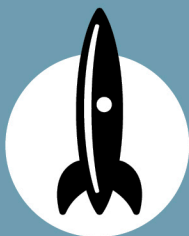
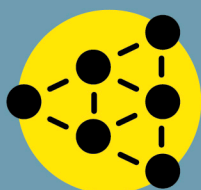


LEADING SMALL GROUPS



HOW TO GATHER, LAUNCH, LEAD,

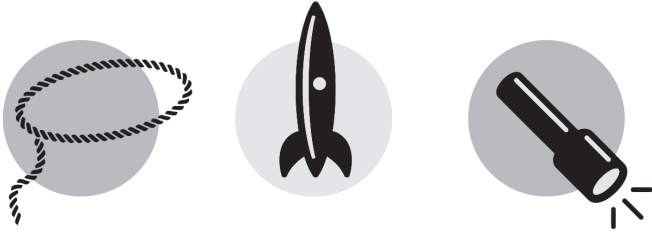


AND MULTIPLY YOUR SMALL GROUP

CHRIS SURRATT

FOREWORD BY STEVE GLADEN

LEADING SMALL GROUPS



HOW TO GATHER, LAUNCH, LEAD,



AND MULTIPLY YOUR SMALL GROUP

CHRIS SURRATT

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Foreword

It's an honor to endorse and write this foreword for Chris Surratt's latest book, *Leading Small Groups*. I owe my faith to a small group. I grew up in a nominally Catholic home but did not respond to the good news of the gospel until my sister brought it home with her from a small group. A friend of hers had bravely decided to start the group and invited my sister to be part of it. Through that group my sister became a follower of Christ. When she shared her experience with me, I, too, put my faith in Jesus. My parents also became Christians all because of the influence of that one small group. Later, my three older brothers and their wives and kids followed. The group that my sister's friend started changed the destiny of our entire family—nineteen people!

What is especially remarkable and special to me about that group is that my sister's friend was not a religious professional. She had not received special training. She was just an ordinary follower of Christ who answered the call to start a small group. Her willingness to step out and lead a group had eternal consequences

on my family, as well as on people to whom my family and I have ministered since. Is it any wonder that I have devoted most of the last thirty years of my life to small groups? A small group changed my life! Over the years, I've had the privilege of seeing the profound effects small groups have had on the lives of literally tens of thousands of other people.

The reason that small groups are so effective is that they are part of God's plan for His church. From the moment the church was born and three thousand people responded to Peter's message on the day of Pentecost, small groups have been part of God's primary strategy. The early church met in the temple courts for large group worship and in homes for small group fellowship. Both meetings had equal importance. Later, when persecution made meetings in the temple courts impossible, the church continued to meet and grow through small groups. Through the centuries, whenever public worship has been banned, the church has continued to meet in small groups and flourish despite the oppression. History has proven that the church can survive and even continue to grow without large group worship when it has a healthy system of small groups.

Small groups are so potent and resilient because of the commitment and courage of seemingly ordinary followers of Christ, like my sister's friend, who step up to lead them. If you are reading this, you probably have already decided to become one of those people. Let me

be among the first to thank you and encourage you as you take this exciting step in your faith journey. You've already done the hard part. You've made the decision. Now that you have this book by Chris, you will gain much of the information and insights you'll need to lead your group well.

Chris has synthesized his years of experience as a small group leader, pastor, and expert into this valuable resource. You'll find his insights both helpful and practical. He'll provide you with a scriptural framework for small groups as well as offer down-to-earth advice on how to make your group a success. He'll give you everything you'll need from gathering your group to getting it started to leading it well, and even how to multiply your leadership by starting more groups. I'd suggest soaking up all you can from this book with your first reading, then using it as a reference going forward. You'll undoubtedly run into challenges along the way as you lead your group—anything worthwhile comes with challenges—and Chris's book will provide you with excellent direction on how to negotiate them effectively.

Congratulations again on your decision to lead and use this book by Chris to help change people's destiny. Enjoy the adventure!

Steve Gladen

Pastor of Small Groups, Saddleback Church

Author, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose*

Introduction

I still remember when my wife and I were approached about the possibility of leading our first small group. My experience with church groups before this was in Sunday school, with different age groups meeting on the church campus before the Sunday morning service. Our current church had small groups that met in homes around the city. Although we had been attending a small group for a short time, the thought of leading one wasn't on the radar.

I am an introvert by nature, so the thought of inviting a group of people into our home every week so we could “do life together” was not appealing. Plus, we were newly married, and the group we were tasked with leading was a Young Marrieds group. How on earth were we going to help other couples be better spouses and parents when we didn't have a clue ourselves?

All the normal insecurities and doubts told me to say “no.”

- I don't have it all together enough to lead anyone.

- I don't know enough about the Bible to lead a Bible study.
- Our tiny house couldn't fit everyone.
- I don't have enough time for something else every week.
- Will I have to be friends with everyone in the group?

With some hesitation and encouragement from my more extroverted (and friendly) wife, Jenny, we said “yes” to leading our first small group. Twenty years and counting, in three cities and six different living rooms, we're still at it.

I cannot imagine what life would have been like without those first couples coming alongside us through the joy and tears of life. I can say now: we did and are still doing life together with the people in our small groups.

If you are reading this and thinking the same thoughts I was about the potential of being a small group leader, you are in the perfect spot. Your small group doesn't need a leader who has it all figured out. They don't need a leader who has the perfect marriage, house, kids, pets, and cookware. They don't need a leader with a seminary degree (although it's not a bad thing if you happen to have one). Your small group needs a leader willing to say, “I'm messed up too; let's figure this thing out together.”

One of my favorite quotes is from C. S. Lewis, who defined friendship this way: “The typical expression of

opening Friendship would be something like, ‘What? You too? I thought I was the only one.’”¹

A small group experience is a series of “You too?” moments. Every one of us is messed up and in need of a risen Savior and a group of people to hold on to when the waters get rough. Even us introverts. We may not show it a lot, but we need people to walk alongside as much as anyone else. We just may not need as *many* people as extroverts do.

This book is written and designed to take you through the journey of building your own small group. That group could be in your home, a neighborhood clubhouse, a break room at work, or a classroom at the church. The location does not matter; what matters is what takes place inside it.

There will be practical tips you can use immediately as you start your new small group or look to make your current group experience better. Every chapter will end with a set of questions to answer as you work through that step of the journey. I would suggest returning to this book as you walk through the different stages of your small group. There are a few things you will need to know from the beginning, and the rest will become more necessary while “on the job.”

We are all in this together. Please know all of your fellow small group leaders are cheering you on. Let’s go change the world one small group at a time!

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Why do you want to lead a small group?

2. What is your experience with small groups?

3. What are your biggest doubts about leading?

SECTION I



Gathering Your Small Group

CHAPTER 1

What Is a Small Group Leader?

The number-one barrier to someone stepping up to lead a small group is the word *leader*.

Take five seconds right now and think about what you imagine when you hear that word. Go ahead, I'll wait. What came to mind? A CEO of a large company? A head of state? The senior pastor of your church?

We all have preconceived ideas of what a leader should be, sound, and look like. I imagine someone who is tall (I'm short), extroverted (I'm an introvert), a scholar (I, um . . . struggled), and forceful (definitely not me). Basically, someone who is the opposite of me.

There is no template for an effective leader. Every successful leader is flawed. In fact, the Bible is filled with damaged and flawed leaders. Here are just a few:

- Adam, the first human being, couldn't lead his own family. His firstborn ended up killing his brother.
- Eve, the first woman, became greedy and took the first bite (literally) into sin.
- Noah, the last righteous man on Earth at the time, got drunk and slept in the nude (in view of his kids).
- Abraham, the forefather of faith, let other men walk off with his wife on two different occasions.
- Sarah, the wife of Abraham, let her husband sleep with another woman and then hated her for it.
- Moses, the humblest man on the face of the earth, had a serious problem with his temper.
- David, the friend of God, concealed his adultery with a murder.
- Peter, the man Jesus named "the Rock," denied Christ three times.
- Paul, the author of most of the New Testament, was a Pharisee who persecuted Christians before becoming one and was hampered by a "thorn in the flesh" after becoming one.

I could go on and on, but you get the picture: the Bible shows us men and women who had issues just like us. Yet, God still used them to build a movement that has not slowed down in more than two thousand years. Even with the death of the only perfect leader, Jesus!

Michael Kelley says that “Leadership is the joyful acceptance of responsibility at a given moment.” I like that definition because, ultimately, leading a small group is supposed to be joyful. It won’t always be easy or fun, but knowing you were integral in someone’s life being changed through the power of community is one of the most joyful things you will do.

To help us know what a small group leader is, let’s consider a few things he or she is not.

- *Someone who has all the answers.* A leader who has all the answers is not a leader anyone should follow. First, it’s impossible, but most of all, we want to follow someone humble enough to admit they don’t know it all.
- *Someone who can teach the Bible weekly.* There are some with the gift of teaching, but a small group experience is not about one person teaching and the rest learning. It’s a shared discussion where we are all growing together. A small group leader is a

facilitator of a synergistic conversation with the Bible as the guide.

- *Someone who is everyone's best friend.* Our job as small group leaders is not to make deep relationships with every person in the group. Not only is that unwise, but it's also unhealthy. Our goal should be to find two to three same-sex people in the group we can disciple outside group time and help other people in the group do the same.

I identify with what Paul said in 1 Corinthians:

I came to you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not be based on human wisdom but on God's power. (1 Cor. 2:3-5)

Isn't that freeing? God chose me and you, sinners and flawed human beings, because He wants all our faith to be in Him, not in our own abilities. When your group members look at you, they are not putting their faith in you as the leader, but in the Spirit's power working through your weakness.

The Shepherd Leader

Peter gave us this definition of leadership as he exhorted the elders of the first-century church:

Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Pet. 5:2-4)

Notice Peter did not say, "Teach God's flock." The spiritual gift of teaching is not the most essential gift for a small group leader. In fact, the teaching gift sometimes does not translate well into leading a small group. That is one reason why a senior pastor is not always a great small group leader. I always suggest a teaching pastor be in a small group but not lead a group.

The elders of the church were put in place to shepherd the congregation in the same way we as small group leaders are to shepherd our portion of the church. Although we are

When your group members look at you, they are not putting their faith in you as the leader, but in the Spirit's power working through your weakness.

not that familiar with shepherds in today's society, God chose shepherds throughout the Bible to lead His people. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David were all shepherds chosen as leaders by God. Jesus even referred to Himself as a shepherd: "I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me" (John 10:14).

Why Did God Choose Shepherds?

Good shepherds lead from the heart. They know each sheep in their care and will work hard to get them to their destination. The small group leader's role is to help the people in their group take the next spiritual step to get them from where they are to where they need to be. A shepherd leader will work hard to make sure no one is left behind on their spiritual journey.

Good shepherds lead with compassion. Jesus (the ultimate shepherd) set the example as a leader who always had compassion for His followers—even when it was most inconvenient.

We see in the book of Matthew Jesus withdrawing for time alone to grieve immediately after receiving the news of the death of John the Baptist, but He still could not escape the crowds.

When Jesus heard about it, he withdrew from there by boat to a remote place to be alone. When the crowds heard this, they followed him on foot from the towns.

When he went ashore, he saw a large crowd, had compassion on them, and healed their sick. (Matt. 14:13–14)

Even though Jesus had every right to not care for another person at that moment, He saw sheep without a shepherd and had compassion for them. There will be many times as a small group leader where a member of your group will have a need at the most inopportune moment. It may be a phone call late at night. It may be someone who wants to stay after group to talk. It may be someone at church who needs to grab time in the lobby during the service you are about to attend. While inconvenient, it's at those times where we have to remember the compassionate example of Jesus.

Good shepherds lead from the front. “When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice” (John 10:4). A leader that people will follow is a leader willing to go first. This may mean sharing a vulnerable story with the group to set the example of authenticity. The group will model the behavior you display. If you want your group to be open, open your heart first. If you want the group to serve, serve them first. Leading from the front does not mean dictating direction. It means setting the example for others to follow.

Good shepherds lead sacrificially. There will be times when leading your group will be a sacrifice. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his

life for the sheep” (John 10:11). While your sacrifices will probably not involve laying your life down for someone, opening your home to a group of people weekly is a sacrifice. You have to keep the house clean, put up the pets, pull out all the extra chairs, make sure there is food, etc. It’s exhausting to host a group! You will need occasional breaks to not burn out, but that sacrifice of time and effort will lead to a group that bonds through consistency.

At the end of our time as leaders, we want to know we led our flock well. We can look to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and follow His example of shepherding His flock. Though we will not be perfect, we want to lead from the heart, lead with compassion, lead from the front, and lead sacrificially.

My Experience

There have been countless times over the years when my wife and I have been called on to shepherd the people in our groups through various seasons of life. There have been many baby showers thrown, lots of meals planned during times of need, and several late-night calls from distraught group members. All of those sacrifices have been paid back many times over by our group friends. For example, the time when our moving company cancelled at the last minute, so all of our small group came over within hours to pack a two-story, three-bedroom house into a moving truck until midnight. That’s true sacrifice.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. What stood out to you the most in this chapter?

2. What was your perception of who a leader is before you read this chapter?

3. Which of the shepherd leader qualities (lead from the heart, lead with compassion, lead from the front, lead sacrificially) do you struggle with the most?

4. What steps can you take to become a better shepherd leader?

CHAPTER 2

Creating Biblical Community

The picture of the community we are called to establish with our groups is found in the first-century church.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple,

and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42–47)

You can see in this passage from Acts that the early church devoted themselves to God and each other through both corporate gatherings (the temple) and in the home (house to house). You can also see an outline for what every small group should strive to achieve.

Discipleship

The text says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.” In other words, they were learning what it means to be more like Christ through the apostles. Creating disciples who then create disciples should always be the final goal of any small group. Jesus made this clear with His commission to His followers before He returned to heaven:

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And

remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt. 28:19–20)

Therefore, we must always gather as a group, not just for the sake of gathering, but for the goal of helping people develop into mature believers. Note that Jesus did not say, “teaching them everything I have commanded you.” He said, “teaching them to *observe* everything I have commanded you.” Of course, we cannot observe what Jesus commanded unless we know what He commanded, but it needs to be clear that, though the study is important, the fruit of the study is what leads to fully devoted followers of Christ.

We must always gather as a group, not just for the sake of gathering, but for the goal of helping people develop into mature believers.

Discipleship is not a static process. It will always involve movement toward something. If you want to know if people in your group are developing in their faith, look for these two movements in their lives.

Movement toward Christ

The original disciples followed in the footsteps of Jesus. Where He was leading, they were following. Consequently, their lives were becoming more like Christ as they followed closer and closer. The disciples in your

group will begin to display more of the characteristics of Jesus as they move closer to Him.

Movement toward Others

Someone who is being discipled will want to share what they are experiencing with others. When Jesus changed the Samaritan woman's life with a conversation at the well, she ran immediately to tell everyone she knew to "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" (John 4:29). When your life has been changed by the gospel, you want to tell everyone.

Community

The early church members "ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people" (Acts 2:46–47). Discipleship is a team sport. I have never enjoyed a meal as much when I am dining alone as when I am eating with a group of friends. Every small group meeting should include elements of building community and having fun. God did not create us to live in isolation.

You can see it modeled with the perfect relationship of the Trinity in Genesis:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness. They

will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.” (Gen. 1:26 HCSB)

And then prayed for by Jesus with His final prayer before His death on the cross:

“May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me and I am in You. May they also be one in Us, so the world may believe You sent Me.” (John 17:21 HCSB)

Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have existed from all eternity in perfect community, God has created us in His image in order to live in biblical community. Our unity displays the oneness of God in the Trinity.

Mission

It’s important that what we gain through being disciplined in community is not just left there. Jesus expects us to be out making a difference in every environment we find ourselves. He said:

“You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. In the

same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”
(Matt. 5:14–16)

Your small group should always look for opportunities to serve missionally in the community around you. Being on mission is not just a quarterly event, but a lifestyle attained by group members. We will hit more specifics on how you do this in a later chapter, but our mandate as a fellowship of believers is to reach out beyond our walls to the people who need what we have. This is the essence of the gospel. Our small group is the intersection of the gospel and real life. The good news of what Jesus Christ did for us needs to go beyond our group into the world.

Balance Is Important

While your group should have all three of those biblical life elements running through it—discipleship, community, and mission—there will be seasons where it is out of balance. The initial spiritual makeup of the group will help dictate where the group spends most of its energy in the beginning.

Community will be the easiest to achieve and where groups will gravitate to. It's important to make sure community is taking place from the beginning of the group,

but you will need to navigate the group toward discipleship and mission as group members get more comfortable with each other.

If your group is made up of mostly mature Christians, then there will also be times when a Bible study may seem more important than reaching those outside the group who need Christ. When that is clear, remind the group about the commission to reach the world with the gospel. There may be times where a study needs to be interrupted to give energy to serving outside the group.

The One-Anothers

Another beautiful example from the early church is how often they ministered to one another. The transliterated Greek word for the term “each other” is *allelon*, and it’s used fifty-eight times in the New Testament. Here are just a few uses of the term:

- Meet together and encourage one another (Heb. 10:25)
- Encourage each other (1 Thess. 4:18)
- Love each other like brothers and sisters (Rom. 12:10)
- By helping each other with your troubles, you truly obey the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2)

- Care the same for each other (1 Cor. 12:25)
- Pray for each other (James 5:16)
- Serve each other with love (Gal. 5:13)
- Forgive each other (Col. 3:13)

It becomes clear as you read through the Bible that we were not meant to walk through life on our own. The original small group spent a majority of their time taking care of one another's needs.

By practicing the one-anothers, they also allowed members to discover and use their spiritual gifts within the group. You can see examples of the gifts—apostleship, discernment, encouragement, evangelism, faith, giving, healing, helps, hospitality, intercession, leadership, administration, mercy, miracles, prophecy, pastoring, teaching, wisdom, and knowledge—woven through the acts of service toward each other.

Creating biblical community in a small group is allowing room for the Holy Spirit to minister to and through group members. As each person is growing spiritually, they will discover their spiritual gifts and, in turn disciple someone else. This is how generations of disciples are created and leaders are developed.

My Experience

Our groups have taken various forms over the years. They all look different. Don't be afraid to change things up and try different approaches to what biblical community can look like. For instance, a few of our groups started to become too social and we discovered that not everyone was growing spiritually. When that was recognized, we took a step back to start asking questions to determine where everyone was on their spiritual journey. We found that one group member had never prayed in public, one was afraid to lead because of a past imprisonment, and another needed ideas on how to build a daily devotional time. It's okay to course-correct occasionally to help the group find its spiritual balance again.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. What stood out to you the most in this chapter?

2. Do you believe the community the early church found can be replicated today? Why or why not?

3. What does it mean to you to disciple someone?

4. Who is someone you can begin to personally disciple today?

5. Which element of biblical life will be the most difficult for your group to achieve: discipleship, community, or mission?

6. Do you have any ideas for reaching outside of your group to help others?
