



GROUP FACILITATOR INFORMATION

Connection Groups are small groups that meet weekly to discuss the sermon series. The goal is to allow God's word to connect in deeper ways in our lives as group members have the opportunity to be in discussion with others, talking about real life application of sermon material.

Connection Group Facilitator

- Your role as facilitator is to create a relational climate of trust and to encourage participation by all group members.
- You should not feel the pressure to be in a teaching role or have an expectation of being an expert on the topics.
- Your job is to serve as a guide to keep the discussion flowing and on track and to create opportunities for group members to share their opinions and life experiences as they relate to the topic under discussion.

Connection Group Resources

- Because the Connection Groups are based on the worship series, the weekly sermons serve as the main launch point for discussion.
- There will be a short video clip that summarizes the information each week. Many groups choose to use this as a seed for the discussion.
- The Connection Group guides are your primary guiding document for the weekly group discussions.
 - This guide includes questions for discussion, quotes from the author to be used in discussion, and relevant Bible verses for you to study.
 - This connection group guide is not a blueprint that must be strictly followed but instead is a resource for you to draw from. If your group ends up deep in conversation on a particular aspect of the topic, you may choose to skip other portions of the guide. Do not feel like you need to cover every single part of the guide.
- Additionally, there is a weekly study guide published by Scott Engle that will have important information on these topics.

Where do I access the Connection Group resources?

- You will receive a Connection Group binder. This will contain your DVD and at least one copy of the Connection Group guides for each week.
- The electronic copies of each week's guide will be emailed to you so that you can forward this to your Connection Group members. If you prefer, you can request additional copies of each guide so that you can distribute them to your members.
- Scott Engle's study guide is printed each week in the sanctuary bulletin, is available on the counter at the back of Smith Worship Center, and is also emailed weekly to those who have requested it. If you are not on this distribution list, please contact us and we can give you instruction on how to have your name added.

Connection Group Expectations

Connection Group Covenant

- Please complete the Connection Group Covenant and have each member sign the document.
- This ensures that the expectations of the group are communicated and provides a framework for discussions.

Track Participation

- It is essential that we know who is participating in Connection Groups. It is important that you or someone in your group tracks attendance at each meeting and enters it online or turns in your attendance roster to the Connectional Ministries admin.

Serving/Outreach

- Connection Groups are encouraged to find a Serving or Outreach opportunity of their choice. Serving the St. Andrew community (ushers, greeters, connection coffee host etc.) or reaching out in the community (Seven Loaves Food Pantry, Joseph's Coat Closet or Project Hope, etc.) are some suggestions. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Pam White.

Things to Discuss During the Last Couple of Meetings

- Plans for the future
- Will the group continue for the next Connection Group session?
- Who will host/facilitate?
- Will we continue to meet as a small group in between Connection Group series? (group material is available in the resource library)
- Do we want to meet monthly for some kind of social event until the next session?

Celebration

- Remember to celebrate concluding the group study series with a "Celebration" time. Just get together (no lesson) and enjoy each other's company.

Feedback/Evaluation

- We want to grow in this ministry area, so your feedback is important. Please take time to fill out the survey that you will receive following the series.
- Please encourage your participants to fill out their survey as well.

Suggestions for Leading Your Group

- Each week try to include:
 - A discussion on the topic at hand, including the video presentation that also addresses real life application.
 - At least one or two Bible verses. We want God's word to serve as a foundation for our understanding. Please encourage people to bring their own Bibles and use these in your group discussion. Have different individuals read the passages while others follow along in their own Bible.
 - Finally, end the discussion by considering the take away. The call section gives the opportunity to consider how God is calling us to grow in acknowledging God's presence and responding to God's word. It is vital that we take God's message and learn to connect it with our own lives, considering how we are being called to respond.
- Suggestions for fuller participation:
 - Encourage participants to attend worship each week.
 - Additionally, if they miss worship or want exposure to the perspective of other preachers, encourage them to listen to the sermons online.
 - Pass out the Connection Group guide ahead of time or email an electronic copy to group members in order to allow them to read through it before coming to the group.
- Remember that some of these topics might feel personal and be difficult to discuss.
 - If you find people unwilling to engage on a personal level, begin by discussing how a topic is seen in our culture in general.

- You might be ready to share a personal example if you are comfortable so that it will encourage more transparency among group members.
- If you come upon a question where participants are not willing to give concrete examples from their own lives, you might just give everyone a minute for quiet contemplation and a chance to consider the personal aspect.

Connection Group Facilitator Tips

Habits of Effective Small Group Facilitators

- Pray for group members regularly
- Be committed to personal growth
- Prepare for group meetings
- Contact group members regularly
- Plan group fellowship activities
- Invite new people to visit your group
- Look for ways to share leader duties so other group participants can grow in this area

Pre-Meeting Prayers for Group Members

A wonderful practice to help prepare for each meeting and to help group members encounter God is to pray for members and the group experience prior to each meeting. Here are some recommendations:

- Pray that the time together would be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Pray that each small group member enters the door to the meeting and leaves the cares/concerns of the day outside. That the time together would be part of God's refreshing and that those relationships will thrive or be restored.
- Pray that God will provide at least one spiritual insight for each person attending; something that God speaks to his/her soul.
- Pray that each member feels a sense of security and community.
- Pray that God effectively uses the leader and co-leader (if applicable) during the meeting.
- Pray that each person participates in discussions and enjoys fellowship.

Effective Communication Skills for Facilitators

- Active listening (Be genuinely interested in other people's thoughts and feelings)
- Modeling (Project a non-judgmental attitude)
- Summarizing (Paraphrase or summarize at the end of key parts of the discussion)
- Refocusing (Keep the group on the topic and limit off-topic discussions)
- Waiting (Practice being silent after you ask a question so that group members will have the opportunity to voice their opinions)
- Inclusion (Make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to participate)
- Phrasing questions (Avoid yes/no questions; try beginning with "what" and "how" to illicit thoughtful responses)

Example Techniques for Broadening Participation

- Encourage additional members to comment by asking "Who else wants to say something." (Note: The previous example is more effective than asking "Does anyone else want to say something?")
- Draw people out by asking "Can you say more about that?"
- Provide balance to viewpoints by asking "Does anyone have another point of view or perspective on this?"
- Preempt an individual from dominating the conversation by stating "We have a few more minutes on this topic, and I want to make sure we have heard from everyone." Another way to handle this is to state "Bill, because of time constraints, give us your Cliff Notes version to question 2."
- Refocus a runaway conversation by stating "It sounds like our discussion has branched out from the original question. What are some thoughts you have on question 1 or are you ready to go on the question 2?"
- Deal with a content question to which you do not know the answer by saying, "Bill, I don't know the answer to that question. We could check with one of the pastors and see if they can answer this for us."