



A Handy Guide to Leading and Running a Care Group

Care Group & Equipping Ministry



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Welcome to the Care Group family!

I am thrilled that you are reading this booklet. It means that you have responded to God’s call to serve Him through serving His church!

For some of you, leading and running a Care Group may be easy. You’re able to do it “on the fly”. For others, it could be your biggest fear with doubts swirling in your head on whether you are “qualified”.

I guess most of us fall somewhere in between. This is actually the best possible scenario. Why? Because it means that you will grow while you are helping others grow. Your members get to see that leadership can be developed and put to good use by all. Through your own growth, your members will be inspired!

Your leadership matters. What you do matters.

Leadership is a journey, not a destination. Spiritual leadership is another form of discipleship. It is a lifelong mission which includes tremendous growth, dismal failures, and personal victories. Embrace every moment as necessary in your journey.

This guide is created with you, a group leader, in mind. We hope to help make leading and facilitating a group easier for you – no matter if you’re leading a Care Group, a women’s group, men’s group, or youth group. It is designed for new and seasoned leaders, and we believe it will benefit you immensely.

Blessed to be serving alongside you,



Pastor Albert Ng

Introduction to Care Groups

The calling

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20

In front of you is a big, ambitious goal set by Jesus and you get to participate as a leader. The best thing is that Jesus himself says “I am with you always”. How do you attain this big goal? You begin by being united biblically and in action, known theologically as Praxis. It’s not just what but also the heart of why. How do you set the tone of your leadership and your group? We begin with a vision.

What is a Care Group?

At Island ECC, a Care Group is a spiritual community that fosters spiritual growth through authentic friendship.

Care Groups provide one of the best environments for discipleship. The ultimate goal is to help members be students of Jesus and to grow spiritually. What makes a Care Group different to a social group is the presence of God in our speech (Colossians 4:6), conduct (1 Timothy 4:12), and attitudes (Romans 12:2).

However, growing in Christ is never meant to be private and alone. From our experience, we know that Christians grow best when they are nurtured in the context of authentic friendships. As Jesus himself says, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35)

Through mutual encouragement, members do not simply know more about God, the Bible, and one another. Instead, they are better prepared to live out a fruitful life and cope with various challenges with biblical resources and responses.

What is the role of a Care Group leader?

Based on your background, you may have different expectations of what a leader actually does. Now, before we talk about what we expect of our leaders, we want to let you know what is not expected first.

Care Group leaders are not expected to be...



All-knowing theologians

While we expect you to have some working knowledge of the Bible, we do not expect you to hold a Ph.D. in Theology (It’s nice if you do). Let’s face it, it is simply impossible for anyone to know everything about every biblical topic.



Sinless saints

While we expect our leaders to exhibit good character qualities, we all know that we are not sinless. We value a life of obedience and growth. We value evidence of repentance through being sensitive to the guidance of the Bible and the Holy Spirit. We value growth over arrival.



Decades-old Christians

While being a Christian for a longer time may be an indicator of both spiritual maturity and biblical knowledge, we also value internal motivation and spiritual growth. Evidence of spiritual growth is one of the best indicators of spiritual leadership capacity.

On the other hand, here are some expectations that we do have for our Care Group leaders.



A willing heart

We value an internal willingness to serve God. We value a simple faith. We value an attitude of a loving response to God's love. As Paul says, "for the love of Christ compels us." (2 Corinthians 5:14)



A helping hand

We value a willingness to serve others, to spend time preparing for a Bible study, to set up chairs and tables, buy refreshments, send out emails and pray for members. We prefer imperfect doers who get their hands dirty rather than perfect talkers who only talk about what should be done.



A keen learner

We expect our leaders to be keen learners. They learn through reading, studying, and doing. They are eager to be a better version of themselves. In other words, they are humble, and they take actions to better themselves.



A mindful facilitator

We expect our leaders to be mindful facilitators who facilitate good discussions rather than lecturers who give great talks. We prefer an environment in which all members contribute to discovering the truth, instead of one person telling their opinions. Adults learn best in dynamic, interactive environments.



A caring shepherd

We ask our leaders to extend their leadership to care, compassion and concern towards their members through active listening, encouragement, and spiritual nourishment. When our members feel heard, validated, and cared for, groups become healthier Christ-centred communities.

Basic qualifications of a Care Group leader

To serve as a Care Group leader, here are some basic qualifications and guidelines.

- The leader must be a Christian who professes a personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ
- The leader must consider Island ECC their home church, and is regularly participating in Sunday service here
- The leader must agree without reservation the biblical beliefs of Island ECC as stated in the Statement of Faith

Notes:

Approval from the pastor in charge of the Care Group Ministry must be secured before a person can officially become a Care Group leader

The leader must be willing to step down if requested by the pastor in charge

What we believe – our Doctrinal Statement

We're flexible on most things, but we uphold the following Biblical truths for our church, its ministries, and we expect the same from our leaders. While the Bible itself is our formal document of faith, we have a statement that assists in understanding those biblical ideas that most fundamentally define who we are.

- We believe that there is one God eternally existing in three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is the Creator of all things. (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1; Matthew 3:16–17; 2 Corinthians 13:14)
- We believe in Jesus Christ, God in human flesh, who came to this world to die for our sins and who was bodily raised from the dead. (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)
- We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the Living God, who draws people to Christ and who lives in every person who has received Christ. (John 16:8–9; Acts 2:38; Ephesians 1:13–14)
- We believe the Bible is the only infallible, inspired, and authoritative Word of God. As such it is our final authority for all matters of faith and Christian practice. (2 Timothy 3:14–16)

- We believe that man, created by God, wilfully sinned and as a result, is lost and without hope apart from Jesus Christ. (Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23; Acts 4:12)
- We believe that salvation—the forgiveness of sins—is available only by the grace of God through the blood of Jesus Christ. This free gift of salvation is offered to all who receive Christ as Lord and Saviour. (Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 2:6; John 3:16)
- We believe the Bible clearly teaches the pattern to receive Christ is to believe in Jesus as God’s Son and Saviour of the world, repent of personal sin, and confess Christ publicly. (Romans 10:9; Acts 2:36-38, Mark 16:16)
- We believe that the Church is the body and bride of Christ on earth, founded on the Day of Pentecost, consisting of all Christians everywhere. (Matthew 16:13-18; Acts 2:14-47)
- We believe in a believer’s baptism and that immersion under water is the mode of baptism as indicated by Jesus’ own example and command, and best depicts our union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. (Mark 1:9-10; Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:4)
- We believe that death seals the eternal destiny of each person (Hebrews 9:27). Those who are forgiven will spend eternity with God in heaven, those not forgiven will be eternally separated from God in hell. (John 5:28-29; Daniel 12:2; 2 Corinthians 4:14; Acts 17:31)
- We believe in the personal return and victorious reign of Jesus Christ, who will judge in equity and justice all people who have ever lived, giving over those who were unrepentant to eternal condemnation but receiving the redeemed into eternal life. (Acts 1:11; 2 Peter 3:9-10; Rev. 19:11-16)



What does a typical group meeting look like?

There are many ways you can conduct your group meetings. Groups of different stages-of-life may look quite different. But here are some common features that may help you plan yours.

Note: Please see them as examples to help you think, rather than “must do’s” that you have to follow.

1/ Pre-meeting socialising

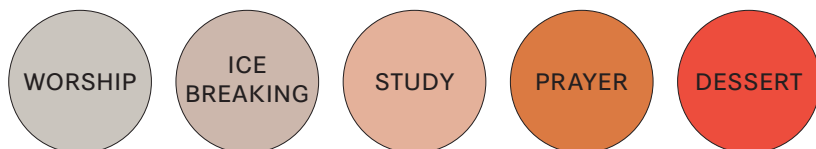
Remember, Care Groups are not business meetings. A healthy group is big on both spiritual growth and friendship. The pre-meeting socialising time helps people relax, connect, and prepare their hearts for the meeting.

Some groups have refreshments, others eat dinner together. Some groups seem to practice the motto that “those who eat together stay together.”

We encourage members to come early, about 15-30 minutes before the meeting begins, to get themselves comfortable and warm themselves up for a meaningful time of fellowship.

2 / Care Group meeting

While different groups may use different formats, here are some common ones.



Worship

Many groups find it helpful to start with some worship songs. Of course, having someone play the guitar or piano would be great however, YouTube has also proven to be just as good. A time of worship and prayer is a great way to direct our hearts to God.

Icebreaking

Simple games of icebreaking are good for both new groups and “old” groups. A few minutes of fun questions can help members open up and discover things that would otherwise be unknown.

Study

This section is usually the main part that occupies most of the time. Your group can decide what you want to study based on your group’s needs or interests. Once a year, however, we would like all Care Groups to do a “church-wide study” together. You can talk to our Care Group staff for advice on studies. A list of resources can be found at the end of this booklet.

Prayer

Many groups find prayer time very meaningful. Sometimes members will share their prayer requests with one another in a big group. Others will break into guys and gals, or groups of three. Be creative in making arrangements that meet your group’s needs. Moreover, many groups find it helpful to have someone record the prayer requests for follow up in subsequent meetings.

Dessert

Optional! But we have never heard of anything other than appreciation when simple dessert is served.

How frequent should our groups meet?

It depends! Most groups meet weekly. However, some groups meet twice or three times a month. This is particularly true for married couple groups with young kids or groups with senior members. They have logistical and schedule challenges that can only be understood by members in the same stage-of-life.

Do we meet outside of our group time?

In fact, most groups do! Some groups will come to Sunday service together and then meet for lunch. This is a great way for your members to get to know one another more. Other groups have monthly socials (or every other month). Who doesn’t want hotpot, a night at the movies, or Ocean Park together with friends? Some groups serve together on Sunday. Others go on mission trips. Some even go on holiday together. The point is, it is good and fun to do something outside of your regular meeting time as it helps foster friendships and creates a healthy group environment.

Can I invite members to help in the group?

Absolutely yes! In fact, one of the best indicators of a healthy group is a “shared ministry” mindset. Members can help with logistics, emails, prepare refreshments, or even rotate in leading the study of the week. The goal is not so much to lower the workload of the leaders, but to create opportunities for members to serve together. This is also a great way to raise and train future leaders.

Where can I get help from the church?

To care for our Care Groups and their leaders, each group will be classified according to a stage-of-life grouping. A dedicated team member is assigned to that grouping to walk alongside its leaders and to provide help.

If you are not sure who your staff contact person is, please email us at caregroup@islandecc.hk and we’ll make sure you know who is here to care for you.

Register with us

If you're considering starting a Care Group, you're in the right place. There are benefits in getting connected officially with the church. You get support, prayer, training, a leader newsletter, and other resources to make your group's journey smoother. To do this, follow these five steps:

STEP 1

Register as a leader

When you register, you are telling us that you would like to become a Care Group leader. We will ask you for some basic information.

Apply now at caregroupleaders.com/register

STEP 2

Let's meet!

Care Groups are about relationships. As a potential leader, we want to build a friendship with you too! After you register (Step 1: Register as a leader), one of our staff will contact you and set up a time to meet. We want to get to know you, your heart, and your vision. We will also share with you what our Care Group ministry looks like.

In the rare occasion that we feel a person is not ready, we may suggest a short trial or wait for a later time in the future before becoming a Care Group leader.

STEP 3

Register your group

When you register your group, we will explore how we can support you.

Apply now at caregroupleaders.com/register-your-care-group

STEP 4

Need a room?

With your group being official, you get priority room bookings at our church for your meetings. We may run out of rooms so please be patient with us.

Email to book a room at caregroup@islandecc.hk

STEP 5

Leader onboarding training

You'll be personally invited to a special onboarding training. You'll meet fellow leaders, learn handy tips, and begin skills equipping.

Starting Well

Now that you're registered, let's get you and your group to the starting line.

Your first meeting

If you are new to group leadership, your first meeting will likely be the most nerve-racking. Am I well-prepared? Who will come? Will people talk? Will they like me? Will people form friendships? Will they come back?

Starting well is very important. But relax. Preparing for your first meeting may not be as difficult as you thought.

1 / Setting up the date, time, and venue

This is one of the most important first steps. As leaders, this is your responsibility to confirm and communicate these in an absolutely clear and unambiguous way. Check and double-check with your members to ensure that everybody is on the same page.

2 / Communication

Whether you use email or any other means of communication is totally up to you. But here are three main areas for you to consider:

- **Warmth**

Please write in such a way that brings warmth and helps people feel welcome. The tone of your email will set the stage for how people anticipate the meeting itself.

- **Clarity**

Make sure that the date, time, and venue information are all clear to them. The keyword is clear to them, not you. For example, if you meet at church, instead of saying "the bird cage room", say "The Living Room on the 10/F. When you enter 10/F, turn left."

If you meet at someone's home, give clear instructions on the address and how to get there. If there is lobby security, give clear instructions on what to say to the security staff.

- **Expectations**

Tell your members what to expect and what you expect of them. For example, tell them roughly how many people will be there, the meeting start and end time, and whether they need to bring anything or do any preparation.

Don't surprise your members, especially during their first meeting. Try your best to help ease their anxiety and nurture a great experience.

3 / Setting up the meeting venue

If you meet at church, remember to come earlier to make sure that the room is set up in a way that you want. Do you need a table for refreshments? Do you have napkins and cups? How do you want to arrange the chairs? Do you need a screen to display the YouTube or PowerPoint presentations that you've prepared?

If you are hosting a meeting at your home, first of all, thank you so much for your ministry to the group! You are awesome! Before they come, imagine how you would like them to sit and where they will put their drinks or snacks.

If you are hosting an online or hybrid (online and in-person) meeting, ensure you have a stable internet connection, enough lighting and to be in an environment that allows you to hear and broadcast audio. As a general rule of thumb, can they hear you and can you hear them? Can they see you and can you see them?

4 / Welcome the members

The good thing about a brand-new group is that nobody knows anybody, and hence everybody is willing and ready to get to know one another. However, this also causes a lot of anxiety to some people, especially for introverts.

One of the biggest challenges for a new group is the need to remember 10 to 15 new names. But there is an easy solution: use nametags or disposable labels. This will significantly help people know one another.

As hosts or leaders, you are the best person to encourage people to get acquainted with one another. It helps if you also introduce people to one another. When introducing people, make it easy for them to remember names. For example, say "this is John, his wife Mary, and their neighbour Sabrina" instead of "This is John, his wife, and their neighbour." (Hi John, Hi wife, Hi neighbour!)

At Island ECC, we see people as equals, even if somebody has a special title. So, please say, "Hi John, please meet Simon" but not "Hi John, please meet Dr. Au." We don't like playing power title games. We all go by first name basis, including pastors and elders.

5 / Kick-start the meeting

After some pre-meeting socialising and getting to know one another's names, call the group to order. Please refer to the section "What does a typical Care Group meeting look like?" for more information on how to structure your meeting.

Your first group covenant

Your new Care Group is formed, and you've cast the vision of your group. The next best thing to do is to create a group covenant. What is a group covenant? A group covenant is a set of governing principles to maintain the health, integrity, and longevity of your group. Groups which don't function well often lack a covenant and have nothing to fall back on. More importantly, group covenants help steer the culture of your group. How do you create a group covenant? Follow these six steps:

Step 1: Announce the creation of a group covenant to your group

Step 2: Set aside time to discuss and finalise the covenant

Step 3: In the meeting, draw out the principles and values critical to the group's success

Step 4: Document the covenant

Step 5: Distribute the covenant and allow the group to digest

Step 6: At the next meeting, have each member pledge to honour the covenant and to be accountable to it

Each group covenant is unique so take the time to create and finalise it. As a leader, remind and encourage your members that group success is dependent on member commitment.

If you find members consistently dishonouring the group-agreed covenant, refer to it as the base for group health, integrity, and longevity.

For a sample group covenant, see the Appendix.

Your first study

As a new Care Group, you've probably already chosen a study prior to the group being formed. The fact is, most members have no particular preference on what to study. They only want to join a group.

Please feel free to choose any study that is light, beginner friendly, and non-controversial.

In general, there are four ways to run your study:

- A pre-made video study where you watch together then discuss afterwards
- A topical study with supporting Bible passages, with discussion
- Reading a book together (usually chapter by chapter), with discussion
- A Bible passage study with discussion (see Appendix)

Generally, leaders and members newer in the faith would do well with pre-made video, or topical studies. As your group progresses in spiritual maturity, we encourage you to create your own Bible study material.

To learn more about resources and studies, speak to us or see the Appendix for how to create your own study.

Your group communication method

Before you finish the first meeting, decide as a group the preferred method for your group's official communication. It can be email or a messaging platform that your group agrees upon. As leaders, you can make suggestions regarding the ones that you prefer.

Following up

A day or two after the first meeting, send a follow-up message to express your gratefulness to the group and remind them of anything that has been agreed upon during the first meeting. This also serves as a reminder for the next meeting.

So, there we have it - your first meeting. With preparation, prayer, and an active partnership with God, it can be a hugely rewarding learning experience. Most importantly, experiment, and give yourself permission to make mistakes. Leading a group is an invaluable lesson in discovering God's gifts in you, and your personal leadership tendencies.

Leadership Matters

Your leadership matters. Lead well and last the long haul. Let's get started.

Introducing important leadership philosophies

Here are some short and memorable leadership philosophies we believe in. We put these at the start because you'll remember short phrases easier than lists – please memorise them! They're useful for your group and for any leadership situation.

1 / Leadership begins with listening

Christian leadership tests your ability to listen to God first, which then develops how you listen to other people. When you listen well, you grow in the humility of Christ and support the maturation of those you serve. You might also learn something new about yourself!

2 / Make it discussable

Whether it is an obvious yet unspoken, tension-causing problem, or an unresolved issue, you can create clarity and prevent further damage by making the issue discussable. Do this by breaking the ice and creating a safe space for discussion. Brené Brown puts it this way: "Clear is kind, unclear is unkind."

3 / The only way to improve is to make mistakes (on real people)

Most leaders fear making mistakes. This drives them into patterns of over-preparation, perfectionism, control, and anxiety. Yet some of the greatest learning comes from making mistakes (on real people). Give yourself permission to experiment, fail, disappoint, and grow. Transform your classroom learning into invaluable, real-life experience.

4 / Mixed messages cause chaos

Sending mixed messages from the same leadership group will confuse those you lead. Make sure your leadership team are aligned in all aspects of messaging – direct (announcements, programme, expectations) and indirect (culture).

5 / Small wins are not baby steps. They are momentum changers

A small win is something good that happens. When shared and encouraged enough, it becomes a catalyst for sustained movement to occur. Celebrate the small wins!

6 / The next faithful step

God requires us to take only the next faithful step in leadership. We do not need to know every step or plan. We only need to listen, learn from God, recalibrate, and then take the next step.

7 / You can't quit smoking for someone else

No matter how gifted or caring you are, you cannot solve some people's problems, especially if it involves changing beliefs, values or how they do things. You must release and allow that person to experience and desire change.

Understanding your leadership calling

How did you get here? Are you ready to proceed?

Oftentimes, people enter a group leadership role unaware of how complex it could be. You encounter people dynamics, cultural dynamics, personal dynamics, and political sensitivities. Group leadership is complex! Therefore, it is crucial that you have answers to the two questions we just asked. Why? Because it's important to know the state of your heart before you do any sort of leading. To help, consider these four identifiers on **calling**.

- **A push from the inside** – something moved your heart to step up and lead
- **A pull from the outside** – others have noticed your potential and raised it with you
- **Relationships that open doors** – from connections to opportunities
- **A platform of opportunity** – a felt need which aligns with your gifting

Frederick Büchner says it this way: “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.” We want you to feel genuinely convicted towards the cause of leading and shepherding other people. If you're reading this booklet because you genuinely feel called to group leadership, we're glad you're here. Read on.

Discovering your motivation and values

Who are you as a leader? What do you bring to the table? Knowing who you are, and what you bring will create healthy identity, purpose, vision, action, and boundaries. So, let's explore more about yourself, your leadership philosophies, and tendencies.

Your leadership motivation

Believe it or not, much of how you lead and respond to others developed in your childhood. No, we're not talking about your art-jamming class or rugby team. How you lead and respond today is indicative of your subconscious and intrinsic response patterns formed from incidents that shaped you. In the words of leadership professor Robert J Clinton, he calls these your *Critical Incidents*.

What are Critical Incidents?

“Critical incidents are the crucial, formative experiences that deeply shape who we are, the nature of our calling, and what we do. These are made up of different kinds of interventions of God and our responses and they take place over a lifetime. They are the most significant markers in our stories. They help us explain why we do what we do and the way we do them.” – Robert J Clinton

What are some examples of Critical Incidents?

- Family of origin or current family issues
- Health issues
- Deep loss of someone or something
- Depression and/or desert seasons
- Formative relationships with others
- Formative work/career/vocational experiences
- Breakthroughs in life, vocation or ministry
- Heart shaping or character shaping experiences
- Formative God moments (God's guidance, challenges from God)
- Mind shaping experiences (certain course, seminar, book, message of a speaker)
- Artistic shaping (artwork, movie, poetry, literature, etc.)

What leadership philosophies or motivations do you aggressively stand for? Can you identify a related *Critical Incident* that may have formed this? For example, a desire for control may have formed from a humiliating failure as a child.

Why is this important?

If you lead blindly from a Critical Incident, you may place more emotional emphasis, attachment, and bias on that motivation than what is healthy. However, if you knew the origins of your motivation, you can create delineation between an unbridled (and unresolved) event response and a healthy and balanced leadership responsibility. Knowing your Critical Incidents give clarity to your motivations.

Your Core Values

Critical Incidents also create in you a set of *Core Values*, which guide decision making and action. They operate subconsciously and become most noticeable when an offense has occurred. Each person usually has three to five Core Values which are consistent amongst their happiest and angriest moments.

To understand more about your Core Values, consider this question: What was a peak sad/angry moment? What happened? As you consider this, write down some values that seemed consistent with your event response. What did you yearn for? What did you wish for instead? Some of the most common values include *safety, integrity, peace, health, family, compassion, kindness, clarity, selflessness*.

Why is this important?

In addition to leadership motivation, Core Values help you understand why different emotions appear in different situations. If you're able to name the emotion and the underlying Core Value, you'll depersonalise conflict better by recognising that your values may not equal somebody else's values (and vice versa). In most cases, conflict is impersonal and involves misaligned values being mutually misunderstood and miscommunicated.

Discovering your spiritual gifting

According to 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, you have been distributed spiritual giftings by the Holy Spirit. If you're a Jesus-follower and have invited the Holy Spirit into your life, you too will have these spiritual giftings.

What are spiritual giftings?

They are divine giftings and abilities given to you to contribute uniquely to the work of the Kingdom – the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). For example, if you have the gift of administration, you can effortlessly plan activities and socials. If you have the gift of teaching, you can lead a Bible study with minimal preparation. The list of gifts is extensive so you and your members will definitely have spiritual giftings.

Leading a Care Group without knowing your spiritual gifting is akin to eating spaghetti with a toothpick – it is possible but very difficult. Once you know your gifting, use them to serve your group optimally. If there are gifting gaps, discover someone else with that gifting and have them meet that group need.

How do you know if you're operating with your spiritual gifting? The clearest marker is whether you feel energised or drained at the end of the session. If you're resonant and energised, then you're using your gifting. If you're dissonant and drained, then you're operating outside of your gifting. Using your God-given spiritual gifts should be life-giving!

Not everyone will share your same gifting set, so discover each other's as a group activity and allocate different people to suitable tasks/roles. There are many spiritual gifting assessments online, so what are you waiting for?

Developing practical leading skills

Equipping yourself with practical skills that push people towards spiritual growth and clarity will reduce confusion and provide significant benefit. How? Learn and develop these commonly used professional coaching and counselling skills to move your members towards deeper insight, new thinking, and Holy Spirit-led change.

Powerful questions

Powerful questions are short seven-worded (or less) questions that cause members to stop and think. They begin with a What, Who, Where, or How. Avoid using Why as it enters problem rumination.

30:70 silence

Silence is powerful and can trigger moments of clarity that can last a lifetime. If you are uncomfortable with silence, consider what is happening in your heart. Stretch yourself to speak 30% and allow your members 70%. Give yourself a 20-second silent challenge after each question. Allow the Holy Spirit to work through silence.

Intuition and discernment

When members are sharing, a thought may arise that you cannot shake off. It could be from the Holy Spirit. This is called Intuition. What do you do with these unshakable thoughts?

Discernment comes in to guide you on what to do next. Should you address it in private or public? Should you address it at all? If you choose to address it, follow this simple formula to remain neutral, unattached and non-accusatory – “I get a sense that...” and fill in the rest.

What next? Once voiced, allow your member to respond by asking “What do you think about that?” Remain unattached, silent, and wait.

Acknowledgement

How do members know they are seen and heard? The most tangible way is for them to be acknowledged. Simply start with “You are...” and fill in the rest.

Clarity over certainty

The most important gift you bring is clarity. People don't follow leaders who know everything; people follow leaders who are clear. If you're in a situation of uncertainty and are missing facts, use your best, educated guess to decide the next step *only*. Clarity provides confidence and supports a *best possible environment*.

Developing leadership through change

“The only thing constant is change”. If we struggle with change, then leading a group will be difficult. Change is unavoidable, so here are some useful things to remember when (not if) it arrives at your doorstep.

“People do not resist change, per se. People resist loss.” Heifetz & Linsky, 2002. Think about the change you've resisted – there was probably an element of loss.

There are generally two types of change – technical change and adaptive change. Technical change can be fixed with time, money, or expertise, such as replacing a used battery. Adaptive change requires a re-alignment of beliefs, values, lifestyle, or principles. Examples include the arrival of a new-born baby, the death of a loved-one, a new boss or even the end of a relationship. These require “heart-work”. How do you lead through adaptive change? You create a holding environment to do two things.

1/ Recognise the loss

Help members verbalise their personal loss from the change by making it discussable. Through identification, members develop clarity of the change and begin coming to terms with it.

2/ Control the temperature

As a leader, you control the temperature of how they transition through the change. Based on observations and group sentiment, you can choose to cool off (delay) or heat up (fast-track) the change. Don't make the mistake of neglecting the change because it's too hard, instead use a measured approach. An example of this is slowly transitioning group leadership to another member three months before you step out.

Leading through change can take some time so be gracious to one another and to yourself.

Creating Sustainable Momentum

Jesus knew the importance of lasting well. After a long day, he would often retreat to a solitary place and pray (Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16). Jesus was continually reinforcing sustainability in His leadership. He looked long-term.

Thinking about sustainability once we realise it is often too late. A good sleep, a nice meal, and a week off can suffice for most but when those don't work, something needs to change. Be ahead of the game. See some of our recommended strategies to remain in leadership for the long haul.

Matching to a stage-of-life

Matching the culture of your group to the stage-of-life of your group ensures a contextually appropriate group experience. Historically, mixed stage-of-life groups struggle to go deeper than focused stage-of-life groups. Be aware of which stage-of-life your group is.

Young Adults

"I'm scared. I need direction. I like hanging out"

Greatest need: Affirmation, security, a stable future, a safe community

As a leader: Create active and exciting community

Suggested study: Navigating the future, discovering work-life balance, godly dating

Married (No kids) and Single

"I have some time. I want to be around people of a similar age. How do I build a good marriage?"

Greatest need: Create and maintain relationships with same and opposite sex

As a leader: Provide space for gender-separate and gender-mixed discussions

Suggested study: Becoming a godly man/woman/spouse, godly dating/marriage, navigating singleness

Married (Young kids)

"I have no time. I need sleep. How can I be a better parent?"

Greatest need: Nurture your marriage in busyness, godly parenting

As a leader: Provide opportunities for child-free meetings

Suggested study: Becoming a godly spouse, raising up a godly family, leading your family

Married (Older kids)

“I have no time. How can I best prepare my kids for university and beyond?”

Greatest need: Prepare children for send-off and self-defined faith.

As a leader: Provide space for parents to discuss university/college options, transitioning from home to dorm, training teens to manage unhealthy influences, and relocating as a family

Suggested study: Leading your family, leading through transition, leaving a legacy

Empty Nesters

“I have time. How can I begin facing retirement and death?”

Greatest need: To serve and give back, invest into younger generations, coming face to face with retirement and death, facing the golden years of spiritual leadership

As a leader: Provide opportunities to serve and space to discuss all topics regarding life, legacy, and leaving an impact

Suggested study: Life, legacy, and impact

What about members beyond Young Adult age who are single?

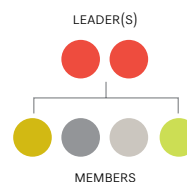
Single members may struggle with loneliness and the painful and unending period of waiting. This becomes harder as those around them marry and begin having families. In supporting them, empathise, encourage, and affirm their value.

Looking further, mature single members will likely share the same inclinations regarding time, social interactions, legacy, and leadership aspirations as their married counterparts. Utilise their experience and wisdom in tangible ways by maintaining contextual inclusion.

Choosing a suitable leadership model

There are three leadership models your group can use. In selecting the suitable leadership model, consider the following:

- Infancy/maturity of your group
- Spiritual and emotional maturity of your members
- Willingness of your members to step up to responsibility

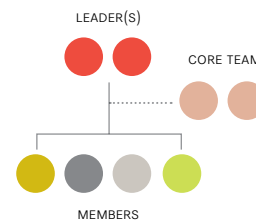


Traditional leadership

Leaders are the key decision-makers and drivers of the group. The vision and strategic direction remain with the leaders.

Benefits: Fast decision-making, suitable for newer groups and younger members, greater quality of ‘product’.

Shortcomings: Rigidity, reduced creativity, reduced member growth, greater demands on leaders.



Core team leadership

Similar to the traditional leadership model, co-leaders take on secondary responsibilities. The vision and strategic direction remain with the leaders.

Benefits: Grows potential leaders, increases ownership, reduces leader fatigue, generates creativity.

Shortcomings: Slower decision-making. Possibility of core team and leadership team conflict.



Peer leadership

All members become leaders of the group, with a select few maintaining administration. The vision and strategic direction is shared.

Benefits: Everybody grows, greatest ownership, least individual burnout, increased creativity.

Shortcomings: Slowest decision-making. Higher occurrence of poor-quality leading.

Don't be afraid to try out different models. If one model does not work, then try another.

Navigating the first two years

As time progresses, you will begin to notice social and dynamic changes that happen organically in the first two years of your group. In remaining contextual, note the five stages which occur and how you can best serve your members.

Formation to 6 months

Theme: Create

Focus: Create culture, friendships, structure, and routine

Greatest need: Logistics clarity, culture that matches group dynamic

7 to 12 months

Theme: Relate

Focus: Grow deeper in relationship with one another

Greatest need: Group based activities — socials, service, prayer, worship nights

13 to 18 months

Theme: Rotate

Focus: Expand leadership and responsibility to capable members

Greatest need: Encourage participation and ownership by empowering members to take charge of group functions

19 to 24 months

Theme: Duplicate

Focus: Create missional vision to plant, multiply, and expand Care Group. Expand leadership.

Greatest need: Shift the vision of your group from inwards to missionally outwards

24 months and beyond

Theme: Generate

Focus: Generate new Care Group by sending out capable members

Greatest need: Continued prayer, support, and fellowship with parent group

Moving from leader to coach

Coaching “is a way of effectively empowering people to find their own answers, encouraging and supporting them on the path as they continue to make important life-giving and life-changing choices.” Kimsey-House, Co-Active Coaching, 2011

There is a start and finish to your leadership because there is a start and finish to you. Moving someone towards leadership requires your preparation to be replaced. It requires your intentionality as a coach. Not to be confused with a sports coach, you don't tell them what to do, but you guide and nudge them to discover their unique, God-given leadership ability. Coaching is the process of intrinsic enabling. When you move from leader to coach, you enable others into leadership and action, thereby sharing the load and reducing your effort.

Consider these three principles:

1 / Release structure, order, and outcomes

When you coach someone into leadership, begin releasing your version of structure, order, and outcomes. Allow mistakes, awkward silences, bad Bible studies and even chaos to happen. Remember, the only way to improve is to make mistakes (on real people). You are to help that person discover their version of structure, order, and outcomes. Guide and advise but don't impose.

2 / Promote discovery, choice, and action

The most successful causes are driven by individuals who personally believed in them. As a coach, trigger intrinsic thought to allow new discovery, self-made choice, and highly motivated action. Create in them new personal beliefs and deep convictions. To do this, refer to the section on Developing practical leading skills.

3 / Seek ownership, and inner transformation

The goal of moving from leader to coach is to have that person take ownership of their leadership role and to be transformed whilst doing so. Behaviour modification does not last, but Christ-driven inner transformation to lead His people does. When the time is right, completely step back, and give them full ownership of roles, tasks, and responsibilities. To lock in the learning, consistently check-in and trigger deep, insightful conversation and reflection. To do this, refer to the section on Developing practical leading skills.

Empowerment begins with invitations, so start inviting and having others take lead.

Six best practices for sustainable leadership

Remaining sustainable in your leadership requires you to make intentional choices on what you allow and disallow. Consider these six best practices:

Operate in your gifting

When you operate in your toolkit (spiritual gifting, acquired skills, and natural abilities), you exercise your God-given design which naturally brings life. A good indicator of operating in your gifting is you feel energised during and after the activity. If you feel dread prior to it and come out exhausted, reconsider and rematch your role.

Slow down

One of the biggest barriers to sustainability is the speed of your life. When you live fast, you project productivity and neglect reflection and rest. Slow down, reflect, and expand your range of leadership and learning. Go on a solo hike, personal retreat and spend some time by yourself as you reflect and reconnect with God.

Protect your sabbath

Sabbath rest is more than just a day off. It requires meticulous planning because it is a day free from all work — paid and unpaid. Protect your Sabbath to allow you to re-energise.

Create emotional boundaries

Maintain emotional distance from difficult and demanding people. ‘Loving at all costs like Jesus’ often goes beyond what Jesus would’ve done and creates unhealthy emotional co-dependence. Say no, hold at a loving distance, and share burdens as a group.

Hold yourself accountable

Stay in scope of your leadership through a personal vision statement and operate within it. An example of a personal vision statement is “I want to cultivate in people the ability to live courageously and lead inspirationally.” Does what you do as a leader contribute to that? If not, don’t do it.

Embody disciplined spiritual practices

Practice intentional daily devotions, prayer, meditation, reflection, and journaling of scripture/spiritual truths on a recurring basis to keep you in check with God and His mission that you’re a part of. As leaders in ministry, we are often pulled to whichever makes the loudest noise at the neglect of our souls. When we spiritually feed our souls, God refuels and resets us.

Preventing and moving beyond burnout

Burnout is different to feeling tired or exhausted as it affects you psychologically. Christina Maslach, a social psychologist and professor at the University of California has devoted her research to occupational burnout and in doing so, gives us three indicators of burnout.

Three indicators of burnout:

1 / Emotional exhaustion

You are wearing out, experience loss of energy, are debilitated mentally, and constantly fatigued. You stop taking care of yourself as you numb on addictions and other things. A common thought is “I can’t take it anymore”.

2 / Cynicism/Depersonalisation

Withdrawal from relationships and the development of a negative, cynical, and callous attitude, particularly in response to your leadership role. You begin to think “There is no hope for this group. It’s pointless.”

3 / Professional inefficacy/Reduced sense of personal accomplishment

You begin losing hope and find less value in what you do. You say to yourself “I’m a terrible leader. I’m not meant for this.”

If you’ve entered into burnout, the first step is to take a pause from your leadership role or delegate a large portion. There are three significant actions for you to wind back burnout.

Three significant actions to wind back burnout:

1 / Reduce the intensity

Delegate, delay, or put on hold. The intensity, occurrence or consistency of tasks need to reduce immediately. If you’re placing considerable effort in something of low value, eliminate that task. In addition, cutting back entirely for a season will bring great benefit.

2 / Increase the value

Increase tasks that bring personal value. What does that mean? Operating within your gifting, skills, and abilities yields greater personal satisfaction.

3 / Monitor your gauges

Pay attention to your spiritual, physical, and emotional gauges. Are you connected spiritually to God? Do you treat your body well? How is your emotional tank? Remember to set limits on intense emotional activities to allow time to refill.

When you find yourself in a healthier position, set up those six best practices for sustainable leadership in your leadership model. Go the long-haul!

Choosing ongoing studies

Choosing ongoing studies can be hard, however, there are various ways to do it.

To promote group ownership, involve your members into the process of study selection.

How?

- Have yourself and your members provide recommendations
- Have members discuss and vote
- The option with the most votes wins

If there's an even tie, then your group is set for the next few study topics. Your group may not do every study requested and this may disappoint but once you hear them out, most members would happily proceed with the group-selected study.

Sometimes a group vote may not be appropriate, so as a leader, you have permission to decide which study is most suitable.

In general, there are four ways to run your study:

- A pre-made video study where you watch together then discuss afterwards
- A topical study with supporting Bible passages, with discussion
- Reading a book together (usually chapter by chapter), with discussion
- A Bible passage study with discussion (see Appendix)

Apart from doing a study, mix it up with a worship event, prayer experience, a retreat, or even a service opportunity in place of your regular meeting (See Creating special events).

Stepping down as a leader

All ministry comes and goes in seasons and so does your leadership. If you discover your passion shifting or lack the bandwidth, consider coaching somebody else, and then handing over your leadership to them. By doing so, you allow them to stretch and grow.

How do you step down as a leader?

Step 1: Ensure you have a replacement leader you can hand over to

Step 2: Announce your stepping down to the group with a clear end-date

Step 3: Let the CG&E leadership team know of this transition

Step 4: Rally your members to pray for and support the incoming/existing leaders

Step 5: Step down and become a follower, not a “backseat driver”

Generating Group Health

A well-known pastor once said the most difficult part of any project is when you reach halfway. The initial momentum and thrill needed to kickstart your project fades, as the inertia slows, and things drag on. The same is for your group. The excitement and thrill of creating something new will wear off as your group enters a “Business as Usual” mode. You’ll make decisions and changes to recorrect its course and often, it may be too late.

Group health and culture needs to be embedded early into the formational stages of your group. The culture of your group will evolve, so as leader, be observant and continually adjust.

The four “ups” of healthy group culture

Pastor Albert Ng has devised four witty, yet easily memorable markers of healthy group culture. Make this common language in your group.

1 / Show up

Be present as best as possible at all meetings, socials, and events. Your presence makes the group lively, exciting and builds consistency.

2 / Speak up

our voice matters, so give rise to it during discussion.

3 / Open up

Your vulnerability allows others to be vulnerable, thereby creating moments of intimacy, trust and growth.

4 / Team up

Serve, pray, and do life together. We were made for relational community.

There is however one unofficial fifth “up” for the Cantonese speakers.

5 / 亂噏 (lyun2 ap1, pronounced “luen up”)

To talk nonsense about topics that one knows nothing about. Why is this important? We create healthy bonds with fun, silliness and informal conversations.

Garnering greater commitment

Commitment is tricky because it goes deeper than excellent studies and smooth execution. Why? Because commitment is an indicator of conviction based upon priority and value. Simply, personal convictions form commitment. So how do you cater for all your members with different convictions? Should you cater for the masses?

Before listing out solutions, let’s understand a key driver for commitment - improvement. People will commit if there is an impetus of improvement, which then leads to positive momentum. As a leader, how well do you know your members? What are they seeking to spiritually improve? How will your group support that?

What does this mean for you? It means you cannot lead blindly with assumptions nor rigidity, rather, leadership and groups must be contextualised to members/meaning. That is why leadership begins with listening. You must know your members so you can know how to lead your group and guide it towards spiritual health and improvement.

As a leader, continuously explore:

1 / Different perspectives

Meetings that worked for one season, may not work for another. Make it discussable by seeking ongoing feedback with your members, experimenting with changes, and then stepping back and observing adjustments. Repeat.

2 / Different styles of leadership

The book *Reframing Organisations* focused on four frames of leadership: Structural, Human Resource (Relational), Symbolic and Political. Structural leaders focus on order, Relational leaders focus on people, Symbolic leaders focus on meaning and motivation, and Political leaders focus on power. Most of us will fit largely into one leadership frame and slightly into a second.

What are your two dominating leadership frames? What are your member's leadership needs? You are challenged to understand your members and then tweak your leadership frame to come closer to your group's make-up. For example, if your members desire to talk long into the night and sing songs till 2am (Relational needs), then a Structural leader won't fair well. Likewise, if your group prefers the comfort of strict start and end times (Structural needs), then a Relational leader with no operational rigour will struggle to keep their members committed.

So, should you cater for the masses? Yes and No. As servant leaders, you have a privileged position to steward your members closer to Christ through community, by allowing Him to use and mould what you bring. If your members feel heard and included, they'll more likely commit. Equally, be prepared to push your members to new levels of commitment and growth. If your members remain complacent, remind them of the group covenant, the goals of the group and their responsibility as contributing members. If still, they are non-committal, make it discussable on whether they are to stay or go discover a better suited group.

There may be instances where group leading isn't working well for you. Consider reviewing misalignments and discovering alternative ministries to serve in.

Setting healthy boundaries and differentiation

Many of you have believed the lie that group health means doing more – we become “yes” people. Whilst necessary in some instances, the act of honouring boundaries and differentiation are just as crucial in maintaining group health.

Boundaries help define your identity, responsibility and influences. It makes you say no to unreasonable requests and pull back when things get too much. In fact, boundaries honour God's design of healthy community. Boundaries/differentiation are relational limits which prevent overreach, such as co-dependency. Breaches occur when both the instigator and the recipient allow overreach. So, how do you know what a boundary breach is? Townsend & Cloud, author of the book *Boundaries*, shared these identifiers:

1 / Your identity blurs

A boundary shows where you end and where someone else begins, leading to a sense of ownership. When you're clear on your identity, it gives you permission to live freely within that. When you're unclear, your choices become limited from "boundary creep" - where external values and principles creep in and redefine/compromise who you are.

2 / Your responsibilities change

Galatians 6:2 moves us to bear one another's burdens, compelled by Christ's love. Yet this isn't a blind bearing as verse 5 says that “each one should carry his own load”. You have responsibilities that only you can carry. And in the same way, so does that person you are supporting.

3 / Your influences change

Boundaries generally keep the good in and the bad out. But occasionally, your boundaries keep the bad in and the good out! Therefore, your boundaries must allow passing, yet be strong enough to keep danger out. You have tremendous power to allow what influences you.

If someone/something external is changing your identity, responsibilities and what influences you, then boundary breaching is happening. Take note!

What could boundary breaching behaviour look like in a group setting?

- Draining, emotional dependency through excessive texting, phone calling, and prayer
- Discomfort caused by unsolicited physical contact such as frontal hugging and touching
- Discomfort from undesired relational advances and flirting
- Members reluctantly lending money to other members, due to feeling bad

In all these true story examples, the recipients weren't able to say no to the advances of the instigator.

How can you facilitate healthy boundaries and differentiation?

In a group setting, lead your members through these expectations.

First, understand this:

- Boundaries are permeable. Breaches may happen as acts of love towards others
- Boundaries do not develop in isolation. They form through supportive relationships with God and others
- Boundaries support the differentiation of one another. We are collectively the body of Christ but we are not identical
- Boundaries aren't just physical. They're also emotional, mental and spiritual

Now, the goal is not to avoid a breach, but to prepare for when a breach happens to you, or when you breach. Here's how.

1 / Identify what you cannot control

What should remain outside of your reach? This prevents you from entering a space that is not yours. Examples include how people respond to advice, how you want someone to live their life, or taking over a task that is not yours. Remember, you cannot quit smoking for someone else.

2 / Identify what you can control

What is in your circle of influence? These are yours to shape, manage and change. They may include creating group culture, or admin work. If there are people in your circle of influence, manage their expectations, but watch your reach. You can control everything in your court, but not how others execute what you've asked them to (to some degree). Set boundaries for yourself too!

3 / Identify what motivates you

What are your core values and principles? What do you stand for? Knowing these will define the differentiation that exists between you and others. Your passion is yours, theirs is theirs. If passions were forced upon you, you'd know and resist. These breaches typically occur with polar opposite personalities/activities.

4 / Make boundaries visible to others and communicate them in relationship

You don't live in a vacuum; you live in relationship with others. If people don't know your boundaries, they will keep crossing them. But if they knew, they may honour them. Make everyone's life easier - communicate.

5 / Hold that boundary/differentiation in tension

Honouring boundaries and differentiation may require difficult conversations, or hard stops in behaviour. Yet, boundaries need to be permeable enough to be both effective and to prevent ongoing dissonance. You may need to do things you don't enjoy. After all, Christ did not enjoy being crucified yet submitted to His Father's will.

Holding boundaries in tension will help you conserve energy, prioritise better, allow others to grow, and honour God's differentiation amongst His people in a group setting.

Handling unique/difficult members

With many different types of people in your group, it helps to understand some common roles and their contributions. This list is taken from the book Growth Groups by Colin Marshall.

Constructive roles / recognise and positively reinforce with acknowledgement

- **The Peacemaker:** Resolves disputes
- **The Focuser:** Keeps to the task
- **The Encourage:** Positive about others
- **The Sympathiser:** Draws out people's feelings
- **The Initiator:** Gets the ball rolling
- **The Summariser:** Draws together the argument
- **The Humourist:** Lightens the moment
- **The Challenger:** Sharpens people's thinking
- **The Socialiser:** Organises the social life of the group

Destructive roles / monitor, remediate, and try to eliminate

- **The Onlooker:** The non-contributor
 - Direct clear, simple questions to them
 - Eagerly respond and refer back when they are overtalked on
- **The Monopoliser:** Dominates the conversation often due to insecurity
 - Reiterate group covenant that honours all to speak
 - Intrude during a pause and thank their contribution and move on
 - Speak to them privately about the problem
- **The Side-tracker:** Inability to stay focused on the topic or task
 - Limit your responses to irrelevant topics and divert back to topic
 - Ask new questions to divert back to topic
- **The Clown:** An asset by relieving tension and a problem if distracting or inappropriate
 - Don't always laugh or respond
- **The Expert:** Members who appear to know everything
 - Timebox their comments and teaching to five minutes
 - Introduce them to leadership – ask questions, listen and facilitate
- **The Fighter:** May be aggressive and intimidating
 - Avoid being drawn into heated debate
 - Privately, point out negative effect on the group
- **The Chatterer:** Conduct distracting side conversations with their neighbours
 - Pause the group and allow everyone to listen to their private conversation
 - Ask the Chatterer their opinion

Handling difficult moments

Group life isn't always smooth. There will be joy and pain, harmony and conflict and you will encounter difficult moments. We don't expect you to be a counsellor or therapist, so please contact us for further assistance. Nonetheless, if you are willing, you can assist in practical ways to some common, difficult scenarios.

To begin, when should you suggest professional help?

- If you're being asked of more than your care capacity
- If your member is threatening harm to self or others
- If your member remains in a depressive mood
- If your member is seeing or hearing things that others do not see nor hear
- If your member remains unwell after six counselling sessions with a lay counsellor

Scenario 1: Grief

The longer you are with your group, the higher the chance that someone will encounter loss. It could come be death, divorce, job loss, miscarriage, or even a relocation. Loss results in grief. Before you try to help someone process grief, know that it is often complex, you may face rejection, and your member may require professional help. The norms of social behaviour may disappear, so remove all expectations and instead, listen well, show patience and grace.

There are generally five stages of grief, and they don't always occur in that order. They are (1) Denial (2) Anger (3) Bargaining (4) Depression (5) Acceptance. Be acquainted with each stage, and how to recognise them. So, how could you assist your member with grief?

1 / Show immediate care

Without too much delay, a demonstration of care is crucial for the member to know they are surrounded by supportive community. This could be a card, a phone call, meals, or flowers. Small gestures help.

2 / Invite and provide a safe space

Be it privately or in your group, allow your member to talk about their loss and the emotions they are experiencing. Oftentimes, they won't proactively share unless they are asked about it – be gentle and non-forceful. Acknowledge, empathise, and allow ample time. Leaders, this is your cue to exercise silence. Refrain from giving advice.

3 / Approach faith gently

During grief, members often struggle with and question God. Be sensitive in imposing prayer or spiritual answers. Your presence is more important than your biblical knowledge. After their initial shock has worn off, ask how they are with God. Once your member begins reconciling with God, they are usually in the final stages of grief.

4 / Show ongoing care

The first 3-6 months of care are crucial in helping that member process the initial grief response of shock and denial. If appropriate, check-in with a message of love, an offer to have a meal and an outward display of support. Have fellow members take turns.

What to do?

- Use neutral phrases such as “I’m sorry for your loss”, “I don’t know how it feels but I’m sure it must be difficult”, “I don’t have much to offer but my love and support”

What not to do?

- Giving advice
- “Compare share” as it may invalidate their grief
- Fast-track their grief journey like a project
- Make uncertain promises on their behalf “You’ll get through this”

When should you suggest professional help?

- If your member is not coping at all
- If your member continues experiencing intense grief 18-24 months after the loss
- If your member’s grief seems “light” compared to the scale of the loss (Note: possible underlying psychological issues)

Special mentions:

- The size of the loss will determine the magnitude of the grief response and mourning period. On average, a deep loss may take 12-18 months to emerge from
- Your care may be limited, so hold all expectations loosely

Scenario 2: Anger

Anger is always personal. It is usually caused by the violation of a principle or value of great personal significance. How do you assist your member through anger?

1 / Acknowledge the emotion

Have your member name the emotions they are feeling and allow them to experience those emotions, short of anything destructive.

2 / Acknowledge the offense and the severity

Reiterate the offense and acknowledge the severity and personal impact that it had. When your member feels heard, the heat will begin to dissipate.

3 / When ready, seek the underlying loss, principle or value

When the heat dissipates, help them identify the underlying triggers through the use of powerful questions. When they have clarity, self-awareness is developed.

4 / Discover the missing link to a possible spiritual gift

Oftentimes, a principle is closely tied to a spiritual gift – help bring greater purpose through identifying the gift and how it can be used for good. For example, if your member becomes angry at other people being taken advantage of, perhaps their gift is compassion.

Scenario 3: Addiction

Addictions are often kept in secret. When an addiction is disclosed intentionally or by accident, there usually comes denial, embarrassment, and shame. Members are also likely to be aware that this addiction is an idol contrary to their faith in Jesus. To assist your member deal with addiction, consider these steps.

1 / Remove the shame and self-condemnation

Romans 8:1 tells us that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Begin by reinforcing this truth in their lives.

2 / Repent and ask for forgiveness

At the point of disclosure, your member will likely be desperate and ready to try all options. Repentance is the spiritual reversal on the addiction. Forgiveness declares the sin, brings humility and their need for help. Ask your member to consider praying for repentance and forgiveness. If so, lead them through this.

3 / Seek the underlying cause

Help your member understand their addiction by exploring what they are trying to numb (run away from/avoid). Ask gentle questions and seek to bring new understanding and self-awareness.

4 / Enter an accountability group

As iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17), have your member join an accountability or focus group specific to that addiction. You do not need to lead this, but you do need to propose this. Island ECC has support groups catering to sexual purity, intentional intimacy and separate male/female ministries aimed at restoring God’s best for each gender. We also facilitate ministries that focus on inner healing, trauma, grief, and other support groups. Get in touch to learn more.

Scenario 4: Conflict

Much like anger, conflict involves intense emotions where all involved have faced offense. After working through anger individually, aim for reconciliation.

1 / Have all involved meet

Make it clear that all involved will be present. Set the ground rules on communication, refer to the group covenant and have all verbally agree.

2 / Introduce very specific language to use during the meeting

The conversations that follow must be done with rigidity and structure. Statements must be non-accusatory and unassuming. Begin each sentence with “I felt... when (event) happened.” “It appeared you...” All statements must allow room for wiggle and cannot be absolute. An absolute statement is “You betrayed me by backstabbing me.” “I felt upset when you deliberately...”

3 / Have each member share, without interruption

4 / Listen for misunderstandings, principles, and values

Very quickly, you’ll often hear misunderstandings or miscommunications. Using your leader skills of intuition and discernment, raise them and seek thought. Highlight principles and values that surface and acknowledge them.

5 / Seek resolution

Once everyone has spoken, seek to resolve the conflict by creating a new way of working. How do you do this? “Sally doesn’t like it when harsh language is used against her. How can we honour her?” By stating what is important to them and seeking change that genuinely honours the other person, we enter into reconciliation.

6 / Pray to close

Exert spiritual meaning, authority, and influence by praying over the group and the conflict itself. Pray for all members to show grace, forgiveness, and honour, just as Jesus did for us.

Conflict takes tremendous energy and effort to resolve. Certain conflicts may be so deep that they never get resolved. Be prepared for this, and that it is not a reflection on your leadership.

Scenario 5: Members with mental health struggles

Mental health struggles are more common than you realise. They can be masqueraded for fear of exposure or that member could be an open book that clings onto anyone or anything willing to listen (unhealthy dependency). Some struggles are beyond the assistance of you and your members so be ready to reach out for further assistance.

How can you respond and assist?

1 / Recognise the signs of possible mental health struggles

These include sleep or appetite changes, unexplained weight loss or gain, mood changes, social withdrawal, disinterest in hobbies/life, increased sensitivity, apathy, sadness and depression, nervousness, anxiety, hallucinations, unusual behaviour, problems with concentration and logic. Most people who have mental health struggles are somewhat aware of it but may be in denial.

2 / Recognise the impact

Begin to observe interactions and responses. Watch for participation and commitment levels. Members may distance themselves from their unsuspecting and unintentional counterpart if that member's behaviour is highly needy.

3 / When and how to intervene?

Leaders, we do not expect you to counsel or provide psychological services, but we do expect you to raise warning bells if things become serious. When the mental health struggle becomes a form of self-harm or suicide threat, you must raise it with people who can help. These include the police, family/relatives of that person, church staff or even their counsellor/psychologist. If less serious, consider encouraging professional help, or sharing within a smaller group.

4 / How to lead your group?

If the member chooses to keep this private, honour their request, but be assertive to let your co-leaders know, to protect the integrity of the conversation and to remain accountable.

If the member is open to having this shared with the group (or several members), create a safe space with them all (i.e., a coffee shop) and have that member share directly. If possible, refrain from being their spokesperson. To prevent co-dependency, always empower the member to make their own decisions. Your role is to facilitate, but never to fully carry.

Scenario 6: Members with special needs

Occasionally, you may encounter a member who struggles to form friendships, is socially awkward or misses social cues. They may have special needs (called neurodiversity) but are also capable enough to integrate largely into society. Neurodiversity may include Autism, ADHD, Aspergers, Dyslexia, Tourettes and other general intellectual disabilities. That member may or may not be aware of their neurodiversity.

How can you respond and assist?

1 / Recognise the signs of possible neurodiversity

They may include fixated interests considered abnormal in intensity, social and communication deficits, attachment and clinginess to routines, and difficulty focusing/staying on topic.

2 / Recognise the impact

Begin to observe interactions and responses. Watch for participation and commitment levels. Members may distance themselves from their unsuspecting and unintentional counterpart. On the flipside, neurodiverse members may not recognise their behaviour, but they'll likely recognise the feelings of rejection and isolate.

3 / When to intervene?

Some behaviours are easy to spot whilst others become troubling after prolonged time. There are three possible triggers for your intervention: 1) When you sense group morale/energy drop, 2) When you receive direct feedback/complaints from the group/neurodiverse member, or 3) When you see the neurodiverse member in a state of dissonance or languish. Failure to respond may lead the group or member towards a premature exit.

4 / How to intervene with a neurodiverse member?

People with neurodiversity have different sensory needs. Therefore, be aware of the following before speaking to them:

- Offer an appropriate space to talk
- Avoid sarcasm, euphemisms, and implied messages
- Inform them of group etiquette, and don't assume they're deliberately breaking the rules or being rude
- Provide concise verbal and written instructions for tasks
- Break tasks down into small steps
- Learn of their individual preferences, needs, and goals
- Be kind and patient

5 / How to intervene with the group?

- Guide the group to understand any stigmas or ignorance that could be present. Well intentioned individuals may exclude others through unintentional ignorance
- Move the group to understand and embrace neurodiversity in communities

6 / How do you move your group into the future with a neurodiverse individual?

- Pray for them – God gives comfort and peace, so pray collectively and for that member. Pray for peace, calmness, & opportunities for them to build community
- Meet them where they're at – Understand what makes them comfortable and try to meet them there
- Be patient and understanding – It may take time, but patience makes a difference
- Avoid assumptions – Don't assume their constant rejecting of invitations is a default no. Even if they regularly turn you down, it shows you are thinking of them
- Avoid comparisons – Don't compare them to others

Whilst fitting-in may not always work, there have been success stories of neurodiverse members developing confidence and becoming great contributors to their group and the wider church. In the same way, groups that choose to embrace these members will also develop in Christlikeness and love towards one another. We call it a win-win.

Scenario 7: Sensitive and taboo topics

The greatest threat to the church is division, which is why scripture speaks emphatically on unity (1 Cor 1:10, Eph 4:1-6). Divisive topics such as politics, sanctity of life, and sexuality have supercharged abilities to unite or divide. You face the tension of making these topics discussable, or not at all to avoid conflict. Here are some suggestions:

1/ Focus on the person, and somewhat the topic

Don't allow the topic and their position to wholly represent who they are. Remember them holistically, their contributions and most importantly, their value in Christ. We must fight the modern-day phenomenon called "cancel culture".

2/ Listen for the unspoken

Refrain from talking to allow them to fully express their concerns. When you listen for the unspoken, such as unexpressed fears or frustrations, you begin seeing their motive. You develop greater understanding.

3/ Respect, not ridicule

Ridiculing a position will bring division. On the contrary, respecting their action (not necessarily position) will display appreciation and maturity. For example, "I appreciate that you spoke up on this difficult topic. It must have taken courage." Recognition breaks down walls and opens discussion.

4/ Separate ideology from real life experiences

Passion about a position is likely based on a personal, first-person experience. Arguing objectively about ideology does nothing more than to negate and ostracize that member. Listen for what is experience and what is ideology.

5/ Create new perspectives with questions

When we rebut or argue, we risk negating their position, or them as a person. To challenge a divisive and strongly held position, ask open questions to push their thinking. Questions may begin with "What if..." or "How does that align with..." At this point, create curiosity by introducing elements of faith. "What would Jesus think about that?"

6/ Affirm the member, without necessarily agreeing on the position

At the end of the conversation, affirm them without having to agree. Feel free to also state your disagreement without fear. "Although I don't fully agree, I valued your speaking up."

Some topics will never reach agreement and are better left as taboo. Choose to focus on the harmony and unity of Christ and therefore, to seek unity, not uniformity.

Decluttering your group

If you notice your group in apathy, low commitment, or laziness, it may be time for a spring-clean! If garnering greater commitment hasn't succeeded, it's time to declutter – to cut back and/or remove completely.

Decluttering is largely heart work as you'll be making difficult decisions and having hard conversations. It may cause conflict and separation, hence requiring more courage to execute rather than the actual decluttering itself. The four possible areas of decluttering are leaders, group culture, members, and programme.

We begin with 2 Timothy 1:7 which says “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.” With this premise, how could we declutter?

1/ Make it discussable

Whether in a private 1:1, or to your group, begin by naming the “elephant in the room”. Raise the issue lovingly, yet truthfully. E.g., “I've noticed that we're all arriving later and later. What's happening?”

2/ Speak symbolism

Use language that targets the heart by highlighting contribution, success stories and victories. Acknowledge that the act of decluttering isn't done in ignorance of past, great things. E.g., “I appreciate how you helped Sally through her depression in the past.”

3/ Build them a golden bridge to retreat

Brainstorm ways on how to proceed, without pushing them into your corner. By doing so, you allow them an out – “a golden bridge to retreat” to preserve their dignity. E.g., “We don't see you much anymore. Is everything okay? How could we support you better?” Then, let them own their decision.

4/ Seek clarity

At the end of the discussion, seek clarity by clearly reiterating the next steps. This could be “Thank you for serving as a leader. You'll now be released from that responsibility”, or “As a group, we're committing to punctuality to honour one another.” No matter the decluttering, it needs to be clearly communicated and understood.

Whilst these are high-level and cannot cater to all situations, the key is to make it discussable. When you raise it for discussion, you're merely bringing to light something that is already happening, and more likely than not, you might be simplifying someone else's life too.

Celebrating your group

Each group celebrates differently but generally, celebration involves happy things. Here are some happy things people love doing.

Games

Games excite people and makes them competitive. Have a little prize at the end.

Food

Have food to share or bring some snacks. Keep it simple and non-exhausting. E.g. Guys bring salty, girls bring sweet. The more complex the arrangement, the more unwilling people become.

Worship

Singing songs of praise is a celebration of God, your soul, and one another. Organise a worship night.

Individual affirmation

Have members affirm one another and what they bring to the group. This requires more time but yields amazing results.

Group affirmation

Have members affirm the group itself and how it has benefitted them.

Doing a group health check

Group health is rarely spoken of but is integral to a consistent and enjoyable group experience. As a leader, taking inventory of where your group is will guide your leadership focus on improving your group, the members, and its culture. To get an overall feel of the health of your group, refer to the *Five Foundations of a Healthy Care Group** as a guide.



* Reference: Based on *Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni

There are five health indicators – starting from the foundation at the bottom:



1 / Abundant trust

The group increases in vulnerability, has more in-depth and personal sharing, and eliminates hiding and pretending



2 / Embrace conflict

The group engages in lively, interesting discussions, quickly reveals and resolves issues, brings ideas out from each other, and displays genuine harmony



3 / Active commitment

The group aligns around a common goal, learns from mistakes, develops spiritually and relationally, hesitates less, remains committed despite disagreement



4 / Intentional accountability

The group questions without hesitation, respects members, holds each other accountable to group-agreed goals



5 / Healthy group

The group keeps their focus on group enhancement, minimises chronic individual attention seeking, is engaged consistently and enjoys spending time together

How does your group rate on the Five Foundations? Which areas need your leadership the most?

Planning your group's future

Moving through and beyond two years, you'll notice changes of group dynamic. How could you respond?

Equip / Expand your leadership team

As your group progresses and your members develop confidence, you will notice their gifts more. Do you notice any members who are more willing to step up and lead with wisdom and discernment? If so, consider approaching them to step up to share leadership.

- Begin having conversations about leadership
- Give them smaller responsibilities/segments of your meeting to lead
- Allow them to lead an entire meeting

If your member is willing to step up to co-lead, send them our way and we will equip them.

Growth / Plant a new group

This is the perfect time to plant a new group. Planting a new group brings healthy culture, spiritual passion, and opportunities for members to step up to leadership. By planting, you allow people with no community to join community.

Stagnation / Open your group

Opening your group allows new members to bring new perspectives. In general, receiving new members happens in batches of two or more individuals/couples. Introducing single members/couples makes integration hard. Buy one, get one free!

Decline / End your group

Please see the next section on how to end your group well.

Ending your group well

Your group will have a shelf life. When times are vibrant and everyone is close, your group will seem invincible. Yet passions change, people get married and have families, and relocate. Just like all ministry, group life also happens in seasons and will end. Be prepared to notice signs of decline and how to transition to a good ending. Why is this important? A crucial function of leadership is to provide clarity – at all times. If confusion or ambiguity remains, then tension will prevail in your group which will limit or delay your members moving on. By officially ending your group, you free yourself and your members to move on.

What are some signs of general decline?

- Lower commitment/turnout levels
- Slower response times
- Increasing last-minute cancellations
- Less external interactions/socials

What could cause a decline?

- Shifting group dynamics/priorities
- Unresolved “elephants in the room”
- Unresolved issues, conflict, bitterness, or resentment
- Busy seasons such as child-rearing, job transition
- Mismatched or poor leadership decisions/choices/styles

If repeated attempts to revive your group have been unsuccessful, consider celebrating and ending. How? Make it discussable. Bring clarity to your members by stating the situation, and then be clear through word and action that the group will end.

How could you end your group well?

- In a positive and celebratory environment, gather your members together
- Share in retrospect how God and the group blessed one another
- Engage in food, cut a cake, take photos
- Then as a leader, officially end the group without blame or guilt

What happens next?

Now the group has ended, you are officially absolved of all group leadership functions. We recommend you take a break from leadership. If you're feeling burnt-out or resentful, speak to us so we can process with you. Be sure to celebrate what God has done in and through you. Your leadership mattered!

Creating Special Events

Worship events

The term worship is now synonymous with Christian music. Let's be clear – worship is not just music, but a holistic posture of faith where we live in honour of God – including jobs, service and singing. For familiarity's sake, I'll refer to “music” as “worship”.

Worship events provide you and your members the opportunity to experience God through expressive creativity of instrument and voice. They provide a break from studies and bring a different environment. So, let's give it a try.

1 / Organise your worship team

Gather the musicians capable of leading song and singing of a skill level to not cause distraction. If you don't have musicians, prepare a YouTube playlist, or even consider doing voice-only worship. Those not musically inclined can also lead with scripture reading or leading a time of corporate prayer.

2 / Decide on the elements of the event

Consider singing songs, scripture reading and meditation, Spirit-led prayer, Spirit-led spoken word, or a time of open-sharing.

3 / Plan a rundown of the event

It could look like this:

- Open with prayer
- Sing some songs
- Read a Psalm and meditate on it
- Ask for reflections and thoughts
- Sing more songs
- In between songs, provide space for Spirit-led prayer or spoken words
- Share communion (supporting scripture can be found in Mark 14:22-25, Matthew 26:26-28, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)
- Read a passage of scripture/sing a song, then pray to close the event

4 / For consideration

The entire event should be no longer than 1.5 hrs – people get tired. The main elements to prepare are the songs and communion. Everything else can be done during the night, such as allowing God to guide you to a passage of scripture, and prayer.

Prayer experiences

Prayer experiences are dedicated prayer meetings – where we experience God through a slowed-down and submissive spirit. Some structure and leading is helpful to move people through the experience.

1 / Prepare topics

Be relevant and contextual to where society is at. What are some major burdens on people's hearts? What about global conflict? War? Famine? Which groups of people need prayer? Do some research and make a list for prayer consideration. Also, allow people to share and then listen to the Spirit on what you could possibly pray for.

2 / Plan a rundown of the event

- Open with prayer
- Sing some songs
- Lead the first prayer experience – corporate prayer for a group-decided topic. Allow 20-30 minutes for people to pray out loud at will. Leader, please close the corporate prayer when you feel the time is right
- Small group prayer – Announce a time for regrouping and then, break off into small groups of 3-4 for personal sharing and prayer. This may take around 20-30 minutes
- Once regrouped, ask one question for all to answer: “How did God speak to you today?”

3 / For consideration

Consider doing communion. The entire event should be no longer than 1-1.5 hrs. Leave room for social connection at the end to wind-down and build relationship.

Same day/overnight retreats

Retreats are great for groups that are feeling stagnant and want a rejuvenating experience. They require greater commitment, especially if costs are involved. Planning an overnight retreat at a hired venue should begin at least three months before the event to secure accommodation. The goal of the retreat is to slow down to allow intentional time with God – either in solitude or in a small group, with minimal distraction and limited/no technology. The retreat elements apply for both same day and overnight retreats. For this section we will focus on an overnight retreat for completeness.

1 / Decide on a date

At a group meeting, ask everyone to take their calendars and find an agreeable date (usually 2-4 months into the future). Lock that date down into their calendars.

2 / Decide on a venue

Considering travel time, distance, and easy access to nature for reflection, list some possible venues and seek feedback.

Island ECC regularly visits the below venues. All are simple, yet clean:

- Bethany House, Cheung Chau
- Bradbury Retreat Centre, Cheung Chau
- Methodist Retreat Centre, Mui Wo
- Noah's Ark, Ma Wan
- Gold Coast Hotel, Tuen Mun (A hotel used as a retreat centre)
- Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre, Sha Tin (Day retreat only)

Other groups have stayed at Disneyland or Ocean Park accommodation. Be creative!

3 / Confirm commitment and book

Give your members a limited timeframe to confirm their commitment. Secure their commitment by deciding on a venue and then booking it shortly after confirmation. For larger groups, consider booking a function hall too. Have the organiser book and pay first, then for everyone to pay them back. As leader, you can send reminders so that the organiser is not left out-of-pocket. If a member backs out and a refund is not possible, that member will need to find a replacement, or forfeit their payment. Make this very clear.

4 / Plan a rundown of the event

Creating a rundown for the retreat is crucial to its success, otherwise you'll waste time, create confusion and frustration with your members, and lose intentional time between God and yourself. Depending on the size of the retreat, here is a simple rundown:

Day 1

- 3pm Travel to location
- 4pm Arrive at venue and settle into accommodation
- 5:30pm Gather and go to dinner
- 6pm Have dinner (onsite or outside)
- 8pm Meet for night event (worship night/prayer experience)
- 10pm Socialise over beverages/snacks/dessert
- 11pm Finish for the night

Day 2

- 8am Have breakfast (onsite or outside)
- 9am Morning solo guided reflection time at quiet spot (A Bible verse + questions)
- 10am Regroup for worship, discussion, prayer
- 11am Pack and leave venue
- 12pm Lunch
- 1pm Explore location, have a fun activity
- 3pm Have afternoon tea/coffee
- 4pm Dismiss and travel home

If your group is smaller, then everything can be done more spontaneously, but remember to make time for the morning solo guided reflection time. Connecting with God well usually happens when we are alert, alone, and attentive (away from distraction).

5 / Set expectations

Retreats are not five-star luxury getaways, but rather, distraction-free, and comfort-reduced stays to seek God. Ensure everyone is clear on this. In addition, communicate a suggested packing list as many retreat centres are not stocked lavishly.

Here is a sample packing list:

- Payment (credit cards, Octopus card, cash)
- Weather appropriate clothing
- Bible, pen, and notebook
- Sandals for your room and/or the beach
- Soap, shampoo, conditioner
- Toothpaste and toothbrush
- Towel
- Mosquito repellent and sunscreen
- Earplugs

6 / Send reminders and remain flexible

One to two days before the retreat, send reminders of logistics, and rally everyone for a good time! Remember that this is a retreat, not a high-efficiency project. If timing goes awry or events don't happen, remember that God is still in the mix. Release, relax and revive! The goal is intentional time with God, so keep that forefront if all else fails.

Service opportunities

Shared experiences, especially serving, brings groups closer together. Using your personal connections to non-profit organisations, or Island ECC, make regular time to serve as one group. Serve regularly at church by signing up here: <http://iecc.hk/groupserve>

For groups more adventurous, serving on an overseas short-term mission trip together is a deeply moving and encouraging service opportunity. Get in touch with us if you want to explore this further.

Care Group library/resources

Care Group Leaders resources

caregroupleaders.com

RightNow Media, our online video studies on a platform

islandecc.hk/rightnow

Island ECC's positional papers on topics such as baptism, marriage, homosexuality and others

islandecc.hk/positional-papers

A website devoted to Young Adults where cultural issues are addressed

shifthongkong.com

Final Word

**For we are co-workers in God's service;
you are God's field, God's building.**

1 Corinthians 3:9

Thank you again for choosing to serve! We hope this booklet is helpful in equipping you with the basics. Our Care Group team is here to walk alongside and to resource you. As a team, we are here for your success, so reach out anytime.

Appendix

Sample group covenant

The vision of the Care Group Ministry at Island ECC is to create the best possible environment for authentic friendships and spiritual growth.

Group aims

- To be a Christ-centred community within Island ECC and the universal church
- To grow in our relationship with God and with each other
- To love, support, and care for each other as we go through life together, encouraging and building each other up in our spiritual journey
- To be accountable to each other through confessing of struggles and sins, being open and honest but without judgment; rebuking, forgiving, and restoring in love when necessary
- To be outward-facing; responding to the gospel practically through service and evangelism*

Member expectations

- Recognise Island ECC as their home church: As a Care Group, we are under the oversight of Island ECC and reflect the same values; regular attendance of Sunday services is expected
- Commit to meetings: Regular, on-time attendance is expected, although we understand that this is not always possible; in these cases, we will let the group know
- Be present: Members are expected to actively participate during meetings. We are here not just for ourselves, hence this is not simply a personal commitment to the group, but a commitment to each member of the group
- Honesty and transparency: As we grow closer as a group, we aim to be open and honest, sharing our lives with each other
- Confidentiality: What is shared in the group stays in the group. Exceptions:
 - (1) If permission is sought and granted to share a story beyond the group;
 - (2) If someone is believed to be a threat to him/herself or to another

Name, Date and Signed

Sample icebreaker questions

- What is your favourite smell?
- What is your favourite day of the week and why?
- What is a personal rule you live by?
- When was the last time you changed your opinion/belief about something major?
- How do you relax?
- What subject can you give a full lecture about without preparing?
- What is worth spending extra on?
- If you could time travel, when and where would you go?
- What is one of your long-term goals?
- What is something you've had to unlearn?
- What is the most dangerous thing you've ever done?
- What is something embarrassing you believed as a child?
- What is a weird fact/habit of yours?
- What are three must-haves for your ideal home/room/office?
- If you could instantly learn one language, which one? Why?
- What is one of your stereotypes? Do you live up to it, or opposite to it?
- What is a favourite/dream holiday destination + three items on the itinerary?
- What are your top three favourite cuisines?
- Which personality traits do you most value/dislike?
- What is a misconception people have about you?
- If you won Mark 6/lottery, how would you spend it?
- What are your top two love languages?
- What are two items on your bucket list?
- If you ended up in jail, what would your friends/family think you did?
- What is the best/worst advice you've ever received or given?
- What is an unpopular opinion you hold?
- What is the funniest thing that recently happened to you?
- What are you looking forward to in the coming months?
- If you could start a business, what would that be?
- If you could retrospectively say one thing to your young-self, what would that be?
- What is something you like to do the old-fashioned way?
- What did you want to be when you were growing up?
- What is your biggest pet peeve/annoyance?
- What mystery do you wish you knew the answer to?

To make ice-breaking more enjoyable, you can print these on cards for which members can randomly select and answer.

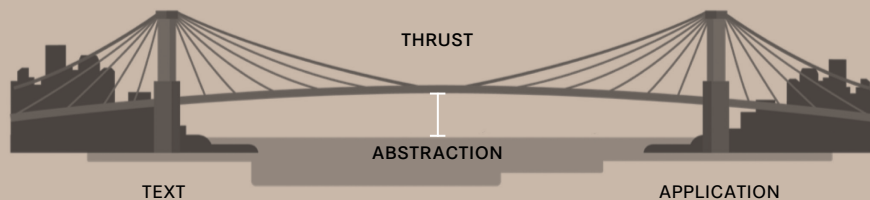
Create your own Bible study

Creating your own Bible study is a great way to grow yourself and your members. There are two main types of studies you can create – Inductive and Topical. Inductive studies draw directly from scripture for topic and application. Topical studies use various scriptures to support a topic that you’ve pre-decided on. Below, you’ll find two Inductive formats and one Topical format. No matter which method you choose, keep it contextual to your group – difficulty, length, and topic choice. We want the word of God to remain relevant and active to you and your members.

Inductive Bible Study (Lite) – Bridge methodology

This method is suitable for leaders who desire a balance between preparation time and depth, and is well suited for newer leaders and potential leaders.

Bridge Methodology



Step 1: Select a passage of scripture you want to study

Step 2: Exegete – interpret the text and some of its themes

Step 3: Abstract – which themes could be used to stimulate group conversation?

If the theme is too high and broad, it could lose thrust and momentum.

E.g., Where was Jesus in the prodigal son story? If it is too low, it could be too deep, and derail the conversation from its intended theme. E.g., What is important about using wine for communion?

Step 4: Go low – choose a theme that is low enough to remain on the bridge to move people towards application. E.g., Do you resonate with Mary or Martha? How come?

Step 5: Prepare generic open questions to use on that topic. Ask open questions to further the conversation

Step 6: Have members identify what this means for their spiritual and practical lives

Inductive Bible Study – SOIL methodology

To go deeper, consider utilising the SOIL methodology. SOIL stands for Select, Observe, Interpret and Life application.

Step 1: Select

- Pray for God to guide you
- Select a specific passage and know why you want to study it
- Read the passage several times, slowly, in multiple versions

Step 2: Observe the text

- Note the audience (You, he/she, they)
- Note the verbs (Who does what?)
- Note the connectives (Therefore, since, but etc)
- Highlight the nouns
- What are the commands/instructions/teachings?
- What are the cause-and-effect relationships?
- What are the repeated words and ideas?

Step 3: Observe the context

- What is the passage about?
- How does the passage fit in the context? (What goes before and after?)
- When and where does the passage fit in?
- Does this passage make use of other scripture?
- Who is writing or speaking and to whom?
- Does the text reveal any problems the recipients were facing?
- Why does the author write what he does?

Step 4: Interpret the language and meaning

- What is the style of the passage? (Poetry, history, prophecy)
- What was the original language and meaning of the words?
- List or highlight significant words and check where else they appear in scripture
- What is the cultural meaning? (What did the text mean to the original audience?)

Step 5: Interpret the theology (Identifying the principles)

- What is the big idea of the passage?
- What do I learn about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?
- What do I learn about human nature and sin?
- What does the passage say about salvation and redemption?
- What do I learn about the Church and/or Christian life?

Step 6: Life application

This section is where we convert what we've discovered into practical ways that God can use to change our lives. Application happens with intent. God enlightens us from the Word, we apply what we've learnt and the Holy Spirit empowers us to carry out these choices.

- What principles are relevant to me?
- What encourages me? What challenges me?
- Where do I fall short? What do I need to change?
- What will I do about it?
- How can I make this principle a constant part of my life?

This SOIL methodology is in-depth and requires time to prepare. When using SOIL, keep verses in context and be sure not to create something that didn't originally exist.

Topical Bible study

This type of study is suitable when covering topics that are pertinent and is suitable for believers of all levels.

Step 1: Choose your topic

Step 2: Gather reference materials (books, websites)

Step 3: Select verses which relate to the topic

Step 4: Pray for understanding

Step 5: Read the chosen verses in context (of the preceding and subsequent chapters, and of the Bible as a whole)

Step 6: Focus in on key parts of the verse that relate to the topic and the related message

Step 7: Present as principles/biblical advice for members to discover

Step 8: Have members identify what this means for their spiritual and practical lives

In all three methods, remember to ask questions to get your members thinking. Give it a go!

For a sample set of questions and study, see the Appendix.

Sample study questions

- What feelings were likely present in that passage?
- What key themes did you pick-up?
- What principles were present?
- What do you think God was doing?
- What was God trying to say to his people?
- What is God trying to say to you?
- What learning is God trying to convey?
- What is applicable to us today?
- What is important about this message?
- Which areas of our lives need change?
- Where did you see God working?
- What would Jesus do?

Sample Bible study

Read Matthew 3:13-17 / The Baptism of Jesus

¹³ Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. ¹⁴ But John tried to deter Him, saying, "I need to be baptised by You, and do You come to me?" ¹⁵ Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. ¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptised, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."

Discuss:

1. What character traits can we learn from both John the Baptist and Jesus? (Humility, obedience, submission). What is important about these?
2. What was interesting about Jesus (God in human form) being baptised by a mere mortal? (Jesus stooped to the same level as us and to serve us. He did not think he was above us.)
3. What would have happened if Jesus agreed to baptising John?
4. What does "fulfill all righteousness" mean? What is important about this?
5. How does verse 17 apply to you? How does God think of you?
6. If God thinks the same of you as Jesus, how would that change you?

