

Leader Guide





Yes! You are leaning into being a GROUP GUIDE! Thank you! It is so EXCITING!

Humanity was originally created to be in relationship with God and with each other. Which means we are **BETTER TOGETHER!** You holding space for others to connect with God and each other makes such a difference in people's lives!

God never intended for us to walk the Christian life alone. Along with the gift of the Holy Spirit to help guide and direct us, God puts others in our path for encouragement and support in both the good times and especially through the hard times.

Listening to one another, sharing our own story and what God is up to in our lives is the basis of every group. Learning, growing, navigating life... **TOGETHER.** Do others need this opportunity to share what Jesus has placed on your heart?

Undoubtedly, **YES** – we need each other!

In an often independent and self-reliant society, such a God thing (authentic community) can be shared and modeled for others to see its importance and catch hold of the vision.

Who or what is Jesus and His word calling you towards?

How will you join with Jesus in this calling?

Are you nervous or unsure about seemingly being in charge or facilitating a group?

That's totally normal. There can be many questions and even doubts about whether you are ready or equipped, but Jesus only asks for a willing heart and for us to act on the things we know, obey God in what we can control and trust Him with the rest.

It's really not that scary knowing that God is totally in control of it all. You

don't have to have it all figured out to be willing and get started. It won't be perfect as people and relationships are involved. It will challenge and cause you to grow as you lean into Jesus and hear others' opinions, input, questions, and are encouraged in the process. Remember we are not here to judge anyone as only God will do that in his timing. His grace is sufficient for all of us and His love will guide our steps.

Most everyone who's ever been involved in Jesus centered groups finds it very rewarding and many special friendships are developed along the way. We on the SK newlife group's leadership team are excited at your interest and are here to help encourage and support you as much or little as needed. Hope you find this guide of ideas informative and helpful.

You might be wondering... "Ok, I'm in! What do I do now?" Here are some initial planning ideas to consider.

WHAT DO YOU WANT YOUR GROUP TO BE ABOUT?

This is a great time to brainstorm your passions, your experiences and/or topics that you want to investigate. Topics could relate to Sunday follow up, a current issue, a specific book of the bible, or a topical study. The next step could be to seek some clarification by bouncing your ideas off someone else or your group coach. This process will narrow your focus and start you off with great expectations! You may need to have a few sentences describing the goal of your group and the materials needed.

WHEN DO I WANT TO HAVE THE GROUP?

Take a peek at your priorities and ask yourself where a group would fit. Is this a weekly or bi-monthly group? Do you envision the group lasting as a community for a few years or a session? Be ready to invest yourself. This includes prayer, planning, meeting time and coordination with others in your life. What specific day of the week, what time, and where your group will meet are questions that need to be answered.

WHO COULD CO-LEAD WITH ME?

Of course you will always have Jesus, but having a 2x2 to help organize and process ideas each week is helpful and twice the fun. It can also lead to creating more groups in the future. When you have someone to share the vision with, you have someone who will not only support each step but help guarantee a great outcome. If you can't identify someone yet, this can evolve over time as you start meeting with the group.

HOW DO I FIND GROUP MEMBERS?

Recruiting group members develops a core. Think about your friends, acquaintances, connect events, people you

encounter during the Sunday gathering, work associates and neighbors. Be open to inviting new people you meet along the way. Asking is the next part. You will be surprised at how many people respond with an affirmative answer, even if they can't commit at the time. There is a hunger for community. Be bold and courageous about this part. Usually if you ask 12, not everyone will come each week. If you want your group to be by invitation only or a closed group, then you are done. If you are open to it, encourage those who say yes to invite their friends as well. If you want your group to be open, be ready to include other newlifers who are seeking community on the groups web page. You will be sent an email requesting to join the group that requires your response.

HOW DO I START THE GROUP?

Once you have all these nuts and bolts identified, fill out the inquiry form on the newlife website. Someone will contact you to answer any questions you may have and/or follow up questions for you while they create your group profile and make it available online.

Here's the fun part... GETTING TOGETHER!

Once you have a general idea of what your group will be doing and when... the next step is to look at how you will navigate the time spent together. Here are a few more things to consider and ideas that have been used and helpful for others.

There are lots of ways you can organize your time together as a group. Make it fun by mixing it up and to get others in your group involved. The order of these are flexible, but here are elements you may consider including:

- Food
- Ice Breaker (fun!)
- Worship
- Scripture
- Discussion/Questions
- Next Steps (application)
- Prayer

Determine the length of time you are comfortable with for your group. Commonly groups go for about 1.5 hours with a bit of time upfront for connection and even some room for people to linger after. If you have a need for a more clear cutoff time, communicate that to your group.

Ownership and participation in a group can grow by inviting those in your group to own/lead a section each week. You

can mix up who does what each week! Assign roles either all from the beginning of a new group season or change of content... or determine the next week's roles as part of the closing time of group.

The most important part is in the COMMUNICATION! Sending reminders, being available to help others prepare for their roles by clearly communicating expectations, and having follow up conversations to affirm what went well (say thank you and they are more likely to want to do it again) and navigate anything that could be improved.

Keep everyone apprised of changes! Use email, texts, and even snail mail during the week for reminders, encouragement and upcoming events. Find out how people prefer to be contacted. Invite others to help with this.

Communication of expectations is not only valuable for those who are assigned a role, clear expectations of every participant is important. Not that we want to be hard, inflexible, or lack grace... There are some ways to minimize having hard conversations later. Namely, by looking at the list of things that may come up below, determine what you prefer, and communicate your expectations around each one.

THINGS THAT MAY COME UP

- Food or not? Food does help. Some groups do a meal, whether they take turns or potluck style every week. Some groups share snacks. Others due to the nature of their group decide to not do food at all. This can be a decision you make and communicate, or allow it to be a group decision. Your choice.

- Kids or not. This can also be tricky because you may minimize who is able to come if there are no kids allowed. Some groups try to minimize the number of participants who would need to bring kids, provide a space for kids to play during the group, and some even pay for childcare so that people can fully participate in the group. If kids are welcomed then the most important thing is to clearly communicate what your boundaries are to the parents when it comes to their children in your home. Sometimes followup conversations are also needed based on how it goes.

- Group Size. Growing groups are a good thing! However, there can be tension in having space for everyone to be heard and find connection if there are too many people. Some prefer smaller like 5-8, and others more like 12-15. Not going over 15 would be preferred. When a group reaches this capacity it can be a hard transition, but MULTIPLYING (starting another group) creates space for each attendee AND for more people to be invited into community.

- Under/Over Sharing. Everyone is different on how comfortable they are with sharing in front of others. Even if it is not a

personal topic, there may be those you have to directly ask to share their perspectives. There are also those who may rush to always share and dominate the conversation. Or end up sharing personally beyond the depth of the relationships can hold within the group. Be sensitive, thank the individual for sharing, and offer the opportunity to connect outside of group time to continue the conversation.

Neither over or under sharing are beneficial for a group. Having one on one conversations with individuals to either address their comfort in sharing, or inviting them to help you get others sharing by limiting their own sharing, is the best way to begin to lean into this tension. Chat with your groups lead about ways to navigate these convos.

- Fixing People. Offering empathy and support for others in a group is helpful. Trying to fix others... not so much. Setting a boundary around this from the beginning is helpful, but follow up conversations may be needed to remind participants throughout the group season. Doing this gently in the group can be effective to remind the entire group, but having a one off conversation might be preferable based on the individual's demeanor.

- Sensitive topics. There may be times when sensitive topics are brought up or shared during group. It is important to not overreact or press judgment. However, it may be necessary to thank them for sharing and see if you can follow up outside of group to give that particular conversation more space. Reaching out for help in navigating those conversations is also encouraged.

- Confidentiality. With sensitivity comes the need for confidentiality. Setting this up as an important value of your group from the beginning can be helpful. Communicating it allows the conversations later, should anything arise, be easier as you can remind those individuals of the commitment that was already made.

- Inconsistent Attendees. Getting to group every week can be tricky. Not everyone is going to make it 100% of the time. It can be distracting to some in the group if there seems to be a person who is on all of the communication but not ever there in person. Have great follow up. Check in with those who miss group assuming the best. "Is everything ok? You were missed." However, if it progresses, it may sound more like... "I don't want you to feel pressured to come, or to respond to the communications being sent, and I really want to honor those who are able to come... Would you like me to remove you from group for now?"

There are hundreds of other things and nuances of these listed that may still come up in group. Just remember that you have a whole Groups Team to lean on and reach out to for help! Support and encouragement are what groups are all about!

Help us help you!

Your coach or the leads will love to hear stories about your group. They will also appreciate responding to updates to keep the website current. There are new people visiting gatherings every week. If they are interested in joining a smaller community, it helps to know who, when and where the groups are meeting! Facilitating a group is not meant to be rigid or a lifetime commitment but be warned ahead of time, you might learn to really love and appreciate “group life” – being in community with others different than yourself. So much so it becomes more natural, important, and a realized need. Walking into Sunday gathering and seeing others from group or those you serve with feels so good. Groups here at newlife SK run on seasonal rhythms. Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer with short breaks between them. Many groups take the summer off or change to a more relaxed, once a month group and/or outreach schedule. Ideally you can commit to at least a semester or two within the calendar year. Or, utilizing others in the group to lead in different seasons to share that ownership.

Groups and relationships develop over time and are the result of prayer and intentional investment. We are all asked by Jesus to walk out our faith and that is a key component of what groups offer. Not that we are perfect, but we walk in humility and under God’s control, asking Jesus to help us grow and change from the inside out. Modeling intentional community and supporting others in their journeys are key components of groups. As we grow and multiply groups, we can continue keeping up with the demand to offer groups and provide community for all interested. Common outcomes of authentic group communities are varied and usually positive. Milestones such as people knowing and saying yes to Jesus, baptism, someone feeling comfortable enough to share from their heart, reading scripture, praying out loud, or seeing God answer prayer. You may even decide to serve in your community as a group. There are so many opportunities to live arrows out as you practice the ways of Jesus together. Every group is different because the people in the group and its dynamics are different.

Spiritual growth as the Bible says – “doing life” with one another, crying with those in pain & hurt, rejoicing with those in celebration, and encouraging one another to love and good works.

Excited for you as you journey with others into Christ centered community. May you receive all the blessings that come with following Jesus’ example in living out the Good News with others.

