

COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER GUIDE

For the week of January 16, 2022

This guide is designed to give helpful hints in preparing & leading your group in discussion.

WELCOME TO THE WINTER QUARTER OF COMMUNITY GROUPS!

This week we kick off our Winter Community Group Quarter. Your first meeting is designed to give you time to get acquainted and connect with each other, as well as time to discuss how to make your Community Group meetings great! The study questions have been shortened this week to allow ample time to accomplish all of this.

To prepare for your first meeting, take some time to focus on the questions below and be prepared to share your answers with the group. Have a great meeting as you come together to connect, encourage one another to grow and see how God might work!

GETTING READY FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING

Each week in this section you'll find the most important information for your group. Check out the **Leaders Notes** at the end of this guide for more information.

⇒ **GOALS OF THE FIRST MEETING**

- *Re-connect with existing members and meet new members*
- *Cast Vision for the Quarter with Your Group*
- *Clarify your group's direction / expectations / commitments using the Community Group Covenant found in the resource tab of the Groups page in Planning Center*
<https://groups.planningcenteronline.com/resources?=>
- *Briefly discuss the sermon topic (if there is time)*
- *Pray for the building of relationships and spiritual growth of the group*

⇒ **Items Needed for the First Meeting**

- *Community Group Covenant – Review this with your group.*
- *Name-tags for in-person groups (Print or write them out ahead of time.)*

⇒ **Contact Your Group in Advance**

- *Contact all members one week before the first meeting to welcome them to the group. You can check your roster online to see all the members of your group and their contact information.*

AGENDA FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING

Looking for more guidance on your first meeting? You can find the "First Night Agenda" on how

to make your first night great on the Leader Tools page of our website. [https://groups.planningcenteronline.com/resources?=
=](https://groups.planningcenteronline.com/resources?=)

HOW WE MEASURE OUR SUCCESS WEEK TO WEEK: Hearing from everyone at every meeting and keeping God's Word at the center.

Make sure you leave plenty of time to answer the questions in the "Looking Ahead" section and spend time going over the Community Group Covenant with your group.

- **Welcome and Dinner**
- **Group Sharing** – Discussion Note: You can transition from the "Getting to Know You" section to the "Looking Ahead" section.
- **Study Questions Discussion** (optional)
- **Go over the Community Group Covenant** – Use the last question in the Leader Guide to Study Questions below to transition into reviewing the Covenant..
- **Try to allow 45 minutes for the "Looking Ahead" section** so you have plenty of time for everyone to answer and go over the Community Group Covenant.
- **Close in prayer.**
- **Mingle afterward.**

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Discussion Note: Add these questions if you have new people in your group or a completely new group. If it hasn't come up in conversation before the meeting officially starts, have everyone in the group share how long they have been attending South Tampa Fellowship, if they have been in a Community Group before and their favorite hobby.

Discussion Tips: Remember to set time limits to ensure everyone has an opportunity to answer the questions. Possibly use the "Tag— You're It" method to ensure everyone can share. Once one person is finished sharing, they select the next person to share.

- ⇒ Tell us a little bit about yourself... *Have fun with these questions. They are good questions to have everyone answer. Have each person respond to all three, then go to the next person. Then go to the next question to see what they're look forward to in 2022.*
- What's the first career you dreamed of having as a kid?
 - If you could take a week off from your regular life to immerse yourself in learning something new, what would it be?
 - If you had to change your first name, what would you change it to?

- ⇒ No matter what we face, God is alive and well, wanting us to experience His love, grace and purpose. What are one or two things you're looking forward to in 2022? *This is an important question to have everyone answer. You may need to transition from this question to the "Looking Ahead" section to ensure you have time to hear what each person is hoping to get out of your group time and to go over the "Community Group Covenant."*
- ⇒ Looking back at your notes from this week's teaching, was there anything you heard for the first time or something that caught your attention, challenged or confused you?

DIGGING DEEPER

Discussion Note: *Because of the extra time spent re-connecting, make sure you have enough time to spend on the "Looking Ahead" section. You may not have time to cover the "Digging Deeper" section this week. If you do have time, both questions could help set up the final section.*

1. This past week, we heard, "Our biggest questions are about method; God's biggest question is about motive." How might the following passages help us understand the role of suffering in our lives and the attitude God wants us to have toward our suffering?

James 1:2-4 New International Version (NIV)

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Hebrews 5:7-8 New International Version (NIV)

7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered.

1 Peter 1:6-7 New International Version (NIV)

6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Romans 5:3-5 New International Version (NIV)

3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Based on the above passages, what is most challenging for you to accept about hardship?

2. As you read John 16:33, circle what catches your attention and will help you in challenging times in 2022.

John 16:33 (New Living Translation)

33 I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

LOOKING AHEAD

The blessing of doing Community Groups is having a front row seat seeing God is at work as you connect, care for one another and encourage each other to follow Him and live out His Word.

What are you looking forward to in your Community Group this quarter?

Important question to have everyone answer. You can transition from here into going over the Community Group Covenant or include the next subquestion.

Thinking back on this weeks sermon, how would you like to see God sustain and/or grow in you this next quarter? *Take notes on what each person says. Some options could be to make it a weekly prayer request or suggest the group makes it their prayer plan for how they can pray for each individual in the group at home. Then you can check in mid-quarter to see how everyone is doing.*

Is there anything specific you need prayer for, or is there any other focus you would like to have in order to grow this next quarter?

Transition Statement to Community Group Covenant: *“It’s great to hear what each of you has said about what you want to get out of your time in our group. One of the great benefits of being in a Community Group is the opportunity to have help from others as we seek to be strategic and intentional about our spiritual growth. The Community Group Covenant is designed to serve as intentional guidelines to help us make the most of our time together.”*

Go over the Community Group Covenant Form with your group. The Leader’s version with helps to explain is listed below.

Use this as a guide to keep your group healthy in communicating and caring for one another each week. *(The leader podcast, “EGR with Chris & Annie” will give you more details on how to do this effectively.)*

Close in prayer: *If you have anyone new in your group and you don’t know them, it is recommended to close with your host or one person praying. Next week, the Study Questions will include an introduction to praying in a group, so if you have a new group or a lot of new members, it’s suggested that you wait until week two to do any group prayer.*

Mingle with everyone after the meeting.

LEADERS GUIDE - COMMUNITY GROUP COVENANT

- *When discussing – use the proactive leadership style – clear direction, yet flexible*

Leaders _____

Ph.# _____

Hosts _____

Ph.# _____

Small groups thrive on participation! The purpose of this Covenant is to help you to discuss and clarify your group's goals, expectations, and commitments.

COMMUNITY GROUPS: THEIR PURPOSE

Community Groups exist to promote spiritual maturity and personal growth through meaningful Christian relationships and study of God's Word (Romans 8:29 & Hebrews 10:24, 25). We'll do this by focusing on four primary activities:

SHARE

Each week we'll take time to share what is happening in our lives. At first this sharing will include planned "sharing questions". But after the first few weeks, it will become more informal and personal as we feel more comfortable.

STUDY

Each week we'll study a section from God's Word that relates to the previous weekend's sermon or an appropriate personal growth topic. Our goal is to learn how to live out our Christianity in everyday life.

Our goal is to interact interpersonally on the topic and how we can practically follow Christ, not to answer all the questions.

SUPPORT

Each week we'll learn how to take care of one another as Christ commanded (John 15:9-13). This care can take many forms such as *prayer, encouragement, listening, challenging one another, and meeting real needs.*

SERVE

Spiritual Growth is fostered not only by what we gain through the support and input of others, but also through service to others. The role each of us fills is important to the health of the church and for us to be the hands and feet of Jesus to our community (Ephesians 4:11-16). Throughout the quarter, it is our hope that you can find and/or be affirmed in the ways God has designed you to serve, and make a difference in God's Kingdom.

FIVE MARKS OF A HEALTHY GROUP

For our group to be healthy, we need to...

1. **Make spiritual growth our number one priority (Romans 8:29).**
⇒ *Tangents – they are okay sometimes, but sometimes we need to be refocused. We'll need to keep spiritual growth our focus and stay on topic.*
2. **Accept one another (Romans 15:7).**
⇒ *We will have different preferences.*
3. **Take care of one another (John 13:34).**
⇒ *When crisis happens we're there to help with support, prayer, encouragement, listening, meals etc.*
4. **Treat each other with respect (Ephesians 4:25-5:2).**
⇒ *Listening to one another, if one's talking let's all listen, nothing worse than two conversations going on at*

once.

⇒ Our goal is to listen, not give advice. (Advice is given when asked for) We are not here to judge or fix – unless someone asks. An example of giving advice is by saying, “Well this is what I think you should do.” On the other hand, that doesn’t mean we can’t question what is said or what someone is doing.

⇒ Some of us have the gift of gab, also known as a dominator – be careful, I as a leader might have to help you.

⇒ Be careful of gossip prayers. For example, “we need to pray for (person’s name) because they are doing this ...”

⇒ No put-downs.

⇒ What is said here, stays here – of course we never promise confidentiality if something shared would be harmful to yourself or someone else and/or if I, as the leader, need to seek counsel on how to respond to an issue in the group.

5. Keep our commitments to the group (Psalm 15:1-2, 4b).

⇒ Please give us a call if you can’t make it to Life Group so we know what’s going on and how to pray for you.

GUIDELINES & COMMITMENT

1. **Dates** We’ll meet on _____ nights for _____ weeks. Our final meeting of this quarter will be on _____. *Fill in blanks*
2. **Time** We’ll arrive between _____ & _____ and begin the meeting at _____. We’ll spend approximately _____ minutes in singing (optional), _____ minutes in study/discussion, and _____ minutes in prayer/sharing. *Fill in blanks*
3. **Children** Group members are responsible to arrange child care for their children. Nursing newborns are welcome provided they are not a distraction to the group!
4. **Study** Our studies will focus on the same topic covered in the previous Sunday’s sermon or an appropriate personal growth topic. Our goal is to learn how to live out our Christianity in everyday life. *Not to answer every question.*
5. **Prayer** Praying for one another. *You’ll go over tips on topical prayer the second week of group. Remember - being forced to pray in group or just the idea of it can cause people to not want to come to your group. If you have new people in your group, you might want to say something like this: “It’s exciting to see how God works in our lives through prayer. We also realize prayer in groups is something many have never done. Know that you will never be forced to pray.” Let them know you’ll talk more in the weeks to come on how we do group prayer and that we break a lot of the stereotypes of what it means to pray.*

6. **Homework & Attendance** Joining a Community Group requires a commitment to *attend each week and do the homework ahead of time*. Obviously, allowances are made for sickness, vacation, work conflicts, and other special events—but not much more!

This commitment is the key to a healthy group.

If we cannot come to a meeting, we will call

⇒ *Emphasize the importance of the commitment to attendance and preparation. (A good group starts with good preparation)*

⇒ *Make sure that everyone is with you. (Do we agree? Is this what we want? Make eye contact, etc.)*

⇒ *Most weeks require 20-30 minutes of homework to prepare for the group study and discussion.*

7. **Desserts** *Sign-up sheets will be made available beginning next week for each of us to bring a snack or drink to share with the group.*

8. **Social & Service Project(s)** *Emphasize the importance of a quarterly social and service project. As a leader and host, have 2 or 3 suggestions ready and 2 or 3 potential dates. Choose a date or ask the group to bring their calendars next week. New groups are preferred to have their social by mid-quarter.*

9. **Other**