



FOREWORD

Small Group
Introductory Study
Leader Guide





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Week 1

We're Here ...Now What?

Congratulations on becoming a small group leader! All of your group members are grateful for your willingness to lead. In these first few weeks, we encourage you to spend the majority of your group time getting to know each other. Ask discussion-starter questions and encourage everyone's participation. The group will follow your lead. If you answer questions from your heart, they will be inspired to do the same.

Before your first meeting, read through the following lesson in advance, becoming familiar with the scripture readings and preparing your responses to the discussion questions. Leader directions and suggestions are italicized. Think about where you are meeting and who will be in your group, and prepare an inviting environment. Plan for aspects like seating and snacks.

If your group members don't know each other, provide name tags for the first few weeks. Spend some time facilitating introductions and conversations within the group.

GETTING STARTED *Review this section with your group.*

Welcome to small group life at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection! Your life will be deeply enriched by the connections you form together. Small groups are one important avenue for spiritual growth and service at Resurrection. Being a group member can help you to live out the wonderful reality that Pastor Adam Hamilton described in his book, *Leading Beyond the Walls*: "One never exhausts all of the possibilities for growing and serving in Christ; Christianity provides an inexhaustible array of studies to explore and ministries to pursue."

Resist the urge to focus on "what you will get" from this small group. Instead, ask yourself how you can contribute to this group, and what God is going to do through you because of this new community.

FOREWORD is an introductory study, meant to help you get to know each other and to lay the groundwork for your group's future. Each lesson is structured in a way that has worked well for many small groups. "Try it on" for these four weeks. Determine what works well for your group, and then tailor the structure and the environment to the needs of your members.

Bring your Bible to your meeting. Become accustomed to taking turns reading out loud. Please note that the scripture passages printed in this study use the Common English Bible translation. There are many different translations of the Bible available, so, as a group, you may want to choose the same translation to use together.

Keep in mind that healthy small groups will develop with an **investment of time** and a **collection of shared experiences**, and will flourish where there is **trust and grace**. Earn each other's trust by keeping confidential the personal details people share. Extend grace and respect to one another when you disagree on theology or on another topic. It will happen, and that's okay. As business leadership author Stephen R. Covey wrote, "Strength lies in differences, not in similarities."

OPENING PRAYER *Use this prayer or one of your own to open your time together.*

We come together before you, Lord, from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. We seek wisdom from community, that we might begin to develop deeper connections with those in this room. We seek to listen, that we might be attentive to others and to You. We seek the grace forever flowing from your hands, for we are your humble servants. Father, you have crafted us to be social beings, and to grow alongside others. Allow our attendance to be an act of worship, so that you alone are glorified.

In your name we pray,

Amen.

WATCH VIDEO *(Week One: We're Here - Now What?)*



FELLOWSHIP (suggested time: 30 - 40 minutes)

People come to the Church of the Resurrection from a variety of faith backgrounds, and many have moved here from other cities. These fellowship questions can be a good way to gain insight into each other's personal history. *Prepare your answers in advance and plan to begin the discussion, so that you can set the precedent for answer length and candor. After the group has answered, note the connections and relationships your group may have in common. It may be helpful to take notes as people share.*

- What motivated you to join this group?
- Tell us one interesting fact about where you grew up.
- What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about God?

Additional Fellowship Questions: (use depending on how the discussion is proceeding):

- Does your name have a special meaning, or were you named after someone special?
- What is the best thing that happened to you in the past week?

STUDY (suggested time: 30 - 40 minutes) Read the following passage together:

Luke 6:12-16

¹² During that time, Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night long.

¹³ At daybreak, he called together his disciples. He chose twelve of them whom he called apostles: ¹⁴ Simon, whom he named Peter; his brother Andrew; James; John; Philip; Bartholomew;

¹⁵ Matthew; Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus; Simon, who was called a zealot; ¹⁶ Judas the son of James; and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

Ask a group member to read the following out loud:

God created us to be in community. Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian, co-founder of the Willow Creek Community Church, has written:

“It is in small groups that people can get close enough to know each other, to care and share, to challenge and support, to confide and confess, to forgive and be forgiven, to laugh and weep together, to be accountable to each other, to watch over each other and to grow together. Personal growth does not happen in isolation. It is the result of interactive relationships. Small groups are God’s gift to foster changes in character and spiritual growth.”

DISCUSSION *Ask the questions, one at a time, to the group, and then wait for answers. Resist the urge to answer these questions first, even if there is silence. If no one is answering right away, make eye contact with one of the more outgoing members of the group and ask them directly.*

- Why do you think Jesus choose to be surrounded by a small group of people?
- Consider what you know of the relationships between Jesus and his apostles, and the experiences they shared together. View those experiences through the lens of the paragraph from Dr. Bilezikian, and discuss how they were a small group together.
- What would Jesus’ ministry have looked liked without the apostles?

Ask a group member to read the following out loud:

The late Christian philosopher and professor Dallas Willard wrote, “Personalities united can contain more of God and sustain the force of his greater presence better than scattered individuals.”

- Where have you seen this principle demonstrated in your lifetime?
- Think about a time when you felt alone, and then a time when you felt supported by someone. If you feel comfortable sharing, describe the differences in the situations to the group.

JOYS & CONCERNS (suggested time: 10 - 15 minutes) *You may need to manage this process; it can be derailed by side conversations or by well-meaning members who interrupt to offer solutions to another member’s concern. Set a “no side conversations, no solutions” ground rule at your first meeting. Encourage members who have advice, or similar concerns, to talk together at the meeting’s end. Use your Portfolio Notebook to record prayer requests. Incorporate the Joys and Concerns in the Closing Prayer.*

This is an important relationship-building activity for your group. Take turns sharing prayer requests or lifting up joys. Resist the urge to offer advice or suggestions to each other during this sharing time – save for that fellowship after your meeting ends. Jot down requests and praises so that you can pray over them in the coming week.



NOTES

Week 2

The ACTS Model

GETTING STARTED *Review this section with your group.*

After working with hundreds of small groups over the years, the Group Life staff has noticed that the healthiest small groups share some common characteristics. “Healthy” in this instance points to groups that have developed meaningful, authentic relationships, who continue to grow spiritually together, and who have managed to thrive even in changing, challenging life circumstances. These are not the only traits groups share – but they are striking in their continuity.

One way to summarize and remember these characteristics is by using the following acronym:

- **A**uthentic (Being real with one another)
- **C**hrist-Centered (Keeping Christ as the focus in your relationships and studies)
- **T**ransformative (Desiring change and growth)
- **S**pirit-Led (Recognizing and inviting Jesus’ presence within the group)

The **ACTS** acronym is especially appropriate because in Acts 2: 42-47 (which we will read next week), you will find a wonderful representation of the type of authentic Christian community that formed from the earliest believers.

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for bringing us together again. Help us to cast aside the troubles of the day, to be attentive to what you would have us focus on. We are busy, but we dedicate this time to growing in faith through community. You are a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths. We trust your leadership above all else.

In your name we pray,

Amen.

WATCH VIDEO *(Week Two: The ACTS Model)*



APPLICATION FOLLOW-UP (suggested time: 15 minutes) *Discuss this question with the group.*

Over the last week, what were your reflections about the people who surround you on a daily basis?

FELLOWSHIP (suggested time: 15 minutes)

Who is the most authentic, or “real” person you know? What is it about this person that makes them comfortable sharing their true nature with others? *(Note: if someone has trouble identifying an authentic person in their life, ask them if they can name a well-known public figure who appears to embody this characteristic).*

STUDY (suggested time: 45 minutes)

Let’s delve a little deeper in to the healthy small group characteristics:

1. Authentic

- Being “real” with one another
- Fostering safety, confidentiality, and acceptance

Read Romans 15:7 together:

⁷Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Then read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 together:

⁷I was given a thorn in my body because of the outstanding revelations I’ve received so that I wouldn’t be conceited... ⁸I pleaded with the Lord three times for it to leave me alone. ⁹He said to me, “My grace is enough for you, because power is made perfect in weakness.” So I’ll gladly spend my time bragging about my weaknesses so that Christ’s power can rest on me. ¹⁰Therefore, I’m all right with weaknesses, insults, disasters, harassments, and stressful situations for the sake of Christ, because when I’m weak, then I’m strong.

Discuss: What is the message from the Apostle Paul in these letters he wrote to believers in Rome and Corinth?

2. Christ- Centered

- Everything the small group studies, says, and does points to Jesus.

Read Jesus’ words in John 13:34-35 together:

³⁴I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. ³⁵This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other.

Discuss: We probably all know from personal experience that loving each other is often easier said than done. Can you think of a time when you chose to love someone who was being ‘unlovable’? When have you been the ‘unlovable’ one? Why is it important that we love?

3. Transformative

- Desiring to grow and develop spiritually to become more like Christ
- Seeking to venture and stretch outside of comfort zones

Read Romans 12:2 together:

² Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

Discuss: Name one or two aspects of your life would you like to change. What could you be doing to figure out what God's will is for you? What are some steps you can take to determine His will?

4. Spirit-Led

- The Holy Spirit is Jesus' presence here on Earth
- Inviting the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your meetings together
- Listening for His wisdom

Read Jesus' words from Luke 12:11-12 together:

¹¹ When they bring you before the synagogues, rulers, and authorities, don't worry about how to defend yourself or what you should say. ¹² The Holy Spirit will tell you at that very moment what you must say.

Then read John 14:16 & 26 together:

¹⁶ I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever... ²⁶ The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you.

Discuss: Have you ever had a spiritual "aha" moment, where the right words or actions came to you in an unexpected flash of insight? Or perhaps you have felt an inner prompting that led you to an action. Reflect upon those moments and consider where the Holy Spirit might have been at work within you.

JOYS & CONCERNS (suggested time: 10 - 15 minutes)

Share with one another. If you have an update about a concern you have previously shared, let the group know about it.

APPLICATION FOR THE WEEK

Decide which of these 4 characteristics of a healthy small group might be the most challenging for you to follow. Perhaps you have become adept at presenting your "best face" to the world, and revealing your weaknesses might be a struggle. Perhaps you are new to the Christian faith and need to learn more about the Jesus before you can place Him at the center of your life. Everyone will have a different challenge. Spend some time this week thinking through yours and come prepared to discuss your findings next week.



Week 3

The Story of God

GETTING STARTED *Review this section with your group.*

This week, we'll study the small groups that formed within the very first Christian communities, and how they blazed an inspirational trail for future small groups to follow.

OPENING PRAYER

O Lord, as we gather again, help us to speak what you would have us speak. Help us to receive your grace and extend it to one another, and to listen to each other carefully and caringly. Give us your joy in our time together.

In your name we pray,

Amen.

WATCH VIDEO *(Week Three: The Story of God)*



APPLICATION FOLLOW-UP (suggested time: 15 minutes)

Discuss your thoughts regarding which of the healthy small group traits discussed last week might be a challenge for you, and why.

FELLOWSHIP (suggested time: 15 minutes)

Have you ever lived in a large, close-knit community, where you were close both in physical and emotional proximity to others?

Perhaps you experienced this type of community in college, in your living quarters, or maybe you grew up in an urban environment with neighbors and relatives very nearby. Describe the positive and negative aspects of your experience.

STUDY (suggested time: 45 minutes) *The Community of Believers - Acts 2:42-47*

Read the following scripture out loud:

⁴²The believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. ⁴³A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were united and shared everything. ⁴⁵They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. ⁴⁶Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. ⁴⁷They praised God and demonstrated God's goodness. And God added daily to their number." *(Continued on next page)*

Let's examine how these words might help form your small group's future. The theologian Gabriel Fackre sorts the practices of these believers into 4 categories:

1. Telling the story of God (Teaching and Evangelism)
2. Doing the story of God (Serving)
3. Being the story of God (Community)
4. Celebrating the story of God (Worship)

1. **Telling the story of God:** Bible study, increased knowledge, and a greater depth of spiritual understanding are vital aspects of the small group experience. However, the goal of small groups is not to learn for learning's sake. The goal is to achieve life transformation as a result of the individual's, and the group's, increasing spiritual maturity. As we share that transformation with the rest of the world, others are drawn to Christ because of his light shining through us.

Discuss: What is one aspect of your life that you would like to transform? You don't have to name a spiritual aspect. Perhaps you'd like to transform your physical health – you might wish that you were in better shape, or that you got more sleep. Whatever the choice, take a moment to jot down how your life would improve if that part of it were transformed into something different, and share it with the group.

2. **Doing the story of God:** The communities depicted in these passages of Scripture were not inwardly-focused, closed-off circles. They sacrificially cared for each other and for those around them who were in need. While nurturing those within the group is an essential part of community life, some small groups can occasionally lose sight of the call to serve in the larger community, as Jesus teaches in Matthew 25:35-36: "I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me."

Discuss: It's highly likely that you already possess the basic physical needs of life – food and water, shelter, clothing. Are there people in your community that do NOT have access to these basics? What might keep them from having these basic needs of life? As an individual, what are you currently doing to help them? What kind of impact could your group make together?

3. **Being the story of God:** The early believers knew that relationships are developed and deepened with social interaction. Strong groups spend time getting to know each other. Sharing your joys and concerns, and helping to carry others' burdens will intertwine the story of **you** with the story of **God**. Consider getting together socially, or serving together, outside of your small group time.

Discuss: Who has the next big life event in your group— birthday, anniversary, graduation? How might you celebrate it together?



100%

100%

100%

100%

Week 4

Planning for the Future

GETTING STARTED *Review this section with your group.*

Now it's time to do some planning for your group's future. In this session, we'll take stock of your experiences together over the past three weeks. You'll determine what is working for you, and what is not. You'll decide if you wish to continue on as a group, and what that group's structure will be.

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, we are grateful for your constant presence and thankful to be in each other's company again. As we move forward in our group, help us to keep you at the forefront of all we do and all we are. Guide us in our discussion, preparation and planning, Lord, and help us to always emulate you.

In your name we pray,

Amen.

WATCH VIDEO *(Week Four: Plan the Future)*



APPLICATION FOLLOW-UP (suggested time: 15 minutes)

Share your prayer experiences from the week. What worked for you, and what difficulties did you face? Share your insights with each other and see if you might adopt a practice that another group member found helpful.

FELLOWSHIP (suggested time: 15 minutes)

What are 2 things that you are really good at? (Don't be humble!)

TAKING STOCK & MOVING FORWARD (suggested time: 20 minutes)

You've met together for 3 weeks, which is not enough time to know each other deeply, but hopefully enough time to get a sense of each other. As a group, evaluate how the sharing and interaction is progressing. Are people beginning to feel more comfortable with one another? Additionally, if you've had trouble attending regularly in the past three weeks, ask yourself why, and determine if this will be an ongoing issue. It's important to be honest with yourself and your group members about your ability to commit to regular attendance.

What has worked well over the past 3 weeks, and what might need to be adjusted? Use a whiteboard or a notepad to record your conclusions. As a group, assess the following about your meeting:

1. Time and length— starting and finishing
2. Place— rotate homes?
3. Structure— changes in the flow you would like to make? Will you take turns leading the studies?
4. Group size (should you recruit additional members?)
5. Discussions— sharing leadership

STUDY (suggested time: 30 minutes)

Next, it's important that every member of the group have a role in addition to "participant." Too often, one or two people will take on all of the responsibilities of the group, which can lead to burn-out, frustration, or resentment. For the health of your group, and for your own growth and development, everyone must have "skin in the game."

Read the following scripture together:

Romans 12:4-8

⁴We have many parts in one body, but the parts don't all have the same function. ⁵In the same way, though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other. ⁶We have different gifts that are consistent with God's grace that has been given to us. If your gift is prophecy, you should prophesy in proportion to your faith. ⁷If your gift is service, devote yourself to serving. If your gift is teaching, devote yourself to teaching. ⁸If your gift is encouragement, devote yourself to encouraging. The one giving should do it with no strings attached. The leader should lead with passion. The one showing mercy should be cheerful.

This scripture encourages us to recognize that we all bring different gifts to the small group. Think back to your answers to the, "What are you good at?" question. What are you good at— and what do you enjoy doing? The intersection of those two ideas can help you find a good-fitting role within the group.

Take a moment to read through the following common group roles. How do your gifts and talents mesh with them? Which responsibilities will you assume? Depending on your group's size, you may be able to share roles as a small team.

Assistant Leader: "Helper" to the group leader. Possibilities: lead in the leader's absence; assume administrative tasks such as sending emails, meeting place scheduling, keeping track of birthdays, etc.

Service Leader: Seeks out and schedules service projects for the group on a regular basis.

Care Leader: Rallies the group when a member needs care, for example, organizing meals for a group member after surgery. Records Joys and Concerns.

Social Leader: Plans "extra-curricular" social outings and events.

Curriculum Leader: Works with the leader to assess group's spiritual growth needs and researches curriculum choices that meet those needs.

(And, any additional roles that your group identifies.)

Now that you have agreed to roles and assessed any meeting changes that should be made, take a few moments to review our Small Group Agreement template on the following page. Feel free to tailor your group's agreement to meet your needs. If time allows, draft your group's agreement together now. Otherwise, be sure to draft it and gain group agreement next week.



CLOSING PRAYER

In your name we pray,

Amen.

NOTES

NOTES

OUR SMALL GROUP ROLES

Date: _____

Leader: _____

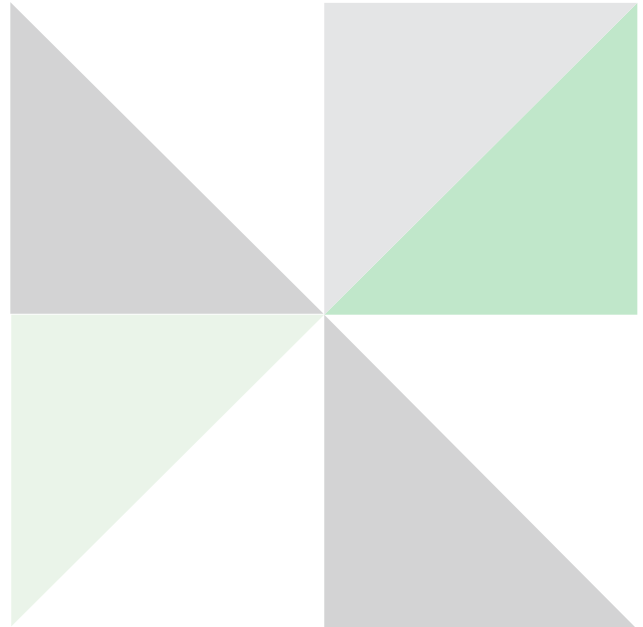
Assistant Leader: _____

Service Leader/Team: _____

Care Leader/Team: _____

Social Leader/Team: _____

Curriculum Leader/Team: _____



Additional Roles:

Role: _____ Leader/Team: _____

Role: _____ Leader/Team: _____

We will revisit these role responsibilities in:

3 months

6 months

9 months

12 months

Other

*Leaders: Distribute a copy of the Small Group Roles and the Small Group Agreement to each member of the group.



OUR SMALL GROUP AGREEMENT

1. Based on the purpose of The Church of the Resurrection ("To build a Christian community where non-religious and nominally religious people are becoming deeply committed Christians"), our group's purpose is:

2. We agree to uphold the significant values checked on this list:

- **Confidentiality**— what is shared in group stays in group
- **Acceptance & respect**— we can disagree on many subjects and still be warm Christian friends
- **Openness & honesty**— we're here to grow together, not to impress one another by pretending to be people we are not
- **Sensitivity**— we listen, carefully and caringly, to what others share in the group
- **Intentionality**— we aren't just here to have a good time, but to grow spiritually, and we will be intentional about that
- **Accountability**— we will hold one another accountable for moving toward the kind of growth God is calling us to

Other values we commit to uphold are: _____.

3. We will meet on _____ (day of the week).

4. We will meet every ____ 1 week ____ 2 weeks from _____ until _____ (time of day).

5. We commit to meeting for: ____ 6 months ____ 9 months ____ 12 months ____ other: _____. At the end of that time, we will review this agreement, and each person will have the opportunity to renew or withdraw from their commitment to this group.

6. The place(s) where we will meet is/are _____.

7. Group attendance is a priority. If we cannot attend, or will be late, we will contact the leader in advance, or check in as soon as possible if advance notice is not possible.

8. Child-care arrangements (if needed) will be: _____.

9. I agree to share in group responsibilities by: _____.

(examples: facilitate a lesson, follow up with absentees, lead prayer, communicate and/or track group joys and concerns, bring refreshments, organize service projects, etc.)

Signed: _____ Date: _____



