

The
Table
Small Group Manual



Hello. Thanks for checking us out!

At the Table, we have a special purpose for small groups. Ultimately, we want them to be a space where groups come together to become more like Christ. We want small groups to be the Church.

This booklet is not the *holy-grail, how-to* of small groups, but it's a book of values, so that small groups can be intentional about the experience. These values will help your group get started, so that the process is approached holistically. It's a resource as you explore what it looks like to relate to one another, invite each other into your lives, and navigate the complexities that relationships tend to have. This tool is intended to help define and develop your groups, so that you can learn something about yourself, others, God, and His big

plans for us. Although the steps aren't foolproof, your commitment, time, prayer, patience, and sense of humor, will allow you and your group the chance to make the process especially unique and personal.

Bless you on your journey!

-The Staff at the Table

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General Guidelines

As a group, make some practical rules to follow that help set the tone for your time together.

Examples:

- ❑ **Set a beginning and an end. Be respectful of the parameters- it shows people you care about their time.**
- ❑ **Talk about conversational leadership within your group. You might find some are better at leading the discussion more than others, or you might try alternating who leads every gathering. A conversational leader is someone who helps facilitate the flow of conversation, keeps the group on track, recognizes when someone is jeopardizing or monopolizing the group (sharing too long), encourages the quieter voices to share (everyone should be sharing), and recognizes tangents and helps refocus discussion. The leader should be aware that they are leading peers.**
- ❑ **Avoid allowing check-ins to dominate the group. Keep check-ins to two minutes per person unless there's an issue that needs more care; focus on a prayer or praise (don't let it become your weekly calendar). You want to make space to grow in conversation, as well as other ways.**
- ❑ **If there are kids, find another space for them after they get a chance to say hello. Be respectful of others who may have arranged a babysitter. And try planning a family time sporadically, so that everyone can get to know each other.**
- ❑ **Circles are best because it's important that everyone can see everyone else's face.**
- ❑ **Practice hospitality! Food is a great equalizer, so have snacks or drinks. Get creative with some music and lighting.**
- ❑ **Within your first meeting, discuss everyone's expectations for this space. Understanding everyone's hopes can help the group function better as a whole.**

Questions from Boren's Missiorelate can help to guide your group. As time passes, these questions can be used to reevaluate and assess the growth and transformation of your group:

➤ **To**

Life Statements

Life statements are a practical way to verbalize, organize, and commit to your expectations as a group together.

what degree is our group experiencing God's presence?

- **What specific actions are individuals taking to simplify their lives, so that they have time to share in community life?**
- **What sorts of sacrifices are people making to be shaped by God for leadership?**
- **How are people who are not Jesus followers experiencing the presence of God through the group?**

As a group, take the time to write out the values and practices you all want. Taking this step will help you produce good fruit. These are personal values not guidelines, like the previous page. Type the list or get creative- do whatever will help you keep the values on your heart and mind. Keep this list around when you gather and pray over it frequently.

Creative ways to make the list:

- **Have each person share their top 3 values/practices.**
- **Locate scripture verses you want to bring to practice.**

- **Encourage everyone to work on his/her list at home (privately) and as a group (collectively).**

Examples of Life Statements-

- **Together and separately, we will pray for one another.**
- **We will work through conflict even when it's uncomfortable.**
- **We will spend time together outside of this space.**
- **Together and separately, we will practice living missionally.**

Books to Check Out:

- Missiorelate by Scott Boren
- Making Small Groups Work by Cloud and Townsend
- ReGroup by Henry Cloud, Bill Donahue, and John Townsend

Stories

Making space to share who you are and where you come from with your group, and to explore that in the context of God's story.

Create space to have everyone in your group share their life story. This might take awhile, and that's a good thing! It's important for the group to know where people are coming from and how each person has been shaped by God and life experiences. Stories are also a testament to God's work, share them weekly in the ways you process

Story Theology:

Some articles to help paint the picture of how our stories impact our faith and community.

Excerpt from "Bumping Into God" by John Greco

In large part, the Bible is a collection of the memories of people whose stories had bumped into God's, whether for a brief moment or for a lifetime. The stories of people meeting God don't end with the close of the Bible either. History is full of people who had an encounter with Jesus and whose lives were never the same. I realize that the accounts in Scripture are unique, primarily because they were inspired by God Himself, but the stories of people meeting God continue to this day nevertheless. Every person who has met Jesus and had their life changed by Him has one.

Excerpt from "Wrestling with Community" by Matt Litton

The people we worship with are also a part of our story, a greater story that is timeless and runs deeper than we can know; a story that truly defines us not just for who we are or who we have been, but for who we are becoming.

My prayer in this struggle to build community is that the greater story we all share, the one that says, "In the beginning was the Word..." would be the story that draws us together, that gives us the strength to offer grace, the trust to be honest, the commitment necessary to build lasting community with other believers. In real terms, to love the people in my community group as if I had known them for ten years. To recognize that we are people of an eternal story, we are old friends.

group discussions.

Tips on sharing:

- **Choose a person each week to share their story for the whole night.**
- **Close in prayer by specifically lifting up the person who shared.**
- **Only ask questions during this process (don't try to solve things, this is not a therapy session) and don't use this time to give your opinions around someone's story.**
- **This is not a dumping or counseling session.**
- **Practice the art of listening; it's the greatest gift we can give.**

Ways to tell a story about yourself:

You can combine these tips however you want. Use these loosely as helpful ways to structure your own story.

- **Choose your beginning and your end. Define your timeline.**
- **Include an instance that something happened, that caused change. (Your whole life is surrounded by instances. You start school. You get married. A relative passes away. You get your license. You decide to join a small group. Etc.) Share what the change was, how were you affected, what you learned, and what actually changed?**
- **Share the 3 moments that have transformed you the most.**

- **Share 3 of your most celebrated moments and 3 of your hardest times in life, including those that have transformed you.**
- **Include the 3 people who have impacted your life differently.**
- **Bring a tangible object to share to go along with your story: picture, childhood item, etc.**
- **Share a quote or scripture that has shaped who you are**

Books to Check Out:

- [A Million Miles In A Thousand](#)

Relational IQ

Equipping people on how to do relationships

- **Ask questions to get to know someone within your first few encounters:**
 - **Start with basics: What do you do for work? How did you get started there? Where are you from? Where did you go to school? What did you study? Were you involved in anything in high school or college? Where is your family? If they're married: how long and where did they meet their spouse? Do you have kids? What are some fun plans or travels this season?**
 - **Tips: Avoid yes and no questions. Avoid overly personal questions until you've had more time together (ex. Are you close with your family?) Allow people the right to pass (not answer).**
 - **Enter new relationships without your own agenda; be focused on getting to know the other person.**

- **Invite people for a meal to your home and make them feel welcome.**
 - **Assign everyone something to bring, people like to feel they can contribute to the gathering.**
 - **Have music because it sets a nice tone.**
 - **If you're eating together, have 1-2 topics you want to cover. This can be fun and creative. Get a question book (ex. the "IF" book) and go from there. "If you could do anything, what's one thing you want to do in the next 5 years, and why?"**
 - **Feel comfortable wrapping things up by thanking everyone for coming. It's OK to end the night, don't feel guilty about this.**
 - **Be sensitive about alcohol, keep it light if offering and have a few options. Some people feel uncomfortable with drinks, while others feel uncomfortable without drinks.**

- **Don't expect people to help you clean up or serve, but allow people to do so if they offer.**
- **Share your life with people with different interests and personalities.**
 - **Take turns planning something for the group to do together based on your own interest. Invite one another into your hobbies. Don't always grab a meal or coffee together, but try different things.**
 - **Step out of your comfort zone as a group, God has a lot to reveal to us when we do new things.**
 - **Ask lots of questions! Disinterest can be rooted in a lack of understanding and experience.**
 - **Be gracious with your time; be OK with listening and giving, rather than always focusing on receiving something from the conversation. Not every relationship will be a mutual one and that's fine!**
 - **Make time to enter into the other person's space and environment.**
 - **Do something: it's often easier to do an activity for an hour than it is to just fill a space with conversation.**
- **Know yourself and how you enter into relationships.**
 - **Examine your intentions for joining the group and share that with one another; you may all have different needs for this space.**
- **Reflect on the stories section**
 - **How does your story affect how you treat others, interact in groups, your self-esteem, your brokenness, your gifts, your strengths, etc. We all have different experiences, which is great! We all will bring different things to the group and there are ways to use this to the group's advantage. How can your life experiences bring you and your group closer to one another? How can all of this influence your spiritual walk?**
- **Spiritual Connections**

- **Small groups can be a great way to explore different ways of connecting with God. Allow this space to be safe, so that everyone can explore what speaks to their heart and be willing to try out new things. Some examples of ways to connect with God are through nature, art, study, relationships, service, meditation, movement, etc.**

Questions from Boren's Missiorelate will help guide your group in relational IQ. These questions are to be used as time passes to reevaluate and assess how your group is growing and transforming:

- **How are your groups working through conflict and difficult relational situations?**
- **How frequently are people within groups sharing meals together outside of schedule meetings?**
- **How are group members sacrificing their personal priorities for the sake of others in the group?**
- **How are those who are not Jesus followers experiencing these group relationships that are different from the world's relationships?**

Books to Check out

- What's Your God Language? By Myra Perrine
- Understanding Who You Are by Larry Crabb
- The Pursuit of God in the Company of Friends by Richard Lamb
- Sacred Companions by David Benner
- Friendling by Lynn Baab

Conflict Resolution

Preparing you and your group for conflict before they experience it

Conflict will happen; it's part of a healthy relationship! Expect occasional conflict to happen in your group, and know how to enter into it with grace and honesty. Conflict will happen, so how will your group respond to it? People respond to conflict however they learned to respond to it, so it's important to remember this when interacting with others. Knowing how you tend to come into conversations will help.

Conflict Resolution Ideas

Some key ways to begin resolving group conflict.

By Todd Mulliken

1. Speak without Offending & Listen without Defending

Make sure when we "lead out" with something difficult to say that we do it well. Also, when we are responding to a tense matter...let's do it non-defensively. Are you coming into the conversation with your fist up? You don't need to be in survival mode. The ultimate goal is to come together, even if you don't agree, you should still be able to care for each other in your differences. It's not easy, but it is achievable. When you enter into and go through conflict, your efforts will likely strengthen your relationship.

a. Examples:

***Lead out:* "Yesterday when you said I was out of line and didn't know what I was talking about, that was hard for me to hear and today I'm struggling with that."**

***Response that is non-defensive:* "I can understand why you had a hard time hearing that and I appreciate you being honest with me."**

- 2. Reveal vs. Conceal: When we conceal; we hide. When we avoid the mess, we carry the mess. Non-offensively revealing our thoughts is always the way to go.**
- 3. Take a Time-Out. If the tension is escalating, take a time-out and revisit. During the time-out, do some self-reflection on your role in the conflict; what you are sorry for and what happened that hurt you? At first, this might feel awkward, but you are managing an uncomfortable situation and that can be hard! Just take a break to get snacks, drinks, show a You Tube video, whatever creates space or lightens the mood. And then, have a different person re-start the conversation. The next step is to have both individuals come back with a spirit of confession/forgiveness and owning their own part; that spirit should lead to another discussion of the matter in a healthier manner.**
- 4. Resolution doesn't mean agreement; learn to agree to disagree. Learn the difference between the need to win and the need to understand. Respecting means allowing people to have their own opinions, even if those**

Knowing Yourself

Giving the group tools to learn about how they are uniquely shaped for

differ with your own. If something continues to sit with you uncomfortably, maybe God is revealing something to you that you might need to explore more with Him and/or through counseling. Be aware of yourself, we all bring our past and stories into our arguments.

Ephesians 4:23-27

Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

The better you know yourself, the better you can relate to others. This section requires you to engage with self-reflective resources to get to know who you are, how you are wired, what your gifts are, how you relate, and how to ultimately become more of who God has prepared you to be. By taking the time to be introspective, you will be able to engage with your group in ways that honor who you are individually and in time, this will help you learn how to serve God and others more effectively and authentically. Try using the resources below as a group.

Initial questions to get group started:

- What questions about yourself and your unique make-up are you most curious about? (Or what areas in your life are you needing more clarification?)**
- What test could be an aid to help resolve that?**
- Have you ever used a personality/gifting test?**
 - **What did you learn from it?**
 - **How was the experience for you?**
 - **Did you**

Books to Check out

- How To Have That Difficult Conversation You’ve Been Avoiding by Henry Cloud
- Non-Violent Communication by Marshall Rosenberg
- Difficult Conversations by Stone, Patton, &

- agree or disagree with your results?
- How has it affected the way you do work, relationships, etc.?

Resources

➤ **Purpose Drive Life** by Rick Warren (www.purposedrivenlife.com)

This book helps readers understand God's incredible plan for their lives. Warren enables them to see the big picture of what life is all about, so that we can begin to live the life God invites us all to live. A lifestyle based on eternal purposes, not cultural values. Using biblical stories and letting the Bible speak for itself, Warren clearly explains God's five purposes for each of us:

- **We were made for God's pleasure, so your first purpose is to offer real worship.**
- **We were formed for God's family, so your second purpose is to enjoy fellowship.**
- **We were made to become like Christ, so your third purpose is to learn discipleship.**
- **We were shaped for serving God, so your fourth purpose is to practice real ministry.**
- **We were made for a mission, so your fifth purpose is to live out real evangelism.**

➤ **Lifekeys- Discover Who You Are** by Kise, Stark, and Krebs Hirsch (www.lifekeys.com)

This comprehensive workbook is for understanding your giftedness and using the information for pivotal life transitions: first careers, volunteer opportunities, midlife changes, and retirement.

➤ **StrengthsFinder** by Tom Rath (www.strengthfinders.com)

From the cradle to the cubicle, we devote more time to fixing our shortcomings than to developing our strengths. Gallup introduced StrengthsFinder to help people discover their top five talents. Each of the five strengths comes with a full comprehensive description that you can interact with.

➤ **The 5 Love Languages** by Gary Chapman (www.5lovelanguages.com)

The Five Love Languages Profile will give you a thorough analysis of your emotional communication preference. It will single out your primary love language, what it means, and how you can use it to connect with loved ones. Teens, workplace, and singles editions are available too.

Scripture Tools

A practical guide to show people how to engage with

Practical: (notes from kLove.com)

- **Start with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you an understanding of the truths you're reading and to give you a greater hunger for God's word. See Psalm 5:3**
- **Make a commitment to regularly spend time in God's word. God commanded Joshua to "*meditate on it day and night.*" See Joshua 1:8**
- **Have a plan, a systematic approach to your study. It's a lifetime endeavor, so approach it with purpose. Our random, "God give me something today" approach, while randomly flipping open the Bible is not the best plan. See Psalm 119:15**
- **Make it a priority by scheduling it into your day. See Psalm 90:12**
- **Have a notebook to write insights from your study. See Proverbs 2:3**
- **Meditate on a text, read and reread. Meditate on it throughout the day, and memorize key verses. See Psalm 119:48**
- **Conclude in prayer. Ask the question, "How will I be different today because of what I have just read?" Then, ask God to help you live it out. See Ephesians 4:16**

Resources: (notes from kLove.com)

- **A bible dictionary will define meanings in the original language.**
- **A concordance will help you locate other passages with the same word.**
- **Commentaries illustrate the different interpretations of a specific text.**
- **Other bible translations or paraphrases: reading text stated in a different way may allow for a greater understanding of the passage.**

- **There are many online resources to enhance your study and to provide you tools to dig deeper into God's word that will enrich your study.**
 - <http://www.biblegateway.com/>
 - <http://www.studylight.org/>
 - www.biblos.com

Grab a book!

Our CPC bookstore has amazing studies to take you through scripture by topic, book, character, life stage, etc. The staff is a great resource to take advantage of throughout the week.

From Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods: For step-by-step instructions on how to use these methods, see Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods (Zondervan, 2006).

The Devotional Method

Take a passage of Scripture and prayerfully meditating on it until the Holy Spirit provides a concrete application.

The Character Quality Method

Through this method you'll focus on one character quality, look at how biblical characters lived it out, and look for ways to build the character trait into your own life (or avoid it). We've all got areas of our lives that need work. Using this Bible study method, you can work on positive character qualities that you need to improve (such as honesty, humility, and diligence) and negative ones you need to avoid (such as pride and greed).

The Thematic Method

This study method involves taking a biblical theme (like interceding for others or "the hand of the Lord") and asking no more than five predetermined questions of the relevant biblical texts. This requires a few reference tools, with a Bible and a concordance being the most important ones.

The Biographical Method

Pick a biblical character and study his or her life as presented by Scripture, to see why they were spiritual successes or failures. Once you discover that, you can either emulate what made them spiritually successful or avoid what made them fail. With more than 3000 biblical characters, this form of Bible study offers an almost endless supply of opportunities.

The Topical Method

When studying the Bible topically, you typically attack a broad subject in Scripture (or in a specific book of the Bible)—like prayer or sin. Also, unlike a thematic study, you ask every question you can muster. What you get at the end is a broad idea of what the Bible (or a book in the Bible) says about the topic.

The Word Study Method

Many of the great doctrines of Scripture revolve around a single word, such as grace, atonement, or faith. This study method allows you to focus on what some of these words mean in the original language. This requires more reference books than the other studies, because you'll need sources to be able to uncover the meaning of the biblical words in the original languages. The method is based on two things. First, the meaning you find from a word must be based on the original languages. Second, context must give you the ultimate meaning of the word you're studying, not the English translation.

The Book Background Method

You do it by focusing on understanding the history, culture, geography, and political events surrounding the passage. This method is highly dependent upon collecting quality Bible study reference tools.

The Verse-by-Verse Method

Take a particular verse of Scripture and study it in detail by asking particular questions, looking at cross-references and paraphrasing each verse. You can either use this study to work systematically through a passage or combine it with the topical method to look at all of the Scripture related to a topic.

The Book Background Method

This method helps you get a good feel for the background of the biblical passage or book you are studying. You do it by focusing on understanding the history, culture, geography, and political events surrounding the passage. Of course, this method is highly dependent upon collecting quality Bible study reference tools.

SOAP Study

S.O.A.P. stands for Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer. It's a great way to delve more deeply into your Bible reading, and record your thoughts, emotions and connections when studying scripture. S.O.A.P. is meant to be a journal you create with your regular Bible reading but it can also be an effective tool to help you connect with particular passages. You can use it with any Bible reading plan, whether you're reading straight through from Genesis to Revelation, or following a reading plan from your church, study Bible or the internet.

S for Scripture

Take time reading and allow God to speak to you. Highlight, underline or place a mark in the margin of your bible next to the scriptures that stand out. When you are done, reread the verses you marked, look for one that particularly spoke to you that day, and write it in your journal.

O for Observation

What do you think God is saying to you in this scripture? Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and reveal Jesus to you. Paraphrase and write this scripture down in your own words in your journal.

A for Application

Personalize what you have read by asking yourself how it applies to your life right now. Perhaps it is instruction, encouragement, revelation of a new promise or corrections for a particular area of your life. Write how this scripture can apply to you today.

P for Prayer

This can be as simple as asking God to help you use this scripture, or it may be a greater insight on what He may be revealing to you.

Remember, prayer is a two-way conversation, so be sure to listen to what God has to say! Then, write it down.

Books to Check out:

- Gospel Transformation Workbook by World Harvest Mission
- How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth by Gordon Fee

Missional Minded

A way to draw the group back into the question of living missionally, constantly moving towards the goal of practicing a Gospel-minded lifestyle.

Occasionally, use these questions to re-focus, re-evaluate and move toward becoming a small group that cares intentionally for others.

Individual Questions:

- **How am I uniquely wired to serve others? How has God enabled me to serve?**
- **What is God asking me to do right now?**
- **What can I offer this world?**
- **Who is around me in my day-to-day life (neighbors, family, co-workers); what are their needs? Do I know their stories? How am I interacting with them amidst those needs?**
- **How am I listening to God on this topic? Am I creating space to be intentional about hearing His call? What needs to change if there isn't space?**
- **In what ways am I loving my neighbor?**
- **How am I using my finances for God's glory and to meet the needs of others?**

Group Questions:

- **How can we be prepared for the next leg of the journey?**
- **What is God asking us to do as a group right now?**
- **How are we serving others outside of our small group?**
- **How are we listening to God's call for our group?**
- **How are we looking for ways to serve others?**
- **In what ways are we equipped as a group to serve?**
- **How are we engaging with scripture around this topic?**

Questions from Boren's Missiorelate will help guide your group in being more missionally minded. These questions are to use as time passes to reevaluate and assess how your group is growing and transforming:

- **Are we ministering outside of predetermined expectations to meet needs?**
- **How are people using their money in unique ways to invest in redemption?**
- **How are we investing in relationships in our neighborhoods?**
- **How are we embracing the poor to bring redemption to social outcasts?**

- **How are those who are not Jesus followers encouraged to participate in the process of serving the world together?**

Books to Check out:

- Missional Small Groups and Missiorelate by Scott Boren
- Linking Arms, Linking Lives by Sider, Perkins,