



Co-Leader Training

SESSION 1: BEFORE YOUR GROUP

Before your group begins, there are a few key details to begin praying through and preparing. Use the tips below as a guide for your readiness.

Recruitment

Our desire is that you are leading a group that you are excited about and are eager to share with others. The first step to launching a successful group is getting people excited about and committed to joining your group.

Consider the following ways to cast vision toward joining your group:

1. Say it simply.
 - Invite them to be “better together” – to be known, loved, and challenged through authentic relationships.
2. Cast it compellingly by making it personal.
 - Everyone is subconsciously asking, “What is in this for me?” Answer this question through the sharing of personal stories.
 - Share why your group is important to you and how it has changed your life.
3. Repeat it.
 - Casting vision about joining a group is not limited to *before* groups begin.
 - Recruit people continually and invite people to take their next step – even if that is not with your group.
4. Celebrate it.
 - Share your excitement about groups often and celebrate those who join a group.
5. Live it personally.
 - Make your invitations personal and your commitment authentic.

Preparation

Effectively preparing for your group will allow you to lead with clarity and confidence. Before your small group is set to meet for the semester, determine the following:

1. Location
 - Determine where your group will be meeting.
2. Overview of Dates
 - Determine the dates and times that you will be meeting each week for the semester and plan to communicate that on Week 1 to allow participants to prepare their schedules.
3. Content
 - Review and prepare the curriculum in advance, so you can focus on the people in the present.

Prayer

Prayer is how we spiritually prepare. Before your group begins each week, set aside time to pray and intercede for those in your group. This not only prepares your heart, but the hearts of the participants.

Set a reminder in your phone to pray for them throughout the week.

SESSION 2: DURING YOUR GROUP

Pastoring Well

To pastor well is to know, love, and challenge those we lead.

What does it mean to know, love, and challenge?

Seek to *know*:

- Them personally – keep in mind the acronym FORD.
- Their past – understand their upbringing.
- Their current threshold of scary.
- Their current felt victories and defeats.

Seek to *love*:

- Unconditionally through their weaknesses or mistakes.
- Through the meeting of physical needs.
- By words of affirmation and/or gifts.

Seek to *challenge*:

- By extending grace and truth in all conversations.
- In accountability of next steps.
- Through improved self-awareness.

Leading Well

To lead well means to influence others toward growth in Christ and to equip them to use their gifts to advance the Kingdom of God.

The primary way we lead in groups is through the identification and accountability of next steps. Next steps can be:

- Personal – Where are they lost and in need of being found?
- Relational – Where are they in need of freedom?
- Organizational – Where are they in need of being empowered?

Consider our Core Values as a guide for next steps:

1. Set Free to Be – We live in Freedom by knowing who we are in Christ.
2. Strive to Thrive – We passionately pursue our relationship with God.
3. Better Together – We are known, loved, and challenged through authentic relationships.
4. Serve All, Love All – We use our gifts to serve others with the love of Jesus.
5. Live to Give – We generously steward what have been given.

Quick Tips

While leading your group, keep the following in mind:

- Be a connector and introduce people to one another.
- Have something fun and lighthearted to start.
- Make the environment warm and inviting.
- Get everyone's contact information, so you can follow up with them.

- Trust God that those in your group are the right people.
- Cast vision toward the importance of consistency in groups.
- Share your heart and expectations for the group.
- Overview the Covenant Group Commitment.

SESSION 3: AFTER YOUR GROUP

Building Community Beyond the Group

We exist to lead people to become fully engaged followers of Jesus. One of the ways we embody this is through our Core Value, Better Together. We define this Core Value as being known, loved, and challenged through authentic community. This Core Value goes beyond the group setting and should be embodied throughout the week, as well.

Staying Connected

Stay connected to your group during the week. This can be as simple as a text message or as thoughtful as 1:1 time spent with an individual member.

Practical Tips:

- Determine a form of communication that everyone enjoys.
- Invite their expectations in frequency of communication.
 - How often do those in your group desire to hear from you?
 - What is their preferred method of communication?
- Establish realistic expectations.
 - This allows you to adjust expectations on the front end to avoid hurt and disappointment on the back end.
- Plan it out!
 - Our schedule is a reflection of our priorities.
 - If it is not planned out, it will most likely fall to the wayside.

Creating Connections

It is not our sole responsibility as leaders to know, love, and challenge, but to empower the group to know, love, and challenge one another as well. Helping people form meaningful connections will often yield lasting transformation.

Practical Tips:

- Spark conversation throughout the week with questions.
 - How can they encourage one another this week?
 - How can they pray for one another?
 - How can they include people and build relationships?
- Plan a breakfast, lunch, or dinner with the group.
- Attend a service together.
- Invite everyone over for a game night.
- Go to a movie, play mini golf, or go to an arcade.
- Plan a trip to the pool or the beach.

Shared experiences not only build trust; they build bridges.

Follow Up

People want to know they belong, they matter, and their absence is noticed. When someone is absent, make it a point to follow up with a simple text message, voice memo, or phone call. This small gesture will mean the world.

SESSION 4: **SMALL GROUP CULTURE**

Our mission for Next Level Young Adults is to cultivate an authentic community of young adults who are engaging their faith as they actively shape their future and identify their purpose.

Our goal is to create an atmosphere where young adults feel they belong and matter; where they can wrestle with their doubts and questions; and where life is spoken into them and potential is pulled out of them.

To achieve this type of culture, our leaders must set the precedent.

Small Groups 101

The following dynamics serve to assist the leader in creating this atmosphere.

1. Invite the Holy Spirit

- As you prepare the atmosphere or environment, spend time inviting the Holy Spirit into the space. Invite His Presence to be a place of safety, peace, comfort, protection, and guidance for those who are joining.
- Before you begin leading, invite the Holy Spirit to move on your behalf. Declare in prayer that you are open to whatever the Holy Spirit wants to do in you and among you.
- As those in your group share, silently pray and intercede on their behalf that they might be guided toward whatever God wants them to notice.
- Conviction and comfort flow from the Holy Spirit. Offering your focused attention and a silent prayer for God to meet a person in an emotional or difficult moment can be more helpful than getting them a tissue, etc.

2. Involve All Members

- Involving all members is essential for creating an atmosphere of trust, vulnerability, and support of one another.
- Invite participation, but do not demand it. Allowing everyone to be in control of their own story creates safety as people can choose how to tell their story or how much to tell.
- Encourage respect of one another by asking participants to share the discussion time.

3. Ask Good Questions

- Questions allow us to lead those in our group to resolution within their heart by helping them understand what is going on beneath the surface.
- Questions invite members of the group to engage their faith by wrestling with their own thoughts and convictions and opening them to the possibility of more.

- Ask questions about thoughts and feelings vs facts to help members express what is going on inside their heart and mind.
- Help members express their thoughts and feelings to deeper levels with “why” questions.

4. **Actively Listen**

- Use non-verbal behaviors, such as eye contact and body position, and verbal behavior that convey empathy, respect, warmth, trust, genuineness, and honesty.
- Listen to the member who is talking and don't interrupt.
- Use statements or questions that show genuine interest and invite more communication.

5. **Focus, Clarify, and Reframe**

- Focus the time of discussion by suggesting that members limit their discussion to a particular topic. *“Thank you for sharing about ____, but let's focus on ____.”*
- If needed, ask a member to clarify or elaborate on what they have shared by repeating a particular communication or sequence of communications. *“I am sorry I am not understanding. Can you help me understand by repeating what you shared?”*
- Check that a particular message was understood by fellow members of the group and help members express themselves more clearly by offering a reframing of their communication. *“By sharing, did you mean ____?”*

6. **Avoid Fixing or Rescuing**

- Advice, suggestions, and instructions are appropriate only when people ask for them. Withhold the urge to offer advice unless it is specifically asked for.
- If you are feeling led, ask if you can submit advice to them and only proceed if permissible. *“Can I submit something to you?” “Can I offer my perspective?”*
- Attempts to fix a person or a situation can cause someone to shut down and leave a person feeling exposed. Most of the time, people just want to be heard – not fixed.
- When a person feels sadness, pain, or frustration, let them feel it.

7. **Listen to the Silence**

- Resist the strong urge to break uncomfortable silence and encourage your group members to do the same.
- Silence allows the people speaking time to listen to themselves, make decisions about what to say next, and allows the Holy Spirit space to do whatever He has in mind to accomplish.
- Silence is very often a gateway to a deeper level of honesty and openness to learning. Even though it may feel uncomfortable, stay with it and use active listening to let the speaker know you are listening.

8. **Maintain Confidentiality**

- Constantly remind your group that this is a safe place to share personal feelings and reflections and to ask questions.
- Reiterate that what is shared within the group setting should remain within the group setting.
- Note: We cannot remain confidential with information that could be potentially dangerous (i.e. abuse, suicide, destructive intentions). This information must be reported.

9. Don't Dwell in the Negative

- Put an immediate end to any and all gossip. Don't allow any conversations that are negative about Next Level Church, another church, leadership at school, parents, or other students occur.
- We can always reinforce a safe environment while not allowing disunity through slander or gossip to enter the culture of our small group.
- Encourage people to talk about *themselves* rather than others.

10. Take the Pressure Off

- God is the one who delivers and the Holy Spirit is the one who convicts. He is the only One who can bring about transformation to the lives of those we are leading. We are merely conduits of His love, grace, and power.
- We simply ask that you be open and willing to receive as to avoid ministering from a deficit. It is our desire to be Spirit-led in all we do and lead.
- It is okay to ask for help. If you do not know the answer to a question or how to navigate a situation, reach out. We are all human and it is good for those we lead to see that.

Sticky Points

What if someone talks too much?

- If you find that one or a few members of the group have a tendency to commandeer the small group time, know that it is okay to redirect or limit their communication.
- *"Hey Joe, I love what you have to say about this and I would love to hear more after the group. Does anyone else have something to add?"*
- Know that addressing it within the group setting may not be enough and may need to be addressed in a 1:1 conversation outside of the group.

What if no one talks?

- As the leader, you can share your story and then ask questions to engage discussion.
- Avoid simple "yes" or "no" questions. If you do ask these questions, follow it up with "Why?"
- Don't feel like you have to fill every void of silence.

What if someone gives bad advice?

- In situations like this, point people to Scripture rather than opinion.
- If necessary, follow up with the person and those they were talking to outside of the group setting.

What if someone is negative or inappropriate?

- This requires a conversation.
- Pull he or she off to the side after the group and explain to them that their behavior is not okay and ask them to adjust before the next group setting.

In all of these “sticky points,” know that you, as the leader, have power to block a group member’s communications, to encourage another member to speak, or to build connections with those in your group by linking one group member’s communication to those of another.

The goal is to stay consistent and continually engage those in your group. Follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and at any point, if you need help, ask for it! Confidence will grow over time.

SESSION 5: PASTORAL CARE

As a leader within Next Level Church, we trust you to lead and pastor those entrusted to you in times of crisis. Our desire is to equip you with the tools needed for you to feel confident and equipped to do so and to see their needs are met.

It is also our desire to be made known of these crisis situations and the needs that may arise from them, so we can walk alongside you within this process.

As situations of crisis arise, please involve your Coach and request help as needed.

One of the easiest ways to communicate this information is through your regularly scheduled 1:1 or Checkpoint with your Coach. He or she can then appropriately document this information within our database.

If the need appears more urgent, please do not hesitate to reach out the Coach directly via phone. Particularly in situations of suicide or abuse, the Coach must be made aware as soon as possible as we have a legal responsibility to report this information.

How do we define crisis?

Oxford's Dictionary defines crisis as "a time of intense difficulty, trouble, or danger."

It is important to note, however, that the crisis is determined by the person going through the situation – not through whether or not a situation is perceived as a crisis to us.

For example, a high school student in the midst of a break-up may consider that a crisis. Though a mature adult could conclude that this situation will not be the end of their life, it is still perceived as such to the student walking through it.

In other words, as we are leading and pastoring those entrusted to us, let us seek to understand what he or she may be experiencing or perceiving as their reality. As you are seeking to understand, keep in mind these varying levels of crisis.

Types of Crisis

Acute Crisis – This crisis is pointed, painful, and immediate.

- Examples may include the death of a loved one or a traumatic event.

Chronic Crisis – This crisis is enduring, recurring, and persistent.

- Examples may include mental health disorders or self-harming behaviors.

Adjustment Crisis – This crisis is temporary, transitional, and situational.

- Examples may include betrayal of confidence, divorce, or the birth of a child or sibling.

How do we recognize what needs to address within crisis?

Once we have identified that someone we are leading is in a state of crisis, we have the opportunity to then acknowledge what he or she may be in need of in order to survive or overcome.

Our first response toward crisis is to pray. Those we are leading should know that we are not only praying *for* them, but that we are also available to pray *with* them. If at all possible, pay a visit to the person. If being in person is not possible, consider digital avenues such as a phone call, FaceTime, or Zoom. Being present in times of crisis goes a long way.

As you are meeting with the person, keep in mind the following:

Emotional Needs

Crisis can lead us to experience a slew of emotions – fear, anxiety, despair, hopelessness, anger, frustration, grief, sadness, shock, etc.

We respond to these emotions in a variety of manners – from lashing out on loved ones to isolating ourselves, from medicating our pain to overworking ourselves, or ignoring the reality of our situation all together.

Our ultimate hope is that he or she is choosing to process their emotions and bring them to their Heavenly Father for comfort and healing.

Assess which emotions he or she may be experiencing and how they are responding by asking, “How are you feeling *right now*?”

Spiritual Needs

Often crisis can drive us to one of two extremes – deeper dependence upon God or separation from God.

A deeper dependence upon Him is usually a result of the state of despair a crisis can leave us within.

Separation from God is typically a result of our anger toward Him in not meeting our expectations.

Assess which direction he or she may be heading by asking, “How is your relationship with God in this time?”

Physical Needs

Some crisis situations, such as the loss of income, can also cultivate physical needs. Assess what these needs may be by asking, “Do you and your family have the means for food, shelter, and clothing?”

How do we respond to emotional needs?

Though our intentions may be pure, if not careful, how we respond can be more hurtful than helpful. Consider the following:

Focus On

1. *Listening*

- In moments of crisis, it is easy to feel the pressure to have the right things to say. Know that the most important thing is to simply listen and *be with them* in the midst of the crisis.

2. *Empathizing or Feeling*

- Empathy is a powerful tool as it allows us to see someone's pain through their eyes. When we empathize with those we lead, we cultivate compassion for them.
- This is not to be confused with sympathy, which means to look at their suffering from the outside and feel sorry or sad for them.
- You may find it useful to give them permission to feel their emotions and to validate them in what they are feeling.

3. *Praying*

- In every situation, we should seek to invite God into the crisis by praying with them and for them.
- Before the conversation ends, ask if you can pray for them and what they would like prayer for.
- This simple act can leave the person feeling loved, cared for, and more full of hope as God begins to do what only He can do.

Helpful Phrases:

- I'm so sorry for your loss.
- I hate that you are going through this.
- I know this is really hard.
 - Note: If you have not experienced their reality, try saying, "I imagine this is really hard."
- Tell me a story about this person.
- We are going to walk through this together.
 - Note: If it is not someone who you can walk through it with, connect them with a leader who can walk through it with them.

Hurtful Phrases:

- How are you?
 - This question is so open-ended, it can be paralyzing. Try to ask more pointed questions such as, "How are you feeling right now?"
- How can I help?
 - This inadvertently takes the focus off of them and puts the focus on you.
- You will get through this.
 - Though this is true, it robs them of feeling safe to embrace the reality they find themselves within.
- Don't cry.

Avoid:

- Clichés such as, “Everything happens for a reason” or “Heaven gained another angel.”
- Answering the “why” questions as this may provide false hope or security.
- Putting a timeline on the crisis. There is no timeline for mourning.

How do we respond to spiritual needs?

Our vision is to lead people to become more fully engaged followers of Jesus. This means that we should seek to give those we lead every opportunity to engage their faith in the midst of a crisis. Though the responsibility to engage their faith ultimately resides with the person we are leading, it is our responsibility to lead them in understanding how to do so.

Practically, this may look like leading them toward:

- Forgiveness (of God, themselves, or others)
- SOAP
- SOAK
- Prayer
- Journaling

How do we respond to physical needs?

As much as it is within your power, it is our desire to seek to fulfill any physical needs. Here are some avenues to consider:

1. **Personal**
 - If you have it within your means and feel prompted by the Holy Spirit, feel empowered to meet the need(s) of those you lead personally.
2. **Group or Team**
 - If you do not have it within your means, but still feel prompted by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the need, consider reaching out to the Serve Team or Group that he or she is part of and enlist their insight and resources.
 - There is something incredibly powerful about a group of people rallying around someone they love in a time of need.
3. **Staff**
 - If the needs go beyond what you and your Serve Team or Group can contribute, reach out to your Coach or Staff Lead.
 - Though we cannot guarantee that we can provide for that need, we would love nothing more than to be part of this process.

In every situation, seek to under-promise with the hopes of over-delivering. In other words, never promise that we can meet their physical needs without the assurance that we can follow through. If we are able to meet the physical need, it will be received as a blessing rather than an expectation.

SESSION 6: INTERCESSION

As leaders, prayer should be our first response in every situation. Praying for group members during the week, praying together during group, and encouraging praying with one another will set the tone for God to work.

What is prayer?

The most basic definition of prayer is “talking to God.” Most often prayer involves talking to God about yourself, your own life, or about Him – in worship, thanksgiving, and adoration.

Prayer is the communication of the human soul with God, our Father, who created our soul. Prayer is not meditation or passive reflection; it is direct address to God.

Prayer is the primary way for believers in Jesus Christ to communicate our emotions and desires with God and to fellowship (have relationship) with God.

Prayer will become more natural as you do it more often.

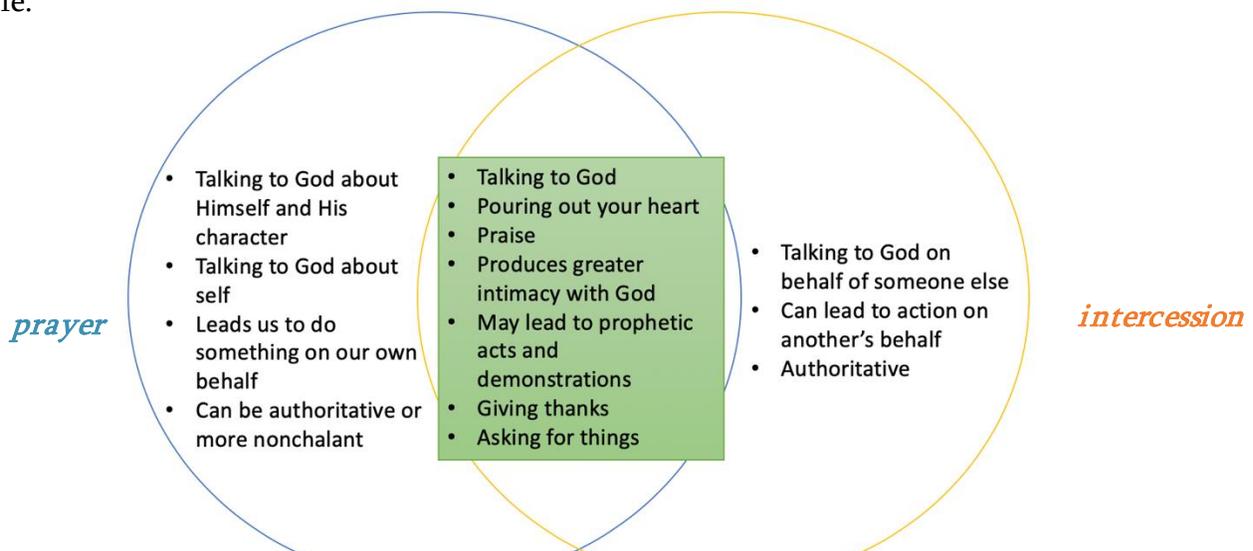
If you are uncomfortable, just start. Take the first step and trust that God will meet you there.

Easy Ways to Pray as You Lead

1. Scripture
 - Turn Scriptures into prayers.
 - Ephesians 2:10 – *God, help us to see ourselves as your Masterpiece.*
2. Prayer Requests
 - Collect before you pray.
3. Keep it short and sweet.
 - Don't feel you need to fill time
4. End each group with prayer.
 - Make it a routine and something everyone expects.
5. Arrive early and pray wherever you are meeting.

What is intercession?

Intercession begins when you move past a self-focus and start to pray for God's will to be done in someone else's life.



True intercession will often cost you something.

- We make a mark on God—taking our prayer from mere “conversation” to real intercession—when we become willing to sacrifice in order to get our prayer answered.
- Sometimes that means you feeling the burden so much that you cannot stop praying. The depth of the burden forces you to pound God with your prayers until He moves on the other person’s behalf.
- Sometimes it means you sacrifice by getting up early, staying up late, and cutting out other activities in order to intercede day and night for someone or something—even if it hurts.
- Intercession can cost us our fleshly comfort, our easy way of living, and our ability to be fine with the status quo.
- It may cost us our physical hunger as we fast and pray.
- It WILL cost you time when you could be doing other, flesh-gratifying things.

Why do we intercede?

We intercede to bring both UNITY and DISUNITY.

1. We intercede to bring unity between God and humanity.

- This was the original intention of creation; for God and His children to be united in intimacy spiritually, emotionally, and physically.
- God desired to simply walk with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day. God made Adam and Eve because He wanted a family.
- When we see someone who we care about, or who God puts on our heart, that is separated from Him, we feel a burden to intercede in prayer so that through those prayers, God is prompted to move and reach that person’s heart in a more intimate way.

2. We intercede to bring disunity between Satan and humanity.

- God gave authority over the earth to Adam. When sin entered the human race through disobedience, Satan was given authority over the earth.
- A huge component of intercessory prayer is to assert the authority in the name of Jesus Christ to bring disunity and to destroy the authority that Satan has over a human being or a group of humans.
- Our intercession creates a divide between individuals and demonic forces so that the person or people can see the light of the Gospel.
- This light can manifest in many ways: salvation, hope, fulfillment, joy, humility, transformation, wisdom, self-discipline, etc.

SESSION 7: NEXT STEPS

At Next Level Church, we believe that everyone has a next step. One of the primary ways we lead people to become fully engaged followers of Jesus is through next steps.

As Small Group Leaders, it is our responsibility to help those we lead identify and take their next steps. These steps are often as unique as the members that make up our groups, so we wanted to provide you with a guide to spark discussion around identifying and taking next steps.

You will find that some next steps feel like giant milestones – salvation, water baptism, or becoming a Small Group Co-Leader. Others are just as essential to spiritual growth, but may resemble more of a baby step – regularly attending a service, following our SOAP Guide, forgiving a past hurt or offense, or starting a journal. Regardless of the “size” of the next step, all steps are worthy of celebration as we become more like Him!

Feel free to incorporate this guide into times of group discussion or one-on-one interactions. Whatever the context, let conversation come naturally. Sharing what you have done, how you have grown, and where you want to continue growing are impactful ways to encourage others in their own walk.

As you engage these discussions with your group, encourage group members to share what they believe to be their next steps and help them identify where to go from here.

Consider the “Potential Questions” to promote identification of their next steps and the “Possible Next Steps” as direction on where to go from there.

In all conversations, seek to address the next steps of those you lead within the 3 avenues listed below.

LOST PEOPLE FOUND – *Personal Next Step*

No matter where we find ourselves in our faith journey, there is always an area of our life that we may feel lost within (i.e. salvation, finances, relationships, etc).

Potential Questions:

- What has God done in your life this semester?
 - If possible, compare this to their expectation of this semester that was shared at the beginning of the semester.
- What is one area of your life that you would like to see a change in?
- What in your life has kept you from going "all-in"?
- What could you do that would impact your life for the better?

Possible Next Steps:

- Salvation
- Water Baptism
- SOAP
- SOAK
- Prayer
- Fasting
- Journaling
- Silence and Solitude
- Counseling
- Tithing

FOUND PEOPLE FREE – *Relational Next Step*

God not only desires His people to be found, but He desires freedom for us, as His children. We believe that healing often comes in the context of community.

Potential Questions:

- What kind of Group do you feel you should be a part of next semester?
- Is this type of group something that would help challenge or grow your relationship with God, family, others, etc.?

Possible Next Steps:

- Attending Weekend Services
- Weekend Connect Group
- Tuesdays @ 7 – Life Group
- Tuesdays @ 7 – Connect Group
- Freedom Group
- Accountability

FREE PEOPLE EMPOWERED – *Leadership Next Step*

God equipped His saints for the work of the ministry and we love nothing more than seeing people use their gifts and talents to advance His Kingdom.

Potential Questions:

- How do you think your gifts and talents point to your God-given purpose in this life?
- Who has been through the Empowerment Track? What was your experience? What did you learn?
- What do you think about leading a group of your own?

Possible Next Steps:

- Empowerment Track
- Joining a Serve Team – Weekend or Second Tuesday
- Mission Trip

Remember in all of this, it is not our desire to pressure anyone into a next step, but to simply offer direction in their next steps.

SESSION 8: TRANSITIONING WELL

It is important to prepare our group members for success after our group ends. Our role as Small Group Leaders does not end until we have successfully assimilated our group members into their next group.

The time between semesters may vary, but if we are intentional in our interactions, we can foster the momentum created during the semester and transition our group members well.

Before the semester ends, engage a group discussion around the question, “*How can we stay connected once the Groups semester is over?*” This will promote buy-in and engagement from every member of the group.

Set clear expectations on when and how you will be in communication with them. Include expectations on when and how you would like them to engage with the communication lines established.

- Method of Communication
 - What is the preferred method for group communication?
 - Individual communication?
- Frequency of Communication
 - How often does the group desire to hear from you?
- Group Discussion
 - What do they like discussing as a group?
- 1:1 Checkpoints
 - What would they prefer to discuss 1:1?

Encourage interaction and accountability of group members to one another wherever possible.

Personally invite your group members to attend the next United Night with you and assist them in registering for their next group.

Celebrate group members as they take their next steps. What is rewarded is repeated!

Identifying Potential Leaders

Fostering the leadership potential in your group members is an important part of leading a Group.

Many people feel there is a barrier preventing them from leadership roles. Our goal is to help them understand that they already have areas of influence in their life and can use what God has done in their own life to help someone else.

If you see leadership potential in one of your group members, discuss this with your Young Adults Coach. We love seeing the potential of leaders come to life!