

Community: leader guide

groups

For use with the *Community: Starting Well In Your Small Group* Participant Guide and DVD

USING THE COMMUNITY: STARTING WELL GUIDE

In most DVD studies, the participant guide contains a summary of the content on the DVD. That's not true of *Community: Starting Well In Your Small Group*. The print and video elements for each week explore the same topics, but do so from different angles. That includes the use of Scripture. Passages referenced in the guide may not be the same ones explored in the video.

This approach provides more opportunity for you and your group members to connect the material with your lives. The goal is that your group discussions help you get to know one another while also challenging you to apply God's wisdom to your lives. Some of the people in your group may respond to what's in the videos; others may be touched by what they read. That's because people have different stories, different styles of absorbing information, and are in different places on their spiritual journeys.

WHAT'S ON THE DVD

The video elements on the DVD may be a little different than what you've experienced in other studies. The mix of content and creative elements is designed to be fast-paced but informative. Here's a breakdown of what you'll find.

SESSION 1

"You're Here For a Reason"

Duration 1:07

An inspirational video casting vision for community.

Host introduction

Duration :59

John Ott introduces the goal of the eight-week starter period.

Message

Duration 3:37

Andy Stanley casts vision for the role of intentional relationships in the process of spiritual growth and introduces the Three Vital Relationships.

Host closing

Duration :37

John Ott wraps up the video and transitions the group into a time of social connection.

Total Duration 6:20

SESSION 2

Host introduction

Duration :40

John Ott teases the first of the Three Vital Relationships: Intimacy with God.

Interviews

Duration 2:16

A brief creative piece in which people express a variety of opinions about God and having a relationship with him.

Message

Duration 3:44

Joel Thomas talks about God's desire that we experience community with him and with one another. (John 17:20-23)

Host closing

Duration :26

John Ott wraps up the video and transitions the group into discussion.

Total Duration 7:09

SESSION 3

Host introduction

Duration :58

John Ott teases the second of the Three Vital Relationships: Community with Insiders.

Message

Duration 5:22

Clay Scroggins explores the connection between community and spiritual growth. (1 Corinthians 12:12-26)

Interviews

Duration 3:22

A roundtable of group leaders talk about the importance of everyone in group showing up, joining in, and being real.

Host closing

Duration :15

John Ott wraps up the video and transitions the group into discussion.

Total Duration 6:57

USING THE COMMUNITY: STARTING WELL GUIDE

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SESSION 4

Host Introduction

Duration :33

John Ott sets up one of the most important phases of this 8-week experience: group storytelling.

Three Stories*

Duration 14:33

A creative piece featuring powerful, true life examples of storytelling.

Message

Duration 4:23

Billy Phenix uses Joshua 4:20-24 to illustrate the importance of sharing our stories.

Host closing

Duration :15

John Ott wraps up the video and transitions into the group leader telling his or her story.

Total Duration 19:44

SESSION 7**

Host introduction

Duration :40

John Ott teases the third of the Three Vital Relationships: Influence with Outsiders

Be the Church

Duration 4:53

A creative video with three stories about Christian community being a light to the world.

Message

Duration 3:30

Jeff Henderson talks about the importance of getting outside the four walls of group and investing in the larger community around you.

Host closing

Duration :27

John Ott wraps up the video and transitions the group into discussion.

Total Duration 6:40

SESSION 8

Group Agreement

Duration 3:41

John Ott introduces the session and highlights a couple of the most important aspects of the Group Agreement.

Message

Duration 3:32

Andy Stanley shares a final insight about the benefits of living in community.

Host closing

Duration :25

John Ott wraps up the eight-week group experience.

Total Duration 7:34

* This is the longest video segment on the DVD. It is designed to model transparency and openness for group members, but also to help the group ease into the rhythm of storytelling.

** There are no video elements for Sessions 5 and 6. During those weeks, group members tell their stories.

USING THE COMMUNITY: STARTING WELL GUIDE

CONTINUED

Before Each Group Meeting

1. Read the “Introduction” and “Weekly Reading” sections in the Participant Guide.
2. Watch the video segment for the session on the DVD.
3. Answer the “Discussion Questions.”
4. Read the “Moving Forward” section.
5. Send your group members an email in which you:
 - Introduce the topic for the upcoming meeting
 - Ask them to read the session materials in the Participant Guide and answer the “Discussion Questions”
 - Encourage them to call or email you with any questions or insights as they work through the material
 - Confirm the date, time, and location of your next meeting

During Each Group Meeting:

1. You may or want to read the “Introduction” and “Weekly Reading” from the Participant Guide aloud.
2. Watch the video segment on the DVD.
3. Have a conversation about your answers to the “Discussion Questions.”
4. Read the “Moving Forward” section aloud. This section wraps up the discussion, teases the topic for your next meeting, and sometimes challenges you with ways to apply what you’ve learned.

ORGANIZING THE GROUP MEETING

Set expectations about what will happen during your group meetings. This is important because different group members will have different ideas about what should happen. Some will want as much social time as possible. Others will be primarily interested in study. Still others will prefer to spend most of the group time in prayer.

All three activities are important to a great group experience. You can decide as a group how much time you want to spend in each. The important thing is that everyone knows what to expect.

A typical group meeting might be structured as follows:

- 30 minutes—Social time (you can serve coffee and dessert during this time; some groups even share a meal together)
- 1 hour—Bible, book, video, or curriculum study (it’s a good idea to begin this portion of the evening with a short prayer)
- 30 minutes—Prayer requests and prayer

At the end of this eight-week study, you’ll use the Community Group Agreement to define when you want to meet as a group, for how long you’ll meet, and the structure of your meetings.

Try to manage the group’s time well. Don’t be too rigid—it’s okay to put aside the group agenda when life happens and a group member is facing a major challenge—but stick as closely as possible to the meeting agenda you’ve agreed on as a group. Some of your group members will be frustrated if, for example, social time consistently stretches on too long, stealing time from the study and prayer portions of the evening.

LEADING THE DISCUSSION

You probably have a mental picture of what it will look like to lead—what you'll say and how group members will respond. Before you get too far into planning, there are some things you should know about leading a small group discussion.

Cultivate discussion.

It's easy to assume that a group meeting lives or dies on the quality of your ideas. That's not true. It's the ideas of everyone in the group that make a small group meeting successful. Your role is to create an environment in which people feel safe to share their thoughts. That's how relationships will grow and thrive among your group members.

Here's a basic truth about spiritual growth within the context of community: the study materials aren't as important as the relationships through which those materials take practical shape in the lives of the group members. The more meaningful the relationships, the more meaningful the study. The best materials in the world won't change lives in a sterile environment.

Point to the material.

A good host or hostess creates an environment where people can connect relationally. He or she knows when to help guests connect and when to stay out of the way when those connections are happening organically. As a small group leader, sometimes you'll simply read a discussion question and invite everyone to respond. The conversation will take care of itself. At other times, you may need to encourage group members to share their ideas. Remember, some of the best insights will come from the people in your group. Go with the flow, but be ready to nudge the conversation in the right direction when necessary.

Depart from the material.

We've carefully designed this study for your small group. We've written the materials and designed the questions to elicit the kinds of conversations we think will be most helpful to your group members. That doesn't mean you should stick rigidly to the materials. Knowing when to depart from them is more art than science, but no one knows more about your group than you do.

The stories, questions, and exercises are here to provide a framework for exploration. But different groups have different chemistries and different motivations. Sometimes the best way to start a small group discussion is to ask, "Does anyone have a personal insight you'd like to share from this week's material?" Then sit back and listen.

Stay on track.

This is the flip side to the previous point. There's an art to facilitating an engaging conversation. While you want to leave space for group members to think through the discussion, you also need to keep your objectives in mind. Make sure the discussion is contributing to the bottom line for the week. Don't let the discussion veer off into tangents. Interject politely in order to refocus the group.

Pray.

This is the most important thing you can do as a leader. The best leaders get out of God's way and let him communicate *through* them. Remember: books don't teach God's Word; neither do sermons or discussion groups. God speaks into the hearts of men and women. Prayer is a vital part of communicating with him.

Pray for your group members. Pray for your own leadership. Pray that God is not only present at your group meetings, but is directing them.

SESSION ONE

NOTES FOR LEADING

DVD RUN TIME: 6 MINUTES

Your first meeting as a group is a social gathering. You may be eager to jump into the study, but building relationships is essential to the group experience. The depth of your relationships will drive the quality of your discussions.

Host the first session in your home, where you can engage with every member of your group. Begin the meeting by watching Session 1 on the DVD. The video only lasts about six minutes, but will help you align expectations and set the tone for the evening.

Before the meeting, send your group members an email confirming the date and time of the meeting and providing them with directions to your home. Let them know that the meeting will last two hours. If everyone has fun and the meeting lasts longer, that's okay. But letting your group members know ahead of time when the meeting will begin and end helps to create a predictable environment.

On the night of the meeting, your job is to create an environment in which people can begin to connect. If your group members have already met and are comfortable with one another, you may not have to do much more than provide coffee and snacks or light desserts. If your group is meeting for the first time, you may want to use some icebreakers to help people ease into the conversation.

Using icebreakers is an essential small group skill. Begin with light and informational questions and then move to deeper and more personal levels as the group progresses together. Since this is your first group meeting, you probably want to stick mostly with Level 1 questions, maybe adding in a few Level 2 questions near the end of the evening.

ICE BREAKERS

SESSION ONE

NOTE: The Level 3 icebreakers are here for you to use later in this study and as you move into future studies.

Level 1: Information (What you know)

- What is your favorite movie? Why?
- What is your favorite city? Why?
- What day of your life would you most like to relive? Why?
- What does your name mean? Why were you named that?
- If your house were on fire, what three items (not people) would you try to save?
- What was the best gift you ever received as a child?
- If you suddenly lost your eyesight, what would be the thing you missed seeing the most?
- What was your first job? What do you remember most about it?
- Tell the group a brief story from your wedding day.
- If you could go to college (again), what would you study?

- You have been given a one-year sabbatical from work. What will you do?
- What has been one of the greatest adventures you have ever been on?

Level 2: Opinion (What you think)

- Who is one of your heroes. Why?
- Who is your number one advisor in life. Why?
- My favorite way to spend time is _____.
- Just for the fun/thrill of it, before I die I'd like to _____.
- I was (or would have been) voted "most likely to _____" in high school.
- I wish before I got married someone had told me _____.
- If you were going to leave the world one piece of advice before you died, what would you say?

ICE BREAKERS (CONTINUED)

SESSION ONE

- Who was one of the most interesting people you or your family ever entertained?
- Who was the best boss you ever had? What made him or her so good?
- People might be surprised to find out that I _____.
- Describe a grade school teacher that made a big impression on you (for good or bad).
- Each person in the group answer for the person on your right: “_____, I am so glad God made you because _____.”

Level 3: Feelings (Who you are)

- What is your biggest fear about death?
- What do you miss most about childhood?
- I am most like my mom/dad in that I _____.
- One of my biggest pet peeves is _____.
- When you were a child, what did you want to be

when you grew up?

- For what do you want to be remembered?
- An emotion I often feel but don’t usually express is _____.
- Where do you go or what do you do when life gets too heavy for you? Why?
- In what area of your life would you like to have greater peace? Why?
- What is one of your biggest fears about the future?
- When you were a child, what was your favorite time of day? What did you like about it?
- In general, I worry too much about _____.

Before you end the meeting, ask your group members this question: *What do you hope to get out of this group experience? Let them know what you hope to get out of the experience of leading them.*

SESSION TWO

NOTES FOR LEADING

DVD RUN TIME: 7 MINUTES

In Session 2, you'll explore the first of the "Three Vital Relationships": Intimacy with God. As you prepare to lead the meeting:

- Spend the week reading and thinking about the three parables in Luke 15:1-32.
- Consider memorizing Romans 8:38-39.
- Pray for the group and your group members individually.

This session is a great opportunity for you to get a sense of where your group members are on their spiritual journeys. This will help you to better understand what they need from you as a leader.

SESSION THREE

NOTES FOR LEADING

DVD RUN TIME: 7 MINUTES

During Session 3, your group will discuss Community with Insiders. To prepare, spend the week reading and thinking about the following Bible verses:

- Day One—Romans 15:7
- Day Two—Romans 14:1
- Day Three—Galatians 6:2-3
- Day Four—Hebrews 10:24
- Day Five—James 5:16

Pray this week for the relationships beginning to form in your group. Pray that God will use them to grow you and your group members and to change your lives.

SESSIONS FOUR - SIX

NOTES FOR LEADING

DVD RUN TIME: 20 MINUTES

Before you begin telling your stories, watch the video for Session 4. It sets expectations and even provides some examples of people telling their stories.

NOTE: Katie's story remains unresolved at the end of this week's video. We recognize this may upset some members of your group. If so, you can provide them with some resolution. Hallie Lynn Green was born on December 19, 2011 and passed away five days later on Christmas Eve. Because of Katie and Chris Green's openness about their story and extraordinary trust in God, Hallie's short life had an enormous impact on thousands of people and inspired Hope from Hallie, a nonprofit that helps other parents of Trisomy 13 babies. For more information, visit the Green family blog at <http://thelittlegreenfamily.blogspot.com/>

In order to encourage openness and transparency, reiterate with your group these values and goals from the Group Agreement:

- **Confidentiality**—for authenticity to occur, members must be able to trust that issues discussed within the group will not be shared outside the group.
- **Respect**—group members should never say anything that will embarrass their spouses or other members of the group.

Plan to spend about 30 minutes telling your story. This will leave enough time for one or two other individuals or couples to share their stories during Session 4. Have two or three individuals or couples tell their stories each week. If it takes more than three sessions for everyone's story to be told, that's okay. Pick up with Session 7 when everyone is finished.

Remember: the best way to encourage your group members to be open and transparent is for you to model openness and transparency.

SESSION SEVEN

NOTES FOR LEADING

DVD RUN TIME: 7 MINUTES

In Session 7, you'll explore the last of the "Three Vital Relationships": Influence with Outsiders. As you prepare to lead the group meeting:

- Spend the week reading John 13:1-18.
- Consider memorizing Galatians 5:13-14.
- Pray for your group and the group members individually.

As you discuss the idea of serving and your group members' previous experiences serving, think about the kind of service opportunity that might best fit your group. Take notes. Don't make any decisions about where and how to serve until after Week 8, but start preparing for a future discussion in which you and your group can work out the details and logistics of your first opportunity.

SESSION EIGHT

NOTES FOR LEADING

DVD RUN TIME: 8 MINUTES

In this final session, you'll review, discuss, and sign the Group Agreement and then spend the rest of your time connecting socially.

This week's video explains key elements of the Agreement, but you'll need to walk your group through the details.

NOTE: Before the meeting, print a copy of the Group Agreement for each individual or couple in the group. Everyone will need a copy of the agreement as you watch the video and walk your group through the details.

Download the Group Agreement at:

groupleaders.org/startingwell

1. Read through the "Values and Goals" section of the Agreement with your group. Be sure to answer any questions.
2. Most of your discussion should be around the "Group Guidelines" section of the document. This is where you decide the day of the week, time, and for how long you will commit to meet as a group. You'll also decide how your group meetings will be organized—how much time will be spent sharing, discussing a study, and praying. Remember: you're not setting rigid rules about your group meetings, but guidelines that help align group members' expectations by making the logistical aspects of group meetings predictable.
3. Finally, you and your group members will sign the Group Agreement. This isn't like signing a contract or mortgage or car loan. It's just a way for everyone in the group to acknowledge they understand why the group exists and how it's going to work.

All of your group members will probably choose to continue in the group, but it's possible some won't. They may contact you individually before the meeting or let everyone know during the meeting. Either way is okay.

The way you respond is important:

- You may experience someone leaving the group as rejection. Don't take it personally. Sometimes a group doesn't work for someone. It may be a matter of chemistry or schedule or personal commitment. It's probably not a reflection on your leadership.
- Encourage anyone leaving the group to seek community elsewhere. Just because this group didn't work out doesn't mean another won't. Being in community with other believers is essential to their spiritual growth.
- If someone contacts you by phone or email, communicate that person's decision to the rest of the group. Be positive and respectful. Limit what you share with the group—it's okay to give them a reason for the person's decision, but you don't necessarily need to share all of the details.

Once you've finished reviewing, filling out, and signing the Group Agreement, spend the rest of the meeting just hanging out and enjoying each other's company. Talk a little about what study you'll do next or begin planning your first service opportunity.

LEADING YOURSELF FIRST

Leading others begins with leading yourself. You're in a unique position to influence the lives of the people in your group. But you have to lead yourself first.

Depend on God.

Self-leading begins with being fully dependent on God. The best leaders have learned how to follow God. They know they are *always* under his authority.

Keep in mind that you're a steward of what God has entrusted to you—beginning with yourself. Your gifts don't belong to you and they aren't there to serve you. God has given them to you so you can use them to serve him.

Most important, in order to lead yourself well, you must follow the Holy Spirit. Learn how to let the Spirit lead you. Don't get out in front of him. This can be tricky (you are, after all, a leader). But it's important to remember that God is in charge, not you.

Be Self-Aware.

Leading yourself involves knowing yourself. You should be a lifelong student of yourself. If you can't currently answer the following questions, start moving in the direction where you can.

What is your personality type?

What are your top three spiritual gifts?

What energizes you?

What drains you?

How do you best connect with God?

In addition to being a lifelong student of yourself, you need to have people in your life who know your weaknesses and struggles and who love you enough to point them out to you. We all have imperfections we can't see. The remedy is a trusted circle of friends to hold us accountable.

Leaning into other people isn't enough, though. On a regular basis, you need to ask God to reveal your faults, to refine you, and to make you more and more like Jesus.¹

Be Intentional

To lead yourself well, you have to be intentional—you have to *do something*. All self-leaders do five things:

1. **Begin with the end in mind.** Self-leaders have a vision for the kind of people they want to be and they pursue that vision.
2. **Actively learn.** Self-leaders recognize that they're responsible for their spiritual development. They explore and discover. They're curious.
3. **Practice rest.** Self-leaders make time to reflect and recharge. They maintain a sustainable pace.
4. **Pursue health.** Self-leaders take the necessary steps to become or remain physically, emotionally, and relationally healthy.
5. **Lead from the inside out.** Self-leaders recognize they can never rise above the limits of their own characters. They cultivate integrity and moral authority by maintaining harmony between what they say and how they live.

¹ Psalm 139:23-24