity to pull out the shy members, etc.
 - Never go around the circle for answers.
 - Do not call on specific people to read or pray, but ask for volunteers. The goal is to make all members feel comfortable.
 - Small Group leader seeks to encourage participation from the whole group. Draw answers from the group, always encouraging participation.

- Affirm everybody's answers, except for misrepresentation of the gospel. At this time it is appropriate to ask another member in your group with a sound doctrine of salvation to share their understanding of the gospel.
- Expect differing opinions. Be the example of warmth and love, not rigidity, concerning individual opinions. Encourage members to state differing opinions in terms of "This is how I see it" rather than "That's wrong" or "I disagree."
- Aim to complete all the questions for the week while being ready to respond appropriately to the needs of your group. Be prepared to finish questions but never too rigid to divert if a necessary dialogue topic arises from the study.
- As the leader, be their model. That is, a few of the things a good group will model are:
 - vulnerability
 - need and dependency on each other
 - support
 - listening well
 - accepting failure
 - confessing faults so as to be restored
 - giving and receiving the truth
 - resolving conflict without ruining relationships
 - discerning people's character
 - forgiveness

Obviously this list could go on, but these important aspects of life are not just taught, but also learnt through a participatory model of living.

§5.4.2 Attitude Toward Self: Who Are You?

Do you ever feel inadequate or unworthy to accept or continue the call to leadership and discipleship? It is easy to recall and remind God (as if He doesn't know already), where the cracks in our character are, where the faith leaks are and where our weakness seeps out. But the reality is that God uses imperfect people to the perfect completion of His plan. So then, in order to understand God's calling on our lives we must understand that it is through our act *in* Christ that God's will reveals who each individual is; and it will not reveal, through successive unveilings, primarily who the individual *always was*, but rather who he or she *is to become* through the action, that is, our performance *in* Christ as well as through our encounters with others.

It is in moments of quiet reflection, prayer, discussion and confession with the Lord and times in His Word that we pour our heart out to Jesus and He pours His heart out to us. It is also through our interactions on the world's stage that we come to realize the essence of our being. When we acquire right thinking about God and about ourselves, and **we begin to see ourselves through God's eyes, as we truly are.** If you were to look at yourself through the eyes of God, what would you see? Let's take a look through the eyes of God's outrageous love. . .

Matthew 5.13-14 “You are the salt of the earth . . . You are the light of the world.”

Salt: season your relationships with the love and truth that comes from God, bringing out the God-flavors of this earth.

Light: You bring out the God-colors in the world; you are God’s light bearers where He has placed you on a light stand, on a hilltop to shine.

Ephesians 1.13-14 “Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal”

Marked: You have been adopted, no longer an outsider, alien, outcast; you are an insider in God’s forever family, sealed with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 2.10 “We are God’s workmanship,”

Workmanship: The creator of the universe with supreme craftsmanship, skill and beauty created you for his pleasure and for his purpose.

Philippians 2.15-16 “You shine like stars. . .”

Stars: You stand out and are regarded as brilliant, excellent, outstanding, a breath of fresh air in a corrupted and polluted world.

2 Corinthians 5.20 “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors.”

Ambassador: You are Christ’s representative, his friend, participating *with* Him to redeem and reconcile humankind to God.

1 Peter 2.9 “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood. . .”

Royal: Having rank with the sovereign . . . co-heirs with Christ.

Priesthood: As the high priest had the privilege to enter the holy of holies, you have free access to commune with the Living God and offer up the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving.

1 John 3.1 “What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it – we’re called children of God! That’s who we really are.”

In Christ, the life of the Trinity is bent on reconciling the world to God. Such action is not only the re-establishment of the once broken relationship between God and humanity, but the betterment of this relationship. It (reconciliation) is the re-humanizing of humanity that answers completely the query: Who am I? Our being, our identity, and thus, the answer to our calling, rest in Christ through the Spirit.

§5.4.3 Attitude Towards the Other (Small Group Members)

In the end, that attitude of a Small Group leader is one of love—always directing members of the group toward the Lord our God, His resources, and His Biblical principles. Small groups help people become learners of God’s ways by getting them accustomed, or acclimated, to righteous ways of living and relating. Through many types of experiences and studies, groups engage their people to show that God’s ways are best. The group points its participants to God as their source. It shows them that personal growth, relational growth, and emotional growth are all spiritual growth. The laws and realities that help people grow come from the Father, the Spirit, and the Son as their foundation. Thus, all we really have to do to get clarity on what our attitude toward the ones whom we’ll be shepherding should look like is look to the life of Jesus in any one of the gospels. When we read of Jesus’ love in action, we find the blueprint for our actions toward others:

- *Loving*: He embraced and held the downtrodden, outcasts and poor. He loved *all*.
- *Accepting*: He healed the lepers that everybody else had rejected and given up on.

- *Took initiative*: He waited for the Samaritan woman to approach the well and invited her to receive the living water of eternal life.
- *Available*: Jesus made himself available to the Pharisees, tax collectors, prostitutes, and the Roman authorities.
- *Unrushed*: Even though Jesus was on his way to heal Jairus's dying daughter, He stopped to heal the woman who had touched the hem of His robe.
- *Flexible*: He adapted to change and was unshaken by constant interruptions.
- *Good listener*: Jesus listened to and engaged with Nicodemus' objections to and confusion by Jesus' claim that he must be born again.
- *Meeting needs*: Countless stories of Jesus meeting physical, emotional and spiritual needs of those he had contact with: healing the blind and lame, raising the dead, giving words of life, casting out demons, convicting without condemning sinners.
- *Other's interests ahead of his own*: Philippians 2.5-8 "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross."

Spend time in the gospel of John: read the stories of Jesus' responses to different people and different circumstances, jot down the characteristics that you find and ask the Holy Spirit to empower you to model them in your own life, understanding that it will cost us, some days more than others. In doing as much, we guarantee you will come to a greater understanding of the beauty of being *in Christ*.

It's no surprise that we have a tremendous need for relationships and Jesus knew about this need and fulfilled it in its fullness. But what's more, is that upon His departure He reminded His disciples of their essential need of each other. Jesus called for the active life of living out God's crazy insane love and in so doing we will faithfully and obediently participating in the "ministry of reconciliation." The drama of life is the reality and truth of God Himself, a reality, notes Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, that exposes the truth that because God is eternally involved in Christ crucified for my sake and for the sake of the whole world, I myself cannot stand by as a mere spectator."

Companionship is a precious and expensive commodity because it can only be bought through the intimate guidance of the Holy Spirit over the span of time. In prayer, conversation and fellowship with your group under the covering of the Holy Spirit, this is where, when and how they will become and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen Jesus!!!

Appendix A

How to Be a Great Small-Group Member

Eight tips to help you give and take in a meaningful way

Imagine we are sitting in Starbucks. You are about to enter a new small group, and you have asked my advice on how to be an effective small-group member. Here's what I would say.

Be a Good Listener

Go into your small group committed to listening. Try to understand rather than be understood. There are a lot of hurting people who come to small groups to unload. They need your compassion and empathy. The first place to start is to listen intently.

Don't be so quick to share your story. Listen to the stories of others. In one sense, when you listen to others, you are earning your right to be heard. Granted, at times this can be hard and painful. You will have to listen to poor decisions, bad habits, and people who grate on your sensibilities. Yet, listening is one of the chief characteristics of love, and Jesus told us to love one another and be patient with one another.

Contribute

After you have thoroughly listened, be ready to contribute. Some people in the group may talk too much, but the other extreme is not talking at all. As a small-group leader, I rejoice when a proactive listener also contributes to the discussion. When I ask people to share their thoughts, I often hope that so-and-so won't blurt out an immediate answer because I know he already talks too much. I'm hoping that other members will share their reflections, but far too often the quieter ones hesitate.

Don't allow one or two people to dominate the entire meeting. Be a contributor. You have something important to say. Even if someone else has given the right answer, there's always more than one way to apply the answer. Other people in the group want to hear what you think.

Share with Transparency

Tell the group how you really feel. Open up the windows of your heart and let people see the real you. I've noticed that the best small-group members share their joys and struggles. They respond to the lesson questions based on how God is working in their lives. They speak in the first person, rather than the third person.

Some group members always give impersonal answers about what the Bible says, what others should do, or how people in general should live. Their answers might be correct, but they don't go deep enough. They don't zero in on how God's Word has touched their own lives.

Take advantage of the intimate, family atmosphere of the small group by sharing what's really happening in your life—and allowing others to hold you accountable. One of the key differences between a small group and the Sunday celebration is the chance to share personally, receive prayer, and get to know others more deeply.

Be a Responsible Member

Responsibility means the leader can count on you. The best small-group members make a commitment to be there for each gathering. They also let the leader know in advance when they can't make it. Granted, life presents unforeseen obstacles. But if you can't make it to the group, call or text the leader that you won't be there.

Responsible membership also involves arriving on time to the group. I remember one couple who was consistently 30 minutes late. I know they didn't behave this way for doctor's appointments or for scheduled client sessions (he was a lawyer). Yet, with their actions, they were saying to everyone else that the small group wasn't really a priority. Their late arrival was also a distraction because we were often praying or worshipping when they entered. Someone had to answer the door and their arrival normally disrupted what we were doing. Make it a point to arrive on time.

Finally, responsible members maintain confidentiality. They realize that what is shared in the group stays in the group. You might be tempted to share a juicy detail about a group member's life with someone you know well. Refuse to do so.

Discover Your Spiritual Gifts

Attempt to discover your spiritual gifts within the group—and then use it. The small-group atmosphere is the best place to discover and use your spiritual gifts. All of the spiritual gift passages (1 Corinthians 12–14, Romans 12, Ephesians 4) were written to house churches. The first church building was discovered in the third century, so for the first couple hundred years, the church met in the home and occasionally came together in larger celebrations.

As you discover and use your spiritual gift in the small-group atmosphere, God will use you to build up other members in the group. For example, if your spiritual gift is counseling (i.e., exhortation), look for opportunities for one-on-one conversations after or before the group. If you have the gift of helps or service, discover ways to use it. You might volunteer to bring the refreshments, open your home, or pick up someone who needs a ride. If you have the gift of teaching, look for opportunities to shed light on the biblical passage the group is discussing.

Reach Out

New people give new life and meaning to the group. The best small-group members invite others to join the group. So, who can you befriend and eventually invite to the group? Is there someone at work who is experiencing a divorce, a job loss, or some other need? Let him or her know what your small group means to you and how he or she could also benefit.

Look for new people in church on Sunday. Often new people are hungry to build relationships, and an invitation to your small group will help them get connected.

Pray for One Another

Paul said to the Colossians, "For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is" (Colossians 2:5). Paul was not physically present in Colossae when he wrote his letter to the church, but he was with them in spirit through prayer.

Praying regularly for others helps you to enter into their problems and lives apart from being physically present. After praying regularly for group members, you will have increased awareness to build them up when you personally see them. Make it a habit to pray regularly for those in the group.

Take the Next Step

After learning how to become an excellent small-group member, God might ask you to take the next step and join the leadership team. The Christian life is a series of new steps and challenges, and God regularly asks each of us to take the next step. For some, the next step is joining a group. Other people need to enter the church's training to grow in knowledge and eventually join the leadership team or even lead a new group.

You will learn more as you give and become responsible for others. You'll learn to depend on God in a deeper way and your faith will grow to new heights. You will also help fulfill the prayer of Jesus when he said, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:37–38).

Appendix B

Avoiding the Not-So-Comfortable Moments

Five tips to remember when joining a Small Group

During a small-group promotion weekend at a church, a woman approached the signup table and said: "I have been in a small group before and it was a bad experience. That's why I haven't joined a group for two years. If I join another group, how do I know that it won't happen again?"

It is not unusual to hear variations of this same theme year in and year out—people took a risk, joined a group, had a negative experience, and are understandably reluctant to try again. I wish we could wave a magic wand and guarantee each person a great small group experience every time. But as we know, there are no "perfect" small groups because there are no perfect people. Small groups are inherently relational and, just like people, they are messy packages. This means that despite our best intentions, group members will sometimes have negative or damaging experiences.

Although there are many issues that can derail a small group, most of them can be traced to a few common causes. The following are five situations that can produce undesirable experiences for small-group members—as well as suggestions for how they can be minimized.

Unclear Expectations

Everyone approaches a new small group with a set of expectations about what the group will be and do. Some may want deep Bible studies, while others hope to quickly build friendships through social activities. These expectations are shaped by the "felt needs" of the members, the specific church culture, an individual's past group experiences, and whatever emphasis the church has used to promote small groups.

So, when someone complains about the group "not meeting their needs," it may be due to a lack of clarity or a mismatch between their expectations and the goals of the group.

The key to fixing this is to identify and express your expectations in the first couple meetings. Ask yourself questions such as: "What led you to join a small group?" "What do you hope to gain from being part of this group?" "What has been the best and worst aspect of your previous groups?" The goal of this exercise is not necessarily to develop consensus, but to increase awareness of people's different perspectives.

Wearing Masks

Counselor and author Larry Crabb commented that in the church, "We arrange our bodies in a circle, but our souls are sitting in straight-backed chairs facing away from the others."

We live in an image-driven culture that craves connection but lacks meaningful relationships. Even in church, we want to be known but are afraid of what people will think of us if they really knew us. So we put up a facade; we make it seem like everything is okay and we are fine.

This mask is also used in small groups where it may not feel safe to share the struggles of faith, relationships, and life. This fear of judgment and rejection results in groups getting stuck at a superficial level. But over time, people find themselves dissatisfied and wishing for something more.

Genuine faith and friendship can only grow from a foundation of authenticity—admitting to God, ourselves, and others who we really are. It takes risk and work to create a group culture where it is okay to ask questions, express doubt, and share the hard stuff of life. For a group to become more transparent and authentic with one another, someone in the room has to start by telling the truth, sharing their struggle, disclosing their weakness, and asking for help. Over time, honesty, safety, freedom, and grace become the norm in the group and significant relationships can flourish.

Allowing People to Hijack the Group

There are certain personality types that can cause trouble within a group: the excessive talker, the judgmental know-it-all, the emotionally draining person, the wannabe preacher, the cynic, the gossip, and so on. These people should not be excluded from group life, but they should not be allowed to dominate it, either.

Unfortunately, in some groups, members with disruptive personality traits are allowed to consistently hijack the group's time. They may not even be aware they are doing it. Left unchecked, this unhealthy dynamic may push other members away or cause them to mentally disengage from the group—this is often demonstrated through body language such as lack of eye contact, rolling of eyes, passivity, or negativity.

In a healthy group, all members need to feel heard, valued, and appreciated. When dominating or disruptive behavior occurs repeatedly, it needs to be addressed privately in a conversation that gently points out the behavior, explains why it is inappropriate in the group context, and helps those involved to change. With prayer, love, and patience, these issues can be resolved.

Avoiding Conflict

Over the course of time disagreements or hurt feelings are inevitable in any relationship. When interpersonal conflicts arise in small groups, it can be awkward, uncomfortable, and difficult. But instead of addressing the issue, sometimes there is an unfortunate tendency to deny or ignore it in the hopes that it will just go away.

The problem is that conflict does not go away. Instead, it goes underground and shows up later as gossip, superiority, criticalness, divisiveness, mistrust, or rejection. Any of these traits can cause a damaging or negative experience, even for group members who are not directly involved.

Whatever the conflict may be, it is better to face it biblically and appropriately. In Matthew 18:15–17, Jesus gives great guidelines on how to best handle interpersonal disagreements. Instead of viewing conflict as the enemy, we can see it as an opportunity (albeit a difficult one) for spiritual and interpersonal growth.

We are called to speak truth in love—something that is rare in this world. When group members step out in courage and handle conflict well, it can become a catalyst for healing and transformation.

Self-Focus and Passivity

In our culture of instant gratification, if something does not give us what we want, we complain and then head for the nearest exit. In group life, sometimes people find something they do not like about the group, which causes them to leave or jump into another group—until they find something "wrong" with that one, too.

It is easy to make snap judgments like, "I don't click with these people," "we have nothing in common," "I don't like this study," or "I'm just not growing here." These may all be legitimate concerns, but group members who feel dissatisfied need to do a heart-check to determine if they are being too self-focused (and whether they have done their part).

For starters, you need to give the group enough time and grace for relationships to develop. A new group will feel awkward for a while—and that needs to be acknowledged and expected. When a member is focused on what they are "getting out of" the group rather than what they can give to the group, they are more likely to be disconnected and disengaged. This leads to an unfortunate cycle: member feels disconnected from the group so he is more likely to skip meetings, which then makes him feel more disconnected when he attends, so he becomes even less committed, until eventually he leaves the group. This cycle can be broken when the member, with humility and grace, pushes through the discomfort or inconvenience and chooses to commit to the group while paying attention to what God wants to do in and through the group.

A related characteristic to self-focus is passivity, which breeds discontent. In order to truly engage and belong as a group member, you need opportunities to serve and invest in the group. The old adage "the more you give, the more you get" is true in group life. When we use our time, skills, energy, and resources for the sake of other group members, we will come to love, accept and value them more. This leads to deeper levels of love, trust and accountability—markers of a growing and healthy group.

Conclusion

So, what would you tell the woman at the small-group table? Our suggested response: "We cannot guarantee that you will have a great small-group experience, but we can promise that God will be there working in you and in your group. It may be different than what you want or expect, but be open to what God has for you."

Every member of a small group needs to work at contributing to a healthy life-giving group. When you clarify expectations, take off the masks, value everyone, grow through conflict, and focus on what God wants to do in you and in the group, you can minimize many of the obstacles that cause negative group experiences.

Appendix C

Simple skills to help you make the most of your group's fellowship time

For most people, the skill of creating and maintaining conversations within a group of people does not come naturally. Yet this is an important skill as a small-group member because your ability to converse helps everyone—including you—feel more at home and comfortable in the group. Here are some practical tips that can help build your confidence in making conversation that actually constructs community.

Tune In

It's easier for any person to talk about issues and ideas that we know about and are interested in. However, strong facilitators know that listening to others and learning about what interests *them* is hard but necessary work if they want to see biblical community flourish.

People light up when a conversation turns to a subject they know and love. So identify what these subjects are for the other members in your group and bring them up in conversation. Ask parents about their kids, for example. And if you know somebody enjoys a hobby, ask them about it. If you don't know what people love in life, ask them to tell you! Finally, make a note when a person's voice gets higher and they start gesturing a lot. Both tend to increase when people are engaged and excited about what they're talking about.

Be Humble

Admit mistakes, ask for help, share your own shortcomings, and when you don't know something—say so. These are all things that make people feel more comfortable in a group setting. If you do this as a fellow group member, others will feel freer to be themselves. One simple way you can do this is to learn to laugh at yourself and open up about areas you're trying to improve in your own life. People can usually discern genuine honesty; they can also detect pretense. One is sure to build community, and the other can destroy it.

Make Eye Contact

This is more than just a tip for making toasts at a wedding—it's a key skill for making conversation. By locking eyes with the speaker, you show that you're interested. Some people will interpret a lack of eye contact as a lack of interest in them and their story.

Smiles and Humor

Smiles stimulate conversation and help to retain people's attention (and interest) in any group discussion. Also, you'll find overall participation increases when you share humorous stories based on personal experiences. This helps people identify with you and ignites a desire to share their own stories. Consequently, you and the other group members will learn more about one another and discover new things you have in common. These interactions serve as "Miracle Grow" for biblical community.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Every group has its own conversational rhythm, and over time you'll become more adept at identifying it and effective at developing it. With each meeting, you'll grow a little more confident in initiating and maintaining meaningful conversations with the other members of your group. And as your confidence grows, so will your abilities in all the skills mentioned above.

Remember, nobody is perfect at making conversation. But everybody can improve their ability to engage in it in ways that build healthy relationships.

Appendix D

Engaging Conflict in Small Groups

Sooner or later, every small group will experience conflict. In some groups, conflict will become evident from the first meeting. In others, great pain is taken to avoid conflict. The members maneuver around it and make it clear that "we don't do conflict here." But the ways we behave in a small group reflect how we will behave outside of it, and handling conflict well in our group can lead to better ways of dealing with the uncomfortable issues people face every day.

A Case Study

Mary and Jim are group members. Mary sees herself as a "truth-speaker." She is perceptive and reads people like a map. She is always aware of the "temperature" of her small group. She listens to what is said and has an ability to hear what isn't being said—and she is more curious about the later. Her greatest desire is for authenticity and honesty. Everybody sees Jim as a "grace-giver." He is trusting and takes people at face value. He values peace, and patience is one of his greatest virtues. He is affirming and very sensitive to the shame in others. His overriding desire for the group is that it feels safe, loving, and supportive.

Mary and Jim, to one degree or another, are in every group. Every group needs what they offer. But before Mary and Jim can offer what is best in them, they will have to face the inevitable conflict that their styles of relating will create.

Behind every conflict is a story that goes far deeper than the presenting clash. Jim grew up in a home with a dominating, angry mother. His father would work hard all day and come home to a wife who would dump her frustrations on him. Jim felt sorry for his father and felt contempt for his mother. She was not the virtuous "Proverbs 31" woman he heard about in church. But his father never complained. Jim sometimes wished his father would step up and confront his mother, but he felt pretty sure his father would lose that battle.

Mary grew up in a home that had lots of secrets. No one talked about dad's alcoholism. No one dared ruffle dad's feathers when he came home, even though the tension was so thick you could cut it with a knife. When Mary was sexually abused by her father, and later by her brother, her mother had a lock installed on Mary's door but never talked about what happened. Mary sat behind her locked door angrier with her mother than with her abusers. Secrets and silence became the enemies that Mary vowed to fight.

Now, Mary and Jim find themselves in the same small group. It doesn't take long for a perceptive Mary to pigeonhole Jim as a weak wimp who is more comfortable with the appearance of harmony than the guts to be honest. And, hard as it is for Jim to admit, Mary's pursuit of people feels dangerous and makes him want to avoid her at all costs. In group, Mary is frustrated every time Jim seems to dismiss someone's struggles with a verse

from the Bible and an offer to pray. Conversely, Jim feels that Mary plows right into areas of shame with little sensitivity. Sometimes it seems that Mary's outrage over injustice is stronger than anyone else's. Jim feels that he must counter her impact by soothing the group.

Unless this conflict is addressed, it will further propagate the dysfunction that both Jim and Mary felt in their families growing up. The group will not be strong enough to bear "truth-speaking," and it will feel that its "grace-giving" is patronizing. The safe, loving, honest, and authentic community will be lost.

A New Perspective

Conflict should not be viewed as a problem that threatens to destroy your group, but as an opportunity to grow the group. It is the unacknowledged and unaddressed conflict that is dangerous. Conflict that is entered into and resolved leads to deeper intimacy, whether in a group, in a marriage, between individuals, or with God.

As you think about addressing a conflict, ask yourself how to engage the issue while still valuing the opinions, observations, and feelings of each member. Remember also that, because the enemy of our souls delights in continued division, engaging in conflict resolution is warfare against him. So prayer is a crucial weapon. Ask for receptive hearts, listening ears, and a resolve to strengthen the unity of the group by honestly facing the issues at hand. Depending on the severity of the conflict and who is involved, you may need an outside person to facilitate a resolution. If so, you will want to make that person's role clear—to facilitate and mediate the resolution process, not to resolve the conflict themselves.

A Practical Method

So how does a group enter into conflict for the good of its members? Here are a few simple steps to work through:

1. The group leader should define the conflict as he/she recalls it. "Our conflict is about the differences between Jim's way and Mary's way of engaging the group and the tension that we and they are experiencing as a result."
2. Ask the group members if the conflict has been defined correctly as they recall it. Go around the circle and give each person an opportunity to respond. Some will have something to say; others may simply nod their head in agreement.
3. Ask, "How has this conflict felt to you?" Or, "What has been stirred up in you as the conflict has become evident?" The purpose here is to give each group member an opportunity to acknowledge and express their feelings. There is no right or wrong answer here. Silence or withholding does not support the conflict resolution process, so encourage everyone to speak.

4. Invite group members to ask questions of any other group member for clarity. Be careful to make sure that one person does not dominate this time, or the process will lose momentum for the others.
5. Ask each person: "What were you hoping would happen in this meeting?" "What did you want for yourself?" "What did you want for Jim, Mary, or the group?"
6. Ask each person what needs to happen for them to feel that this is a safe and healthy group again. What a member may express may not necessarily be something the group can guarantee (e.g. that the conflict will never happen again). The leader's role is to make sure all have been heard and to stay engaged in the process for the sake of the group. Allowing the process to stall or wander will make the group feel unsafe and lose trust.
7. Ask each person, "Can you recommit to this group?" If someone says "no," go back to points 3 and 4 and try again. Typically a group will want to get going again and not remain stalled.

This process relies on the integrity of the group to call one another out. At its best, it is a way for the body of Christ to minister to each other. Here are some questions for a leader to keep in mind during this process:

- Did the people in the conflict hear one another accurately? It is often helpful to ask Jim what he heard Mary say. Then ask Mary, "Did Jim hear you accurately?" Reverse the process, asking Mary what she heard Jim say. Many conflicts escalate due to faulty perceptions as communication passes through each participant's emotional filter.
- Did each person take ownership of what they perceived to be their part in the conflict? If your group is at a stage where you can go deeper, these discipleship questions can lead to real change: 1) Is this a pattern in my life? 2) How does this pattern in my life affect those in relationship with me? 3) How do I feel about the way I impact others? 4) Who or what does this situation remind me of?
- Has any group boundary been broken? If so, is this something (or is there something else) we need to need to talk about now or later?

When you notice a conflict is occurring, be ready to pull out this list and walk through it. Believe us, your group will be grateful for you and your courage. Many of your group members live daily with chaos and conflict that never gets resolved, so your willingness to enter into conflict is a real gift to them!