

Small Group Leadership
Module #1
Launching Your Small Group



Willowdale
CHAPEL

Loving God, Loving Others

Hello advocates for community,

Welcome to the wild world of small group leadership. Anytime you get yourself involved with people, you never know what might happen. Yet, anytime you are involved in God's purposes with people, you never know what God might do. I am thrilled that you are looking into how to get a small group going. Small groups have and continue to be an enormous source of spiritual benefit and challenge to me in my life.

I cannot begin to tell you the number of stories of how God has used small groups to change lives. More than that, often times the life most touched and transformed is the life of the small group leader. Know as you move out into this adventure, you will be prayed for by myself and others involved in the small group leadership. Yet, the greater promise is that Jesus himself, who sits at the right hand of God intercedes for you (Heb 7:25) and for those who will be a part of your group.

This booklet will provide for you some information and activities that can help you get your group started. Use this booklet to:

1. Remind and refresh yourself for God's vision for friendship and community
2. Understand what a small group does
3. Understand the role of a small group leader
4. Learn how to run an effective meeting.
5. Think through how you can go about starting a small group
6. Develop a plan to start a small group
7. Understand what a covenant is and how to use in order to guide your group
8. Acquaint yourself with being an advocate for community at Willowdale Chapel
9. Consider the stages of small group life

Jesus' Vision for Community
Bible Study from John 15:1-17

In science, we often take things apart in order to understand the pieces. Then, once we understand the pieces, we then can understand the whole. Friendship, community and devotion to Christ are all mixed up into a whole. We often look at these topics in isolation and we each have our own understanding of them that has been built by looking at each of them individually. Yet, they are part of a glorious whole and looking at them as a whole helps us to understand each of them better individually. Use this Bible Study on your own or with your group.

John 15:1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. 17 This is my command: Love each other.

1. What shows/reveals a disciple according to this passage? (verse 8)
2. How does fruit bearing occur according to this passage?
3. What are some of the interesting dynamics of being in the vine?
4. Jesus says that a disciple will reveal the Father's glory by bearing much fruit. How do these sorts of expectations shape the way you think of your relationship with God? How does it shape the way you may go about leading your small group?
5. There seems to be a cyclical dynamic where remaining in the vine requires obedience to Jesus commands. Obedience to Jesus commands means loving one another. The way we love one another is the way he has loved us. Jesus uses "remain in me" and "remain in my love" synonymously, so you could say that the only way we can love each other is to know Jesus' love. Does this seem cyclical to you? Where does it start? What does this teach us about community and our relationship with God?
6. In verses 14 and 15, Jesus discusses with his disciples what friendship with him looks like. Could small group involvement and leadership involve you in "Jesus' business" to the point where we find a growing friendship with him? How would that happen?

Steps to Launching a Group

MEET

- Meet with a pastor or coach to learn about small groups and to hear first hand how small groups at Willowdale Chapel work

ORIENT

- Work through Small Group Leadership Module #1
- Work through Online interactive small group training
http://smallgroups.com/articles/1066/1/eTraining_Starting_a_New_Small_Group

STRATEGIZE

- Meet with pastor or coach to strategize how to build your small group

GATHER

- Begin contacting people and gathering people to be a part of your group

GO!

- Start meeting with your group
- Keep in touch with your coach for encouragement, prayer and resources.

What are Small Groups? What do Small Group Leaders do?

Small groups are the unique place within the church where people can grow their faith while growing their friendships. It is a place for people to team up in order to care for one another and to serve and engage the world. Small Group Leaders create a community that fosters an environment for this to happen. Small group leaders take the initiative to see that the four measures of health (below) are occurring with their group. Small Group Leaders help a group develop their own personality and to function out of their strengths.

Small Group Leader models and leads the group in:	<i>During Meetings</i>	<i>Between Meetings</i>
Loving God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a place where Biblical truth meets life • Raise the value of each individual's personal relationship with Christ • Create an environment where the group relates to God from the posture of worshipper. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make connections at Sunday morning worship • Take other opportunities to build the group's relationship with God
Loving Each Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build community, intimacy and authentic relationship in the group. • Plan and prepare for strategic serving opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shepherd members and identify and invest in new leaders. • Equip members for life
Loving the World Jesus Sends us to Serve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the experience of followers of Christ and pursue those who are with and do so with it • Integrate mission on a regular basis - points the group to meet needs beyond their own • Create opportunities for new leaders to try leading and learn to be a small group leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model engagement with the world. Ask about it with those in the group • Serve others outside your group • Identify new leaders who can be launched from your small group to start other new groups
Finding and fulfilling their unique contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figure out and execute the particular calling that only your group can fulfill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with a coach and others to discern the capacity of the group and the opportunities that it may have to serve God • Understand your own unique best contribution as a leader

How to have a Great Meeting
(from pp. 96-100 *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*)

Desired Outcome

- a) I want my group members to KNOW...

- b) I want my group members to FEEL...

- c) I want my group members to DO...

- d) I want my group members to PLAN...

- e) What is the narrative tension of your meeting? (see page 8)

Agenda:

Start	Finish	Item	Who

Death By Small Group Meeting? Creating Narrative Tension

I. Create Drama

“...imagine if I were to ask a room full of executives which they enjoy more: meetings or movies? They would probably think I was joking. And yet, meetings should be more interesting than movies because they have more inherent potential for passion and engagement than movies do. ...And so, how is it that we can enjoy one activity that is inherently passive and irrelevant, and loathe another that is interactive and relevant? Because screenwriters and directors have figured out long ago that if you avoid nurturing conflict in your story, no one will want to watch your movie. And they also figured out that it is during the first ten minutes that they must use drama to hook their viewers, so that they are willing to stay engaged for another two hours.”¹

What are the sources of drama in the life of a Small Group Meeting?

How can conflict be a resource to draw the interest in a group?

Narrative tension is what keeps the reader reading, because they're wondering what's going to happen next. We up the urgency in our meetings by giving careful thought to the narrative tension we feel. As leaders you set the tension on the front end by creating expectations in those who attend the small group. This could look like:

- By the time we leave tonight, we want God to meet us and to show us _____ (this aspect) about himself. We want to respond to him in a way that honors him and edifies one another.
- Jenny has a need. As the folks in her small group, we are the first ones who ought to be on the scene to care for her. We need to take the time we need tonight to figure how God would want to us to care for her.
- Tonight, we are going to spend extra time praying. We need to spend enough time and give it enough attention so that each of us leaves here knowing that we met with God personally tonight.
- By way of reminder. We are studying Ephesians because it particularly speaks to us as members of community. God calls each of us to be a part of community and we want to take that seriously. I expect each of us will come away tonight having learned something significant that will affect the way we relate with each other.
- Have you ever experienced joy the way the Bible teaches us about joy? Do you believe you can?

¹ Patrick Lencioni, *Death By Meeting*, p. 227-228

Death By Small Group Meeting? Different Types of Meetings

2. Different Types of Meetings

“The single biggest structural problem facing leaders of meetings is the tendency to throw every type of issue that needs to be discussed into the same meeting, like a bad stew with too many random ingredients. Desperate to minimize wasted time, leaders decide that they will have one big meeting, either once a week or every other week. They sit down in a room for two to three hours and hash *everything* out. Unfortunately, this only ensures that the meeting will be ineffective and unsatisfying for everyone.”²

A. Is it possible to burden a weekly or bimonthly small group meeting with too much agenda?

B. What other possibilities are there out there for ways we can build our small groups through different types of meetings?

Different Types:

- **Classic Small Group**—A well executed Bible study with thoughtful guidance given towards personal prayer requests and prayer time. Administrative things are discussed with reminders about the vision of the group without it becoming unwieldy
- **The Fellowship Night**—This can be dinner, dessert, games, etc. The goal of this evening is to build community and friendship in a more casual setting. For some groups, *getting out of Dodge* is the best course of action, either going out to dinner, to an event or a beach house, etc.
- **The Night of Prayer**—This is an evening that helps the group grow their involvement in prayer. A guide from the group sets up a schedule that has the group praying together for much of the evening. Well-chosen places for briefly sharing prayer requests, etc. This could be a gathering to particularly pray for one particular topic, event, etc. or for the needs of a community. This night needs narrative tension also. This needs a compelling vision greater than the outbreak of influenza among the children of the group.
- **Gender nights**—Men meet on an evening after kids go to bed to hang out in front of a ball game or just to talk and pray with each other. Women get together during an evening or a Saturday morning breakfast to build their friendship and to pray for each other.
- **Outreach Night**—Share with each other two-three friends who do not know Christ and pray for them. Plan an outreach together that will give those friends an opportunity to meet some of the members of the group.
- **Service events**—Portions of the group gather to help each other or the community with various service projects and special needs.
- **One on ones**—Lunch and coffee between different group members to build friendship and collaborate.

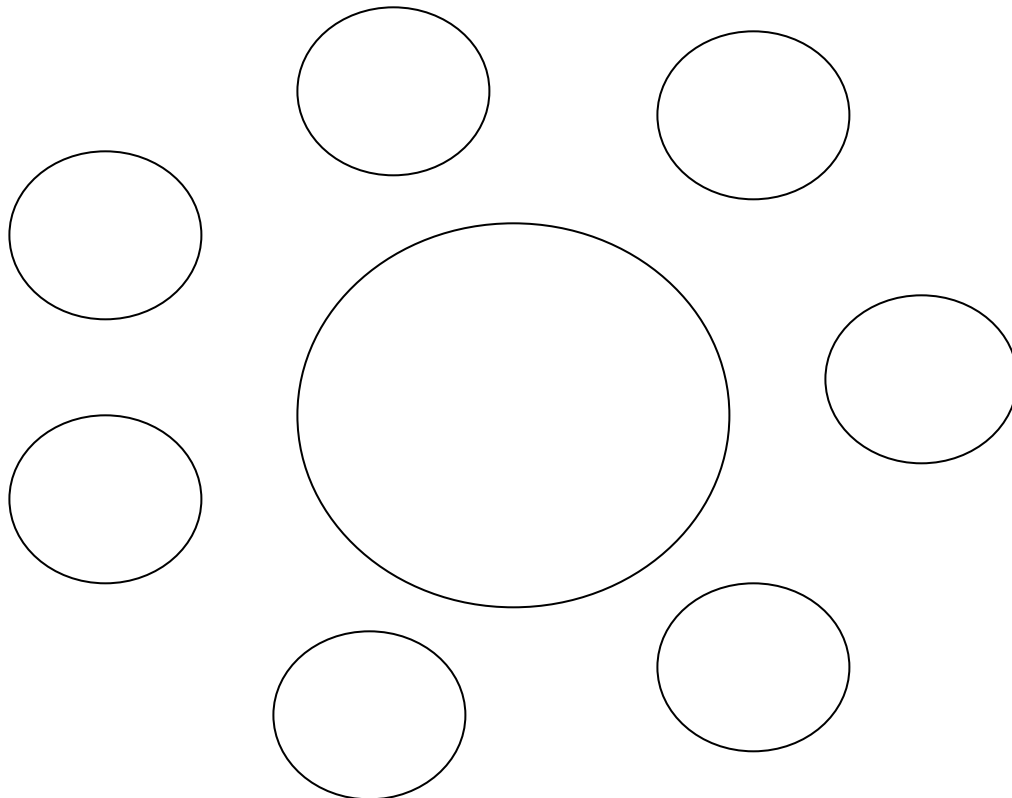
² Lencioni, p. 235

How do we get a group going?

Part of the power of community rests in the difference between **Linear** versus **Circular** relationships. A linear relationship is dependent upon the connection, harmony and mutuality of two people. To meet the needs of someone in a linear relationship require intense attention, effort, and availability. Circular relationship divides the attention, effort and availability throughout a group. Within a broader set of relationships a person has more giftedness, diversity and availability at their disposal. Circular relationships also take pressure off of closer friendships that are more linear in nature.

As you move to get your group started, you want to stop and consider the different circles or relationships in your life. Use the picture below to represent the different circles of relationships that you live in. For example, you probably have friends in your neighborhood, your workplace, at church or through one of your hobbies. Quite often the fastest way to start a group is to find a circle deep enough to form or deepen an already existing circle of relationships through a small group.

- 1) Write in the circles below the different circles of relationship that you are a part of.
- 2) List the names of people within those circles that you would like to spend some time with.
- 3) Try to find a bunch a circle of people that are already a community and plan on inviting them to your group.



Ten practical tips for gathering people into small groups

- 1) Invite people to come together once to discuss the idea. Don't try to pull people into the group based upon your own merits.
- 2) Ask for a higher level of commitment initially. Higher commitment breeds deeper community. If you need to, you can always back off. However, it can be difficult to speed up when you start slow.
- 3) Go for a short-term commitment. Some groups should only run six weeks.
- 4) Don't do it alone. Your first concern is lining up a co-leader to share the responsibilities.
- 5) Pay great attention to the concerns of the place where you meet. It really matters.
- 6) Be very clear on your plan and communicate it clearly. Invite involvement in the shaping of the vision. But only invite involvement where you want involvement.
- 7) Pray and share prayer requests within smaller groups of 3-5.
- 8) Do icebreakers with your group, even when you think they are geeky.
- 9) Sit next to overly talkative members.
- 10) Never stop challenging your group.

Resources for starting a small group

- www.smallgroups.com
- www.smallgroupsfriends.com
- *Leading Life Changing Small Groups* by Bill Donahue
- *Better Together: What on Earth are We Here For*, book and DVD by Rick Warren and 40 Days of Community
- *Connecting in Christ*, six week dvd series by Life Together
- *Making Room for Life*, by Randy Frazee
- *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoefer
- *Groups: The Life-giving Power of Community*, Ortberg, Pederson, Poling. Available at www.willowcreek.com. For more mature groups

What is your plan?

Starting a group can be as simple as picking up a phone. However, for some of us, we dread this. This worksheet can help you put together your plan for your new group. Here you want to write out your dream for the group. If your group was awesome, what would it be like—what would make it awesome? Tell the people you invite about this. Let them hear your enthusiasm and if they don't share your dream, it is ok if they do not come.

It is best to not try and make a regular weekly schedule with your first contact. Try inviting people to a simple meal or desert. At that desert, you invite them to share about their experience in community and you can share your dream for the group. It is at this meeting where the most important deciding factor of whether they will join the group will happen—they will meet each other.

What is your dream for this group?

When will you have your vision meeting?

Who will be praying for you?

Who will help coach you through this?

Who will I invite?	How will I invite them?	When will I invite them?
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		

Group Covenant

Date _____

1) The purpose of our group is

2) We will meet _____
from _____ to _____
at _____. We will arrive on time so we can end on time.

4) We agree to the following disciplines as a group:

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| Attendance | To give priority to the group meeting and call when absent or late |
| Safety | To help create a safe place where people can be heard (no quick answers or judgments) |
| Confidentiality | To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential |
| Accountability | To give permission to group members to hold you accountable to goals you set for yourself |
| Invitation | To keep the door of the group open to others (unconnected and unchurched people) who need what we have |
| Multiplication | As we grow as a group, we will seek to help start new groups that may continue to fulfill the purpose of our group. |
| Responsibility | To share in the roles and responsibilities fo this Small Group |

5) We will work together to have a great group. The following people will coordinate the various aspects of our group.

Hospitality _____

Discussions leadership _____

Prayer _____

We will review and revise this covenant periodically or when appropriate

Group Signatures

Being an Advocate for community and small groups Newcomer Follow-up

As a small group leader, we ask you to be an advocate for community at Willowdale Chapel. We have a lot of people who come through our doors and are asking the question, “Will I make friends here?” For this reason, we want people like you follow up on those who are new. Our desire is to help them take their first few steps in connecting here. You may find that they would be a perfect fit for your group. If not, we ask that you let them know what groups may be available near them.

When people fill out a Welcome Card at Willowdale, they are letting themselves be known and giving us permission to be part of their lives. That’s a great privilege and responsibility that we want to handle wisely. Too little follow-up and our welcome will seem insincere. Too much follow-up and we’ll seem pushy and aggressive.

So our basic approach is to give prompt, measured attention to our visitors:

- A follow-up letter goes out from our office within 2 days.
- A follow-up call is made within 7-10 days.

The call is strategic because it is one of our first person-to-person contacts with a newcomer. Newcomers are highly sensitive to whether people are “real,” welcoming, and helpful. By loving and serving them well, we can open a door to a lasting relationship with our church. And Small Group Leaders are especially key to this process because they live nearby; they can provide a next step to involvement by helping newcomers access a small group; and they are “normal people”—not pastors or employees who might be suspected of having another agenda.

As you make these calls think about how you would comport yourself with a new neighbor. You would be easy-going and friendly, not pushy or “sales-y.” On first contact, you would want to make a person feel welcome to the neighborhood, and create the possibility of an ongoing relationship. That’s exactly what we’re trying to achieve with these calls.

Consider taking this approach:

1. Introduce yourself as casually and disarmingly as possible:

“Hi, Betty, I’m Jane Doe, a member of Willowdale Chapel. I just wanted to give you a call because you visited our church last Sunday and filled out a Welcome Card. How did it go? Was that your first time?”

...This sets a conversational tone and gives the person a chance to talk.

2. Continue the conversation:

“Well I just wanted to touch base because I know it can be tough going to a new church and not knowing how it all works. So if there’s anything I can do to help out, I’d be happy to. Do you have any questions about anything?”

...Answer as best you can; if you have to get back to them on something, do so.

3. If their Welcome Card contains any specific questions or checked boxes, address them:

“One thing you marked on your card was that you might like to make Willowdale your church. There are definitely some ways to do that...do you know about the Welcome Lunch and the Belong Class?”

...Tell them about it. You could also casually mention the regional small groups and how you would be happy to have them visit yours just to meet some people.

4. Close by offering something tangible. Offer to meet at the Welcome Center after a worship service. Or offer your phone number:

“Hey, I’ll let you go—but why don’t I give you my phone number just in case any questions come up?...It’s 610.555.5555, and that’s Jane Doe. Seriously, feel free to call me, okay? Great. Hope to meet you soon.”

And/or: “Hey, maybe we could touch base on Sunday. I’d love to meet you face-to-face...at least then you’ll know one person!...which service do you attend? Would you want to meet me at the Welcome Center right after?”

Additional Matters

- Try to have a bulletin handy when you make the call, for quick access to information such as times, dates, and contact persons for various ministries.
- Make your calls in the evening, when you have the best chance of connecting with a person.
- If you get an answering machine do the following:
 1. Leave a message:

“Hi, Betty, this is Jane Doe calling. I’m a member of Willowdale Chapel and I was just calling to touch base because you visited us last Sunday and filled out a Welcome Card. It was so good to have you! I hope it all went well; I know it’s sometimes hard to walk into a new church. I just wanted to say “hello” and “welcome” and see if I could answer any questions or help you out in any way. I’ll leave you my phone number so can call back if you want. I’d love to chat. My number is 610.555.5555.”
 2. Write an email:

Assuming you have their address, follow-up your phone call with a brief email saying the same thing. Some people might prefer the slightly more anonymous option of communicating in writing.
- Always follow-up with Jan Codichini: jcodichini@willowdalechapel.org. Let her know what you’ve done—called, emailed, arranged a meeting, etc. And if your contact needs any additional help beyond what you’ve given, please let Jan know so she can help provide it.

Key Questions to discuss with your coach or pastor

1. What helped you in the packet?
2. What questions do you have regarding the responsibilities of a small group leader and the role of small groups within Willowdale Chapel?
3. What do you think will come easy to you as a small group leader? What will be more challenging?
4. How do you plan to get your small group going? How can we work together?
5. Who do you think that you can draw in early to begin sharing the leadership of your group? Is there someone you could foresee launching their own group soon?