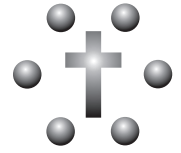




Being a Small Group Leader

Quick Start Guide 3



If you have just been appointed as a small group leader, this guide is for you! If you have been a small group leader for years there could still be something here to reflect on how your leadership is progressing. Do read the other guides on Bible study, pastoral care, etc. — as a leader you need to be informed about all of these.

The big picture: Knowing where you are leading them to...

As a leader, you need to know where you are going, where you are now and crucially, how to bring the group with you. You might not know all the twists and turns along the way but you need to know the overall direction. Ask:

- Where is the group I lead at? What level of spiritual maturity do the members have? Where do they need to grow? Is it in Christian character, understanding, in outreach or taking a step back from being too busy?
- Where does God want them to be? Like Christ obviously! But what does that look like for them? Is it having the confidence to share their faith with work colleagues or neighbours, is it discovering what their Spirit given gifts are, is it learning to forgive, something else, or all of these?
- These two questions will form the basis of the purpose of the group. A purposeless group will be aimless and you are responsible as the leader to make sure that does not happen.
- Your purpose or overall vision may well (and probably should) be set by the congregational leadership. But often it is left to you as the leader to work out the details of what that looks like in practice.
- Communicate the purpose to the group including the overall vision set by the congregational leadership. Listen to their feedback and be prepared to make adjustments but also be prepared to resist attempts to steer down a totally different course (like 'we just want social events' or a single item agenda that neglects other areas).

I didn't sign up for that!: Managing expectations

When problems arise in leadership, it's often because people expected something of you or of the group that they didn't get. Therefore, it's good to present the expectations for the group at an early stage and seek each person's agreement to these after one or two meetings (if you have an established group and you haven't done this it can be harder but you could use any 'un-written' expectations as a starting point). Be prepared for some adjustments or additions so that expectations are owned by the group and not just by you! As new group members join they should also be allowed to discuss the expectations before accepting them (if they can't maybe the group is not for them). Don't make them too demanding and keep them simple. Here are some essentials:

- I will (as a leader or a member) prepare for the meeting, e.g., by reading the Bible passage in advance
- I will take part in group discussions but I will try not to speak too long so that others can take part
- When someone is speaking we will all listen
- We will start and finish on time (as the leader you are primarily responsible for this – don't wait for latecomers)
- We will be committed to this group in attendance and participation
- We will ask God to help us love and support each other through hard times and good
- We will not gossip about church issues but we will be engaged with and supportive of the wider congregation

You can add others but it is better not to make the list too long or detailed – it should be easy to see if someone has not met an expectation, e.g. if they speak an unkind word. Hopefully the group will aim to exceed expectations!

You don't have a big stick!: How to influence in a Christlike way

Shepherds in our part of the world herd sheep with dogs but it was not so in Jesus time. The sheep followed the shepherd because they knew his voice. The big stick was to fight off the wild animals who threatened the sheep. Christlike leadership is exercised in the positive influence we have on the group. How can we do this?:

- Don't neglect your own spiritual growth in personal prayer, Bible Study and witness to others.
- Lead by example, e.g. be on time, be prepared, be willing to help, speak words to build up and not tear down.
- Have a plan – it may need some adjustment when they hear it but the group will expect you to have a good idea of what happens now and what happens next (in the meeting, next time, over the coming year).
- Don't let a group member with a strong personality take over. Someone like this might step into the gap if you have no plan or they may present an alternative plan – be clear on the group purpose and remind them of this if necessary. That doesn't mean you should not sometimes accept other's ideas – but if they always come from one group member then they are effectively leading the group not you!
- Involve others. One expectation that should be clear is that the leader doesn't do everything. This could mean meeting in other people's homes (if you are a home group), someone else leading the Bible study, someone else providing the refreshments and perhaps most importantly – have a co-leader or deputy.

Passing on the baton: Preparing your successor

A good leader looks for who could take over after them (think of Moses and Joshua) or who they could equip as a leader even if they are not going to be their direct successor (think of Paul and Timothy). If the approach in your congregation is for groups to divide and form two new groups this is absolutely essential. Even if this isn't the norm, preparing new leaders helps the growth of the church and may also mean you can be released to what God has for you next. Here are some pointers :

- Look out for someone who has all the following: good Christian character, commitment and gifting (shown in their ability to organise and influence others in a positive way). Normally a key gift is also the ability to teach – give people opportunities to lead the Bible study while you are present (you can use the resources in this series to help them). But remember a gift in teaching is not enough – leadership is more than this.
- Having observed someone for a while, you could appoint them as a deputy leader. Let them occasionally take the lead for a whole meeting (while you are there – later they may help if you are absent but that is different).
- Meet with them one-to-one after they have had a leadership opportunity and talk through with them how it went. Allow them to speak and reflect and then affirm what went well and suggest what action could be taken to improve (don't highlight something that could have been better without showing a way forward but don't avoid the subject either – if they go on to have a leadership position and do badly because you didn't want to talk about anything 'negative' you will have failed them).

You're not on your own: How to be supported as a leader

Hopefully your congregation has a structure to support leaders but if not seek out people who will pray for you and ask you how it's going. Remember that it's not all about you – you lead in dependence on the King of Kings!