



Small Groups



LEADER TOOLS

WORD-CENTERED
OTHERS-FOCUSED
DISCIPLESHIP-DRIVEN

GROUP LEADER MANUAL

Word-Centered:

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV)

We believe that God's Word—the Bible—has the authority and power to literally change people's lives. But, we must dig in it. One of the most transformational ways to do this is studying the Bible *together*. As we do this, we'll learn to love God better.

Others-Focused:

"Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." (John 13:34, ESV)

Loving one another is at the heart of what it means to live out the Christian life. Groups give us an environment to practice doing this well. We also rely on one another for encouragement, care, prayer, and to point one another to Jesus.

Discipleship-Driven:

"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.'" (Matthew 16:24-25)

We believe everyone needs to grow in their spiritual relationship with Jesus and in what it means to follow Him. Princetown Church Groups are safe environments where singles or couples can learn and practice taking next steps to follow Jesus.

Description: A Small Group leader shepherds approximately 10-12 individuals toward maturity in Christ. A leader's responsibility is to create an intentional discipleship community where group members learn God's Word, care for one another, and begin to take next steps in obedience to Christ.

Qualifications:

- Member of Princetown Church.
- Small Group member for at least one year.
- Biblical character of a Deacon (1 Timothy 3:8-13).
- Has displayed leadership and consistent attendance within their Small Group.
- Has been recommended by other church leadership.
- Has completed the Small Group Leader Application.
- Humble, honest, teachable, and passionate to love Jesus, love one another, and to live with purpose.

Personal Expectations:

- Love God and one another.
- Worship Christ through Bible reading, prayer, service, giving, and other spiritual disciplines.
- Faithfully attend a weekly Princetown Church worship service.
- Regularly connect with your Small Group leadership/staff.
- Commit to participate in Small Group leader team building sessions.

Group Expectations:

- Faithfully lead your group consistently.
- Facilitate Princetown Church approved studies and follow sermon discussion guides when requested.
- Foster care and biblical fellowship in your group.
- Encourage individual group members to serve at Princetown Church.
- Develop future group leaders.
- Value and encourage group multiplication.
- Ensure that the Small Group attendance and report is completed each meeting.

Small Group Leader(s) Initial(s) _____

Date _____

03

STARTING A GROUP

12 THINGS TO DO

STEPS 1 - 8

1. **Pray** - Pray for your group members and their relationships with Jesus. Pray also that God would foster a biblical small group community within your group.
2. **Sequence of Meeting** - Decide on a sequence of activities that will make up your meeting time. Should include welcome, icebreakers, study, prayer, etc.
3. **Goals** - Write out group goals that center on our Small Group Values and Princetown Church's Next Steps (Worship, Grow, Serve, Invite). Emphasize the role of a commitment to attendance as a key to the group being successful. Fill out Small Group Covenant Form.
4. **Study** - Select your group's topic of study. Your group may use Princetown Church's sermon discussion guides (when available) or choose an approved study. Contact Pastor Mike (mikeb@princetownchurch.com) for study approval (please allow 2-3 weeks for study reviews).
5. **Serve** - Who will your group serve in the next few months? Choose a person, family, or group of people to serve. You may also want to select service opportunities that are sponsored directly through Princetown Church. Check in with Pastor Mike for ideas.
6. **Social** - Map out a few times for your group to gather specifically for the purpose of "hanging out." Go to a restaurant or sporting event. Host an ethnic-themed potluck. Enjoy a movie or game night together. Schedule some "fun time" together as a group.
7. **Schedule** - Make a Small Group schedule and be sure everyone in the group has it. This allows your group members to put important dates on their calendars, well in advance, through the end of the group session.
8. **Contact List** - Develop a contact list of group members, for those in your group. You may want to include: Names, addresses, phone numbers, e-mails, birthdays, and anniversaries.

03

STARTING A GROUP

12 THINGS TO DO

STEPS 9 - 12

9. Group Roles - Share the responsibilities in your group by deciding on some group roles. You may want to include: Serve coordinator, weekly e-mail administrator, snacks coordinator, social gathering coordinator, etc.

10. Groups Portal - Take a few minutes to make sure your roster is up-to-date on the Groups Portal. Please ensure everyone's name is listed, with the appropriate email and other contact information.

11. Group Members - Reach out to each of your group members to invite them to your next meeting. Be especially intentional about connecting with those who may only attend sporadically.

12. Future Leaders - Consider those in your group who would be quality future Small Group leaders. Offer them opportunities to facilitate lessons and plan activities. Talk with Pastor Mike about the possibility of them becoming a Small Group leader in the future.



1. **Frequency** - Relationships take time, specifically time together. The more often your group meets, the more opportunities you have to develop real community. If you can meet every week, do it. Hebrews 10:25 says, *"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."*
2. **Authenticity** - There are levels to fellowship. First, we share. We share about our families, jobs, and school. Next, we study God's Word. We learn together about who God is and what He wants for our lives. Another level of fellowship is serving. When we serve together, we grow together towards a common mission. Finally, suffering is the deepest level of fellowship. When someone in your group goes through tough life circumstances, your group has an opportunity to grow in authenticity. Another way to promote authenticity in your group is to confess your sins to one another. James 5:16 says, *"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective."*
3. **Accountability** - Develop accountability relationships in your Small Group. Encourage and honor one another. Ephesians 4:29 says, *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."*
4. **Cultivated Courtesy** - Listen before speaking. Understand where people in your Small Group are coming from. Most people don't want to be fixed; they want to be heard. 1 Peter 2:17 says, *"Show proper respect to everyone, love the families of Believers, fear God, honor the emperor."* Romans 14:1 says, *"Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters."*

5. **Humility** - Humility is being honest about your weaknesses, not denying your strengths. It is about giving God the praise for the work He does in you. Humility is saying two words: Forgive me. It has been said, "Don't think less of yourself; think of yourself less." 1 Peter 5:5 says, *"In the same way you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."*
6. **Honesty** - Most people do not have anyone who loves them enough to be honest with them. When we are honest in the midst of conflict and see it through, genuine *community* is produced. Ephesians 4:15 says, *"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ."*
7. **Mercy** - God didn't give you what you deserve. Give your group members what they don't deserve. Offer Mercy. Colossians 3:13 says, *"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*
8. **Confidentiality** - The quickest way to kill your Small Group is by gossip. What is said in the group stays in the group. Exceptions are only for major issues such as criminal activity or abuse (i.e. substance, physical, sexual, emotional). Talk to Pastor Mike if this is the case. If someone is struggling in life (i.e. marriage, parenting, financial) and needs help or counsel, encourage the person(s) to talk to Pastor Mike or Pastor Ian. Proverbs 16:28 says, *"A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends."*

05

GROUND RULES

VALUE ONE ANOTHER

share opinion - don't convince

Las Vegas Rule - What is said in the Small Group, stays in the Small Group. Everyone needs to understand that what is communicated is not water cooler talk for the week, and may not be communicated outside of the group. Make sure everyone knows this in your group.

(If sensitive subjects arise that you are questioning might have legal ramifications, meet privately with that person and include your apprentice and/or spouse. Consult with Pastor Mike for guidance).

Transparency - Allow others to get to know you as well as God knows you. We should strive to be men and women with no secrets so we can help one another grow. Create an environment of transparency. Remember this: A group will only go as deep as its leader is willing to go.

Don't Convince - It is completely okay to share your opinion - a difference in opinion is welcome. But please don't try to convince others to your side of thinking.

Listen - We should each value one another in the discussion, not just what we want to say. Be sure to listen while others are speaking. Do not be thinking about what you want to say next, really listen.

Pause - After a person shares, leave a pause to allow the entire group to feel the weight of what was shared. No one should feel rushed to "get their thoughts" out during the discussion time.

05

GROUND RULES

DON'T RESCUE

USE "I" STATEMENTS

Don't Fix - Hear what people are sharing without trying to fix them. If they need your advice, they will ask for it. (It is okay to ask permission to share advice).

Don't Rescue - When someone is sharing a deeply personal or painful story, we can tend to try and make them feel better about the situation. This usually stops people from sharing any further and hinders them going deeper than they might have gone. Resist the temptation to "rescue" people.

Don't "Cross-Talk" - Be considerate of who is talking - don't have a side conversation while someone is sharing.

Use "I" Statements - It's easy to talk about the Church or others around you, but we want you to put yourself out there. Try to use "I" statements rather than "them," "the church," "us," "we," etc.

Self-Assess and Self-Reflect - It is very important that we use this time to consider where we are at in our relationship with Jesus, and what He would have us do.

Questions like these are helpful to remember:

- How am I walking this out in my personal life?
- How does this affect my ability to relate to others?
- What is my part of the issue/solution?
- What changes does God want me to make?



06

FACILITATION

STEER THE DISCUSSION

FOSTER CONNECTIONS

- Facilitate; don't teach. As a leader (facilitator), you should talk less than 20% of the time.
- Plan to be flexible. Be prepared, but if the group spends a lot of time on something important, let that happen.
- Steer the discussion without controlling it.
- Be curious. Actively listen so that you can ask clarifying questions to discover what is going on in people's lives.
- It is very important to foster connections between group members. The more comfortable people feel, the more likely they will be to share and discuss.
- Point out similarities between comments people make.
- Invite people to answer one another's questions. You are not responsible to answer all the questions. Remember, you are not the expert.
- Affirm questions with phrases such as: "Great question! What do all of you think?"



06

FACILITATION

DON'T TEACH, FACILITATE

ALLOW FOR SILENCE

- Affirm “dumb” questions (i.e. “I can see why that would have been confusing, I’m glad you asked about it”).
- Encourage everyone to participate. Never call on a quiet person unless you know them well. Instead, ask a quiet person what they are thinking.
- Unless a person is asking for specific factual information (i.e. “What is a Gentile?”), defer to the group.
- Let them exhaust their discussion, then round it out and fill in any remaining gaps. “For me, this also means...”
- Allow Silence. Although this can be uncomfortable, some people need silence to be able to share.
- Show interest in what interests your group members.
- Tell Stories.



06

FACILITATION

CRAZY ANSWERS

RABBIT TRAILS

DEALING WITH “CRAZY ANSWERS”

- Affirm the contribution! Better to express something erroneous so it can be addressed than to keep it hidden.
- “Hmm, say more about that... where are you seeing that reflected in the passage?”
- “I’m glad you brought that up. Can anyone else speak to that idea?”

DEALING WITH “RABBIT TRAILS”

- Mentally assess: Is this more important and pressing than the immediate study? If yes, then go with it. If not, redirect the discussion and suggest that you can discuss with the person after the group meeting.
- “I’m glad you’re thinking about these questions because they’re also important, but let’s stick with tonight’s study for now.”
- “That’s a great question and I want to address it, so let’s talk further about that after the study.” Make sure you follow up with the person.



06

FACILITATION

- **Communicate Well** - Figure out how those in your group best communicate and do that (i.e. email, phone, face-to-face). Be sure to over-communicate details about upcoming group studies, gatherings, and service projects.
- **Say, “Thank You”** - Let your group members know you appreciate them. Thank them for attending meetings, participating in discussions, and helping the group grow. This can be done verbally, by sending a card in the mail, or offering praise about them in front of others.
- **Ask, “How Can I Help?”** - Whenever you sense there is a need among those in your group, let them know you are available and willing to help. Then, listen well to discern how to best help them. If you or someone in your group cannot meet a specific need, find someone who can. If needed, contact Pastor Mike or Pastor Ian.
- **Allow Silence** - For those of us who are more introverted, sometimes we need a little silence following a question before we’re willing to share. Silence can be the prod some need to begin to vulnerably open up with the group.
- **Discuss ‘Good Attendance’** - Openly discuss the importance of ‘good attendance’ with your group members. Groups that spend time together, grow together. If poor attendance has caused an issue in your group, let your coach know... we want to help!

06

FACILITATION

DOMINATE PEOPLE

BLANK STARES

DEALING WITH DOMINANT PEOPLE

- “Thanks Susie. Can anyone else add to that?”
- Pose question, “I’d like to hear from someone who hasn’t talked yet.”
- May need to talk to them afterwards. Let them know you appreciate their willingness to participate, because time is limited you just want to make sure everyone gets a chance to share.

DEALING WITH BLANK STARES

- Name the process: “I’m getting a lot of blank stares. Would you like me to rephrase the question? Is there something in particular that isn’t making sense?”
- Give a real life example: “I know in my life...” “Can anyone else relate to that?”
- “I’d like to go around the circle and have everyone share one take-away from tonight.”

- **Spend Time With Group Members** - Spend time with group members outside of normal meeting times. This may involve connecting before or after worship on a Sunday morning, going to lunch, or inviting each member (individually or as couples) over for dinner. Just spend time with them to show you care.
- **Show Interest in Their Interests** - If your group members are involved in sports, go to a game with them. If they like music, go to a concert or musical. If they like baking, invite them over to bake with you. Show interest in what interests your group members.
- **Keep Them Connected** - Sometimes our group members do not stay in touch with us very well, especially over Christmas or summer break. Don't wait for them to reach out to you. Intentionally look for ways to get into their worlds. Send a card, stop by for a visit with a gift card, or call them on the phone. Show that you care by keeping your group members connected.
- **Think: Who Needs to Be Connected?** - Ask God, "Who in the group needs to be better connected?" Start with one person at a time. Intentionally invest in him or her.



As a Small Group leader you will have situations that have a ‘counseling’ feel. So, here are some helpful guidelines.

1. Remember that Small Group leaders are not endorsed by Princetown Church as trained counselors and that Small Groups are not designed to be counseling sessions.
2. The most important counsel provided in a Small Group setting is the encouragement of God’s Word.
3. Some situations open the door to coming alongside those who are struggling with tough life events. We come alongside with words of encouragement and prayers.
4. There may be a Small Group meeting in which the gravity of a person’s or a couple’s struggle demands significant time together as a group of people who are committed to doing life together. However, you can’t devote big chunks of time to the same situation every time you meet – that’s when the group becomes a therapy session.
5. If something has a ‘counseling’ feel, encourage the person or couple to reach out to Pastor Mike or Pastor Ian.
6. Follow-up with your recommendation to seek counsel from one of the pastors.

What is group multiplication?

Princetown Church Small Groups are called to fulfill the mission of the church: Love Jesus, love one another, and live with purpose. At the heart of this is the Great Commission found in Scripture. This mission, to make disciples, drives the concept of group multiplication at Princetown Church. Small Groups multiply by one individual or couple exiting their current group and starting a new group. This individual or couple could be a current leader or group member. Either way, the idea is that each group would “send” or commission an individual or couple to step out and act like a missionary by starting a new group when ready to do so.

When should our group multiply?

When multiplying, Small Groups will face the tension between growing as a group vs. multiplying the group. This tension has existed from the beginning of Christian discipleship due to the nature of the Great Commission. God’s mission involves growing people and then sending them out. Some groups may be ready to multiply every 1-2 years, other groups may multiply every 2-3 years, and some may take longer. Regardless, set a goal to try to send an individual or couple from your group to start a new one every two years. Fulfilling this goal will depend on the dynamics of each group.

What can I do to work towards multiplying my group?

As leaders, you should constantly be praying about who in your group exhibits group leader characteristics. Look for people who are “shepherds” or care-takers. You can discover these characteristics in your group members by delegating leadership tasks to them, such as prayer, social activities, service projects, and administrative responsibilities. You can even ask them to facilitate a study once or twice. When you identify a potential future leader, tell Pastor Mike.

How is a new leader selected?

Ultimately, Pastor Mike selects new leaders for groups. However, leaders play an important role because he will ask existing group leaders for recommendations. Those who are asked to consider leadership will be given a ministry description and application.

How will our group make the leadership transition?

Each group is different. Some leadership transitions will seem quick, others may be gradual. However, Pastor Mike will walk your group through its transition.

Final Thoughts...

Sending an individual or couple out to start a new group is like a church sending a family into the mission field as missionaries. It can be challenging, but it is something worth celebrating because our groups are growing and we get to be part of fulfilling the Great Commission. Celebrate the sending of friends and the birth of a new group together!

Let's say your group decides to go out for dinner to a nice Italian restaurant in town. As everyone arrives and you are seated at your table, the hostess provides menus and requests everyone's drink orders. A relatively new couple to your group say they would like a beer and a glass of the wine on special. The couple then suggests to the whole group, assuming it would be a polite, "get-to-know-you" sort of gesture, that they would like to buy drinks for everyone at the table.

As a Small Group leader, what do you do?

Instantaneously, you sense the uncomfortable nature of the situation as thoughts begin to race through your mind:

This is a "church" event, and people are ordering alcohol! What does the church believe about alcohol? What if someone from the church sees us or hears about this? Will I get in trouble? Am I a bad Small Group leader if I don't say anything...or, what if I do say something?

Not only do you feel like you need to figure out if this is appropriate or not, you need to determine (relatively quickly) how you are going to respond.

So, how would you respond? How would you respond if you ask a different couple to host your group gathering, and they serve alcohol with the snacks? What would you do?

Alcohol and Small Groups creates an interesting dynamic. Some people may be very comfortable consuming alcohol appropriately. Others may struggle deeply by simply being in the same room where alcohol is being served. You throw "church event" into the conversation, and the discussion gets really interesting!

Concerning alcohol and Princetown Church ministries, our desire is to reach unchurched people, but also that alcohol would be managed appropriately. Therefore, Small Groups are not to stress prohibition of alcohol, but Small Groups should not promote alcohol consumption.

If you would like discuss alcohol and Small Groups, please contact Pastor Mike.

Love Jesus. Love One Another. Live With Purpose.

Small Group Covenant

A covenant is a promise made to another in the presence of God. This covenant will serve as a reminder of your commitment to your Small Group. Prayerfully consider the commitment you are making.

The Purpose of our Small Group is:

(use Princetown Church's mission statement as a guide)

- We plan to meet _____ times a month. We will meet on _____ (day of week).
- We plan to meet from _____ to _____ (time of day).
- We will meet at _____ (various homes, specific location, or virtually).

I am committed to fulfilling the purpose of our Small Group:

(use bullets to write specific, attainable commitments in each category)

- **Word-Centered.** Love God.
 - Attend *WORSHIP* services regularly
 - _____
 - _____
- **Others-Focused.** Love one another.
 - *SERVE* in at least one area of the church
 - *INVITE* others to know Christ and join our worship community.
 - _____
 - _____
- **Discipleship-Driven.** Live with purpose.
 - _____
 - _____

Leader(s) Signature(s): _____ Date: _____

Group Members' Initials: (group members initial because this demonstrates our mutual accountability)

Guidelines for Hosts of Small Group Meetings

Dear Host,

Thank you for opening your home to a Small Group! The mission of Princetown Church is *to love Jesus, love one another, and to live with purpose*. By hosting a Small Group, you are helping to fulfill this mission.

Below we have outlined a checklist for hosts of Small Groups. These may seem like very detailed items, but we have learned through experience what it takes to provide the best environment in which to facilitate Small Group gatherings. If you are unable to fulfill any of these items, please inform your Small Group leader as soon as possible.

Please ensure the following are adhered to:

1. Please pray for the leader(s), the meeting, and those who will be attending.
2. Please be home at least twenty minutes prior to the meeting so the leaders can come, settle in and receive early arrivals.
3. Ensure the meeting area is clean and sanitary. If you have pets, please ensure that areas where pet hair or feathers have accumulated are swept up and/or dusted.
4. Turn the ringer off on your telephone so it will not ring and interrupt the meeting.
5. Please turn the volume on the answering machine down as low as possible so that a personal message will not be heard by the group and that a message will not interrupt the meeting.
6. Ensure there is ample lighting available so people can easily read and write.
7. Maintain the temperature within the home at a comfortable level.
8. If you have pets, please place them in another room or outside prior to people arriving so that they will not disturb the gathering.
9. If you have children, please either have them at a babysitter's or ensure they are in another location within the home, where, if they make noise, it will not disrupt the gathering. If children are home, please ask them not to interrupt the meeting unless there is an emergency.

Thank you so much for your sacrifice and service to Christ and His Church! May God bless you for your kindness!

Pastor Mike

Child Care Responsibilities for the Church & Group

Child Care Options:

- Arrangements for child care are the responsibility of the individual or the group as a whole.
- Princetown Church does not intend to pay or reimburse for Small Group child care.
- Individuals can pay separate child care providers.
- The group members can collectively pay for group child care.

Princetown Church Responsibility

- Small Groups are Princetown Church programs, therefore:
 - Princetown Church is responsible to protect Small Group participants as much as is reasonable and possible.
 - Princetown Church is required to perform background checks on all adults providing Small Group child care, when the care is collective and not when it is for one family and in one home. Failing to perform a background check is a form of negligence on Princetown Church's part if any abuse happens.
- Princetown Church requires that minors under the age of 18 must have an adult (with a background check) in supervision over collective child care.

Small Group Leader Responsibility

- For **group** child care:
 - Ensure background checks are done on any 18 years or older provider.
 - Ensure an adult, with a background check, is supervising a minor child care provider.
- For general activities, realize that Small Groups are a programmed Princetown Church activity and therefore are viewed as a representation of the church.
 - Risky activities: bungy jumping may not be the best Small Group activity.
 - Public liability: confronting social activists, LGBTQ, will be viewed as a Princetown Church confrontation and might need Princetown Church leadership inclusion.

PRINCETOWN CHURCH EXISTS TO

LOVE JESUS,

LOVE ONE ANOTHER,

AND LIVE WITH PURPOSE.

Princeton Church

518-355-0794

3662 Giffords Church Road, Duanesburg, NY, 12056

Pastor Mike Barnhart, mikeb@princetownchurch.com