

saltchurch.



GETTING STARTED AS A

SMALL GROUP LEADER

INTRO

You might be getting started as a Small Group Leader and you're not real sure what you're meant to do. Or you may have been leading Small Groups for years and you've read every book there is. Or you might be new to leading a Small Group *at Salt Church*, with our unique vision and culture.

Wherever you fit, this guide is for you.

WHAT IS THIS GUIDE

At Salt Church we want to have Small Groups where we: 1) help each other know God better and 2) learn to love each other like God loves us.

This guide covers 7 topics, which will show you how to build a healthy Small Group that does those 2 things really well.

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](#)
7. [How to keep growing](#)

THE JOY OF SERVING

It can be hard work to be a Small Group Leader. But at the same time it's a glorious privilege! We get to know the God who made us and who bent over backwards to save us. God lets us join in His work of seeing lives transformed. So as you lead your group, remember the God you're serving. Serve him with joy and keep praying!

1

WHY CHARACTER MATTERS MOST

GOD CARES ABOUT BEING AND DOING

When Titus needs to choose pastors for the churches he oversees, Paul gives him a list of qualifications.

'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! Lives are transformed as a pastor manages God's household/the church and teaches the truth.

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 the list, how different is it to your average job description on seek.com? For most jobs qualifications are about competence – what you *do*. But almost all of 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, actually.

Who you *are* as a leader and what you *do* as a leader matter 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 growing to be lifelong disciples of Jesus. As you lead your Small Group grow in what you do and in who you are. God cares about *being* and *doing*, but being, character, matters most.

A SPRING AND A STREAM

Craig Hamilton in his book *Wisdom in Leadership* explains: who we *are* is like a freshwater spring and what we *do* is like the stream, the water that flows from the spring. They’re connected: without a spring there’s no stream. But they’re not the same thing.

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 too. Which means you need to:

1. ***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 does care about *doing*. But how you live, your character, matters most.

2. **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 better thing.

God doesn't need you to lead a Small Group. He can make us know him and love each other without you.

But God wants you to lead so you can share in 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...

Work hard for Jesus. Labour for his glory. People need to know God better to have their lives transformed and you're key to making that happen.

But as you do all that, 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 to hear his voice, and to grow to look more like your Heavenly Father.

God cares about being and doing, but character matters most.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. What 1 thing did you learn or were you reminded of about God?
2. What 1 thing can you do 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 Church is to do 2 things:

1. Encourage your group to know God better
2. Encourage your group to love each other like God loves us

Basically it's to 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 unswervingly 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 has gathered us together as Christians. By holding onto the words of Christ and holding them out, we can teach and instruct each other.

BUILDING AN 'ENCOURAGING GROUP'

So how do you encourage a *group of people* to know God better and love each other like God loves us?

You want your group to take responsibility so it's not just you encouraging, but everyone encouraging. Your group might not be natural friends. You may never become best friends. Be united around a deeper thing: a common purpose. Help your group see that your Small Group exists to *help each other* know God better, and to *help each other* love.

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

TIME TO OPEN A CAFE

How do you build 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 mini-pastor. You're a culture shaper.

Imagine you've just decided to open a brand-new café in Wollongong. There's stiff competition, so what would you do? Get the finest ingredients, locally sourced produce, single origin coffee beans. You'd hire the best chef and 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 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 whether people will come to your café.

That's like what you do as a Leader: you shape your Small Group's culture. You can't avoid this: you will shape your group's culture. What you say and do shapes the culture. So how do you shape your group's culture to be an 'encouraging group', where people take responsibility for each other?

6 WAYS

1. Work with your other leader

Most Small Groups at Salt have 2 leaders. You're both trying to create an 'encouraging group'. If you don't work together, you may unintentionally work against each other!

Work together by praying regularly for your group, planning each new term and series together, share how you've seen the group grow so far, ask each other for feedback, check in on what the group's culture is like.

2. Decide on expectations and culture as a group

Every individual in your group has ideas and expectations about how your Small Group will operate. As these people come together, you get to decide together what sort of group you want to be.

You can discuss that deliberately or let it happen by default. Either way it will happen. The best way is to discuss it together so you all own the expectations and culture.

Here's a way to have that conversation. The 1st time your group meets:

a) *Tell the group what sort of group you want it to be*

The Small Groups Infographic helps you have this conversation. It's an easy way to show people what Small Groups at Salt are for. Use it to explain what an 'encouraging group' looks like.

b) *Ask how we're going to do this*

As a group discuss: how do we want to do this? You could cover things like:

- Attendance: aim to be here each week?
- Apologies: post on our group's Facebook page if you can't make it?
- Facebook: what's a good way to share info online during the week?
- Meals: dinner or dessert? How often? Who's cooking?
- Participation: how can we make it safe to all share our thoughts?
- Prayer: will we pray together? In smaller groups? As guys and girls?
- Trust: how can we learn to trust each other and be real?
- And so much more...

You could write this on butcher's paper so everyone can see it.

c) *End the discussion by summarising, 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 our expectations'.

This will probably feel a little awkward. But it's crucial for your group to decide on expectations together and set the culture early. Expect it to feel a bit awkward but see it as a necessary brilliant investment in your group.

3. Keep setting culture

Having spent all that time working out your expectations and culture, the last thing you'd want is to stick it on a shelf and forget about it. So:

- 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: how are you finding the group? Is it what you expected? How can *you* help it be the sort of group we want it to be?
- Chat as a group after 6 months to see if the culture is slipping, or if there's anything new the group wants to set as the culture.
- If a new member joins your group fill them in on the expectations and culture.

If you find some people aren't doing what you all agreed to, have a chat in private with them about that. After all, these aren't *your* expectations, they're *our* expectations – they're what our group decided together. So it's ok to point out to people if they're not doing what they said they would and it's hurting the group.

4. Praise what you want to see

E.g. 'It was great when you shared what you thought that verse meant, because we want to wrestle with God's word so we can know Him better.'

Or '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.'

Or 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?'

5. Ask people to do things

You want your group to take responsibility, so ask people 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.

6. Meet every week

Meeting every week – even when only 3 people can make it – is a powerful statement to your group that you're committed to encouraging them and that you think Small Group matters. 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 and run the prayer and bible discussion – after all, it's not your group, it's our group.

Summary...

There's 6 ways to shape the culture of your group. Shape it to be a group that takes responsibility for each other: that helps each other know God better and learns to love each other like God loves us.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. What 1 thing did you learn or were you reminded of about God?
2. What 1 thing can you do 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 people thousands of years ago. Words breathed out by God. Words God breathes out right now, every time we hold the bible in our hands and open it and listen to him speak. 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.

Basically 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?

Of course just *opening* the bible's not enough to help people grow. They need 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.**

So it's a Tues night, your group's finished eating and you've told them to open 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

Lots of factors make for a successful flight on an airplane. Booking tickets, check in, boarding. Mechanical tests, re-fuelling, a competent pilot. Take-off, rising to cruising altitude, dealing with turbulence, coming in to land.

The most important sign of success is that you land! But many factors made it successful. It wouldn't be a success without refuelling or boarding or a competent pilot. 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 read 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 thoughts and questions
- People were thinking through what it personally means for them
- People were thinking through what it means for others 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 and help each other know God better. Here's 7 ways:

1. **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 and think about it. As you ask a question also say: 'take a minute to think about that', and then wait until someone other than you speaks.
2. **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.
3. **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 Chris said in the passage? Where do you see it?' This helps the group keep looking at the bible, instead of the bible becoming a springboard for whatever we want to talk about.
4. **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 thing we've seen so far?'
5. **Enlist talkers.** Every group has someone who talks more than others. That's really helpful as it gets discussion rolling. Sometimes their talking stops others from talking though. So chat privately and enlist them as allies who can start the discussion but then ease up so others can share. Another way to help others 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 much yet, what do you think v2 means?'

6. **Divide and conquer.** One way to help everyone participate is to divide into pairs or smaller groups every so often to discuss a question. Or you can give each pair different bible verses to look up and report back to the group. This is a great approach for people who feel nervous sharing with the whole group.
7. **Love a good tangent.** There's bound to be tangents. They can be 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. You can do 2 things with a tangent:
 - a) go with it and ask the group to brainstorm other parts of the bible related to that tangent
 - b) reign it in and ask the group to try to understand the piece of the puzzle that's in front of us first.

Summary...

Chewing on God's word is how God changes and grows us. Love and trust the bible and help your group to do the same. Every time you meet and open God's word you get to discover what God says next!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. What 1 thing did you learn or were you reminded of about God?
2. What 1 thing can you do 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 reconciled us. 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 can 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. We also pray God will *apply* what we learn, helping us live it out and helping us love each other like God loves 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'd be a problem if we never prayed big prayers: scripture filled prayers.

HELP PEOPLE PRAY

It takes time for any group to feel comfortable praying out loud. How can you shape your group's culture to help people pray?

Start by assuming people need *help* to pray. It's not realistic to expect everyone will start praying in a group setting without help. Some people feel intimidated, embarrassed or unworthy. Some feel like their concerns are too small or they don't know the right words. Some have never prayed out loud with other Christians before.

And you might fit into one of those categories too – you may 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.

1. **Start small and take small steps.** In the first week ask people to share 1 thing they're *thankful* to God for. Next week ask them to share 1 thing they want to *ask* God for. Slowly build on that.
2. **Be creative with 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 points. There's no rules – experiment and see what suits your group best.
3. **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.

4. **Make time to pray.** It takes longer than you may expect to pray in a group. People have to talk first and share their prayer points, before someone else can pray for them. Leave enough time for prayer, so people actually talk to God and not just each other.
5. **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?'
6. **Follow up.** One of the best ways to love someone like God loves us is to pray for them. Another great way is to follow-up prayer points. E.g. if you split into guys and girls or pairs to pray, encourage 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 and praying big.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. What 1 thing did you learn or were you reminded of about God?
2. What 1 thing can you do 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, gamers, craft groups, uni friends. Groups that are warm and fun and who 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* made us a group. 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)

God has gathered us around Christ. We not only belong to God, we also belong to each other, as a body. Jesus has won that gathered-ness for us by his death and resurrection. We are God's gathered people.

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

Christians are an odd bunch. Jesus is the one thing your group has in common. He may be the *only* thing you have in common. Some in your group may be working, others retired or unemployed. Some married or parents, some unmarried or divorced. Some may be migrants, some from Wollongong, some from other parts of Australia.

That makes for lots of differences – beautiful differences!

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

Unite round the thing you share and celebrate it: you belong to God. Unite around a common cause: to help each other know that God better and learn to love each other like God loves us.

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 and 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. Deliberate time having fun, growing relationships, getting to know and understand each other better.

5 WAYS

Here's 5 ways to speed up time.

1. **Small Group Away.** You get about 2 hours a week together to build relationships. But if you go away for a weekend you get about 30 hours to build relationships. That's 3 months worth of Small Group!

Plan and organise a weekend away soon after your group starts meeting, as that'll help your group commit to each other. If you can't do a whole weekend, do 1 night, or 1 day.

2. **Shared Experiences.** Shared experiences build relationships. Things like eating together, watching a movie, going to the beach, playing a board game. These are moments your group can look back on.

Aim to do these kinds of things once a term, and twice in your first term together.

You could also 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 involve other group members to organise them.

3. **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.
4. **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.
5. **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 builds trust.

IT'S A LIVING THING

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

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

1. PLANTING

When your group starts, things may feel a bit 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. These 3 things are like putting fertilizer in the soil before planting a seed.

- a) Work out expectations together to clarify all that uncertainty.
- b) Explain to the group that it's living and will go through stages, so you want them to get through all the stages and not tap out if it gets hard.
- c) Build shared experiences quickly.

2. GROWING

As plants grow they get bent and knotted. Branches shoot off in different directions. As your group grows you'll have some conflict, relationships might get bent and knotted, people want to go 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 want to be.

3. FLOURISHING

A plant has rapid messy growth initially. But once it's settled and spread its leaves, flowers appear on the plant. It starts to flourish. As your group settles into a groove it'll 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 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 the group as you've wanted it to be. The hard work of shaping culture, setting expectations and encouraging people has paid off. So enjoy that God's used your efforts to get it here!

4. ENDING

Eventually every plant dies. Eventually every group ends. When that happens, you can help your group finish well. People will feel sad because they're about to see each other less often. So give people the chance to acknowledge that change. Celebrate what made your group good and how God's grown you all to know Him better. Encourage people to look forward to a new group and the chance to help other people know God better.

You'll probably feel sad too, and it's ok to feel that way! It shows you cared about the people in your group and had a good culture.

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

- **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, anymore than a plant can jump from a seed to flowers. If your group'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 with time (and remember you can speed up time by being intentional).

- **Graft in a new member:** If a new person joins your group that's like grafting a new branch onto a plant. It takes time for the plant to adjust to the change. Same with your group. If you were in the 'flourishing' stage, a new member will likely move your group to the 'growing' stage.

Help the new person get to know your group and its quirks. Tell them the in-jokes. Share stories of experiences you've had together. Ask everyone to tell the new-person one thing they've learnt about the person sitting on their left. 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 spending time together, getting to know each other, learning how to love each other, and having fun!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. What 1 thing did you learn or were you reminded of about God?
2. What 1 thing can you do now to apply this? How will you do that?

6

WHY YOU GET NOWHERE WITHOUT TRUST

TRUST AND LOVE

You want your group to help each other know God better and learn to love each other like God loves us. You meet weekly to read the bible, pray and spend time together. **In all these activities, you get nowhere without trust.**

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

'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)

The 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 with each other. They trust others have their best interest at heart. The group's got their back so they can be real and let people know what they really think and feel.

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. We all tend to test the waters with a small thing before we jump in with something bigger. In the early days of your group meeting, 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, laughed at or criticised.

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.

5 WAYS

How do you shape your group to trust each other? Here's 5 ways:

1. **Be a model.** When you're honest that helps others be real too. Tell the group when you don't know what part of the bible means either. Share if you're struggling with something and want prayer.

Also, God placed you in your group not just so you can encourage them but also so they can encourage you. It's good for you to be real so the group can love and support you too.

2. **Talk deep.** Surface talk is safe, but it doesn't grow relationships anywhere near as well as talking deeper and being open. Don't be afraid to ask deep questions of your group or to talk deep yourself.
3. **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 in time as they grow to trust the group.
4. **Don't let trust be crushed.** When you see trust being crushed, jump in to remind the group we're here to love each other, so let's love the person sharing by listening to them without judging.

5. **Always praise honesty.** To encourage a culture of being honest about what we really think and feel, praise honesty. E.g. when someone shares in a bible discussion, you could say to them and the group: 'thanks so much for sharing', whether you agree with what they said or not. Or in a prayer time: 'thanks for telling us that. I'm sure it wasn't easy to share. Let's pray for you about it now'.

Summary...

God loves us and is helping us love each other. We're safe with God and are learning to be safe with each other. As you read the bible, pray and spend time together, shape your group to trust each other.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. What 1 thing did you learn or were you reminded of about God?
2. What 1 thing can you do now to apply this? How will you do that?



HOW TO KEEP GROWING

GROWING YOURSELF

Whether you've been leading Small Groups for years or you're just getting started, you can grow as a leader. We all have strengths and weaknesses, areas we're aware of and blind-spots. You can always become better at shaping the culture of your group. If growing as a leader leads people to know God better and love each other more, then that's effort well spent!

You can find a bunch of tips so you can crawl, walk and run as a Small Group Leader [here on the Small Group Leader's page of the Salt website](#).

GROWING FUTURE LEADERS

We want to be a church that's wide – we're praying for a *flood* of lifelong disciples of Jesus across the Illawarra and beyond. As God graciously answers that prayer we'll grow in number as new disciples join our church.

We also want to be a church that's deep – to be people with an unceasing hunger to know God better and to be excited to see reality the way God does so we can live in light of it.

Both of these impact our Small Groups – as we grow in number we'll need *more* Small Groups; in order to grow as *lifelong* disciples of Jesus we'll need *quality* Small Groups with *trained* leaders.

That's where you have a crucial role: you can raise up Future Leaders.

There's so many wins for a Future Leader stepping up to give leading a go. Many of them will be the same things you've experienced as you began to lead: your own growth as a Christian, the chance to serve and grow others, the joy of making a bigger impact for God in the lives of more Christians.

What you might not have thought about though is that there's also a bunch of wins *for you as a leader* when you raise up a Future Leader:

- It makes your job easier because you're sharing some of your leading responsibilities with them.
- It creates a healthier culture for your Small Group, as they take more ownership, a more active role in the group, and model that to others.
- You have a replacement leader ready to go if you want or need to finish leading your Small Group at any point.
- Teaching someone else how to lead grows is one of the best ways to hone your own skills and convictions.

HOW TO RAISE UP FUTURE LEADERS

We want to help people get ready to lead a group so it's a *natural next step* instead of an enormous leap. So just like we've created tips to help you grow as a leader, we also have steps a Future Leader can take to crawl, walk and run into Small Group Leading.

You'll find them [here on the Small Group Leader's page of the Salt website.](#)

How could you do this in your group? There's no need to complicate it...

- Choose 1-2 people in your group that have potential to be leaders
- Choose 1-2 of the boxes and help them give it a go

How good would it be to help raise up someone brand new who can be Getting Started as a Small Group Leader too.



For more Small Group resources:
www.saltchurch.info/resources/small-group-leaders