

How to use this book:

This book is free of complicated language and religious clichés. It will help you address a lot of areas of your life and not just the stuff that seems religious. It will offer you great encouragement, but in the end this book leaves the success of your group up to you and the Holy Spirit.

It's pretty simple. There are four little chapters that get you oriented to what happens in small groups. The chapters tell you how to start, what you "do" in a small group; how to make progress in your life; how to keep your group on track. After these chapters you'll find a thick section of resources to help you succeed. Whether you're just starting or have been meeting for a long time, you'll find material to help you.

God desires to bring you and your friends into a place where you face your fears and your sins, and take concrete steps to move forward in your life. Jesus Christ is alive and at work through the Holy Spirit. May he work through you and the friends that come alongside you!

**“Bring
as much as you know of
yourself to
as much as you know of
God”**

Welcome to the University Ministries small group resource. We are committed to forming small groups that honor God and build up our Christian community! There are many resources out there, and many ways to do small groups well. Based on a lot of reading and conversations with SMCs, Sharpen leaders, and other SPU students, these are our ideas.

Authenticity, passion, encouragement, and intentionality are what you long for. What you don't want is to share your deepest secrets with people you just met, to always smile and say you're fine, to feel like your small group is made up of superficiality, obligation, and parole officers asking if you screwed up.

Developmentally, the things you need to work on most are discovering your identity and core values, and making decisions that align with those values.

God acts in small groups the same way he acts everywhere else.

He puts us into his big story - the creation of a people that will love him and love others as passionately as God himself loves. And he puts himself in our small stories as individuals: he calls us to give up our junk, gives us purpose, heals the injuries of our hearts, offers forgiveness, and gives us power. Jesus Christ is the center of God's work. Jesus showed us what God is really like, and showed us what it means for humans to really follow God.

We believe Jesus is still alive and doing ministry in the world. HE'S NOT SITTING ON A SOFA IN HEAVEN.

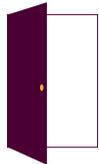
Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is doing the same things now that he did when he was on earth. In your small group you can experience Jesus doing these things. He will do them through you.

THIS MEANS THAT YOUR SMALL GROUP CAN HELP YOU **find out what's really going on in your small story as an individual so you can take part in God's BIG STORY of loving the world.**

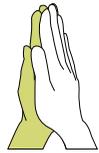
Bring as much as you know about yourself to as much as you know about God.

Here are
some
“steps”
for small groups

Small groups (like all relationships) don't usually progress in a nice, neat step-by-step fashion, but you can steer them in the right direction. So hold on loosely to this sequence. Feel free to take from whichever “step” seems most helpful to you where you are:



Open Door: This is a time for you to think what a fruitful small group would look like for you, and talk that through with other people. No commitment, no pressure.



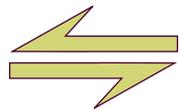
The Big Now: You've decided to give the group thing a shot with some other people. Here's where you do the fun but tough work of figuring out your story: Who are you now? Who has God made you to be?



Align: You're finding more focus about who you really are. Do your actions match up with your values? Here's where you align your life with your identity.



Need: What do you need to move forward? Who and what will help you?



Backwards and Forwards: Your group needs to pause every so often and decide if this thing is working. Look backwards and look forwards. It's okay to “open the door” again here.



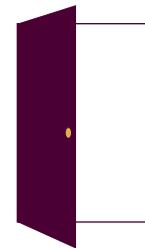
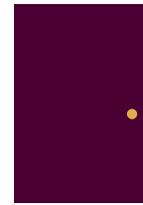
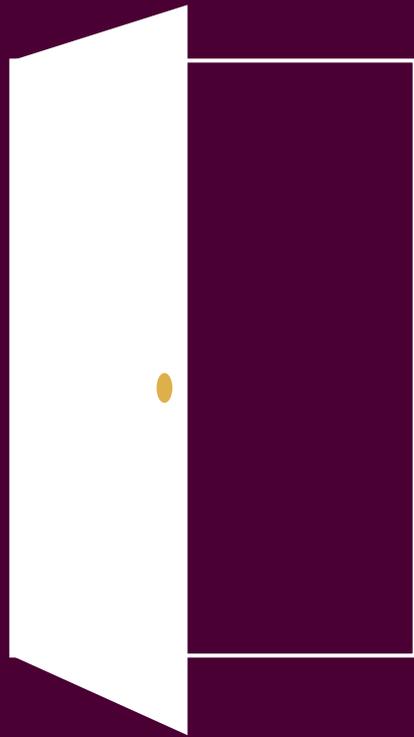
Resources: What you need to know about small groups.

This is only a resource, and only one way we want to support you!

At the back of this booklet you'll find a bunch of resources that we hope are a help to you!

We also form groups and coach groups to succeed, and train students to coach each other. Contact our ministries for help!
(um@spu.edu and sharpen@spu.edu)

God bless your journey!



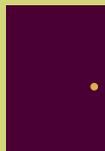
open door

A group of girls realizes they are hanging out quite often. They want to be more intentional about their relationships, but they aren't sure what that looks like.

Another group of guys doesn't know each other well, but they've decided to meet one morning a week. When they get together, their conversation remains on the surface level.

There are awkward times of trying to be intimate but no one really bites the hook. Both groups of students are hanging out in the Open Door. Shallow conversations are okay here. Asking questions is okay here. Clarifying expectations is essential here.

**WHY ARE YOU LOOKING INTO A SMALL GROUP IN THE FIRST PLACE?
WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR IN A SMALL GROUP?**



Here's the tricky balance:

DON'T FORCE THE OPEN DOOR CLOSED TOO SOON.

People get nervous and feel trapped. They feel they've gotten involved in something they weren't ready for. At the same time, don't leave it open forever. People need the security of an established friendship.

How do you know when? Talk about it; pray through it; and go for it. There are no easy rules to this stuff—it's a spiritual thing. The questions below will help you discern when to close the door.

ALSO REMEMBER THAT IT'S OKAY TO OPEN A DOOR THAT HAS BEEN SHUT.

An open door is a chance to opt out. Relationships change as seasons change. Small groups are not life-long commitments like marriage! Allowing a door to open allows relationships to change identity and nature. See more on this in the last section, "Backwards and Forwards". You'll learn how to decide when it's time to open a door again.

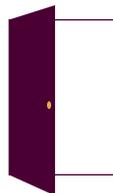


As you consider forming a small group, ask yourself the following questions. Then pick some of them and talk them through with some people you might like to form a group with. Don't be intimidated. Nobody else knows any more than you.

- What do you want from your friendships?
- What do you want from friends in a small group?
- How might small group friends be different than "social friends"?
- Do you believe in these people?
- Do you want to see them succeed in life and faith?
- Do you want them around you to help you succeed?
- Would you like to talk about something private with these people?
- Would you like to have some assurance that they won't repeat it?
- Would you be willing to give authority to relationships with these people?

In a small group, no one has authority over one another, but the relationship you have enables you to speak truth into each other's lives.

- Are you drawn to these people spiritually?
- Do you sense that God is shining through them in a way that you can learn from?
- What makes you nervous about joining a small group?
- How could these people help ease that anxiety?



How do I find a small group?

THERE ARE TWO GREAT WAYS:

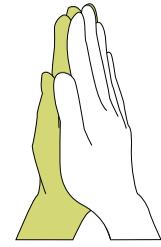
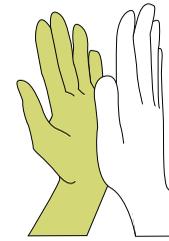
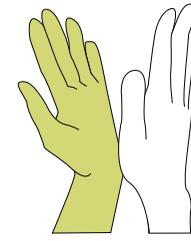
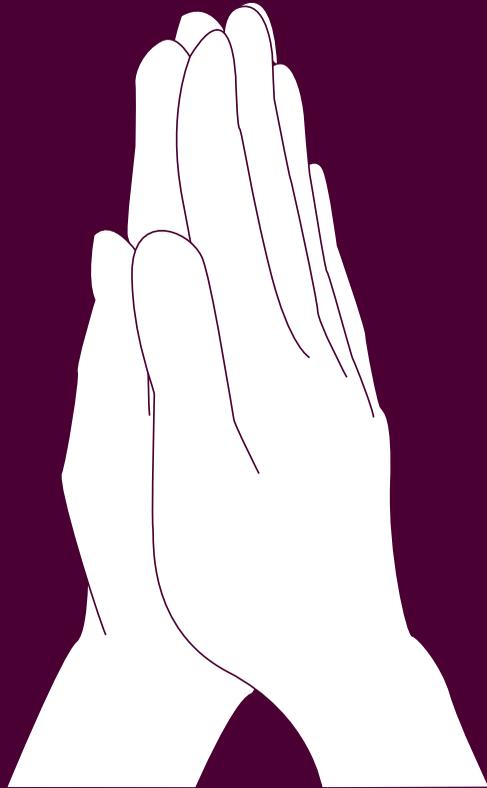
Who do you know? Consider how you naturally connect with people – sports, class, movies. Aren't these already small groups in some way? Why not broaden your friendships to include your faith?

1

Contact the SPU Ministries devoted to discipleship. If you're a resident, contact your SM

2





the BIG now

Once you've found people and formed a group, you're ready to engage the Big Now.

(We're assuming you've agreed to meet and have worked out a time and a place!) If you've ever wondered what you "do" in a small group, this is it!

You help each other figure out who God has made you to be, and you help each other do what he wants you to do.

This is both harder and more fun than you think! Your small group can help you discover who you are and what God is doing in your life. They also can encourage you to cut off the things in your life that are killing you—the things you do that are alien to your true identity. They will help you hear God tell you how you are to use your gifts and how your small story will fit into God's big story.

The big question for the Big Now:

Do I really know who I am?



Example:

Jon grew up in a great church that nurtured his faith. He didn't realize it then, but all the people had similar clothes, cars, and beliefs. In college he's got new friends, but they look different. Also, their beliefs sound generally similar, but every so often he hears something that makes him think "wait a minute!"

With his parents and his old church not as available, John's not sure he knows who he is anymore. John's small group can journey with him through the process, help him clarify his essential convictions, and experience the power of the Holy Spirit to bring different people together.

As a Junior, Caitlin still feels overwhelmed. She's good at scheduling, but there's still not enough time for classes, homework, activities, volunteering, her job, chapel, and family.

All these things are great, but Caitlin can't do them all. Her small group can ask the tough questions about her priorities, and help Caitlin clarify which activities line up most closely to her core identity.

Brett is asked by a friend to play guitar for his hall worship. "Awesome!" Says Brett, and he does a great job. Then another friend invites him to go to a party at the UW. He gets drunk and hooks up with a girl. "Awesome!" says Brett.

Brett hasn't clarified who he is. He's a different person depending on what group he's with. Small groups can help him clarify his values and align his actions with them (not judge him as a hypocrite!).



So, how can your small group help you figure out who God is making you to be right now, at this moment?

You must really listen to each other **1**

Ever been in the middle of a conversation when the person you're talking to suddenly picks up their cell phone? We constantly stop short of saying what we really feel because we don't believe people will really listen. Imagine someone listening to you talk about your life for thirty minutes, without interrupting or looking bored. You and your small group can give this gift to one another.

You must ask great questions **2**

If you want to see an example of someone asking good questions, look at the Rabbi Jesus. He rarely answered people directly. If someone asked a question, he'd ask another one right back (Mt. 12:9-12; Mt. 19:16-18). Think of questions not simply as a means of keeping a conversation going, but as tools to help you and your small group discover what's really happening in your lives and your souls.

Together with prayer and Bible study, these are the things that people do in great small groups. Check out the *Two Essential Skills: Listening and Asking Great Questions* in the Resources section.



Some big questions for “The Big Now”:

What are your core values?

What motivates you?

How did your family shape you?

What does God reveal to you when you read the Bible?

How has God wired your personality?

What are your greatest gifts?

What virtues do you rejoice in practicing?

What sins hold you back from fuller love for God?

What's your personality type?

What are your dreams for the future?

(for more questions and exercises, see the Resources section)



Two things to remember as you engage “The Big Now”:

First, don't rush intimacy with your group. Give it time to build and grow. When you ask questions, consider the trust level of your group. A lot of questions in the Resources don't require ultimate vulnerability. Don't force it, but follow the Holy Spirit's lead as he grows your relationships.

Second, the Big Now is not something that can ever be nailed down and finished. You never stop figuring out who you are. This is often a frustration for college students. You want to know exactly who you are and exactly what you will do for the rest of your life, and you want to know right now! In reality, every day is the Big Now. Every day God breathes new life into us, and has a new place for us in his story. Successful groups will always return to the “Big Now” to discover more things about their lives.

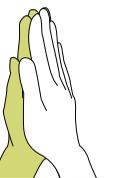


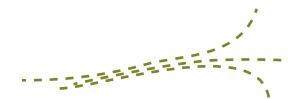
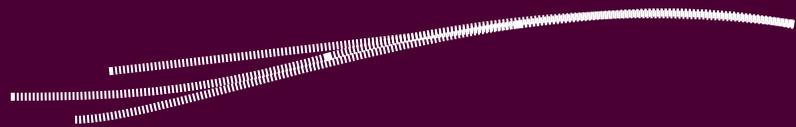
How much does it cost?

Being a part of a group will cost something – mostly your time.

But consider the cost of *not* discovering your identity and your priorities.

Many in our culture are plagued by disappointment and frustration because they don't know who they are, and they don't know their place in God's story. Your group can help each other avoid these pitfalls.





align

By working through some questions in the Big Now, you've sharpened your vision of who God is making you to be. Your small group has helped you discern the gifts God has given you, the core values you want to live by, the type of person you want to be.



Now the question becomes, **Do my actions line up with my identity?** Chances are your life is a little inconsistent (or more than a little?).

Your group can encourage and praise you for what you are doing well. They also can encourage you to cut off the things in your life that are killing you—the things you do that are alien to your true identity. They will help you hear God tell you how you are to use your gifts and how your small story will fit into God's big story.

Align is the bridge to get you where you need to be. This is the time when you set goals—not the overwhelming goal of Olympic dreams, but real goals that you can test. These could be in areas of schoolwork, faith, behavior, relationships, feelings, overall health, etc.

Example:

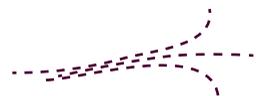
Stephen has realized, again, that he is bitter towards his parents for getting divorced in high school. Stephen senses God's call to forgive them and he wants to forgive them, but he isn't sure how. He feels it deeply and knows that it needs to happen but he is stuck.

Feeling is not enough. Once Stephen realizes this about himself he has to develop a plan to get to the place of forgiveness. **He has to figure out what thoughts need to be present before he can honestly forgive.** Does he need to meditate on certain Scriptures? Ask for people to pray for him? Possibly see a counselor? He has to figure out what he should say, when he can say it, how soon he can share that. The point is to gradually—but deliberately—move forward.



1 As you set a goal, let your small group in on what you're doing and why. Talk specifically about what you are going to do and when you will do it. Be ruthless about narrowing down the core reason behind why you want to achieve this goal. This will help you further clarify your identity and values.

2 Don't let fear become an issue. Be confident! Not in yourself, but in the place God has set you. God has you here for a reason. The people around you, journeying with you, are there to help. Use them to move forward!



More help for setting goals are in the resource section of this book. Here are a few questions to get you started.

- Where do I want to go in life?
 - In faith?
 - In relationships?
 - In education?
 - In service?
- How can I get there?
- How committed am I?
- What obstacles am I facing?
- How can I measure my progress?
 - Have I tried this before?
 - Was I successful?
 - Why or why not?
- Where is God in this situation?
 - How is God leading me?
 - Why do I want to do this?
 - What am I willing to give up?
 - Is it worth the sacrifice?
- How will this affect my health?
 - Relationships?
 - Education?
- How can my group pray for me?



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need

After creating the plan, you are going to need some stuff to get you to where you are going. Let's face it: you can't get there alone. Growing and transforming as a member of God's story requires that you step out of yourself and allow God to transform you. Maybe you need time, maybe prayer. The simple reality is realizing

YOU ARE GOING TO NEED SOMETHING TO HELP YOU MAKE THE MOVE FROM POINT A TO POINT B.

So what could you need? Finances? Time? Resources? Talk about these things, **GET IDEAS FROM THOSE WHO MIGHT KNOW.**

Keep in mind that God has wired and shaped you to be a resource to yourself, and you are also a resource for others. Speak up if you think you can help, or point people towards places that would help.

Example:

Laura feels she's ready. She realized that God has given her a passion for those in need and she has set out her plan to serve soup at a soup kitchen next Thursday. Done deal? No!

She still needs the details!

Which soup kitchen is she going to? Do they have feeding hours on Thursday night? What about her background check and volunteer application? Not to mention she doesn't have a car and will need to find a ride.

When you set goals, it is easy to dream about them. The reality is that it takes a lot to get where you are going. Be as deliberate as you can about figuring out how to

ACCOMPLISH YOUR GOAL



Questions :

What do I need to get to where I want to go?

What could help me along the way?

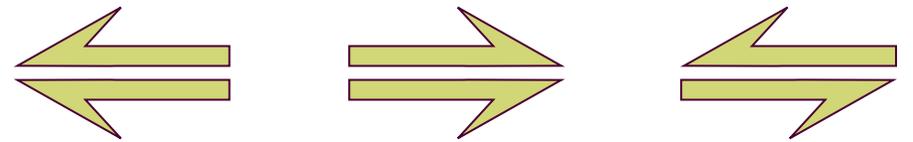
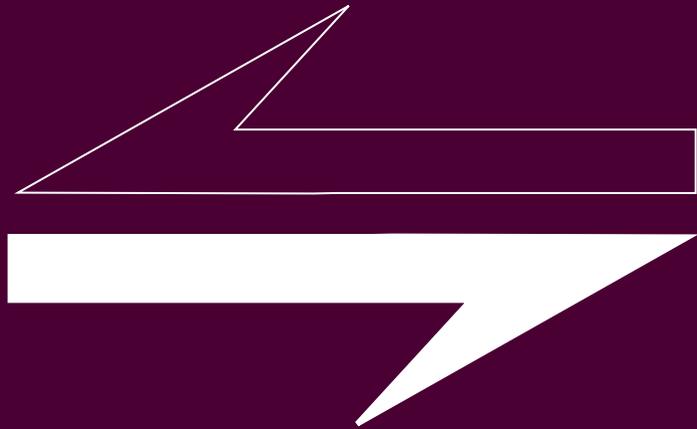
What do I already have?

What am I missing?

How can my group support me?

What experiences have I gone through that will help me where I am?





backward & forwards

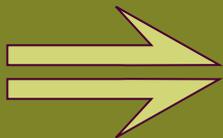
AT SOME POINT THE GROUP WILL NEED TO LOOK BACK
AT WHERE YOU'VE BEEN AND WHERE YOU WANT TO GO.

Should the group keep going or is it time to move on?

EXAMPLE:

A group of off-campus guys has been meeting Fall and Winter quarters. The upcoming Spring Quarter, they will have far different class schedules and finding a time to meet will be extremely difficult—especially since they're not on campus. Some in the group are also feeling that things have been kind of dry recently. Is this a good time to move on? Or should they persevere and work through the issues?

We can't answer this question for you! But here are some questions to help you focus your prayers and conversations. There are more questions in the Resource section at the end of this booklet.



Since you have been together...

Is this group working for people?

What surprised you about being together?

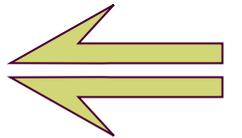
Are there some things you want to change?

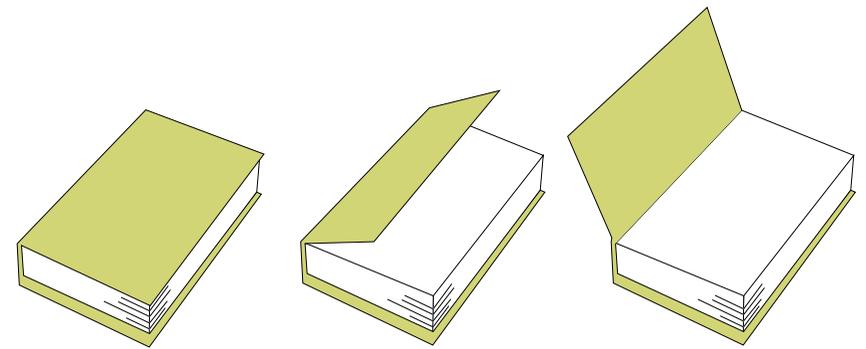
What's happening with the logistics?

What will it take for your group to meet consistently?

What areas of your life have you not explored?

What new stuff does the group want to work on?





resources

How to Listen WELL:

FOCUS: Give undivided attention to the person who is talking, without allowing your mind to drift off toward what you'd like to say next or to the concerns in your own life. Try to gently silence the chatter in your own mind and focus on the other person.

MIRROR: At appropriate points, reflect back what you hear the person saying. Don't interpret, evaluate, project your own responses, or talk about yourself. It is not helpful to say things like, "Oh! That happened to me last year, blah blah blah..." Just make sure you are hearing what they want to say.

INVITE: When a person talks a bit about something and then stops, invite them to share more. Often people will stop short of really talking about something because they don't think the person is still listening.

CLARIFY: If you think you don't understand something, you probably don't! Ask the person to describe it a different way.

LISTEN FOR THE SPIRIT: Trust that the Holy Spirit is already at work in the person you are talking to. Listen for cues that God might be prompting a person. Be careful that you don't import your own ideas of what you think God wants them to do!

How to ask Great QUESTIONS:

ASK APPROPRIATE QUESTIONS—consider the depth of commitment and trust within your group. Don't push people beyond what they are comfortable to share. If the group seems to remain at the surface level, ask specific questions that allow a member to open up if they are ready.

ASK FOCUSED QUESTIONS—that get to the heart of the issue being explored.

ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS—that elicit discussion. Questions that simply fill in the blank, or can be answered by yes' or no' will not lead anywhere.

ASK INCLUSIVE QUESTIONS—that give everyone in the group the opportunity to speak and contribute.

ASK CLARIFYING QUESTIONS—that give people the opportunity to restate what they've said so that others might grasp more fully their intent; or that encourage members to explain why they think what they do, or what brought them to that conclusion.

Studying the Bible

Okay, it's ridiculous to try to tell you how to study the Bible as one page of this resource, but the tips below are solid. These are tips on inductive Bible study. The main goal here is to slow down and listen to the word of God by doing three steps: observing the text, asking questions of the text, and applying the text. We are confident that if you do this God will indeed speak through Scripture to tell you who you are and what you are to do.

Observe:

Look for, mark and list the following in the text:

Repetitions	Comparison/Contrast
Numbers	People: <i>main characters, minor character</i>
Environment	<i>commands</i>
Cause and Effect	Themes
Audience	Introductory Guiding Thoughts
Places	Therefore and since
Conclusions	Moods
Climax	Time
Metaphors	Verb Tense
Parallels	Nouns

Ask Questions:

- What did the author intend to communicate to readers?
- What's the main point of the passage?
- Why is this here?

Application:

Studying the Bible is not just informational. It is meant to be transformational.

Ask:

- Do you sense God is working in your life?
- Are you experiencing what any characters are living out?
- Is there a promise, command or example to follow or avoid?
- Have you experienced deeper insight into God?
- What action will you take in response to what God is saying to you?



Exercises:

These exercises are designed to work with “The Big Now” and “Align”. Many people go through life unaware of why they do what they do. They miss out on the direction of the Holy Spirit. These exercises help you discover how the Holy Spirit is molding you as a unique person to participate in God’s mission to the world.

Exercise One: FAITH JOURNEY

Invite your group members to write out or talk about their faith journeys. Respond to these questions: How did you come to faith? Would you currently describe yourself as a believer, seeker, skeptic, or all of the above? Who are the important people in your faith development? What were significant events in your faith journey? What role did your family play in your faith? What crises in life or in belief have you faced? How is God blessing you at this point in your life? What questions do you have?

Exercise Two: THE STUFF WE CARRY

Talk about how you have experienced the things below. Talking through them will help you discover why you’re passionate about certain things and why you are anxious about others. From here you can think about where the Holy Spirit is directing you in your future:

MONEY: Was your family secure financially? Source of stress in your home?

HEALTH: Have you been healthy or have you struggled with sickness?

FAMILY: How would you describe your relationship with your parents, siblings, extended relatives? How does your family background impact your decisions?

CHURCH: Did your family go regularly? What kind of church? Do you attend now?

HIGH SCHOOL: What were some of the ups and downs of high school for you?

DATING: Does this bring up hope or anxiety for you? Good, bad experiences?

FUN/RECREATION: What do you do for fun? Why?

MAJOR: What sorts of questions does the choice of major bring up for you?

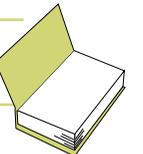
OBSTACLES: What have you learned from the challenges in your life?

Exercise Three: THE SEVEN HOLY VIRTUES & SEVEN DEADLY SINS.

This is an ancient list of the seven holy virtues which, if practiced, can help guard us from the seven deadly sins. Some virtues will come easy for us; others will be more difficult. Similarly, we are not all tempted by the same sins. Small groups can rejoice with one another when members exhibit virtues, and at the same time help one another combat vices. Remember that it takes time to incorporate virtues and find victory over sin! **See also Proverbs 6:16-19; Galatians 5:22-26; 2 Cor. 6:6-10; Php 4:8-9; Col 3:12-15.**

How would your life look different if you aimed for these virtues?
Which sins continue to crop up in your life? Why?
How can your group encourage you?

VIRTUE	SIN
HUMILITY - modesty, a right perspective on your importance in the world	PRIDE - vanity, glorification of self
KINDNESS - admiration, recognizing good in others	ENVY - jealousy
FORGIVENESS - willingness to work out problems peacefully	WRATH - undirected, uncontrolled anger
DILIGENCE - energy, hard work, managing our time	SLOTH - laziness, sadness, despair
CHARITY - giving to others	GREED - avarice
TEMPERANCE - self-restraint	GLUTTONY - over-indulgence in material possessions
CHASTITY - purity, rightly directed sexuality	LUST - excessive sexual appetites



Exercise Four: THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR CORE VALUES.

One way the Holy Spirit directs us is by repeatedly bringing us into contact with certain ideas, situations, or people. Behind these interactions lie particular “values”. By discovering the values at the core of these experiences, we can listen for the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

Take five minutes and choose eight of the values below that inspire you or that have cropped up in situations or conversations recently. Then narrow the list down to the five that “shout out” to you the loudest, then down to three.

Discuss with your group where these values are showing up in your life.
Are there one or two that you really hope people see in you?
How could these values guide you when it’s time to make a difficult decision?
How could they provide a check against negative or sinful impulses?
Why did you choose these values?
What made you narrow the list from 8 to 5 to 3?

Humor
Directness
Partnership
Service
Contribution
Excellence
Creativity
Focus
Friendship
Relationship
Harmony
Accomplishment
Orderliness
Honesty
Integrity

Success
Accuracy
Adventure
Openness
Tradition
Diversity
Growth
Participation
Collaboration
Community
Freedom
Space
Connectedness
Appreciation
Comradeship
Other:

Questions:

How to Start Well/ Clarifying Expectations of Your Group (also see questions in the Open Door section of this guide)

What do you want to get out of a small group?

What would you want to offer this group?

If you trusted your group enough to tell them how to challenge you most effectively, what would you say?

What will make this small group rewarding for you?

Would you be willing to give authority to a relationship with these people? In a small group, no one has authority over one another, but the relationship you have enables you to speak truth into each other’s lives.

What do you want to focus on? This guide works equally well with discussion, prayer, or Bible study. You may want to focus on one of these specifically.

How to help your group know you

What are you most proud of?

What is your biggest disappointment?

Are you satisfied with your life so far? Why or why not?

What is the most life-giving relationship you have had so far?

What has been the most challenging relationship in your life so far?

What’s missing in your life? What would make your life more fulfilling?

If you could point to one moment in your life and say, “God was there”, what would it be?

What words describe you when you are at your best?

What words describe you when you are less than your best?



How to Get Ready for Your Group Meeting

- How am I today, right now? How has my week been?
- What do I want to get out of the group today?
- What action did I take since we last met?
- What were my victories? Defeats?
- What do I need to get off my chest?
- Where do I need encouragement and prayer?
- Other?

When You're Stuck in a Bad Situation

- What do you do when you encounter a big difficulty in life?
Like a health crisis, family emergency, financial issue, friendship ending?
- How did you see your family respond to unexpected crises?
- What do you need to hear from others to get you back on track when you're stuck?
- How would you like them to pray for you?

How to Assess the Effectiveness of your Group

- What have you discovered about who you are?
- How have you sharpened your priorities?
- Can you list some priorities that you did not know before you entered this group?
- How has God answered your prayers?
- How have you seen God working in the life of others in the group?
- What have been some obstacles for you personally or for your group?
- How have you learned from those obstacles?
- What would help to get through them?
- How have you clarified your use of time?
- How has the group affected your schoolwork and interest in classes?
- How have you learned to think differently about your place in the world—how to partner in what God is already doing in the world?



Questions About Faith

- When do you first remember hearing about God?
- How did you relate with God as a child?
- What do you most admire about Jesus?
- What is the one thing about God that you would most like to understand?
- If you were to describe why you believe in God to a stranger on a plane, what would you say?
- If you were honest about your greatest doubts, what would they be?
- What are your favorite passages of Scripture? Why?
- How do you show your love for God?
- What hinders you from a greater love for God?
- Why was it necessary for Jesus to die? Why was it necessary for Jesus to be raised from the dead?
- How do you think faith should relate to politics?
- How much do you know about Christian denominations?
- What are the essentials of the faith to you? What are the non-essentials?

Common Errors in Small Groups

(These questions are written for a group “leader”. Adapt as needed if your group does not have a specific leader.)

- 1** Not making questions sound conversational. Even though you are asking questions which are written down and prepared, it is possible to ask them in a conversational tone. Use your own vocabulary.
- 2** Being afraid of silence after impatient or nervous. You must give people time to think.
- 3** Limiting yourself to asking questions and leading. The leader is also a participant in the group. You may share your answers and observations, but don't dominate the study.
- 4** Combining two questions into one. Be careful to ask only one question at a time.
- 5** Trying to maintain too much control. If the group “takes off”, don't worry as long as it is in a direction you want to go. You may need to step in from time to time to nudge the direction.
- 6** Not explaining what you expect the group to do. You are in charge. Don't hesitate to bring the discussion back if it gets too far off the topic.
- 7** Not participating when you feel the group may be wandering. The leader needs to be a participant and completely involved, even in the tangents. Obviously, don't let it go too far.
- 8** Asking a question, which can be answered “yes” or “no”. These questions hinder discussions. “How” and “Why” questions are excellent. “Who”, “What”, “Where”, and “When”, questions can also stimulate discussion.
- 9** Asking too complex a question. State the question simply and clearly.
- 10** Tending to stress your own personal application. You should not expect the rest of the group to be impressed deeply with the same things that impress you.
- 11** Not finishing on time. If people voluntarily stay around and fellowship, that's fine, but end the group lesson at the previously agreed ending time.
- 12** Immediately answering a question directed to you, the leader. Don't answer the question right away; kick it back out to the group. Ask, “What does someone think?” Once the group members have tried to answer, you either affirm their response or handle the question yourself.
- 13** Being afraid to admit to the group that you don't know the answer. Don't hesitate to say, “That's a good question; I don't know.” It doesn't make you less of a leader; it just shows that you're honest. Tell the person you'll do your best to find the answer and give it to them next week.
- 14** Launching into a lecture as soon as the discussion wanes. Don't start a sermon just because the silence is uncomfortable during a lull in the dialogue. Be patient. It will come alive again. Give it time. Keep asking questions.
- 15** Being afraid to show weakness. As the leader, you are setting an example for the group, but that doesn't mean you're perfect. Admit a weakness. Share your sin. Admit a lack of understanding. The people in your group won't think less of you.
- 16** Being too concerned with getting through the lesson material. There will be some nights when you need to put down your workbooks and minister to someone in the group. The relationships are more important than finishing the study by a certain date. Obviously, shelving the lesson isn't something to do often, but in certain cases it is appropriate.
- 17** Allowing doctrinal discussion that is divisive or argumentative. Two things that will polarize a group right down the middle are doctrinal disputes and political debates. If someone brings up a doctrinal dispute that divides people, as a leader you should make the statement that this is not a matter to be discussed in this context. Tell the person you'd be glad to talk privately with them after the meeting.

Other Trouble Shooting Tips

Small group member doesn't talk

Problem: Possibly the questions are either too hard or too obvious; or leader is not allowing enough silence.

Approaches: Be patient with silence.

People come late.

Problem: Pattern is established of not starting on time? Expectations aren't clear. You're still in the Open Door phase.

Approaches: Begin on time and discuss the issue with group members.

Prayer is stifled.

Problem: lack of trust, verbal public prayer may be a new experience, focus of prayer time unclear

Approaches: vary the approaches to prayer—silent, one word, sentence prayers, pray about one specific topic

Small group member talks too much.

Problem: Possibly because of impatience, enthusiasm, dogmatism, or dislike of silence

Approaches: Explain the need for reflection and conversation. Ask members to reflect for a minute in silence to a question.

Sharing is superficial.

Problem: Leader may not be setting example; questions may be unclear

Approaches: Be open in your own sharing; ask for specifics in members' sharing. Share something a bit more vulnerable than the current level of vulnerability. You will set the model.

Disagreement to the point of conflict about theology, interpretation, issues.

Problem: Different backgrounds, perspectives, or lack of tolerance

Approaches: Remind members how much we have to learn from different perspectives and how much richer the relationships will be as you engage in dialogue. We can help sharpen each other through asking questions and truly listening.



How Do I Know When to Refer Someone to Counseling?

Some Warning Signs:

Physical complaints when no medical causes can be found.

Excessive anxiety for no apparent reason.

Prolonged feelings of despair and unhappiness, withdrawal, lack of interest in daily activities, etc.

An unusual amount of irritability or suspiciousness toward others.

Not working up to capacity at school or work—inability to concentrate.

Personality changes that can't be explained, such as sudden shifts in mood or behavior.

Physical Reactions:

fatigue, insomnia, hypersomnia, under activity, headaches, nightmares, hyperactivity, startled reactions, exhaustion, diarrhea

Cognitive Reactions:

difficulty with concentration, solving problems, making decisions, memory disturbance, flashbacks, inability to attach importance to anything other than the incident

Emotional Reactions:

fear, guilt, emotional numbing, over sensitivity, anger, irritability, anxiety, depression, violent fantasies, feelings of helplessness, amnesia for the event, ambivalence

Counseling contact information:

SCC@spu.edu
206.281.2657

Check the University Ministries Website
for resources and books
that might help your small group
be the best it can be. We're proud
of you and we're praying for you!

Resources That Informed This Guide

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