

A close-up photograph of several small green seedlings with two leaves each, growing out of dark brown soil. The seedlings are arranged in a row, with some in the foreground and others slightly blurred in the background. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the soil and the vibrant green of the plants.

GETTING STARTED  
AS A  
SMALL GROUP LEADER

**saltchurch.**

# INTRO

## **2 BURNING QUESTIONS...**

So, you've agreed to be a Small Group Leader at Salt Church. There's probably 2 big questions you're asking. Or if you're not asking these 2 questions, you should be!

**What's a 'good' Small Group Leader look like?**

**What's a 'good' Small Group look like?**

To answer those 2 questions, we normally go to our experiences.

At my old church, Small Group Leaders did this, or in my last group at Salt the leaders did this. Maybe that's what I'm meant to do?

In that group I was part of it was such a good group because it was like this. But that other group I was in was so bad, it was awkward. I would definitely never want to have a group like that!

Our experience is a good thing to draw from. But experience doesn't necessarily answer those 2 questions. It can mean you just react, instead of knowing what you're working towards, what you're aiming for.

## **OVERVIEW**

That's why this training package exists: to help you know what you're aiming for as you lead a Small Group. We'll cover 6 topics, all of which will show you what a Small Group at Salt looks like.

1. [Why character matters most](#)
2. [Building an 'encouraging group'](#)
3. [What's good bible discussion?](#)
4. [What's good group prayer?](#)
5. [What's good community?](#)
6. [Why you get nowhere without trust](#)

## **THE JOY OF SERVING**

I'm so encouraged you've decided to serve God's people. It's not an easy thing to be a Small Group Leader. But even still, it's a glorious privilege! God has served and saved us by sending His Son to die for us. God's made us new people, his treasured possession, and he lets us join him in his work of transforming lives.

So as you lead your group, remember you're serving God. Serve him with joy and keep praying!

*Geoff*

# 1

## WHY CHARACTER MATTERS MOST

### **GOD CARES ABOUT BEING AND DOING**

Titus needs to choose leaders for the churches he oversees. So Paul gives Titus a list of qualifications. This is what pastors in the church need to be like:

*An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, having faithful children who are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless – not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (Titus 1:6-9)*

As you scan that list, what does a pastor need to do? 2 things – teach and manage a household. Those are crucial things! By managing God's household of the church and by teaching the truth, lives are transformed.

Now what does a pastor need to be? 14 things. 14 ways our character is to be like the God we love and trust.

As you scan this list, how different is it to your average job description on seek.com? For most jobs, almost all the qualifications are about competence, what you do. But almost all God's qualifications are about character, who you are. What does that tell you about God? What does God care about: who we are or what we do? Both. Who you are as a leader and what you do as a leader matters to God . God cares about being and doing, but character matters most.

These are qualifications for pastors. But that doesn't mean it's not for you. Across the New Testament, all Christians are told to grow in all these qualities. It's just that for leaders of God's church, they need to already be the settled pattern of the way they live. At Salt, we're all seeking to live as disciples of Jesus. As you lead your Small Group, you should be striving to become more godly – not just in what you do, but in who you are. God cares about being and doing, but character matters most.

“Who you are as a leader and what you do as a leader matters to God”

## **A SPRING AND A STREAM**

What's the difference between being and doing? Who we are is like a freshwater spring. What we do is like the stream of water that flows out of the spring. They're connected. Without a spring there's no stream. But they're not the same thing. The stream doesn't flow backwards, it flows out of the spring.

## **LET 'BE' SHAPE 'DO'**

Jesus says our hearts are the spring of all we do. Our hearts flow out in the way we work, parent, party, rest, give. Your heart will flow out in the way you lead your Small Group. Which means you need to:

Check and change your heart. If a freshwater spring is unhealthy, you'll notice the effects downstream. As you look at your actions, what's that show about your character? As you lead your group what are you most concerned about? If you've prepared enough? If discussion's good? If the group's gelling together? All those things matter. God cares about doing. But your character matters most. So grow.

Grow by being like Mary. When Jesus came to Mary and Martha's house, Martha rushed round to get everything ready. Mary just sat at Jesus' feet and listened to Him. Mary did the right thing. God doesn't need you to lead a Small Group. He can make his people know him better and love each other more, without you. God wants you to lead, because he wants to let you share his work; He invites you to serve him with joy! Your value as a person has nothing to do with your Small Group. God doesn't love you less when it's tanking and more when you're kicking goals. He loves you in Christ, and nothing can ever separate you from his love.

**Summary:** Go work hard for Jesus. Keep labouring for his glory. But remember, the best thing you can ever do for your group is to love God deeply, to serve because you want to, to sit at Jesus' feet because you love to hear his voice, to trust the gospel every day and to grow to look more like your Dad. God cares about being and doing, but character matters most.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What's one thing you've learnt, or been reminded of, about God?

What's one thing you want to do right now to apply this?  
How will you do that?

# 2

## BUILDING AN 'ENCOURAGING GROUP'

### WHAT AM I EVEN DOING HERE?

Your role as a Small Group Leader at Salt is to do 2 things:

1. Encourage your group to know God better
2. Encourage your group to love each other like God's loved us

Basically, live out the 3 let-us' of Hebrews 10:19-25

*'...brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus... Let us draw near to God... Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess... And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.'*

We can draw near to God because of Jesus' sacrifice. So draw near, stand firm, and help each other love. Or, here's how Colossians 3:16 puts it:

*Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom...*

God's gathered us together as Christians. By holding onto and holding out the words of Christ, we can teach and instruct each other.

## **BUILDING AN 'ENCOURAGING GROUP'**

Your role as a Leader is to encourage your group: to know God better and to love each other like God's loved us. But how do you encourage a group of people to do that?

You want your group to take responsibility for each other. Not just you encouraging, but everyone encouraging. Your group might not be full of friends. You might never become friends. Be united round a deeper thing, a common purpose. Help your group realise that: we're here to help each other know God better, and to help each other love.

A group is much more than the individuals in it. Groups are more than the sum of their parts. Groups take on a life of their own. Groups have their own culture and personality. Groups of people committed to the same thing have radically changed the world, all through history. So build an 'encouraging group', by being a culture shaper.

"You want your group to take responsibility for each other. Not just you encouraging, but everyone encouraging"

## **TIME TO OPEN A CAFE**

How do you create a group where people take responsibility for each other? It starts with how you see yourself. You're not primarily a facilitator, or a bible teacher, or a pastor. You're a culture shaper.

Imagine you've just decided to open a brand spanking new café in Wollongong. There's stiff competition, so what would you do? You'd get the finest ingredients, locally sourced produce, single origin coffee beans. You'd hire the best chef and best barista in town. You want the food and coffee to be the highest standard. After all, that's why people come to a café in the first place.

But if you were a culture shaper, you'd also hire friendly staff, the kind of people you want to say hi to. You'd create a warm space with comfy seats and a cool feel. You'd host events in your café and have a rotating menu so there's always something new and exciting happening.

Those things have nothing to do with the quality of the food or coffee. But they have a huge impact on the culture of the café. On whether people want to come.

That's like what you're doing as a Small Group Leader. You do 3 activities each week: read the bible, pray and spend time together. But how you do them has a huge impact on the culture of the group, on whether it's an 'encouraging group', on whether people help each other know God better and love.

## 7 WAYS

In big and little ways, what you say and do shapes the culture of your Small Group. You can't avoid this: you will shape the group's culture. So, how do you shape your group to be an 'encouraging' group, to be a group where people take responsibility to help each other grow? Here's 7 ways:

### Work with your other leader

Most Small groups at Salt have 2 leaders, a male and a female. You're both trying to create an 'encouraging group'. But if you don't work closely together to see that happen, you might unintentionally work against each other! Work together by praying regularly for the group and planning each new series together. Share the ways you've seen the group grow so far, and ask each other for feedback on how you're helpfully or unhelpfully shaping the group's culture.

### Decide on expectations as a group

Each group member has expectations about what the group will be like. As these people come together you get to decide what sort of group you want to be. You can decide that deliberately or let it happen by default. But you can't pretend it won't happen. There's always expectations. The best way is to decide together, so you all own the expectations. Here's how to have that conversation.

The first time your group meets for the year:

Tell the group what sort of group you want it to be. The Small Group infographic was written to help you have this conversation. It's an easy way to show people what Small Groups at Salt are. Use it to explain what an 'encouraging group' looks like.

"it's crucial for your group that you decide on expectations together"

Ask how we're going to do this. As a group, how do we want to help each other know God better and love each other more? You might want to cover things like: attendance (plan to be here each week), apologies (text the leader or post on the group's facebook page if you can't make it), meals (are you going to have dinner together or dessert? How often? Who's cooking?), prayer points (are we all happy to share these with the group), participation (we want to all share our thoughts when we're reading the bible so we can help each other grow), trust (we want to

learn to trust each other and be real), etc. It could be helpful to write this out on butcher's paper so everyone can see what they're agreeing to.

End the discussion by summarising the expectations, then pray! Say back to the group: 'As a group, we've decided this is why we're meeting, this is the kind of group we want to be, and these are some our expectations'.

Now this will feel awkward and totally uncool. It's like going on a first date with someone and starting it by asking them where they think the relationship is going. That's so unromantic! You want to have fun and enjoy the moment. But it's crucial for your group that you decide on expectations together (and for a dating relationship incidentally). You have to do this! You can't avoid it! So expect it to feel awkward, but see it as a necessary and brilliant investment in the group.

### **Share those expectations regularly**

Mention them the next time you meet, e.g. 'we decided we're going to share our thoughts when we read the bible so we can help each other know God better, so let's do that now'.

Revisit them 4 weeks later. Ask the group: How are we going at this? Is there anything we'd change?

Give people in your group a phone call/chat after church and ask them: how are you finding the group? Is it what you expected it to be? How can you help it be the sort of group we want it to be?

### **Check in at the 6 month mark to see how you're going at being the group you want to be**

If a new member joins your group fill them in on the expectations the group will have of them, and what they can expect from other people.

In these conversations hold people to what was decided. Remember these aren't your expectations, they're our expectations; they're what our group decided together. It's ok to point out to people if they're not acting by those expectations and it's hurting the group. You all agreed to it for the sake of the group.

### **Praise what you want to see**

'It was great when you shared what you thought that verse of the bible meant, because we want to be a group that wrestles with God's word says so we can know Him better.'

'It was great when you asked Jess how her presentation at work went, because we want to be a group that knows and cares about each other.'

Another way to do this is to celebrate how God's helped your group grow. Every so often you could ask the group: 'How has someone else in this group helped you grow?' Or 'what have you learnt about someone else that you admire, since we started meeting as a Small Group?'

### **Ask people to do things**

Your group is responsible for each other, so ask people in the group to do things. Share who does dinner / dessert / food each week so other people get to serve the group. Ask people what their skills or gifts are, then give them a chance to do those things. You might need to stop doing things so someone else can start. Remember, it's not your group, it's our group.

### **Meet every week**

Nothing tells the group you're committed to this than running it every week. It's a powerful statement that you really are committed to encouraging them if you run it, even when only 3 people can make it. Of course, don't be stupid about it! If you're so sick you can't get out of bed, stay in bed! Or better yet, ask someone else to host the night and to run the prayer and bible discussion because it's not your group, it's our group .

*"it's not your group,  
it's our group"*

**Summary:** There's 7 ways to shape the culture of your group. Shape it to be a group that takes responsibility for each other. To be a group that helps each other know God better and love each other like God's loved us.

## **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

**What's one thing you've learnt, or been reminded of, about God?**

**What's one thing you want to do right now to apply this?  
How will you do that?**

# 3

## WHAT'S GOOD BIBLE DISCUSSION?

### TRUST THE BIBLE: IT'S HOW GOD GROWS US

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul tells Timothy to read the bible because:

*'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting & training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.'*

The bible is God's word, not just words written by some guys thousands of years ago. Words breathed out by God. Words God breaths out right now, every time we hold the bible in our hands, open it and listen to him. Do you believe that?

If you believe that then you'll want the bible to be the centre of all you do. As a Small Group Leader, trust that if you can just get the Bible into people, God will work. If people just listen to God, he will transform and grow them – and that's the thing you most want for them! That's why we have Small Groups at Salt: so people will know God better and love each other the way God's loved us. Basically you just want the people in your group to turn up each week and open the bible, because that's how we grow.

“you just want the people in your group to turn up each week and open the bible, because that's how we grow”

### WHAT DOES 'GOOD' LOOK LIKE?

But of course, just opening the bible's not enough to help people grow. They have to read it and chew it over. You want to discuss it together. People need to apply it

and live different now. We want Small Groups at Salt to wrestle with what God says, and to encourage each other to go live it.

It's a Tues night, your group's finished eating together and you've just told them to open their bible to Leviticus 1. What now? How do you lead a 'good' bible discussion? Or to put it another way: when your group closes their bibles at the end of the night, how do you know if it's been a good bible discussion?

## **SIGNS OF A GOOD AIRFLIGHT**

There's a lot of factors that make a successful flight on an airplane. Booking tickets, check in, boarding. Mechanical checks, re-fuelling, a competent pilot. The take-off, rising to cruising altitude, dealing with turbulence, coming in to land.

The most important sign of a successful flight is that you land! But many factors make it successful. Without refuelling, or check in or a competent pilot, it wouldn't have been successful. All those components are signs of a good flight.

## **A GOOD BIBLE DISCUSSION LETS GOD SPEAK**

What are the signs of a good bible discussion? God speaks in his word, so a good bible discussion let's God speak. At the end of the discussion you want to be able to say:

- Our bibles were open and we read the bible carefully
- We reflected on what we were reading and wrestled with what it meant
- We tried to interpret the words and sentences by what else the bible says, rather than by our experiences
- People were engaged and participating
- People were teaching each other and sharing their thoughts and questions
- People were thinking through what it personally means for them
- People were thinking through what it means for other people in the room

## **7 WAYS**

As a leader you don't need to know all the answers or be the bible expert. You just want to guide people to read the bible so we can teach each other, so we can help each other know God better. Here's 7 ways:

**Silence is your friend.** The temptation is to fill every pause with the sound of your own voice because you're worried silence means the discussion's over! But if you

want people reading the bible for themselves then they need time to read it and think about it. So as you ask a question also say: 'take a minute to think about that'. Or 'take a sec to reflect on what this means for you'.

**Get the group involved.** When someone shares an answer to a question ask 'what do other people think?' This draws the group into the discussion so we're all looking at the bible.

**Ask for evidence.** When someone shares their answer ask them: 'where do you see that in the passage?' Or better yet, ask the whole group: 'Can you see that idea that Chris said in the passage? Where do you see it?' This helps the whole group to keep looking at the bible, instead of the bible becoming a springboard for whatever someone wants to talk about.

**Summarise.** You want discussion to land somewhere, because we want to know God better than before and to love more than before. A sign you've landed is that the group can summarise what you've covered . So ask the group: 'Who can summarise the big point we've seen so far?'

"A sign you've landed is that the group can summarise what you've covered"

**Enlist talkers.** Every group's got someone who talks more than others.

That can be really helpful! But sometimes their talking stops others from talking. So chat privately and enlist them as an ally, who could start discussion but then ease up so others can share. Another way to help the rest of the group talk is to sit next to the talkers. This limits their eye-contact with you, which means they're less likely to talk. Another way is to say something like this: 'Next question. How about people who haven't shared anything yet, what do you think v2 means?'

**Divide and conquer.** One way to help everyone be engaged and participate is to divide into pairs or smaller groups every so often. Divide then pairs to discuss the question. Or give each pair different passages to look up and then share their answers with the group. This approach especially helps people who feel nervous sharing with the whole group.

**Love a good tangent.** There's bound to be tangents. They can be really good and helpful. They're good if they're a moment of fun to break the tension. Or if it's a question everyone's thinking but no-one's asked. Or if they get you thinking about God. 2 things you can do if someone starts a tangent: 1) go with it and ask people to brainstorm other parts of the bible related to that tangent; 2) reign it in and ask the group to try to understand the piece of the puzzle that's in front of us first.

**Summary:** God's word is how God changes and grows us. Love and trust the bible, and help the people in your group to do the same. Every time you meet and open it up, you get to discover what God says next!

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What's one thing you've learnt, or been reminded of, about God?

What's one thing you want to do right now to apply this?  
How will you do that?



# WHAT'S GOOD GROUP PRAYER?

## **OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN...**

One of the greatest blessings of being a Christian is that we can pray. When Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray he says: 'This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...' (Matt 6:9). We can pray to God the Father because God the Son's death has reconciled us to God. We can pray to God the Father because God the Spirit is living in us, to connect us to Christ Jesus and all the blessings Jesus brings.

It's a privilege that we get to pray to our Father in heaven. Jesus has won that access for us.

We pray as a response to what God's shown us about himself, as we know Him better. We also pray God will apply what we've learnt, helping us live it out and helping us love each other like God's loved us .

"We pray as a response to what God's shown us and pray God will apply what He's shown us"

## **PRAYING BIG**

We can pray to God about anything and everything. He loves to hear us pray! We want to pray for each other, to bring each other's cares and concerns to God. But we also want God's concerns to shape out concerns.

It's a problem if we never pray big prayers – prayers fuelled by scripture, prayers that flow from God's word, prayers shaped by God's concerns. Help your group to pray big!

## HELP PEOPLE PRAY

It takes time for any group to feel comfortable praying out loud. How can you shape the culture to help people pray? Start by assuming people need help to pray. It's not realistic to expect everyone to just start praying in a group, without help. Some people feel intimidated, or embarrassed, or unworthy, some feel like their concerns are too small, or they don't know the right words. Some people have never prayed out loud before.

You might be one of those people! You feel like you're not very good at prayer either. That's ok! We're all learning to trust God more. We can help each other learn.

## 6 WAYS

Here's 6 ways to help your group teach each other to pray.

**Start small and take small steps.** In the first week ask people to share 1 thing they're thankful to God for. In the second week ask them to share 1 thing they want to ask God for. Slowly build on that.

**Be creative in how you pray.** Pray all together, split into guys and girls to pray, pray in pairs. Get people to share their prayer points out loud, or ask them to write down their prayers. There's no rules. Experiment and see what your group likes best.

**Be creative with when you pray.** Pray at the end, pray at the start. Pray in response to the bible and then pray again for things people have shared. Experiment!

**Make time to pray.** It takes longer than you think to pray as a group, especially when you're praying for each other. People have to talk first and share, before someone else can pray for them. Factor that time in, so people actually talk to God and not just each other.

**Explain the process.** For those new to prayer it helps to explain how you'll do it. E.g. 'I'll start, a few of us can pray for the things we chatted about, and then Kate can you finish our prayer time?'

**Follow up.** One of the best ways to show you love someone is to pray for them. Since your group's committed to loving each other, encourage them to follow up prayer points. E.g. if you split into guys and girls or pairs to pray, ask people to text the person they prayed for during the week, to follow up how the thing they wanted prayer for went.

**Summary:** It's a privilege that we get to pray to our Father in heaven. Jesus has won that access for us. So enjoy that blessing by praying regularly, praying together, praying big!

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What's one thing you've learnt, or been reminded of, about God?

What's one thing you want to do right now to apply this?  
How will you do that?

# 5

## WHAT'S GOOD COMMUNITY?

### **CELEBRATE BEING GATHERED**

There are good groups all across the Illawarra. Sports teams, gaming groups, craft groups, uni friend groups. Groups that are warm and fun. Groups that like spending time together. Groups that care about each other. Good groups are not a uniquely Christian thing.

What is uniquely Christian is that God has gathered us together. As Paul tells us:

*'Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.'* (1 Cor 12:27)

*'Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.'* (Rom 12:4-5)

“celebrate the  
gathered-ness Jesus  
has won for us”

God has gathered us together around Christ.

We not only belong to God, we also belong to each other as a body. God's brought us together. At Salt we get to celebrate being God's gathered people! Jesus has won that gathered-ness for us by his death and resurrection.

In Small Groups, at Church, in fact every time you meet with another Christian, you can celebrate the gathered-ness Jesus has won for us!

## AN ODD BUNCH

Jesus is the one thing your group has in common. He may be the only thing you have in common. Some people in your group might be working, others retired. Some married, others unmarried or divorced. Some parents, some students. Some migrants, some born in Australia, some from Wollongong, some from other parts of the country. That makes for lots of differences – beautiful differences!

Christians are an odd bunch. Why would such a different group of people ever hang out together? Because God has brought us together around His Son. You might not be friends with the people in your Small Group. You might never become friends. That's totally fine. You're something much deeper than friends: you're brothers and sisters in Christ.

Unite around the thing you have in common and celebrate it: you belong to God! Unite around a common cause: we're here to help each other know that God better and love each other like that God's loved us. Celebrate doing that together!

## TIME, TIME AND... SPEEDING UP TIME

How do you shape a group so it celebrates being God's gathered people? The short answer is time. It takes time to get to know each other, to learn how to love each other. So spend time together.

“The good news is you can speed up time, by making it intentional time”

The good news is you can speed up time, by making it intentional time, deliberate time having fun, growing relationships, getting to know and understand each other better.

## 5 WAYS

Here's 5 ways to speed up time:

**Small Group Away.** You get 2 hours together a week to build relationships. If you go away for a weekend you get about 30 hours to build relationships. That's 3 months worth of Small Group! Plan a weekend away early, as that'll help the group commit to each other. Organise it as a group. If you can't do a weekend, do 1 night, or 1 day.

**Shared Experiences.** Shared experiences build relationships. Things like eating a meal together, watching a movie, going to the beach, playing a board game. These experiences are deliberate time together that you can look back on. Aim to do

these kinds of things once a term, but 2 or 3 times when your group first kicks off. You could do something special, the kind of thing you wouldn't normally do: like trampolining at flip out, the Minnamurra rainforest walk, beer tasting or a High Tea. Ask your group for suggestions and ask group members to organise them.

**Have Fun Together.** As you get to know each other more your group will be quicker to have fun together and crack jokes. That's a great thing! Have fun being a group together.

**Hot Seat.** Have a rotating hot seat in your lounge room, where you get to know a particular person better. Each week someone different is in the hot seat, and everyone gets to ask them one question each.

**Talk Deep:** Don't be afraid to ask people in your group deep questions, like: what was your biggest disappointment this year? When's a time you found it hard to trust God? What's the best thing about being a Christian? Don't be afraid to answer these questions yourself. It will help your group learn to love each other, and will build trust.

## **IT'S A LIVING THING**

Plants are living. They go through stages. A seed germinates, the stalk shoots up, leaves appear, flowers start to bloom, then at some point the plant slowly dies.

Groups are living. Your group will go through stages. 4 stages.

**Planting:** When your group starts, things are awkward. You don't know each other. People are nervous. They want to know what the group will be like and if they belong here.

3 things will make a huge difference: a) Hammer out expectations to clarify all that uncertainty, b) explain to the group that it's living and you want them to be there through all the stages and not to tap out if it gets hard, and c) build shared experiences quickly. These 3 things are like putting fertilizer in the soil before planting a seed.

**Growing:** As plants grow they get bent and knotted. Branches shoot off in different directions. As your group grows you'll start to have conflict. Relationships get bent and knotted. People want to take the group in different directions. This is a normal part of growing together. If you're going to learn how to love each other you're going to get it wrong sometimes. Help the group to be thoughtful of each other, quick to apologise, and keep reminding people what sort of group we decided to be.

**Flourishing:** A plant has rapid initial growth. But once it's settled and spread its leaves, flowers start to appear on the plant. It starts to flourish. As your group settles into a groove it will start to flourish. It'll feel like a group instead of a bunch of individuals. People will be more honest and ready to listen. They'll want to explore different ideas together. They'll be looking out for each other and taking responsibility for each other. It'll feel like you're on the same team.

This is where you want to get to! The hard work of holding people to the group's expectations has paid off. It's the group you wanted it to be. So enjoy that God's used your efforts to get it here!

**Ending:** Plants die. Every plant dies eventually. Groups end. Every group ends eventually. When it happens, help your group finish well. People will feel sad because they're about to see each other less often. Give people the chance to say goodbye. Celebrate what made your group good, and how God's grown you all to know Him better. Help people look forward to a new group and an opportunity to help new people know God better and love each other. You'll probably feel sad too, and it's ok to feel that way! It shows you're a leader who cared about the people in your group.

Groups are living. They go through stages. 2 last thoughts on these stages:

“A plant can't jump from a seed to flowers. Your group can't jump a stage”

**You can't skip:** If you could, wouldn't you want to skip straight to flourishing?

It's the stage you want to get to! But you can't jump there. A plant can't jump from a seed to flowers. Your group can't jump a stage. If it's going to flourish you can't skip the initial awkwardness, or the conflict. It takes time to grow a plant and a group. So let it come in time – but remember you can speed up time by being intentional.

**Graft in a new member:** When a new person joins your group that's like grafting a new branch onto the plant. It'll take time for the plant to adjust to the change. Same with your group. If you were flourishing, a new member will push your group back to the growing stage because they're brand new to the group.

Help a new person get to know your group and its quirks. Tell them the in-jokes. Share the stories of experiences you've had together. Ask everyone to tell the new person one thing they've learnt about the person sitting next to them. Tell the new person what the group expects from them and what they can expect from the group. Help them join this team that's committed to each other.

**Summary:** God has gathered us together around Jesus. Help your group celebrate the gathered-ness Jesus has won for us by meeting together, getting to know each other and by learning how to love each other.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What's one thing you've learnt, or been reminded of, about God?

What's one thing you want to do right now to apply this?  
How will you do that?

# 6

## WHY YOU GET NOWHERE WITHOUT TRUST

### TRUST AND LOVE

You want your group to know God better and to love each other with the love God's shown us. You want to encourage your group to take responsibility for each other. You are meeting weekly to read the bible, pray together and spend time with each other. In all these activities, you get nowhere without trust.

Trust is a glorious thing! It's a sign of love. God's loved us and we're safe and secure in that love . As Paul says:

“God's loved us and  
we're safe and secure in  
that love”

*I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:38-39)*

God who has shown us that love has also gathered us to show each other the same love. As Jesus says:

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:34-35)*

When people are loved, they're willing to be honest and open with each other because they know your group has their best interest at heart. The group's got their back, so they can let people in to what they're really thinking and feeling. They can be real and honest because they know they're loved.

## **TRUST IS PRECIOUS AND FRAGILE**

Trust is glorious, because it shows people genuinely love and care about each other. But trust is fragile. Some of the most precious things in life are fragile: relationships, health, your Grandma's china.

Trust takes time to build. People test the waters with a small thing before we jump in with something bigger. In the early days of a group as people share their answer in a bible discussion or share a prayer point, they're checking to see how people react.

Trust is easy to crush. It takes time to build but it can be crushed in half that time. It's crushed when someone shares a thought and they're interrupted, or laughed at or criticised.

## **5 WAYS**

Your group meets weekly to read the bible, pray together and spend time with each other. In all these activities you get nowhere without trust. So how do you shape your group to trust each other?

Here's 5 ways to cultivate trust:

**Be a model.** When you're honest and real that helps others be real too. So tell the group you don't know what this part of the bible means either, or that you're struggling with something and you'd love prayer. God put you in that group not just so you can encourage them but also so they can encourage you . So it's good for you to be real, so the group can love and trust and support you too.

“God put you in that group not just so you can encourage them but also so they can encourage you”

**Don't force it.** You can't make people share their thoughts in a bible discussion or be honest in a prayer time. They'll share more as they grow to trust the group. Talk deep. Surface talk feels safe. But it doesn't grow relationships and it doesn't ultimately help your group love each other. So don't be afraid to ask deep questions of your group.

**Don't let trust be crushed.** When you see trust being crushed, jump in and remind the group we're here to love each other, so let's love the person sharing by listening to them without judging them.

**Always praise honesty.** Say to the person and the group: 'thanks so much for sharing your thoughts', or 'thanks for telling us that. I'm sure it wasn't easy to share and it sounds really hard! Let's pray for you about it.'

**Summary:** God's loved us and is helping us love each other. As you read the bible, pray and spend time together, help your group grow in their trust and love of each other.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

What's one thing you've learnt, or been reminded of, about God?

What's one thing you want to do right now to apply this?  
How will you do that?

### THE JOY OF SERVING

With all this, remember it's a privilege to be a Small Group Leader! The bible and prayer in community is how God changes lives. Nothing is more exciting than seeing God change people by his word!

"Nothing is more exciting than seeing God change people by his word!"

So keep serving God with joy, keep encouraging your group to know God better and love each other more – and keep praying God will grow you.

**NOTES...**



**saltchurch.**

For more Small Group leader resources:  
[www.saltchurch.info/resources/small-group-leaders](http://www.saltchurch.info/resources/small-group-leaders)