



# LEADING A CONNECT GROUP

TRAINING MATERIAL ON LEADING A SMALL GROUP

# **LEADING A CONNECT GROUP**

*Training Material on Leading a Small Group*

*Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts – Acts 2:42*

# CONTENTS

WHY DO WE BELIEVE IN CONNECT GROUPS	5
HOW TO PLANT A CONNECT GROUP	7
BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS AND COMMUNITY WITHIN A GROUP	10
THE STRUCTURE OF A CONNECT MEETING	12
MAINTAINING MOMENTUM & HEALTHY GROUP DYNAMIC	14
HOSPITALITY IN A CONNECT GROUP	16
PASTORAL CARE	19
FACILITATING A GROUP DISCUSSION	22
FACILITATING A RESPONSE TIME	26
HANDLING TRANSITIONS	29
RAISING LEADERS	31
GATHERING PEOPLE AND GROWING	34
HEALTHY CONNECT GROUP LEADERS	36
INSPIRING TRANSFORMATION IN PEOPLE	38
DEALING WITH “TRICKY PEOPLE”	40
APPENDIX	42
LESSONS WE’VE LEARNED OVER 50 YEARS ON CONNECT GROUPS	42
USING THE CONNECT GROUP RESOURCE & INSIDER INFO	48
AN EXAMPLE OF A CONNECT GROUP MEETING	50
TOP TIPS FOR NEW LEADERS	52

## WHY DO WE BELIEVE IN CONNECT GROUPS

Why small groups? Why all the trouble to start Connect Groups? Because from the outside, it can appear inconvenient. I've heard these excuses.

"You don't know how busy our city is; people can only attend one weekly meeting?"

If that's the case, ditch Sunday and make it the small meeting! That's how important it is. I've gone to some places where they say it's too dangerous. For example, in some of the townships in South Africa and some of the farming areas, it's too dangerous to go home and leave home after dark. And yet small groups are happening with great effect all over our country.

Why?

Well, it's God's plan.

If you look at the early church, they didn't just meet in temple courts; they met from house to house. So have you thought how it was, that 5000 people, 3000 people, and the women and children and friends etc. got added to a church in a single day? (Acts 2:41).

How did that work?

How did the church keep its values? How did they keep a sense of family? How could there be no needy among them at that size? How did they devote themselves to fellowship and breaking bread in such a large group? How did that work? It wouldn't have worked if it were just 10,000 people in a big building. It worked from house to house; when they planted churches, it was from house to house. It was like the two lungs that the early church breathed with. They met in temple courts, in massive groups where there was devotion to apostolic teaching and prayer, but they also met from house to house, whether it was breaking your bread, handling issues, or dealing with crises they faced. When people are in a Connect Group (small group), people have a sense of belonging.

Remember, when Lidiya in Acts 16 got saved, the woman who dealt with purple cloth, she said to Paul and his companions, if you consider me a believer, come to my house. She began to host meetings in her home. It's always when we do faith in each other's homes that there is a sense of family getting together. Then, there's

the handling of the crisis. How do you handle a crisis if you sit there quietly with 10,000 people around you? Remember, in Acts 12, when the disciples were buttoned down, Peter was in jail, and James had lost his head. Where were they? They were at Mary's house. That's where they were.

People's gifts grow in small groups. Remember the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus; Jesus loved to go to that house (Luke 10:38). Mary grew her gift of worship and extravagant generosity; Lazarus exercised his gift of being a friend; Jesus knew when he came to that house. Martha ran the administration and logistics. Giftings develop in small groups.

We have small groups because our connectedness, relationships, values, and ministries can be authentically worked far more effectively than in massive congregations. What you find is that if a church doesn't develop small groups, when people are in groups of more than 150, they feel as if it's no longer part of a family; they feel lost in the numbers. Many churches, of course, can get a lot bigger if they are not using small groups, but they become simply preaching halls—just a guy with a great gift calling a massive crowd together. But if you want to live out New Testament Christianity, it happens in small groups and big crowds.

My challenge for you is to put up your hand to be trained to lead a connect group. If you're already leading a small group, raise somebody else so that they can take over your group, so you can go and start another one. We should invite new people into our connect groups because that's how they connect with the body; that's where their faith is outworked.

The other day, I spoke to a guy who said I don't have to connect groups because I only want to listen to good preachers. Well, your understanding of connect groups is wrong. It's not a forum for someone to preach for half an hour. Instead, it's where we wrestle through the Word and connect with God. That's why we call them "Connect Groups;" you connect with God, you connect with others, and you connect to the Bible. Connect groups are very much in God's plan for you, and for me, Jesus did far more preaching, miracles, and discipling training in homes than in synagogues and temples; that should be our model.

# HOW TO PLANT A CONNECT GROUP

One of our dreams is that every believer would be disciplined in a small group. But for that to occur, we have to train leaders and open up several new homes. So, what does it look like to plant new Connect Groups? I'd like to suggest four stages of starting a new connect group.

## 1. Identify New Leaders

The first stage would be identifying a new leader. If you've got a current group that meets in your lounge, and they meet week to week, and it's a healthy group, you're very excited. You think to yourself, "I could do this until Jesus returns!" But that's not the point. The point is that, ultimately, we're also there to facilitate growth and to release people. It starts with identifying who are the potential leaders that could possibly lead one day, and I don't think we're looking for perfection; someone took a risk with me one day, and possibly you and I, we should look at them through the same lens, these potential leaders, I think, look for more than just one leader, look at the possibility of two or three, identifying them for your group or for other groups along the way, that would be the first step.

## 2. Train new leaders

A second step would be the training process and feedback along the way. Now, training will happen formally where they may attend a "Connect Leaders Training Course," but training also happens on the go. This is where the majority of our training happens, but it needs to be intentional even though it is "on the go". This is where I fall short as a Connect Group Leader. Tuesday night comes too soon, and I haven't thought about who I want to release in six months. How am I going to get someone ready so that in six month's they can competently lead a Connect Group?

Training on the go begins by looking at all the different elements of a connect group and putting certain elements in their care. For instance, asking them to take over the communication every week? Or, for instance, the catering, such as food rosters? What about pastoring when someone is in need or just some shepherding? What about facilitating a discussion? They need to do that and give feedback that helps them when they encounter a difficult person or have a difficult discussion. Why? Because it's during the safe space that we train them so that, ultimately, we can launch them to plant a group. Training needs to be on the go and regular, with loads of encouragement and then one or two little adjustment issues that may have appeared.

### **3. Timing and Releasing**

#### **Deep-End Release**

A third thing to consider is knowing when it's time to release people. The first way I release people is what I've called the **“deep-end release”**. This is where someone says, “I'm ready to go; I'm ready to pioneer!” If he's got courage, let him go. Let him find people and start a group. I might not send people with him just yet, but many times he does a great job. The beauty of this is that if he fails along the way, he can check in again, and we haven't given people to him, and so people haven't been hurt along the way.

#### **Small Core**

The second type of release would be with a small core. I look at people and assess their capacity, relationally, time-wise, etc. I'll send a small core of people with them. I'm asking: “Does he have faith for the people coming with him?” That's really important; they can't be imposed on him. But I'm also asking, “Do the people have faith in the new leader? We need to make sure there is some synergy. Often people get quite excited about a smaller environment! They are excited about a new mission, and releasing these guys can be quite exciting.

#### **Large Group Release**

A third way that I release people is with a large group. When I've looked at a leader and think this guy's got influence, I can see a leadership mantle on him. People listen; he can relate across the board. As long as they're trained well, I'm happy to send a large group of people with them. The release moment comes when they can take that group they're in, grow it, and lead it.

#### **Specific Group Release**

Another way that will release people is what I have called the specific group release. This might be an age-related category. It might be around ladies who aren't at work and can meet in the morning. It might be around babies and moms and tots type of group, a 20s group that's it's a specific type of group etc.

#### **Specific Area Release**

The last type of release for me has been very helpful. Looking at some areas where we are in Durban, South Africa, we found that a whole bunch of people were coming from the south of Durban to the north, where we met on Sunday. We wanted them to be in connect groups, but they weren't willing to drive through during the week. So we found a courageous leader and gathered all these guys together. It wasn't big. But we managed to start this group in the south of Durban, that's still a very healthy group. It's been around the geographical area that's been very helpful.



My last comment is that as we launch these groups and grow with a dream for everyone to be involved, the last point is that new Connect Leaders need support at every level. We shouldn't just be dropping them! Celebrate them often, and keep regular contact, regular support, and regular encouragement, just like we ourselves need as leaders.

# **BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS AND COMMUNITY WITHIN A GROUP**

The most important part of Connect Group and the biggest reason we have Connect Groups is to create a sense of community. As connect group leaders, we should plough most of our energy into building community and friends. I encourage every connect group leader to focus on building community instead of building a meeting that happens once a week. I've heard of many stories where people part of a connect group have been in a crisis, and the first people they've contacted have been the people in their connect group. This is a clear sign of a healthy Connect Group. A Connect Group focused on building community and friendships is vital to help people on their faith journey. So the question is, how do people feel part of the community?

## **1. They are loved**

As Connect Group leaders, we need to know that every person that is in our Connect Group has been placed there by God. That means that God will give us as leaders the capacity to love them, and we can call on God and say, God help me to give time to give energy and to love every person in my group.

Every Connect Group leader should focus on loving people; we have been called to love people, not to try and fix them. So don't see the people in your group as different projects of how to fix them. We need to remember that God heals, God restores people; as leaders, we are called to love them and shepherd them toward God. That is our role.

We can do this by spending time with him and even spending time with him socially. When we spend time with people in our group in their homes, they feel part of the community; they feel loved, they feel cared for. And when we spend time with them, I encourage you to ask them not only what's happened in the past or what's happening in the present but what they have got in their hearts for their future. What do they feel God is placing in their hearts for their future? We can be a part of that by saying I want to pray for what God has for you in the future and see you walk into that. That happens when we spend time with people individually, building into them and making them feel part of the community.

## **2. Make them feel that they have a part to play.**

How do we make people feel part of a community? When they feel they have a part to play. We can look at 1 Corinthians 12. Paul speaks, and he says, *“Every person has*

*a part to play. Every person has a unique gifting that God has given them.*" So I want to encourage us not to wait for people to come to us and say, "I feel God is doing this inside of me," or "I feel God is showing me that I have this gifting." Just assume that every person has a part to play.

I recently heard a story during an Alpha Course where one table leader didn't arrive, and some reluctant leaders in the building were nervous about leading that group. One of the leaders eventually called a couple who weren't leading and said to them, "You need to fill a gap tonight; please, can you just sit with these people and lead the table tonight." As a result, they continued to lead the table for the rest of the course, and after that, they formed a Connect Group from the table. That is a leader assuming that people are on His journey and everyone has a part to play. We need to call that out of people. God has given us a mandate to ask Him, "God, what do you have for each person, my group? I want to make them feel part of the community by making them feel a part of what we are doing!" As leaders, we can open doors for people in ministry.

### **3. Connect People with other People in the Group**

I encourage you to use the people within your group, possibly those that have been with you for some time, and to connect them with others in your group. So, for example, if you know that there's someone who's going to visit your Connect Group for the first time or someone is new to your group, ask someone who you can trust, someone, who's been with you for quite some time in your group, to engage with the new person. I've seen so many great friendships formed because of that; we need these friendships in our journey of faith. This also helps us to share the load. We don't need to be everything as Connect Group Leaders.

### **4. Take them on Mission.**

Once again, we just need to assume that people are on mission instead of waiting for them to get on mission. So assume that they are on mission and give them opportunities to be on mission with you. Take them where you go. Assume that they want to go with you. So that can be, for example, at church, when people are being prayed for, take one of your Connect Group members with you, and even if they just stand there in silence, they are catching your heart. If you are going on a mission somewhere, assume that people want to go and take them, and invite them to come on a journey with you that makes them feel part of this community.

These four principles will help make people feel a part of a community and build great friendships and lasting relationships.

# THE STRUCTURE OF A CONNECT MEETING

Before we look at the structure of a Connect Group, it's important to understand that there doesn't have to be a set structure for Connect Group meetings. But there have to be some vital components that make up the structure. The first one is fellowship. The second one is engaging with people. The third one is the discussion time, and the last one the fourth one is the response time. It's important to understand that there isn't one component that's more spiritual than the other; every single one of them is a way of building into God's kingdom and seeing God's Kingdom advance in people's lives. For example, some of us will think that the discussion time and looking at God's word is much more important than the fellowship time at the front. But that's not true. Every component adds to the meeting and seeing people advance in God's kingdom.

## 1. Fellowship

Firstly, creating an atmosphere in your home that makes people feel welcome is essential—having background music that eliminates awkward silence while people engage in conversation, having coffee or tea served, and some eats or some food that is sustainable for your group. All of these add to the atmosphere of making people feel at home. Make people feel like they are at home instead of at a meeting. This is the moment we see people conversing and getting to know each other during this fellowship. Because of these moments, friendships form and are a critical part of people's faith journeys. Now that we've had this moment of fellowship, we have created an atmosphere to make people feel welcome and willing to share and be open.

## 2. Engaging the people

As connected leaders, I encourage us to think about people instead of the message we want to share with them. So that means that when we engage with people during this time, we listen to them more than we talk to them. You can start this time by engaging with people by asking a simple, relevant question. Opening with a fun question that can make people laugh, or an icebreaker helps get people talking. Don't go too deep too soon. If we go deep early, very soon in your meeting, you'll lose people because they feel like they can't relate. Now that we've had the engagement time with people where we've asked them questions about how the week was or had some fun with them by playing an icebreaker game, we have laid the platform for greater depth, where people feel more comfortable to talk. Now we can trust God to work in their lives.

I want to encourage every Connect Leader to use the Connect Resource and Insider Info. As I said in the previous point, we must think more about people than our message. And this is why we have generated this Connect Resource based on the

series so that every Connect Leader can think about the people coming to their home instead of the message they want to give. So we have made questions and scriptures available for you to use and add to the discussion time.

As Connect Leaders, we need to know that it's essential not to preach during this discussion time; that's why it's called a "discussion time". Instead of preaching, we need to listen after asking questions, which makes us discussion facilitators. Ask questions, and then share your thoughts as a leader after everyone has shared. What we've done is we've now laid the platform for people to respond to God.

### **3. A Response Time**

This leads us to the last component of our Connect Meetings, the response time. We need to give people a straightforward way of how to respond after the discussion time. We've now heard the word of God. We've discussed, in-depth, what our thoughts are. But now we need to respond to him. And how do we do that? Here are some examples of things you can say

*"We are going to respond and pray now."*

*"We're going to wait on God now."*

*"We are going to ask God for this now in asking him for forgiveness."*

*"We're going to ask him for open doors of opportunity".*

We have now given people a straightforward way of responding to God. During this time, it's also important to pray. As Connect Groups, we should be praying together, not only as leaders but also giving our people an opportunity to pray. Giving people a chance to pray in a safe environment makes them more confident as they learn and grow.

Finally, in response time, we can challenge people to go out and respond to what they felt God stirred inside of them. During this response time, I'd also encourage you to ask them to chat if they feel challenged about something God is doing in their lives. You can ask them to come and talk with you and stand with them and pray. I hope this has been helpful, and I trust that we will see healthy connect groups as we look at the structure.

# **MAINTAINING MOMENTUM & HEALTHY GROUP DYNAMIC**

How do we maintain momentum within a Connect Group and ensure a healthy group dynamic?

## **Meeting Regularly and Consistently.**

Firstly, meeting regularly and consistently helps maintain momentum. In addition, it builds trust with the people in your Connect Group. So, for example, if you start at 7 pm, with food and coffee and end at 8:30 pm, honour people's time by being consistent with your times. People can hang around afterwards but give people a clear indication of when those are.

Also, consider whether you will have regular breaks, for instance, during school holidays or when people are away, such as during the festive season & give people precise breakup dates and, most importantly, when you will be starting again as a group. Keeping the rhythms of Connect Group going with the school terms is helpful since most people with children orientate themselves around the term times.

## **Postponing Connect Group**

Sometimes life gets crazy, and you have to postpone meeting together that week, which can happen occasionally. It's vital that if you're going to postpone that it's done early enough and communicated to everyone well; just be realistic about why you are postponing. Missing one evening won't necessarily hurt momentum, but two weeks in a row will hurt the momentum of your group. Try as much as possible not to miss two weeks in a row. If it keeps happening, consider scoping ahead in the month and assessing when life may get crazy and maybe move to connect group that evening from your home to another home and get someone else to lead.

## **Keep it Consistent! Keep it fun!**

The third principle that helps in terms of ensuring a healthy group dynamic is to have fun. Consider now and then changing things up not to make it too boring and predictable. So, for one evening, change things up and do a braai together, or go for a walk together.

**Make sure you keep fresh!**

Thirdly, as a leader, you should find ways to keep yourself fresh. Regularly meeting with the Lord and reading your Bible helps keep you fresh.

**Keep the conversation clear.**

Another thing that helps is using the Connect Group guide; it stops the Connect Group discussion from becoming stagnant and people defaulting to their theological and philosophical bents. It also prevents you from defaulting to what you usually like to discuss. Remember that you're leading people in a direction somewhere. There can be other distractions where somebody can dominate the group discussion. Distractions like a dog constantly barking or phones going off can bring distractions into the conversation.

**Keep the conversation clear.**

Lead somewhere or volunteer someone and watch God grow them and watch God go to them. That's very, very important. Oscar, what about each person in your group and lead them, help, help lead them into his core for their life? That's very, very important for them. Say to yourself in your heart; this is long-term. It will keep you grounded, make people invest in you and the church and God's call, and build trust.

**Keep your group part of the whole church.**

It's very important that you continue pointing people back to the local church. You don't want your group to become isolated and disconnected from the local church. Get them to events that are hosted by the church, too, and obviously get them to Sundays. Get them involved in serving so that they feel like they belong and not simply sit passively in a church on Sundays.

**Share Testimonies & Celebrate Moments**

Share testimonies of what God's doing in other people's lives. If there are answered prayer celebrate that, and always point people to the fact that God is moving. Also, celebrate moments in the lives of people, whether it's a job promotion, a new job opening, a birthday celebration, kid's birthday. Celebrate and share those moments.

## **HOSPITALITY IN A CONNECT GROUP**

Over the years, we can do so many things that will make hosting people in our homes so much easier. Now, the venue where you meet has absolutely no impact on the success of your Connect group. If we look at Jesus, he met on seashores, mountainsides, temple courts, and people's homes; he spoke to people in the streets; he connected with people in so many different venues. It doesn't matter whether you're in a classroom, a common room, a shack, a home, or wherever you might be. God has such wonderful plans for your connect groups. Here are a few thoughts on hosting people in our home:

### **Parking**

The first thing that I'd love us to give some thought to and that I have often forgotten is parking. Some people may have arrived at your Connect Groups either by walking or riding bikes. But for those of you who have people that arrive in cars and motorbikes to connect groups, please do give thought to parking. Sometimes we are so used to parking in our homes and in our driveways that we give it no thought to where others may park. But for some people, your driveway may only have three parking options. So whether people are parking on the street or parking in an area where other people are also allocated parking, think through it to make it easier. Think to yourself, "Is there enough parking?" "Do I maybe need to go outside and be with the people just to direct them!" Perhaps get someone in your Connect Group to come early to help direct people to park so that they feel confident and they feel secure.

There's one guy in our site in Durban who lives in a multi-storey complex, and it's very confusing to know where to go, but there were loads of visitors parking. So what he did was he got drone footage of the place where he lived. And he highlighted all the different visitor parking areas for people to park. He put it on his WhatsApp chat, and he said, "We can't wait to have it tonight; these are all your options; come ready." And they have a connect group of over 20 people every single week. They meet in a complex, but there is a parking space for all of them. They feel secure and it's easy for them to find their way.

Think about the lighting of your parking lots; if it's very dark, people can feel unsafe and seem very unfriendly. Put someone up with a spotlight; if you can't put up more lighting, have someone else with the torch to welcome people. It has such a big impact on their first impression.

### **Think through what people are walking into**



The third thing that I want to consider is what people are actually walking into when they get to your venue. I always like to think of all the different sensors; it just covers all the ground and makes it so easy. So think through what is the first thing people see when they enter your home. My children have full-on into sport; they're coming home late, having to eat supper, and getting home; we've done all of that is going on within minutes of people arriving at our home for connect group. But I've got to give thought to that. If people arrive at my home and there are rugby socks on the floor. There's homework on the table, and half-eaten plates of food are lying in my kitchen. It may look like they are actually disturbing me and that I'm not really ready for them to come to my home. So I often did everything in my kid's bedroom on those nights. I'll feed them in the bedroom; we'll do homework in the bedroom so that when people walk into my home, it looks like there's some sort of order. What does your home *look* like when people come in?

The second thing is, what do people smell when they come into your home? Such a silly thing, but you might be so used to the smell of wet dogs or wet rugby socks, in my case. It's smelly, boys. I need to make sure my home smells good. Sometimes I say to the kids, "Get the air freshener and run around; just spray this place smells disgusting". Open the windows and give thought to that because we might be used to it, but other people are trading night, and it can be so off-putting to walk into a home where all they can smell is smelly shoes. On that note, something that I always need to remember to do. Check the bathroom. It's such a practical thing. Check that the toilet is flushed, that it smells nice, that you've got toilet paper, and that your kids haven't left dirty rings in the bath. Just make sure that your home looks and smells great.

### **Put on some music**

Think through what people hear when they walk into your home. I've got to make sure that I'm not shouting orders. We want to make sure we put on some beautiful music. We want the home to sound inviting. So put on something beautiful in the background. It takes two minutes, but make sure it's on; it really does change the environment that people walk into.

### **Set up your home**

My day is often too busy for me to set up my home when I get home. On my Connect Group days, I wake up slightly earlier, and we set up the lounge, teas and coffees to ensure it's all done. It may take 15 minutes, but at least it's done. We don't have to do it at the end of the day when we are scrambling.

Before Connect Group, forecast and think about how many people are coming. Who do you need to prepare for? Get your seats ready and put your chairs out in place. If people are arriving, you're like, "Oh my gosh, we run out of chairs!" - It

makes them feel like “, I hope it's fine that we're here?!” Make sure there are enough seats for everybody.

### **Think through people's specific circumstances.**

The last thing we should consider is people's specific circumstances. If people are coming to your Connect Group, and one is bringing a friend in a wheelchair, consider that. Do you have easy access? Consider people who bring children. Are we ready for them? If people bring kids to my home? I'll always send them a message beforehand. What do your kids want to do? Well, you want to put them to sleep? Or when should we put a movie on for them? We may chip together as a connect group and hire a babysitter for the night if it's an older kid who can look after them. If you don't give it any thought, you're going to be caught. Think of safety, such as your pool and balconies.

Another thing to consider is animals. Many of us are animal lovers, and we don't mind dogs jumping up on us or cats lying all over us. But for some people, they are absolutely petrified of animals. So if you do have animals all over your home, maybe on that night, put them in the backyard and for those few hours of Connect Group.

We are not looking for perfect homes. It's not about having THE home. That is Martha Stewart perfect. But it's just showing people intentionality. If Jesus was coming to our home, what would we do? We would make sure that we were ready! When we have Connect Group, we need to ensure that we understand the privilege of having people in our home to talk about Jesus. Let us prepare for them. Let us honour their time, honour them, and get our venues ready.

My last thought is the famous Mary and Martha story. Mary prays, sitting at Jesus' feet. She wanted to hear his heart. She wanted to worship Him. Martha, we often look at it and think, oh, what are you doing, Martha? Preparing your home instead of sitting at Jesus' feet. Martha was doing what was right. She was preparing for Jesus; she was preparing for the people. The problem was she chose the wrong time; she should have prepared that stuff so she could have sat at Jesus' feet. When Connect Group, it's not the time for us to put out the coffee cups. It's not the time for us to be cleaning our counters. It's not the time for us to chat with our kids to jump in the bath, and get the homework done... When we invite people into our homes, and we are ready and prepared, then we can be like Mary and serve them with love. We can sit at the feet of Jesus, and we can receive on those evenings. So I just want to encourage you in the same way that we serve God with all our hearts and strength. Let us open our homes and prepare them as if the King of Kings was coming home. Every single time we host the Connect group. All the best, and enjoy it. It is such a joy and a privilege.

## PASTORAL CARE

I'd like to begin by giving you three statements about pastoring. First is that pastoring is an immense privilege. Jesus was referred to as an apostle, a prophet and evangelist, a teacher, and a pastor. But the only one that he called himself was the pastor. We read that in John 10:11, where Jesus said not only that he was a Shepherd (pastor), but he said, I'm a good one. The second thing about pastoring is that it's something we never move past. It's not like pastoring is kind of like the basics that everybody has to do, and then once you've done your time caring for people, you move on to the more interesting things you really want to do in the church. We never progress past pastoring. It's a bit like masala in a curry. You can take ostrich chicken, beef, venison, goat, anything...However, in order for it to be curry, it has to have masala take the masala out, and it just turns into a stew. If you take care, love, and pastoring out of ministry, it's no longer ministry. Thirdly, there is a big difference between what I've called "traditional pastoring" and "biblical pastoring." Traditional pastoring aims to keep people happy, and you basically do that by doing whatever they want. But biblical pastoring, if you look at how Jesus pastored, is about healthy people. So for you and I to pastor, this is what we're on about keeping the people we lead healthy!

Dudley Daniel described pastoring (and as a Connect Group leader, you're effectively pastoring) as loving, leading and feeding. So you need to think through those three things in regard to the people you lead. Are you loving them? Are you taking them somewhere? Are you feeding them?

The people we lead, ultimately, their primary need is cared for by God. But the question for you as a leader and for you as somebody pastoring them is, what is the thing that you need to give them? Now this is a massive subject with many sides to it. But the most important thing you must give to the people you lead is you. I have travelled to the UK a number of times, visiting churches there and about a year ago, we wrote back to all the churches we visited and asked them to audit our ministry and our contribution to the church. We asked them this question, "What is the thing that we bring that is most important to you?" Thinking it was obviously the preaching or ministry. Without fail, everyone said, "The thing that we need most from you is the relationship". So for the people you care for, the people you're leading, the primary thing you have to give them is you. A relationship with you. If we go back to John 10 & and we look at the relationship Jesus had with his sheep, these are the statements that come out of John 10: He calls them, He leads them, He goes before them, they follow him, they know his voice, and finally, he knows them, and they know him. It's a two-way relationship. Sometimes in traditional pastoring, we're happy for us to know people, for us to be in their house, for us to be in their circumstances, for us to be in their world. But we're not really happy for

them to be in us, our world, and to know us. Genuine pastoring is a two-way relationship. It's a two-way vulnerability.

This helps me keep that relationship with people. I've called it my four P's. These are the disciplines I have in place that helped me to pastor and in no particular order.

- **Prayer**
- **Photos**
- **Phone**
- **Person to Person**

So with my pastoring, people like to think that it's all spontaneous and comes out from the inside, but that's not how it happens. Most people's birthdays, I don't remember spontaneously; I remember because I've written it down somewhere. And so I have these four disciplines in place in my caring for people.

### **Photos**

It actually starts with photos. Because if I have people in front of me visually, I have them in my mind; I see them every morning when I walk into my study. So I have in my study the pictures of the people I lead that way; every morning when I walk into my study, I can't forget them.

### **Prayer**

The second thing I do is pray for them. I don't pray for all the people every day. But I pray for them. I have this conviction that for the people that I lead, if I'm not praying for them, the chances are nobody is, and the thought of having people in my care that nobody is praying for, I find, undoes me. So I pray for people.

### **Phone**

I pray with my phone, and I have this goal: I will write a personal message to at least three people every day. It must be personal. For instance, if you send me a message and I see that it's one of the ones that you've sent to 100 people, it goes right down to the bottom of my inbox, and I might get to it next year. I pray with my phone so that if I feel anything prophetic or encouragement for a person or just some tenderness or love, I write it down and send it to them immediately so that I don't forget.

### **Person-to-Person**

The last discipline that I have with regard to leading people is person-to-person. My wife and I will set our diaries three weeks in advance and diarise who we want to connect with face-to-face in our home.

Lastly, we're very aware of the Great Commission, which is to go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). But the great Commission is built on the great commandment, which is to love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul, all your mind and all his strength and the second commandment is to love your neighbour as yourself (Matt 22:37 - 40). Ministry is built on these two great truths, the "Great Commission" and the "Great Commandment". Go and enjoy loving people!

# **FACILITATING A GROUP DISCUSSION**

I want to look at four points when leading a group discussion: The first one is preparing for group discussion.

## **Preparing for a Group Discussion**

Preparation is important because it honours God and the people sitting in your lounge each week. But also realise that many of us are juggling busy schedules and so, we are looking to cut down on our preparation time; what I find really helpful is to use the Connect Group Resource that gets sent out from the church every week. It is in no way meant to limit us regarding what we can cover. But what I love about it is that it takes the topic that we cover on a Sunday at church and puts it into question form. It allows us to ask questions in Connect group, which makes it practical and applicable to our lives. The way I like to use it is in my preparation to get an angle on my discussion and to add some questions to that.

It is also really helpful to pray in our preparation because the Holy Spirit knows each person coming each night and knows where they're at. And so, it's really important to rely on Him in our preparation so that we don't miss the mark completely. But I also find it helpful to try to think logically about how I approach the questions that I'm preparing. So that it can take people from A to B in their faith as we progress in the discussion. I also find it super helpful to send the questions on to two or three of my potential leaders so they can look at them. I'm always wondering whether my questions are easy to answer and whether it's easy for some to understand.

## **Starting a Group Discussion**

The second thing I want to look at is actually how we start off a group discussion. I start with an icebreaker question or an easy question that everybody can answer and that also leads to a particular topic. The other day, I did the topic of patience, and my starting question was, "What is your pet peeve?" This was an easy question that anybody could answer, and I got the group talking from the word go, which is a great start.

## **Ask questions about the Scriptures.**

Take a few scriptures and ask people to give their opinion on the them. For example, I would ask questions like, "What stands out to you about this?" and "What can you take and apply to your own life out of those verses?" This is not then an opportunity to prepare a sermon and to preach a sermon to connect the group rather it's a discussion, and it's successful when everybody else is talking instead of me. If, like me, you hate awkward silences, you will be tempted to give people the answer as soon as you've asked a question if nobody answers right away. But I want

to encourage you to give it some time; most people take a little bit of time to think about the question and then to have the courage to answer that question. What is also helpful is to listen carefully to what people say. Often because we want to rush ahead to the next question while people are answering, we look down at our notes to see what to say next. But I found that if you can listen to what people are saying in the answers, it can give you amazing opportunities to have one on one conversations with people afterwards about what they've said, you'll often see Jesus asking questions of people, and they might seem abstract or surface level at the beginning.

You can see that Jesus lets those questions lead to a heart motive or a place of vulnerability, which is what we want to do and connect group two; we start off at a surface level, and we lead people into depth and connection.

What I always find helpful in terms of vulnerability is to share something personal from my own life, which gives others the courage to do the same. What's also helpful is for potential leaders to be the first ones to answer questions. Sometimes it takes some time for people to get the courage to answer. But if you can get a few of your potential leaders to answer upfront, it just breaks the ice.

If the conversation is not going well and everyone's not talking, sometimes it's helpful to ask a regular member, "What do you think?" just to keep the conversation going?

### **Landing a Group Discussion**

It's really helpful for every group discussion to have one big idea and to lead all your questions towards that endpoint. In other words, "What do I want people to walk away with?" It's very helpful as a Connect Group Leader if those final questions can be about practical application and a take-home message.

Our job as Connect Group Leaders is really to lead people towards the Word of God, which impacts the way that they live. We don't just want to be hearers of the word but doers of the word. We have the amazing privilege of allowing people to digest the word of God, which allows them to make good decisions in everyday life.

### **Challenges of Leading A Group Discussion**

I have been in the most incredible group discussions where there is vulnerability and connection, and amazing results come from the group discussion. And then I have been in the most horrific group discussions where you lie in bed that night, thinking, how could that discussion have ended up like that? It is no surprise to me that when we take a whole lot of different people from different upbringings

who are in various different stages in their spiritual journey, and we ask them their opinion that things don't go as planned. A few of the challenges I faced are, firstly, when you have your big idea and you have the direction of the discussion, but somebody asks a question that takes the discussion in completely different direction.

If you feel that it is adding to the discussion, and people are engaging, and it's on the right track, by all means, let it continue. But in other scenarios, sometimes a question may hijack the whole discussion. And it is not going in the direction you had in mind or felt for the meeting. In such scenarios, it might be a good idea to say something like, "Thank you so much for your input; you have a really great angle on that; could I ask that we park this idea, and we can chat about it afterwards?" This helps to get back on track with our discussion. The other scenario that I've had is when somebody says something biblically incorrect. Now, there are two approaches here that I've taken. On the one hand, if it's something major, where the whole discussion now becomes about the comment that has been made, and there's a lack of truth there, it's helpful to bring biblical truth in a gentle and kind way so that the person doesn't feel humiliated. On the other hand, if it's a passing comment, that doesn't take centre stage for the Connect group meeting. In other scenarios, I might just talk to the person one on one and kill it with neglect so that they aren't humiliated. You really have to go with your gut feeling there and engage based on how well you know the person.

The other challenge that I've had and Connect Group is when somebody dominates the conversation and don't doesn't give anybody else a chance to talk. In that scenario, its really sad for me because I want to hear where everybody's at since it gives you a doorway into their spiritual journeys. And so a phrase such as, "Thank you so much for your opinion; we've loved hearing what you have to say. Could I just interrupt you and ask, does anybody else have an opinion?" This just to gives everybody else a chance to speak as well.

The other challenge that I've had in Connect group is, when I was younger, I felt very ill-equipped to lead a Connect Group because I felt like I didn't know the whole Bible, and I was so worried about what if they ask a hard question that I don't know the answer to? There's no shame at all and saying, "I'm really not sure what the answer is. Why don't we both research it and come back and chat about it next week or during the week?" The other way of doing it is to open it up to the group and ask, "Does anybody have a thought on this question?" If you're not sure where you stand on it yourself, I think it actually brings courage to others when they can see that we, as leaders, are still learning about the Bible, as are they. The last challenge, which is a great challenge to have as when the group grows probably to



more than about 14 people, it becomes difficult for every person to give their opinion, you'll see that it'll be the more confident outgoing people that will speak but the quieter ones won't get an answer in. I found it really helpful to break into smaller groups and to bring through potential leaders that can use the same questions that are prepared, but in a smaller setting and allows everybody to share their opinion. What is great about that is that you also get to raise leaders in a safe setting. They don't have the pressure of the whole meeting, but they are still taking a step forward in their personal leadership development.

What an incredible privilege it is that we get to do this week after week.

## **FACILITATING A RESPONSE TIME**

In the response time in a Connect Group, we are enabling people to put practical feet to walk out what they have just learned in the Connect group. Generally, a response time will happen towards the end of your Connect Group, after discussion, after unpacking the Word, but don't limit it to that. There have been instances where I've walked into a Connect Group, and someone has bared their heart before everyone has even had a cup of coffee. We have immediately had an opportunity to rejoice and praise the Lord for something that's happened. Or maybe there's been tears, so prayer and encouragement are needed. Just be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, come prayed up full with the Spirit and expect God to touch people. Create an environment where people can respond. I'm going to divide what a response time is into two areas. First, an immediate response time (a response time within a Connect Group Meeting) and then I will look at a response which would play out in the days or weeks following a Connect Group meeting.

### **Immediate Response Time**

We must never forget to give people a straightforward way to respond. We can say something like, "Well, let's respond to this by doing this or that", or "We're now going to take a moment and just wait on the Lord." When you have mature believers in your Connect group, you'll find that because they have worked with the Lord for a time and practised this for them to respond, it becomes easy, and they'll probably know ways in which they are to respond. But when you have unbelievers, new believers or immature believers in your Connect Group, you must be clear and boldly lead them into responding to the Lord.

What are some of the responses that we could make? The first and the most obvious one is prayer. You can pray for people, and you can give people an opportunity to pray. Connect Group is a safe environment where you can grow and learn. New believers are often very nervous about praying out loud. In those instances, it may help to give them tips on how to pray. It may help by giving them something specific to pray for, for example, "Will you please pray for George, or maybe you can pray for Julie?" It helps when they have something specific they can pray for.

It could also be personal requests. For instance, what does someone need? This could be praying for people. Maybe an unsaved friend. A family member. Someone who is sick. It could be praying for church events. It could be praying for our teachers, maybe other churches, like in Acts 4, where they prayed for boldness. Prayer could take any one of these forms.

Another response that we could have is prophecy. It's an excellent opportunity for people in the Connect Group to encourage one another, hear from the Lord, share a scripture, and encourage the word with one another. Sometimes people may say something well-meaning but not biblical. In those instances, gently point to what the Bible says.

Another form of response could be worship. Now, worship isn't just singing; worship can take many different forms. The first could be singing. If you have a musician or someone who sings well or your group is comfortable playing a CD and worshipping, do so. These moments can often be great moments with the Lord.

Quiet contemplation is another form of response. Sometimes, when a deep truth has come, we need just to take moments and be quiet. Silence. If it's well intended, silence is not a bad thing. But you can lead your group into that and say, we will just be silent for a while and let what God has done settle.

Another form of response is waiting for the Holy Spirit to fill people. What a wonderful way to respond to what has been discussed. There could be those who are being filled for the first time or those who have been filled already and need once again to be refreshed by the Spirit. The Scripture speaks about a continuous filling of the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18).

Another response could be salvation. If you have unbelievers in your group, create moments where the people can respond to the Gospel. Sometimes this can be done by asking if anyone in the group wants to get saved and leading them in the prayer. Sometimes it could be saying, "If you are here and God has stirred your heart, and you know you need Jesus in your heart, please come and speak to me as the Connect leader or maybe one of the other mature believers". If anyone comes, follow that up over coffee, and someone could get saved.

### **Response time after Connect Group**

Sometimes the response we need from a Connect Group meeting is not always played out in the Connect group. A response can be played out in the following days and weeks—for instance, baptism. If someone suddenly realised that they needed to be baptised, you could immediately, as a Connect Group, go outside to the swimming pool and baptise them there and then. But maybe a baptism is a moment to invite unsaved friends or family members to come and celebrate with you. So maybe they want to get baptised in a church service the following Sunday after Connect. A response could be well, who are you going to invite? Who are you inviting to Connect Group next week? Who are you inviting to the church service on Sunday? Who are you inviting to the prayer meeting or to the event that is

coming up? Maybe a response would be applicable handles on “how to pray”, “how to have a quiet time”, or “how to read the Bible on your own.”

Lastly, we have a little saying we call “Closing the Loop.” It means that you bring something to completion. And I encourage that when the response has been elicited next week, whether the response was in last week's Connect Group or worked out in the days following Connect Group. Next week you ask, “Well, how did it go?” “What happened?” “How did this response play out over the week?” You can give testimonies to answered prayers. You can give encouragement to keep going, and in that, we bring believers to maturity, and they walk out this authentic faith that we have in Jesus Christ.

## HANDLING TRANSITIONS

Interestingly, psychologists say that one of the things that can cause tremendous stress in life is change. So thinking about your life when change has occurred, whether moving towns or cities, changing jobs, getting married, or having kids, can stress your life tremendously. For some people, it's good stress, a good change, but it can go the other way. Transition is like changing gears in a car. When a gear change is done well, it adds to the vehicle's momentum; when poorly done, it's a bit of a grind and can cause the car to halt. It's a helpful analogy to get our heads around regarding the topic transition in Connect Groups. Transition is necessary when it comes to Connect Groups. Whether it's because of some natural factors, like a leader moving to another city or a new leader coming in to lead, transitions will come at some point within a Connect Group. But how these transitions are handled ultimately results in healthy or painful transitions for people. Here are a couple of lessons we learnt along the way regarding transitions.

### **Challenges & Resistances to Transition:**

Resistance can often happen when you and I, as leaders, have been thinking through a change for many hours, days, and weeks, but the people haven't been aware that change is coming. Then, suddenly they encounter a transition, and at first glance, it may appear to you like there's immediate resistance. This resistance can catch us slightly off guard, but people have been unaware.

A second challenge to a transition may occur when groups are split. There may be a big bustling group, and it's very exciting. In your mind, you've said, "I'm going to split this group, and one group will go that way, and the other that way." Unfortunately, The presumption assumes that relationships will continue in the same vein. But often, that doesn't happen. Since relationships are severed apart, the group just ends up being different in a different lounge with a different leader. It can often become starchy to start a new group as a new culture is formed along the way.

A third challenge to transition is what I've called presumption; it's acting without faith; it's just presuming that we'll do it again this year because we transitioned last year. We can make these leadership steps without faith. However, faith pleases God. Faith is a vital ingredient in bringing about change.

A fourth challenge would be poor communication. Again, we can presume that people are just on the same page as us. But if we don't communicate proactively, it can result in much pain during the transition process.

A fifth challenge is the depletion of critical mass. In a small group, we often have, we have those that contribute, we have those that bring food, we have those that are just good, faithful attenders, we have those that may help with lifts, those that are good at communication etc. When you transition a group, suddenly, the first week, some of that critical mass is not there anymore, there's not the same level of contribution, not so many people are involved, etc. So this is an element to be considered.

### **Tools to help transition**

Here are five tools that are important in handling a transition. The first is prayer. The start of all big decision-making and considering that we are dealing with people's lives is spending time in prayer. It's essential for the people you're leading down a new path to know that their leaders have weighed and waited on these decisions. Pray changes the hand of God; it moves the hand of God. So it's an essential part of the transition process.

A second tool would be communicating at different levels. People shouldn't hear about the transition process for the first time in a public meeting. It needs to be communicated with the new leader first, then with some other group leaders. Why? Because they have got influence. They will settle the rest of the group if they are on board with the new change and excited about it. Also, consider those that are vulnerable in the process. They might need a coffee or dinner to help them process what's about to happen, notably if they've tapped into you as a leader. You're asking them now to have faith in a new leader along the way. Give others at least a phone call and tell them what is about to happen. Thirdly look at the public announcement; when you announce it at Connect Group, it needs to be a declaration of faith saying something along the lines of, "We believe God's in this, it's an exciting time, and this is how we're going to do it".

Lastly, have a definite process and timeline. A 4 - 6 weeks timeline is a good length when considering a transition. More than six weeks is too long, whilst shorter than four weeks may not allow you to get everyone on board and the time to process the transition. It should be somewhere between 4 - 6 weeks. If you're going into two groups within your current group, you can establish separate group cultures in a safe space before launching out. The handover meeting should be full of faith and bring in some elders and other leaders that can help celebrate the moment because change is ultimately good; the kingdom is advancing! The moment of the handover meeting needs to be a declaration of faith and victory; celebrate it, and make sure the food is generous and everyone is excited.

## **RAISING LEADERS**

We will look at four leadership principles and how to bring through a leader. Firstly, leadership is God's idea; it's not some strategic plan painted by business gurus. God set leaders such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and David in place. In every family, fathers and mothers are put into families as delegated authority to bring order and righteousness into a family. That's the way the kingdom comes. The kingdom comes with the government of God, the authority of God, into a situation. So it's God's idea.

Secondly, God expects all people to lead in one capacity or another. You can't say that this is not for me; this is for somebody else. If you believe in Jesus, you are ordained to lead. Let me prove it to you. When the Holy Spirit is at work in your life, one of the fruits of the Spirit is that you develop self-control as you begin to lead yourself properly. When you understand your faith, you are encouraged biblically to lead nonbelievers to Christ. If God gives you a family, mom's, dad's you; you are told to lead that family. Paul says in 1 Timothy 3, and then Titus, that when you've got self-leadership, right, and you've got home leadership, right, then you entrusted with church leadership, that's essentially the qualifications of elders and deacons. God intends every single believer to be a leader. If you have the King of Kings, the governor of all governors, inside you, you can lead when we understand that, when a church gets this right. It begins to grow, not by addition only.

For example, I'm a pastor, and the church's growth is limited to my giftedness. The church will grow according to how I grow! It'll just grow according to the capacity of my gift. But if I'm able to replicate myself over and over and over and over and over again, and dozens of people start pastoring and looking after people and discipling people and leading people, now we are growing through multiplication, not merely through addition. This is how God's glory will be seen across the earth. When disciples, make disciples and lead disciples who lead disciples. That's God's plan. So how does it work?

I'm going to suggest to you that there is a five-step process, there's like a pipeline if you like, and if one of these steps in this pipeline is absent, you're going to get a blockage in your production of leaders, whether that be in business, school, family, or a church environment.

### **Develop a Culture of Servanthood**

The first step in releasing leaders is developing a culture of servanthood. You want people to serve because that's how Christ led. He said, The Son of Man has come to serve, not to be served (Matt 20:28); when husbands are called to lead their families, they are called to lay their lives down to serve their wives and their families as Christ

did for the church (Eph 5:21 - 25). The word the *diakonos*, for example, from which you get the word Deacon, or minister, means to serve. Create an environment where people are serving. When you see people serving, it's from that pool that you pick your leaders. If you don't have people serving, you won't have people laying their lives down for the sheep. And so create an environment where people can serve. For example, if you're running a connect group, create opportunities to serve. Opportunities to fetch, carry, do the teas, do the communications, share the word, organise social events, etc. The people that jump at the opportunities to serve are developing Christ's likeness, and we find our leaders from that pool.

### **Call Leadership out of People**

The next step is to call leadership out of them. In Mark 3:13, Jesus goes up to a mountain to pray, comes down, and calls the disciples that they might be with him. He picked them. Very few people will just raise their hands and say, "Pick me!" Most people need leadership called out of them. When you say to somebody, "I see leadership in you.", "I see the potential." "I see God's hand on your life." If you speak that over somebody, you identify them, you're getting them into the process of leading.

Every leader should have a list of potential leaders that he's praying through. In the back of my diary, I have a list of potential elders, and I'm praying through them constantly because you've got to identify leaders. If you are a Connect Group Leader, you should identify someone ready to lead almost imminently and one who could potentially lead further down the road, but you want to invest in that person and tell them. Tell the Lord, tell yourself, and write it down. You need to pick leaders to get the next part of the leadership pipeline: training.

### **Training People**

When Jesus trained his disciples, he specifically told them where to go, what to take, how to handle rejection, what to say, what to preach. He did full-on training, and many churches will have training programs: You can put guys on training programs, and you should. But most training happens on the job rather than in classrooms. You, as a leader, should always do something with others. If you visit someone in the hospital, take someone with you. If you go pray for someone's business, take people with you. If you're going to go and do some marriage counselling, take people with you. When you lead your Connect Group, you should hand over areas of your Connect Group for others to lead. This is how we train on the job.



## **Releasing Leaders**

The next step is crucial. It's getting ready to release them. You don't just take someone and then just chuck them off the edge of the cliff and say, "All the best!" You will have very few people to stand up to lead after that! When you're getting a kid to ride a bicycle, they've got those training wheels on. And so first, they ride with the training wheels. Then once they are confident, you take one training wheel off. You may have them leaning to one side for a while, but eventually, they balance just with one training wheel. Finally, you take them all off. But after that, you don't just leave the kid on the top of a massive slope and say, "Go, buddy!" Instead, you run behind them with your hand under the seat." Why? Because they need it. When someone's about to start leading, you want to set them up for success. Let them win victories in the safe country. Set them up to do well.

I remember when my son first asked me to preach; he was about eight years old. I allowed him three minutes in a meeting I was in. But before he got up to speak, I made sure that he had practised in the mirror about ten times that he'd said it to me at least five times. Then I taught him how to use a microphone; I gave him a deodorant can and put it under his chin. And so when he came to speak, he knocked it out of the park. Why? Because he had been set up for success. It was just three minutes, but many hours of training beforehand. Now he just can't get enough. You want to set potential leaders up for success.

## **Encouraging Them**

The final step in the process is encouraging them until Jesus returns. Just because someone's now leading and you've handed over leadership to them, you don't wash your hands clean and say good luck. You encourage him! If you stop encouraging leaders and neglect them, they'll get tired. They'll say I need a sabbatical and bailout. And then, to get them back in the pipeline of leading again is very difficult!

## **GATHERING PEOPLE AND GROWING**

How do we grow and gather people within our Connect Group? In the New Testament, we see the people gathered around Jesus. They wanted to be with Him and be where he was. Every week, when people arrive, we need to make sure that they feel the love of Jesus. They experience Jesus every week, so they are bound to return because Jesus is there. That's when crowds gather.

In the New Testament (Mark 2:1 - 11), there is a story about four men who lowered their paralysed friend through the roof to the feet of Jesus. That house was packed because people were there because they wanted to see the miracle of Jesus. And when Jesus deals with the paralysed man, he deals with his physical and spiritual needs. So we must take our cue from Jesus with how we deal with people in our Connect Group.

We also need to remember that every human desires to belong, and what better place to belong than in a Connect Group? People want to know that they are wanted. So as we communicate with people to invite them to Connect Group, we should communicate that we really want them there, that we're excited to have them in our homes and that it will be such a pleasure to have them in our home.

Many people tend to shy away from Connect Group if they've never been to one or maybe they've had a bad experience. Make sure that when you are inviting people, communicate what they can expect at the Connect Group. Also, make sure you ask them if they're happy for you to have their contact details and ask their permission if they are happy for you to invite them to your WhatsApp chat. Before they even step into your lounge, the group has gotten to know them via the chat, making them feel welcome and part of something before they even come to your home from day one.

WhatsApp groups are a fantastic way to get your people to feel connected. They often communicate with each other, send prayer requests, and celebrate each other's birthdays or anniversaries, making them feel like a part of the group.

If a new Connect group member has contributed during your meeting, acknowledge and encourage them. People love to be acknowledged; they love to know that they're appreciated. We need to remember that communication is key. People feel connected and acknowledged in so many different ways when you are communicating with them.

When visitors arrive at your Connect group, ensure they are your focus. Ensure that the people in your Connect group know there will be visitors that week and help

make them feel welcome and comfortable. It's also great for people who have been in your Connect group for a while to share their first-time experiences. This all helps people feel welcome and relaxed. If a person has attended your meeting for the first time, call them during the week or send them a message and tell them how great it was to have them and that you enjoyed them being there, and you hope that they felt at home. That communication helps them to know that they were appreciated, that it was great to have them, and that you hope to see them soon.

We should encourage those in our Connect Group to invite others. When they invite people to the Connect Group, they feel like they, too, are helping grow the group. If visitors attend the Visitors Lounge on a Sunday and have signed up for a Connect Group in your area, give them a phone call during the week, invite them to your Connect group, and maybe even have a look at visitors that raised their hands after the Sunday meeting and go and connect with them straight away. You've at least had that connection before they enter your lounge.

Another great way is that often, different sites have courses like Alpha or Starting Point. So you can get involved in those courses and meet new people. So they don't get lost after those courses but rather join a Connect Group.

It's also essential to include your Connect group in your social life; it's not just about one meeting a week. Organise events outside of Connect group meetings; have other people in your Connect Group organising social events. It's usually at these events that people who usually just come on their own bring others to. Eventually, those visitors to the social events begin attending the Connect group themselves. It also allows everyone to become closer as friends within the Connect Group.

If your people feel loved, if they feel cared for, if they feel welcomed. They're going to want to come back. They're going to want to invite other people. Make Jesus the centre of those meetings because that's when people begin to gather and that's where people grow.

## HEALTHY CONNECT GROUP LEADERS

What is a healthy leader? There are many aspects to it. In the New Testament, Paul writes two letters to Timothy, affectionately called the pastoral letters. If you read 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy and we separate what Paul instructs Timothy to implement in the church and what Paul instructs Timothy to implement in his personal life, you will be pretty surprised. So much of what Paul writes to Timothy is about what he is to implement in his own life as a leader in order for him to be a healthy, growing, strong leader within the church. He deals with Timothy's devotional life. He deals with his ministry. His relationships with old and young women, men, rich and poor. He speaks about his sexual purity. He addresses his speech! He even tells him about his diet and encourages him to exercise. And he speaks into the area of his emotions and his self-confidence.

2 Timothy 1:7 says, "God has not given us a spirit to make us fear, but a spirit of power and love". Some versions say "sound mind", others say "self-control", and others say "self-discipline". I know this is not the favourite word for us to hear, but a lot of being a healthy leader revolves around self-discipline. Now you will have different areas that are important to you. I will tell you the areas that I feel are important for self-discipline; these are in no particular order. Your devotional life, your emotional life, your relational life, your physical life, your financial life, your sensual life and lastly, your vocal life. In each one of those areas, we have to develop, and the Holy Spirit is in us to help us develop in each of these areas.

### **1. Define these areas of discipline in your own life.**

Now, I'd like to say three things about these areas of discipline. Firstly define what it means in your life. I don't mean define them like a New Year's resolution where you're all motivated, rah, rah, rah. Now I'm going to go do it. Rather in the presence of God, asking the Holy Spirit to lead you and guide you, let Him speak into your heart to define what disciplines need to be there and what those disciplines look like.

### **2. Don't rank the disciplines.**

Secondly, don't rank them. What I mean by that is if you look at these disciplines, you may say surely devotional discipline (My prayer life, worship, Bible Reading). Surely that is more important than a physical discipline. Not really. If you are very disciplined in your devotional life, but you are so poor physically that you can't even preach for 15 minutes. There's an obvious problem. You may be relationally brilliant and really disciplined, but financially shocking. There's a problem! And so don't rank them and say, "This one's more important than that one"; just say, "These things are all important. I need to fit them all into my life." If I find that life is getting tight and I

haven't got time to fit them all in, don't chop one out; just squeeze the amount of space for each one. Once you develop a discipline, it's very, hard to get it kick-started again if you stop. Whereas if you just compress it, keep it in place, just compress it when your space opens up is so much easier to continue that discipline.

### **3. Be Accountable**

There needs to be somebody that we are accountable with when it comes to our disciplines to. And so the question is this who's your Paul? So Paul had a very good look at Timothy's life and was able to write two books on what he needed to implement. Have someone who will look into your life, be that close, be that familiar, that they can write a book and say, this needs to be done, that needs to be done.

### **4. How do you pick yourself up**

If you're leading, and it's going to happen, you're going to have times when you feel worn out. You have to figure out for yourself what things will pick you up. I've got a couple of things I'll do if I'm struggling. I immerse myself in his word, not to study not to prepare some to read it. It washes over my soul. I must read a whole book. Secondly, I pick up my guitar, and I worship, and it can be for 5 minutes. It can be for an hour, but I just worship God. The third thing I do is take a walk. Whatever it is to pick you up.

God never looks for perfection, but rather that we're healthy. I really hope that God leads you and helps you and that you listen to the Holy Spirit to not just be healthy the moment but to stay healthy.

## INSPIRING TRANSFORMATION IN PEOPLE

*"And we who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."* 2 Corinthians 3:18

God's desire for us is to see us transformed into His likeness, meaning that we become increasingly like His Son, Jesus Christ. Our aim should be the same with the people we're leading - to bring them to maturity in Christ by becoming more and more like Him. So, how do we inspire transformation?

Acquiring knowledge in isolation may be interesting but is not particularly useful. However, when a crisis looms, suddenly, knowledge becomes imperative and most often converts to life transformation. For example, information retention suddenly becomes essential at exam time (crisis). For students who are regular in their class attendance; their attention span is heightened, and study notes are made and the entire class environment transforms - the only difference is the exam (crisis) ahead.

Life is similar, although we do not have the benefit of knowing when these crises will spring upon us. During an emergency, people invariably change. This can be either for the (long-term) good or result in the long-term bad. Unfortunately, life shows us that many negative, life-altering decisions are made during times of crisis that have crippling repercussions: people default back to previous ways of living, they regress in their faith, they settle for sub-standard quick-fix solutions- all to survive and ride out the storm.

With this in mind, every believer is presented with a few essential questions: Where do I run to in times of crisis? How do I keep growing?

The answer is threefold:

- 1. Run to Christ**
- 2. Run to the Bible**
- 3. Run to the Christian community**

Connect groups are thus constructed with this same philosophy at their core. The three aims of every Connect group would always be for people to:  
When this happens, "crisis" presents an opportunity to grow. Thus, Connect groups are constructed with this same philosophy at its core. When this happens, "crisis"

presents an opportunity to grow. Thus, Connect groups are constructed with this same philosophy at its core. The three aims of every Connect group would always be for people to:

- 1. Connect with God - Worship, Prayer and Spiritual gifts**
- 2. Connect with the Bible - Personal Devotion, Study and Connect Group Prep**
- 3. Connect with the Christian community - Love, Care, Friendships, Counsel**

## DEALING WITH “TRICKY PEOPLE”

Some groups drift to a point where they slowly become unhealthy over time. One of the significant contributors to an unhealthy group culture is the presence of 'tricky people' that can drain a group of its life.

'Tricky people dynamics' could be a result of any of the following:

- Incessant talkers
- Needy people - financial, emotional, psychological
- Those looking for attention
- Controversial people look to unsettle, shock and affect the group adversely.
- Withdrawn people - it's challenging to get them to contribute
- Emotionally detached people - they don't read a group dynamic very well
- Unbelievers - If they are particularly sceptical they can unsettle some of the immature in a group

Most groups can cope with one or two 'tricky people dynamics', depending on the size, but there is a tipping point at which a group reaches the 'Point of No Return'. If a group is heading in this direction, it is wise to establish the cause, act quickly by changing the dynamic, and as a last resort, eject / relocate one or two personalities into other environments. It would be advisable to do this in conjunction with an elder or another leader.

While navigating some of these tricky waters, establishing clear parameters to a group discussion is helpful to ensure a meeting is never hijacked by one dominant personality. Some examples would include the following phrases before or during a discussion:

- “We're going to spin around the circle very quickly. So if you're a communicator, start planning a concise answer to the question.”
- “We're going to discuss it for the sake of time and to give everyone an opportunity; let's keep our answers brief.
- " Let's pray for that (need) when we finish our discussion (rather than diving the whole meeting)
- I'm going to interrupt; you have some great points there - let's hear someone else's take on the matter.

People in any of these categories are best dealt with first behind closed doors. They need to be heard, and leaders must win their hearts. In public, a leader should treat them with dignity and respect but never allow them to remove the life from a



meeting. Strong leadership in a meeting is palatable, where the person in question knows a leader's love and commitment for them.

# APPENDIX

## LESSONS WE'VE LEARNED OVER 50 YEARS ON CONNECT GROUPS

These are short principles that we have learned over the course of 50 years of leading, growing and planting Connect Groups.

### 1. IT'S OUR PRIMARY DISCIPLESHIP TOOL

Connect groups are our primary discipleship tool. We believe that in order for a church to grow in numbers and for us to effectively disciple individuals, people need to feel cared for and nurtured. In our experience, people flourish best when they are planted into Connect Groups and realise that church is also about doing life together. Although courses, programs and ministries contribute to the development of a person's faith, Connect Groups should always be first priority.

### 2. A CONVICTION OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is neither a chore nor a favour nor is it a charitable service. We are the Church of Christ, and, as leaders, we are privileged to be involved in nurturing and growing His bride. It is imperative that we are arrested by the conviction that God doesn't need leaders - He chooses to use leaders. A need for leaders drives most church environments. When we release leaders as a result of lack or in a desperate attempt to fill a leadership gap, we are in danger of taking undue risks with God's bride. The question one ought to ask is, "Am I called?" and not "Can I do it?" In the Bible, we can't find many leaders that consider themselves adequate for the task of leadership. When leaders suddenly feel under pressure, their first reaction often is to deflect than assume responsibility rather. This may be because they lack confidence to or don't feel equipped to handle the situation correctly.

At this point, it is a leader's innate conviction of his or her calling to be in leadership that ensures they will stay the course and not give up or back down, no matter what challenges they may be facing.

### 3. LEADERS REQUIRE ASSISTANCE

Leaders value assistance when it comes to providing content and structure for a meeting. The majority of leaders lead because they love people and they love hosting people in their homes. It is important that this remains the major focus of our connect group leaders. To encourage this we provide a weekly Connect Group resource, complete with questions and discussion points, which facilitate conversation and provide a structure around which connect groups can gather.

#### **4. GROUP DISCUSSION**

*"But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."* - Heb. 5:14. This text gives us an important key in bringing people to maturity. This key is constant practice. To use a sporting metaphor, a good discussion is one that is well constructed, enabling every person in the group to "get in the game" and contribute. No sitting on the sidelines- every person's contribution is valid and meaningful. Those that are new in their faith tend to learn from those that have been serving Christ for years. The more mature ones offer deep, tried-and-tested perspectives that have weight. And the recent converts offer raw, real-life contributions that keep everyone stimulated and curb a group from becoming so "heavenly-minded" that they are no "earthly good". With everyone "in the game", contributing, discussing and wrestling real-life issues against biblical truth week by week, life transformation occurs a whole lot quicker than merely listening to a lecture. The power of this principle is not only seen in life transformation but leadership development. Facilitating a group discussion is a far more reasonable step to take for an emerging leader than expecting them to emulate a typical "Sunday meeting". Anyone can learn to facilitate a group discussion skillfully; not everyone has the gift to preach and teach.

#### **5. DOING LIFE TOGETHER**

We live in a culture where human relationships are greatly influenced by, and often limited to, cyberspace. The result is that people manage relationships, bypass filters, protect their hearts and create an idyllic community environment that suits their life. The downside of this is that the world we live in is slowly losing the biblical idea of community that is reflected in the early church:

- a culture of sharing
- a culture of caring for those in need - a culture of hospitality
- a culture of devotion
- a culture of generosity

A connect group doing life together is an attempt to create a community that is healthy and primarily informed by the Bible. Doing life together does have some challenges. Most groups live at two opposite extremes:

##### **Extreme 1: Grow, multiply and split up:**

In this extreme, the aim is to grow as quickly as possible and then split the group up into multiple smaller ones to cope with its multiplication. This is generally very exciting for the leader, as the environment is progressive,

explosive and highly energetic. The challenge is often with the people in the group and their resistance to change. People don't naturally enjoy a change in leadership too regularly. Groups are most often split down the middle and valuable friendships are torn apart. If this is the only aim of a connect group, people begin to guard themselves as they subconsciously wait for the next traumatic group split.

### **Extreme 2 - No growth, keep group exclusive and closed**

In this extreme, the intention is to counter Extreme 1 by locking down in a closed circuit group that becomes inflexible and resistant to change. The group becomes ring-fenced at a certain size and dynamic. From here on, visitors are frowned upon and considered as no more than a nuisance, ultimately giving the group an insular feel. The challenge is that the group is completely dependent on one leader and as a result the development of people and teaching them to take responsibility and lead is put aside.

The happy middle ground is found when a group commits to doing life together, sharing their lives with each other and committing to long-term friendships. However, additionally, a strong emphasis is placed on training and releasing every person to lead and engage in active involvement in the group and the local church. To facilitate the natural progression of change and development in connect groups, one of two things is suggested:

1. Start smaller groups out of existing groups - this minimises the trauma of breaking up many of the established relationships and celebrates the courage of a new leader pioneering with a minority group.
2. New groups for New people - New membership classes are an effective place to start new connect groups. People that attend these classes all have one thing in common, the fact that they are unique. Integrating new members into a church community effectively can be challenging and invariably breaks down while attempting to place each person in a separate, existing and established group that suits their station in life. This one element of commonality provides a far more effective integration strategy for new members in the same group regardless of each individual's diverse background.

## 6. WORSHIP

Worship needs to be re-defined as connecting with God. There remains to be the misconception that worship equates to singing. If this was true, then every connect group leader would have to be a musician or have a musician in their group.

- Singing in intimate environments can be very awkward. It is not a mandate to sing.
- Worship can look different from group to group. The aim is to connect with God at every meeting. This can be done in a variety of ways, be it through singing, praying, prophesying, waiting on God, listening to a worship CD etc.

## 7. ONE KEY LEADERSHIP COMPONENT

The most popular argument against leading a connect group is that people feel they need more Bible knowledge. Yet, as important as Bible study and knowledge is, the question remains, "When does a leader ever know enough?"

Presuming our leaders qualify biblically, we feel the key leadership component God uses in Connect Groups is warmth. The rest can be learned or taught without compromising or diluting other leadership components.

- **Spiritual warmth:** This is a fervour and devotion for God above all else. Practically, this is reflected in how a leader talks, in their love for the Word, for the people of God, and whether they prioritise Kingdom activity.
- **Relational warmth** refers to the leader's love and cares for people and their well-being. Some leaders may not be especially strong in this area, but their spouse is, making them the perfect team.

## 8. COMMONALITY

Every group has cultures and sub-cultures that drive it. Intentional leadership will develop a group culture. However, if neglected, a default culture will emerge nonetheless. Cultures often grow around a few common factors, that often are the things we celebrate and talk about. Culture, rightly or wrongly, ultimately creates a sense of belonging.

Examples of commonality in a connect group

- Job sector: members involved in the financial industry
- Sport: a common interest in gym or football

- Family: newly married couples and children

Other examples:

- Members may have recently participated in an Alpha course; thus, every person is at the same stage, perhaps searching for answers to do with faith.
- New groups for new people often work well because the common ground is found in the fact that everyone is new regardless of other interests, jobs or stations in life.

As a leader, we need to look for commonality in our group. We need to find the relational connection point, other than Jesus, that will keep the group doing life together in the future.

## **9. LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND SUCCESSION**

Every leader by association has the responsibility and privilege to raise up other leaders, in the same way a parent has the responsibility and privilege of bringing a child to maturity.

### **Good reasons to raise leaders:**

#### **1. The harvest is never the problem:**

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few." Matt 9:37. God intends to reach every village, town and country with the Good News of Jesus Christ. To enable this process, He chooses to use emerging leaders that are being carefully prepared, highlighting the fact that the only shortage there will ever be is with the workers.

#### **2. Wise leaders consider succession.**

Change is inevitable, and it would be wise to consider that none of us will be around forever. Wise leaders build away from themselves and develop a leadership core around them.

#### **3. Natural family dynamics:**

In any family, a parent's primary objective is aimed toward their child's progression and development in life. A particular moment comes when sons and daughters grow up, take responsibility and become independent. This can be painful, but it is a natural and godly progression.

In the same way, every believer is on a journey toward maturity, where growing up and taking responsibility is a natural part of the Christian life. We call this raising and developing leaders.

## **10. LOOKING AFTER LEADERS**

Connect group leaders are at their best in the community with other leaders. Discovering that other Connect Group leaders face similar situations and challenges is very comforting. In addition, leaders thrive when given periods of rest. To accommodate this, Connect Group closes down for some time at the end of every term. We have discovered that, generally, leaders are comfortable committing to ten-twelve weeks of constant facilitating before requiring a break. This also has a positive impact on the longevity of a leader.

## USING THE CONNECT GROUP RESOURCE & INSIDER INFO

A weekly email is sent out on a Monday morning to all Connect Group leaders, which includes:

- Connect Prep
- Insider Info link (discussed below)
- Sunday sermon link

You can also access the Connect Group Resource at [onelifechurch.org.za](http://onelifechurch.org.za) or ask your Site Captain to add you to the mailing list.

A leader or group administrator can distribute this email to those that weren't able to attend the Sunday church meetings.

The Connect Resource has been designed for the following reasons:

- Connect Group Resource builds on the Sunday series - Continuous repetition of biblical truths converts knowledge to life transformation.
- Connect Group Resource removes the pressure on the leader to have to come up with a big idea every week.

One should not be fooled - the success of a meeting doesn't lie in the questions, but in how a leader facilitates a meeting around the questions. The Connect Resource enables budding leaders a safe environment to begin their leadership journey, giving them the confidence that they too, can lead. Learning does not take place in a single isolated moment; in the same way, a single isolated Sunday sermon is no guarantee that people will experience life - transformation. Learning knowledge generally takes place in four distinct stages:

- 1. Inspiration** - Being inspired by a Sunday sermon.
- 2. Familiarity** - Internalizing by note-taking
- 3. Boredom** - Doing the preparation
- 4. Knowledge** - Coming prepared and applying the truth

Structure of the Connect Resource:

### **a) Get-to-know-you questions:**

These are introductory questions that are superficial and lighthearted and enable people to relax while introducing the topic for the meeting.



**b) Digging deeper:**

In this section, parallel texts are explored and used to discuss the topic in greater detail.

**c) Application questions:**

These questions aim to apply the truth of the Bible and challenge the group toward life transformation.

**USING INSIDER INFO**

Insider Info is designed in a way to give a leader valuable inside information around the weekly topic and establish a clear bottom line. This is in no way prescriptive but merely an aid to creativity and focus. Practically, each Insider Info email has a link that presents a five to seven-minute online video or audio file and includes coaching tips, visionary church announcements, potential ministry outcomes and reflections on the topic of the previous week's preaching meeting.

## **AN EXAMPLE OF A CONNECT GROUP MEETING**

### **PLAN FOR AND HONOUR TIME**

People are generally time-conscious and live under constant stress, and so honouring time is important. A meeting that consists of life-giving people connecting around feedback, sharing life stories, a healthy discussion, faith-filled prayer and ministry should be possible in 90 minutes. It is tempting to wait for people that are late and push out the end time. Although this may appear noble, those who are on time are penalised and it creates a culture of dishonouring time. If people these days can't rely on a meeting finishing at the given time, they often don't come back again.

A good meeting structure could look as follows:

### **Pre-meeting (30 minutes)**

**6:30 PM** - Supper or coffee - this moment can be used to gather people arriving at different times. Dinner works well to connect and remove pressure from the working sector to make dinner and get to a meeting. This is also a good time for families to settle the kids and get ready for the meeting.

### **Meeting (90 minutes)**

**7:00 PM** - Welcome - introductions, feedback, testimonies, my life story questions

**7:20 PM** - Group discussion - introduce the topic, get feedback from the Sunday message, work through Bible texts and discussion questions

**8:00 PM** - Discussion summary & application

**8:10 PM** - Prayer & ministry- requests, personal needs, local church events, outreaches, prophecy moments

**8:25 PM** - Vision casting - give the group direction by looking at important announcements and upcoming events

**8:30 PM** - Coffee to close

## **ELEMENTS OF A LIFE-GIVING MEETING**

In any environment, there are numerous elements that contribute to the overall energy and life of a Connect Group. When these elements are missing in a Connect group environment, meetings become predictable and monotonous. It is important as a leader to include and celebrate as many elements in a meeting as possible. A few of these would include:

- Presence of Christ
- Regular testimonies of answered prayer
- Visitors that integrate well into an existing group
- New salvations
- Baptisms
- Leadership development and release of these leaders
- Informal social interaction outside of the leader and formal meetings
- Passion and faith that is evident and contagious
- Prophetic encouragements
- Changing venues and environments - this can equally work the other way when not carefully managed.
- Fresh voices as a, much as a leader has a responsibility to lead from the front; people respond well to fresh voices every so often.
- Consistency - an inconsistent leader eventually drains the life out of any group

## TOP TIPS FOR NEW LEADERS

As the leader of your group, you have courageously stepped out in faith to help others to grow in their faith. Thank you for the impact you will make. As you prepare to facilitate your group, here are a few thoughts to keep in mind: You are not alone. God promises, “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5).

Whether you are facilitating for the duration of this series or longer you will be richly blessed.

**1. Don't try to do it alone.** Pray right now for God to help you build a healthy team. If you can enlist a co-host to help you shepherd the group, you will find your experience much richer. This is your chance to involve as many people as you can in building a healthy group. All you have to do is ask. You may be surprised at the response!

**2. Be friendly and be yourself.** God wants to use your unique gifts and temperament. Be sure to greet people with a big smile - this can set the mood for the whole gathering. Remember, they are taking as big a step in showing up at your group as you are in leading a group. Don't try to do things exactly like other leaders; do them in a way that fits you. Admit when you don't have an answer, and apologise when you make a mistake. People appreciate authenticity.

**3. Prepare for your meeting.** Preview the session ahead of time and write down your responses to each question.

**4. Pray for your group members by name.** Before your group arrives, take a few moments to pray for each member. You may want to review the Small Group Prayer List at least once a week. Ask God to use your time together to touch the heart of each person in your group. Expect God to lead you to whomever he wants you to encourage or challenge in a special way. If you listen, God will surely lead.

**5. When you ask a question, be patient.** Someone will eventually respond. Often people need a moment or two to think about the question. If silence doesn't bother you, it won't bother anyone else. After someone responds, affirm the response with a simple “thank you” or “great answer”. Then ask, “How about somebody else?” or “Would someone who hasn't shared like to add anything?” Be sensitive to new people or reluctant members who aren't ready to say, pray, or do anything. If you give them a safe setting, they will open up over time. If someone in your group is

very quiet and sits silently through every session, consider talking to them privately and encouraging them to participate. Let them know that they are important to you and that the group would value their input. Remember, still waters often run deep.

**6. Provide transitions between questions.** Ask if anyone would like to read the Bible verse, for example. Don't call on anyone, but ask for a volunteer, and then be patient until someone begins. Remember to thank the person who reads aloud.

**7. Break into smaller circles of three or four occasionally.** With an opportunity to talk in a small circle, people will connect more with the study, apply more quickly what they're learning, and ultimately get more out of this experience. A small circle also encourages a quiet person to participate and tends to minimise the effects of a more vocal or dominant member.

**8. Small circles are also helpful during prayer time.** People who are unaccustomed to praying aloud will feel more comfortable trying it with just two or three others. Also, prayer requests won't take as much time, so circles will have more time to actually pray. When you gather back with the whole group, you can have one person from each circle briefly update everyone on the prayer requests from their subgroups. The other great aspect of subgrouping is that it fosters leadership development. As you ask people in the group to facilitate discussion or to lead a prayer circle, it gives them a small leadership step that can build their confidence.

**9. Rotate facilitators occasionally.** You may be perfectly capable of leading each time, but you will help others grow in their faith and gifts if you give them opportunities to host the group.

**10. One final challenge:** before your first opportunity to lead, look up each of the six scriptures listed below. Read each one as a devotional exercise to help prepare you with a shepherd's heart. With your heart prepared in this way, you will be more than ready for your first meeting.

MATTHEW 9:36 (NIV)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

JOHN 10:14-15 (NIV)

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep, and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep.  
1 PETER 5:2-4 (NIV)

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-5 (NIV)

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

HEBREWS 10:23-25 (NIV)

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards 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.

1 THESSALONIANS 2:7-8, 11-12 (ESV)

But we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well because you had become so dear to us...For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

## **11. Write down Prayer Requests**

This is a place where you can write each other's requests for prayer. You can also make a note when God answers prayer. Pray for each other's requests. If you're new to group prayer, it's okay to pray silently or to pray by using just one sentence.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>NAME</b>	<b>PRAYER REQUEST</b>

**12. Create a Small Group Calendar**

Healthy groups share responsibilities. Shared ownership ensures that responsibility for the group doesn't fall to one person. Use the calendar to keep track of who's bringing eats (if you're meeting in person), communicating changes in venue etc. Feel free to use this calendar at your first meeting. Planning ahead will create a sense of shared ownership.

<b>DATE</b>	<b>LEADING</b>	<b>VENUE</b>	<b>EATS</b>