

Small Group Leader's

# Start-Up Guide



## Welcome & Vision

*"For where two or three gather in my name, there I am with them."*  
– Jesus in Matthew 18:20

Jesus, Creator of the cosmos, lover of our souls, King of this world, comes into the same space with people who gather in his name. And if Scripture is any indication, whenever Jesus comes into the room, people are transformed in his presence. When you are a small group leader, you are joining the Holy Spirit in the art of creating joy-filled gatherings that welcome Jesus and others into the same space through community-building, Bible study, prayer, and sending out God's people to be a blessing in God's world.

This small group start-up guide offers guidelines and practical next steps in joining the Holy Spirit in God's miraculous work of transformation in your life and the lives of all who enter into God's loving presence together.



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## Small Group Model



## Preparing your heart as a leader

### Example Bible study (for those committed to forming a group)

If there are other Christian students who are interested in being part of this new small group, invite them to do this Bible study with you!

### Read Matthew 9:9-13

1. Picture Jesus at a dinner table. Looking at the passage, what groups of people would be around Jesus at the table?
2. What do you think it would have sounded like if you were at this meal? Would you hear swearing? Coarse jokes?
3. How do you think the disciples are feeling about eating with tax collectors and sinners?
4. Why do you think these people trusted and ate with Jesus?
5. Now, picture a big table with you and the rest of the small group sitting around it. Who is missing? Whom do you long to see enjoying this group and its shared love of Jesus?
6. Pick someone you pictured at the table. What can you do to invest in that relationship and build trust? Ideas: go for a walk together, throw a football, get coffee, watch a Netflix show, or go grocery shopping. How would you invite them to small group?

## Discovering the Layers of Flavor

This drink contains **5 key ingredients** that all work together to form a healthy, welcoming, safe, and thriving small group family. It is meant to be life-giving to all members and enjoyed in loving community.

It starts with **God's presence**. God is at work on your campus and is within you if you're a Christian. God's presence is the basis for meeting and is the espresso that energizes and fuels the group.

Then, you actually want to start **inviting others** and welcoming people. That's the whipped cream on top that attracts people to your group. Inviting others should be an ongoing practice. Seriously... you never want to stop inviting new people—both Christians and seekers!



**Authentic community** is the warm, steamed milk that makes your group members feel connected and loved. This happens through growing deep community and cultivating vulnerability and intimacy, so the small group becomes a safe space.

However, when you gather a group of people, conflict is natural. Sometimes, conflict is about differences between group members such as ethnic background, beliefs, or ideology. Other times, it's about the purpose of the group (e.g. Are we a group that engages with our seeking friends?). But don't be afraid of conflict. It's a normal and necessary part of a group, and conflict handled with grace—**healthy conflict**—can be sweet and add a depth of flavor, like the chocolate in a caffè mocha.

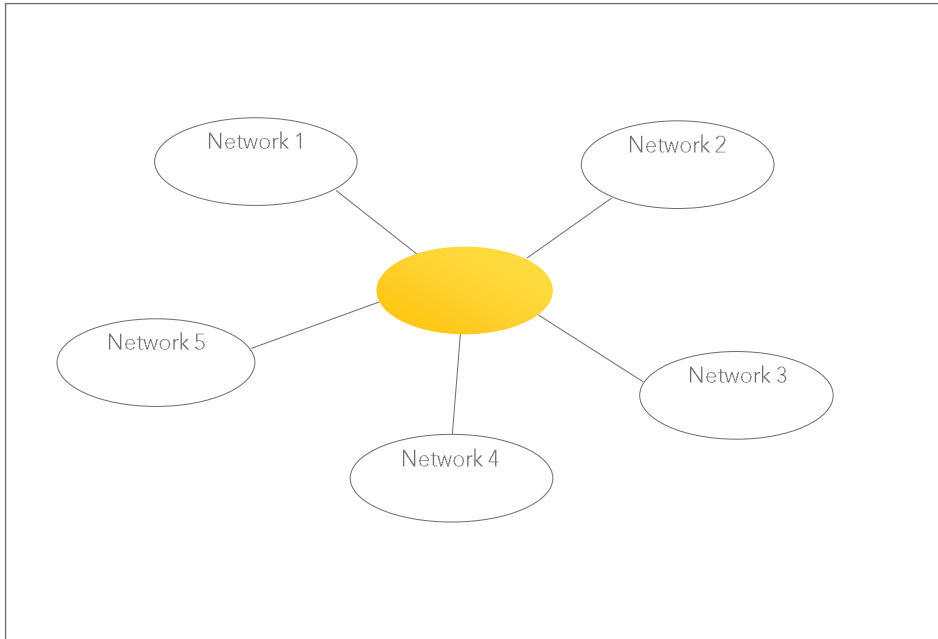
Finally, as the community is experiencing deep discipleship and conversions, and as vision for the purposes of God inside and outside the group expands, the group can challenge itself and be challenged. Like milk foam, the authentic community can bubble over and **start new groups**. This is the time to ask the Holy Spirit how the group can multiply to a new corner of campus so that more students can experience God's presence in community.

## Whom do I invite?

Vision comes from seeing people and places through God's eyes. Ask God, What is your vision for the people in my life? What are you already doing here on campus? What corner do you want me to reach?

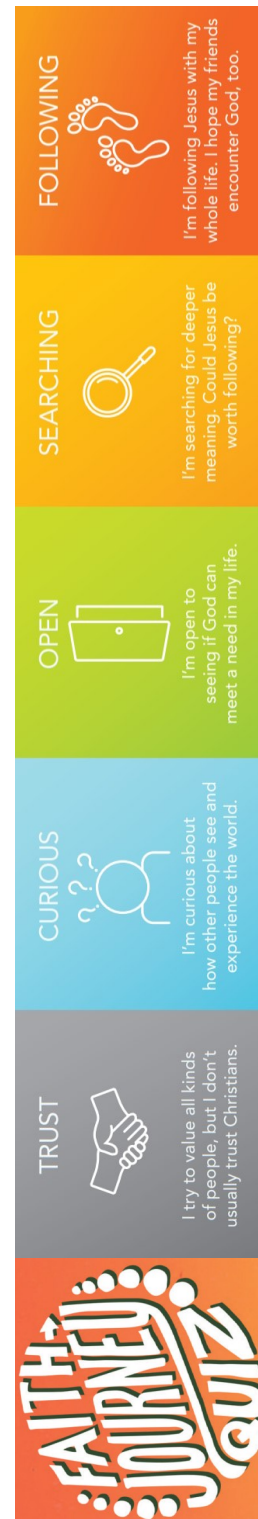
### Activity spotlight: Network Maps

Make a map of everyone you are already connected with on campus. Use the questions to help you see where and to whom God is calling you.



Start by writing your name in the yellow circle.

1. Where do you primarily spend your time? Write and connect your name to any networks and social groups of which you are a part. Write the names of people you are connected to in each of these networks.
2. ★ Star anyone with whom you have had spiritual conversations.
3. **Highlight** the names of any Christians you know who are actively sharing their faith.
4. Underline key people in each network who can advocate for you.
5. Each of the people on your network has a network as well. Indicate the size of the networks people are connected to with small lines around each name.
6. Where is God working in your networks?
7. How does God want to use you?



**FOLLOWING**  
I'm following Jesus with my whole life. I hope my friends encounter God, too.

**SEARCHING**  
I'm searching for deeper meaning. Could Jesus be worth following?

**OPEN**  
I'm open to seeing if God can meet a need in my life.

**CURIOUS**  
I'm curious about how other people see and experience the world.

**TRUST**  
I try to value all kinds of people, but I don't usually trust Christians.

Here are 5 steps on a spiritual journey. Where are you?

### Resource spotlight: Faith Journey Quiz

Read through the 5 Thresholds' (Steps) descriptions. Guess which threshold best describes the people in the community you are wanting to reach. Put the number (1-5) of each threshold next to names on your network map. Listen to God for insight.

Here are possible next steps for you to take to reach people in each threshold:

1. **Trust:** Invest in your friendship & build trust.
2. **Curious:** Ask them questions about their view of God and spirituality. Don't get defensive or argumentative.
3. **Open:** Ask them how they want to grow personally. Ask how they think God might help their growth. Offer to pray with them.
4. **Searching:** Invite them to seek Jesus with you and others.
5. **Following:** Ask them, "Can I share with you who God has been putting on my heart?" Invite them to join you in starting something to reach others.

If you just need to meet more people on campus, you can use this quiz to start spiritual conversations!

Faith Journey Quiz, video tutorial, and sample script ([bit.ly/sgstartup-faithquiz](http://bit.ly/sgstartup-faithquiz))



## Gather & Celebrate

### Big picture

Before your small group begins, you'll need to invite people and share a bit of your vision for why the group is forming. Groups start in different ways. You might be in a situation where you already have a group of people, so you won't need to do a ton of inviting. You might, however, be the only one starting your new group, in which case being able to share about your group's vision and invite well are really important. Remember, you never stop inviting and gathering!

### Key skill

A compelling, 90-sec vision cast is directed to someone who isn't part of your small group yet, answers three questions, and ends with a clear invitation:

1. What's the big picture and need on campus?
2. How does your group provide an answer to this need?
3. How have you been changed by the answer you're offering? (Share a personal story)
4. Invite the person to the group. Give a specific time, date, and place.

**Bonus:** Offer to meet up for coffee or a meal before the group starts!

### Activity spotlight: Bigger or Better game

**Instructions:** Divide into teams of at least 3-4 people each. Each team gets a pencil to start with. Set a time limit (60 min is plenty). Then, each team goes to a house, knocks on the door, explains the game and asks for something bigger or better than the pencil. As you proceed, you keep getting bigger and better things! It's best to play this game near a neighborhood with lots of people, so teams don't have to walk far for asks. At the end of the time limit,

you give prizes for the biggest or best (most expensive) thing. You can also give prizes for creativity. Have fun!

### Resource spotlight: Spicy Faith cards

This is a fun way to put faith into action. Introduce the game as a way to spice up their faith. Participants choose how spicy of an activity they want to try—up to 3 peppers! Mention you'll check how it's going in a day or two. (Ask your staff or coach for a set of these cards.)



### Ideas for gathering throughout the year

- Reserve a table at your student center or union to meet people
- Host meals and social gatherings
- Do a scavenger hunt, road trip or fun over-nighter
- Proxe stations are a good way to meet seekers and Christians

### Example Bible study

#### Read Psalm 1

1. What two main metaphors does the psalmist (author) use in this psalm?
2. Chaff is the useless part of the grain that the wind blows away when "threshing" the harvest. How does chaff contrast with a tree?
3. Psalms 1 and 2 are often seen as the two-part introduction to the whole book of Psalms. What is this psalm saying about the life of faith that sets up the whole book?
4. There are times in life when we feel like we're not very rooted and we're being too influenced by what people (like professors, parents, or friends) think of us and our image. How can this psalm help us in these situations?
5. Spiritually speaking, what would it look like for each of us and our group to grow a garden with God?

### Debrief & formation questions

1. Working at being an inviting group and committing to inviting friends to join week after week is hard work. What helps you ground your identity in God's view of you, not whether the invited person shows up or not?
2. As you invite Christians and seekers, the community gets more complex. Inside jokes have to be explained, different questions are asked about Scripture, etc. How does doing this work of hospitality honor Jesus and give you his heart for seekers?
3. What's a lie that will stall the group? (E.g. Our group is formed—new people will only be disruptive.)





## Build Community

### Key skills

1. Learning to share at the right vulnerability level (proportional to trust) and active listening
2. Growing the group's love for God and one another through Bible study, prayer, worship, and community

### Activity spotlight: Share your story

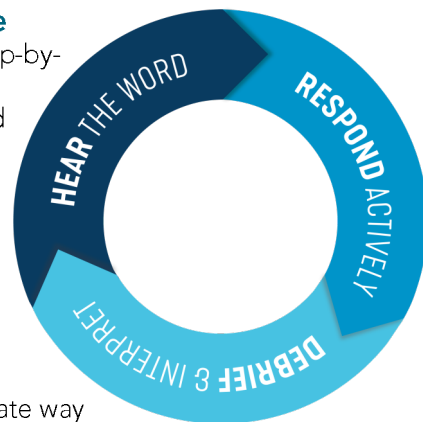
It's hard to really love and connect with people you don't know. Here's a way to help members start to know one another more deeply:

- Invite 2-3 members to share their story each week (10-15 mins each)
- Have a prompt or question that can help guide their sharing:
  - ⇒ If my life were a book, the chapter titles would be...
  - ⇒ Here are some key places where life really changed for me...
  - ⇒ These are the 5 most important "yeses" I've said to Jesus...
- As the leader, be prepared to go first and model depth and vulnerability

### Resource spotlight: Discipleship Cycle

Following Jesus is an active, intentional, step-by-step process. In this journey, discipleship cycles help us understand more of who God is, who we are, and identify our one next step in following Jesus.

- **Hear the Word:** Through prayer, Scripture, community, and the world around you, what is God saying to you about: God and God's Kingdom? Yourself and a situation you're in? The relationships around you? The world?
- **Respond Actively:** What is an immediate way to apply what you hear God saying to you?
- **Debrief & Interpret:** Debriefing an experience and interpreting what it means should be done in Christian community with wise people, aligned with what the Scriptures reveal about God, and filled with love versus fear. What did God show you? What is God inviting you to do next?



### Other resources

- Fun! Keep doing outings and games as a group.
- Intimacy vs. Impact assessment ([bit.ly/sgstartup-assess](https://bit.ly/sgstartup-assess))

### #KeyToConflict

As group members become more authentic, transparent, and vulnerable, differences will arise. This is OK! Celebrate the growing depth, and use the Approaching Differences diagram (see pg. 10) to help navigate the emotions we feel when we are misunderstood or encounter a cultural difference.

### Key Scripture passages

Early in the community-building stage, it's helpful to pick passages that people can easily engage with regardless of their faith background or years of church involvement. Picking a psalm, a gospel like Matthew, Luke or John or Jesus' parables is a great place to start. Note: You might want to avoid Mark if you can, since many chapters use it for training later in the year.

### Example Bible study

#### Read Genesis 11:26-12:9

1. How does the description of Abram's family tree establish his rootedness in the first part of this passage?
2. What words of motion contrast with his rootedness in the second half of the passage (ex: "go", "traveled")?
3. How does this passage help us understand the costliness of Abram's decision to obey God and to "go"?
4. How does Abram's decision to trust God and go to an unnamed place create a ripple effect of blessing? Identify ripples, small to large.
5. How would you define faith based on this passage?
6. Faith is often about resisting security through familiarity. Instead, God invites us to embrace uncertainty as we follow him because this cultivates trust in his promises. How can this group practice faith together?

### Debrief & formation questions

1. Anytime anyone shares a vulnerable part of their story, it's a holy moment for the group. What builds trust to invite these kinds of moments?
2. As you get to know people in the group, what differences do you notice (ethnicity, gender, worldview, etc.)? How does that make you feel? Excited? Scared? Uncertain? Ask God to reveal how and why he's brought this group together and give him your honest feelings.
3. What's a lie that will stall the group? (E.g. It's too hard to invest in other people's lives.)



## Grow through Conflict

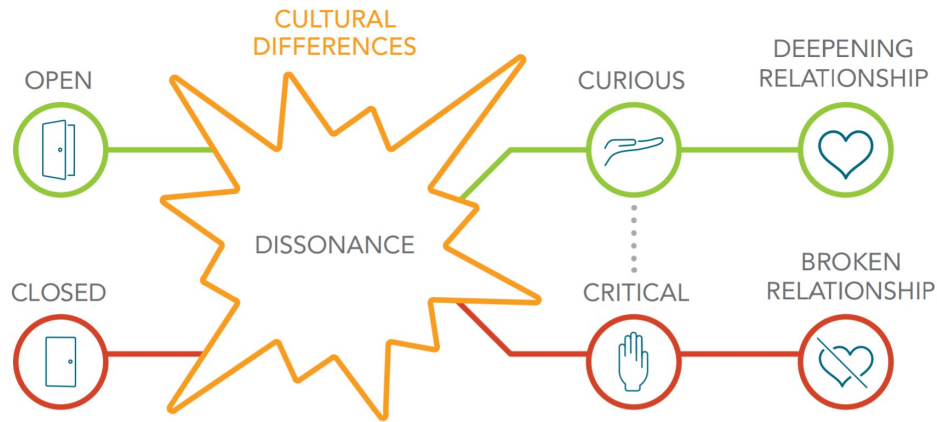
### Big Picture

Contrary to what we might think, conflict is essential for a group to grow! It also helps members develop a vision for the kingdom of God that includes conflict and resolution as a way God brings about growth and transformation. Handling conflict with grace can result in healthy resolution between members as well as a communal desire to be a witnessing community.

### Key skills

1. How to resolve a conflict ([bit.ly/sgstartup-conflict](http://bit.ly/sgstartup-conflict))
2. How to express your ethnic identity journey ([bit.ly/sgstartup-beyond-colorblind](http://bit.ly/sgstartup-beyond-colorblind))
3. Next steps for group based on Intimacy vs. Impact assessment (see pg. 8)

### Resource Spotlight: Approaching Differences diagram



Crossing cultures can be studying abroad or studying with a person who has a different ethnic background. The key idea is that culture clashes are inevitable and create dissonance. Dissonance occurs when something you or another person says or does is misunderstood and creates emotions like anger, frustration, sadness or shame. It's OK to feel these emotions, but what you do next matters. Stay on the green line! You stay on the green line by practicing openness to people's ideas, culture and life. After encountering dissonance, you also remain curious by learning from the interaction. If you find you're judging the other person or withdrawing from the relationship, stop and pray to ask for God's help to stay open and try to switch gears to being curious again—the green line.

### Key Scripture passages

- 1 Corinthians 12-13 (We are one body but many parts; love is the greatest spiritual gift)
- Ephesians 2 (The gospel breaks down the dividing wall of hostility)
- Romans 14-15 (Understanding the weaker and stronger brother/sister—don't break up the body)

### Example Bible study

#### Read Acts 6:1-7

1. What were the Hebraic Jews doing, and what effect did it have on the widows who were Hellenistic Jews? *Note: "Hellenistic" means they spoke Greek as their primary language.*
2. What do you notice about the solution? *Notice that the seven men chosen to serve the Greek widows have Greek names.*
3. Notice how the Twelve responded to the complaint: they listened to and believed the experience of the Greek widows. How did this help with resolving the conflict?
4. What is the result of this conflict being settled (see esp. v. 7)? How does the resolution also provide better alignment of gifts and roles?
5. How does healthy conflict resolution in a group energize it for mission and God's purposes?
6. What's a conflict (that might be below the surface) that's holding back this group? *Note: If this is too difficult to discuss as a group, try splitting into twos or threes to discuss before talking as a whole group.*

### Debrief & formation questions

1. Fear of conflict that leads to avoiding it is settling for false peace. We think we are keeping the peace of the group, but we're actually hindering its growth. What do you need from God, your coach, and/or your staff to believe conflict can help your group grow?
2. Spiritual and emotional resilience comes from practicing conflict resolution and talking about what matters deeply to us. We grow in our confidence that friendships can handle disagreement and that false peace is a cheap peace when we choose to engage in conflict well. How is God inviting you to grow spiritual and emotional resilience?
3. What's a lie that will stall the group? (E.g. Conflict should be ignored.)



## Send & Plant

### Big Picture

Now, group members trust one another enough to talk about what matters most and are able to lovingly challenge each other. What are you looking for in this stage? Recognizable apprentices that can share the gospel and engage their networks. Hopefully, the group is also seeing seekers come to faith and actively pursuing how it can multiply to reach a new network.

### Key skills

1. Training apprentices in vision casting, network mapping and gospel sharing proficiency
2. Helping the group engage with an evangelism strategy

### Resource spotlight: Launch Party & GIG Guides ([bit.ly/sgstartup-launch-GIGs](http://bit.ly/sgstartup-launch-GIGs))

- See “Launch Gathering Guide” under “Grow the Movement” at the bottom for how to host a party for seeking friends to hear testimonies  
⇒ We’ve been studying how God used Antioch as a place to send kingdom people who carry with them the seed of the gospel to plant and grow in new places. The Launch Party guide will walk you through how to tell a story about something God’s done in your life or how you came to faith—people are open to hearing this! The Launch Party is then a place where your small group hosts your seeking friends to hear you share your stories of God’s work.
- See “The Encounters with Jesus Series” for five Groups Investigating God (GIG) guides to use after your launch party  
⇒ Next, you offer a chance to keep talking about faith through the Encountering Jesus studies. These offer simple, but powerful pre-written Bible studies based on the Five Thresholds. Gathering people to do these studies is the first step to seeing a new group get started!

### Tips for sending a leader/apprentice to plant a new SG

1. If a rising leader sees a lot of interest in their Encountering Jesus group after the Launch Party, prayerfully consider sending other members to make this a new group. The rising leader may need a co-leader.
2. Sometimes the original leader (you) is the person who feels they are being sent to start a new group. If this is the case, overlap with the new leaders you are training, helping them learn to run the group as you transition out.
3. It’s OK if your group doesn’t have immediate success through the Launch Party or starting a new group. It’s important to celebrate the kingdom risk and to keep asking God what to try, experimenting with new ideas.

### Key Scripture passages

- Acts 2:40-47 (Looking at it to see how each element contributes to mission going forward is helpful)
- 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10 (How the faith of the Thessalonians became known “everywhere”)
- Luke 10:1-12, 17-21 (Jesus sending of the 72 disciples and how he debriefs their experience)

### Example Bible study

#### Read/skim Acts 11:1-26 and 13:1-5. Study 11:19-30 and 13:1-5.

1. What personal experiences does Peter share with the Jewish believers in Jerusalem? Note: “Gentile” means all ethnic groups that are not Jewish.
2. What is the effect of the persecution in Jerusalem (11:19-21)? How does a new believing community get formed in Antioch?
3. Jumping forward in the story to 13:1-5, what is the long-term effect of having a sending church get established in the Gentile city of Antioch?
4. What attitudes and beliefs (see 11:1-3) would have held back the gospel? How did God’s work through Peter to change things?
5. How does persecution (a form of conflict) energize the Jewish believers to share the gospel in other places?
6. In this passage it’s not right that no one was taking the gospel to the Gentiles. God intervened to help the gospel spread. Where do you long to see the gospel go forward? It could be a sports team, a cultural club or a campus nearby. Pray and ask God to stir up holy discontent and a desire to see the gospel go to new places.

### Debrief & formation questions

1. Jesus commands his disciples to abide in him (John 15) but to also go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28). Groups that never “go” are like an appliance that’s not plugged in. Discipleship doesn’t work without evangelism. How might God want to help your group grow in Jesus by going with Jesus?
2. How does evangelism deepen your discipleship? How does sharing your faith with seeking friends energize your prayer for them? How does evangelism transform how you read Scripture?
3. What’s a lie that will stall the group? (E.g. Reaching a new corner of campus isn’t worth our group changing.)





## Have Feedback? Contact Us!

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