



# Small Group Leader Training

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## Heartland Small Groups

Small Groups have one simple purpose – to bring people together. We believe God created us to live in community with others, and only then can we experience the full life He intends for us.

At Heartland, we help people to Know God, Find Freedom, Discover their Purpose, and Make a Difference. Small Groups are the Find Freedom component of this mission. God wants every one of us to experience freedom while on this earth; and He uses people to accomplish that freedom.

*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*  
**James 5:16**

We go to God for forgiveness, but we have to go to people for freedom. It's God's design! We believe life change happens in the context of relationships. Meaningful relationships can be hard to find, and Small Groups exist to make life-changing relationships relevant and accessible to you.

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.*

*A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*  
**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**

# Why Small Groups Exist

We gather in Small Groups to build community and care for people. Heartland Church is a church of Small Groups, not a church with Small Groups.

We base our Small Group model on the early church as described in the Bible in the book of Acts. In Acts, you can read about the tremendous growth of the first church in Jerusalem, where small group meetings in homes helped lay the foundation.

*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.*

**Acts 5:42**

On the Small Groups team, our rally cry is this: Connect, Protect, Grow. What we mean by this is, Small Groups offer people:

## 1. [A Place to Connect](#)

*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.*

**1 Corinthians 9:22 TLB**

We were not made to do life alone. God created us for community, and Small Groups provide a place to connect with others, share life, and grow in faith together.

## 2. [A Place to Protect](#)

*We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.*

**1 John 3:16 NLT**

It is through life together that our problems become smaller, and God uses others to bring support and encouragement to our lives. Small Groups become a place where others don't just know your name but care about what is happening in your life and want to support you in your spiritual journey.

## 3. [A Place to Grow](#)

*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.*

Proverbs 27:17



We believe every person is created with God-given potential to make a difference in the world. Small Groups are a place you can grow with others to become more like Jesus and reach the potential God has put inside you.

## What Does a Small Group Look Like?

### Your Life is Your Group

We use a free market approach to Small Groups. This means we want people to gather together based on the things they enjoy and are important to them. Essentially, the things you are already doing in your life are the things that can make up your Small Group! Free market leaders form their group around their gifts or interests.

From sports groups to lunch groups, mom groups to student groups, Bible study groups to creative arts groups, our groups are as varied as we are.

# Group Structure

Groups meet throughout the year in three semesters.

Groups meet weekly during each semester.

Groups meet in a variety of places like homes, parks, restaurants, coffee shops and office buildings.

New groups start every semester making it easy to build community and enjoy different types of groups.

No matter what your group meets about, each meeting should be made up of four things:

## 1. Casual Fellowship

A laid-back time for group members to talk and get to know each other.

## 2. Activity or Discussion

This will vary based on what kind of group you're leading. It could be an activity like Frisbee or outreach or a discussion about a book or Sunday message.

## 3. Prayer

Ask for prayer requests from group members and pray at the beginning and/or the end of each group meeting.

## 4. Spiritual Component

This is what differentiates your Small Group from your neighborhood pot-luck or pitch-in. Whether it's through activities or discussion, always find a way to include the Word of God. This can be as simple as sharing something God is teaching you with the group or talking about a verse you read that week.

Small Groups are not a place for:

- Business
- Offerings
- Unapproved materials or speakers
- Controversial topics

# Your Role as a Small Group Leader

God has a part for all of us to play in the church, and Small Group Leaders come alongside the pastors and staff of Heartland to help care for people.

*Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.*

**Ephesians 4:11-13 NLT**

The primary role of a Small Group Leader is to help group members take steps in their walk with God. Remember: Connect, Protect, Grow!

*Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds;*

**Proverbs 27:23**

People in your group will be at different places in their spiritual lives and each person will have different next steps to take. Here is a guide of some next steps you can help people take:

- Start attending Sunday services
- Start reading the Bible regularly
- Start praying regularly
- Be water baptized
- Complete the Growth Track
- Join the Dream Team
- Start tithing
- Invite a friend or neighbor to church or a Small Group
- Attend a Small Group Training to become a Small Group Leader

## How to be a successful Small Group Leader

1. Pray Daily for members of your group
2. Consider partnering with a co-leader to help share the responsibility of caring for and leading your group.
3. Connect with group members between weekly meetings through phone, email, text, social media, or face-to-face. Encourage group members to connect with each other throughout the week as well.
4. Have fun through laughter and by creating an enjoyable environment.
5. Respect people's time by beginning and ending your group on time.
6. Invite group members to attend church services as a group.
7. Rally the group around a member going through a crisis. Use wisdom and be sensitive.



# The Importance of Prayer

Prayer is a foundation of our church, and it is important for your Small Group.

*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*  
**2 Chronicles 7:14**

## How to Pray for Your Group

- Pray for any requests group members share.
- Ask for the presence of the Holy Spirit in your group.
- Pray that God will open people's hearts to hear His truth.
- Pray for authentic community to develop.
- Pray for wisdom and strength to lead your group well.

## Confidence as a Small Group Leader

If you only do what you feel comfortable doing, you don't need God. God's best is often found outside your comfort zone. When you serve God and people by leading a Small Group, He will equip you and give you the strength and wisdom to lead well.

*For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.*  
**Philippians 4:13 NLT**

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline.*  
**2 Timothy 1:7 NLT**

## When you feel uncertain about leading a group, use Scripture to overcome the lies of the enemy:

1. When you feel like you don't have the time, remember God has created you for this, and His timing is perfect.

*If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done.*  
**Ecclesiastes 11:4 TLB**

2. When you feel unqualified, remember God has equipped you.

*It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God. He has enabled us to be ministers of His new covenant.*  
**2 Corinthians 3:5-6 NLT**

3. When you feel like your past disqualifies you, remember God uses imperfect people

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*

[2 Corinthians 1:3–4](#)

4. When you feel like you don't know how to help someone in your group, remember ESPN:

E – Encourage

S – Share Scripture

P – Prayer

N – Next Steps

## Leadership Support

As a Small Group Leader, you are never alone in creating community. We have pastors, staff, and the Small Groups Team who are all working alongside you to invest in great Small Groups at Heartland.

### Your Coach

As a Small Group Leader, you have a Coach paired with you to help as you need support throughout the semester.

Your Coach's number one priority is to pray for you daily. Reach out to your Coach if you have a need, prayer request, or concern.

# How to Create Good Group Dynamics

## Set expectations.

A key to helping people feel comfortable in your group is to let them know what to expect. Take time to share how the group will flow from week to week. This can include things like explaining the times you will begin and end the group, how discussion or group activities will happen, and how group members can share prayer requests or best engage in the group.

## Follow the 70-30 rule.

Give the members of your group room to speak up instead of doing all the talking yourself. About 70% of talking should come from members and 30% from the leader.

## Keep discussion positive.

If conversation takes a negative or destructive turn, guide it back to a healthy place. If someone needs to talk about a sensitive or complex issue, you can follow up with them after the group or call your Coach to help you respond well.

## Keep the conversation relevant to everyone.

Remember people in your group will be at different places in their spiritual journey. Be thoughtful when you talk about spiritual concepts or church terms that might be unfamiliar to new Christians or new church-goers.

## Respect boundaries.

Men should minister to men, and women should minister to women. A couple may minister to a single person. We want to maintain integrity and purity in our Small Groups. These boundaries will help protect the leaders and group members from entering into an uncomfortable or inappropriate situation.

## Stay Connected

Throughout the semester, respond to your Coach and the Small Groups team about group attendance, potential new Small Group Leaders, and how members are taking next steps.



# Preparing to Lead

All Small Group Leaders complete the following steps before leading

- Become a Member of Heartland Church
- Complete the Heartland Growth Track
- Attend a Small Group Training

## How to Start Your Small Group

1. Ask God for direction about what group to lead and who to invite.
2. Once you decide on a topic or activity for your group, choose a place and time to meet.
3. Register your group in the Online Small Groups Directory at [heartlandchurch.com/groups](http://heartlandchurch.com/groups) so people can find it and contact you to attend.
4. Invite people you know or meet to come check out your group.
5. Pray for God to do great things through your Small Group.

## Preparing for Your Group Meetings

- Send a message to group members reminding them about the first meeting.
- Arrive early to set up a welcoming environment.
- Consider having name tags available to help everyone learn names for the first few weeks.

## Conversations

Here are a few conversation starters to help get people talking as your group gets to know each other:

- How did you learn about our group?
- What are your hobbies?
- What are you looking forward to this year?
- What brought you here?
- What are you hoping to get out of this Small Group?

# Common Questions

## How can I recruit people to come to my group?

- Start with people who are already in your sphere of influence (co-workers, friends, and neighbors).
- Find people around you who are new to the church, are new believers, or have shown interest in getting involved.
- Look for people you think you can help to realize their potential.
- Ask God to send the right people to your group.

## Where can I hold my Small Group?

We encourage Small Groups to meet outside the church building in places where you like to spend your time. Some of the most common meeting places are homes, restaurants, parks, coffee shops, and office buildings.

## Where can I find Small Group Curriculum?

Heartland Church provides a free membership to RightNow Media to all Small Group Leaders! RightNow Media is a streaming library of more than 20,000 Bible study videos for leaders to share with their people. To get access to this amazing resource, simply click the link below and create a profile. It is completely free and a wonderful tool.

## Does my group have to meet weekly?

We encourage meeting weekly each semester in order to build genuine relationships.

## How do I measure if group members are taking next steps?

Ask! Make it part of your discussion whether in a group setting or individually. Here are some great questions to guide your conversation:

- How did you get connected to this Small Group?
- What are you most looking forward to in the group?
- Do you attend Heartland?
- What brought you to Heartland?
- Have you ever been part of a Small Group before?
- What do you feel like God has been doing in your life lately?
- Are you familiar with 21 Days of Prayer?
- What areas of your faith are you hoping to grow in the coming months?
- What are you focused on in your life right now?
- Have you been through the Growth Track? Do you remember what your personality type is or what your spiritual gifts are?
- Have you ever served on the Dream Team?
- How can I pray for you?

Here are some examples of next steps you can share depending where a | 12

## group member is spiritually:

- Invite them to attend a Sunday service with you.
- Share your personal story and what God has been teaching you.
- Invite them to 21 Days of Prayer
- Share how the Growth Track can help them discover their purpose and invite them to attend.
- Invite them to consider being water baptized. Invite your Small Group to be there to celebrate anyone getting baptized.
- Share how you find time regularly to pray, worship, and read God's Word, and encourage them to make their own plan for time with God.
- If they are ready to receive Christ, offer to pray with them.

## What should I do if someone asks a question I can't answer?

It's okay to not have all the answers. Thankfully, we can find guidance through prayer, God's Word, and the Holy Spirit. Encourage them to spend time reading the Bible and praying. Also, let them know that you will do your best to get some information and get back with them at your next Small Group meeting. Do some personal research and call your Coach to get advice.

## What should I do if someone in my group shares something with me (or the group) that requires attention beyond what I (or we) can provide?

If you encounter a difficult situation within your Small Group, please know that you are not alone. If a member is going through a crisis, you can rally the group around them to provide prayer, encouragement, and support. Use wisdom and be sensitive to the situation. If you are unsure of what to do, don't hesitate to ask your Coach. Also, you and/or the group member can contact the Small Groups Ministry Team by emailing [smallgroups@heartlandchurch.com](mailto:smallgroups@heartlandchurch.com)

## How can I share stories of life change from the Small Group semester?

We love hearing about lives that are changed through Small Groups. You can share your stories with your Coach or submit them by going to [heartlandchurch.com/shareyourstory](http://heartlandchurch.com/shareyourstory).

## Can people who don't come to Heartland come to my group?

We welcome & love having people who aren't a part of Heartland attend our small groups.



# Leadership Honor Code

As a valued member of the Heartland Church Dream Team, I have a remarkable opportunity to show others the love of God through my attitude, interactions, & leadership. Therefore, as a servant leader, I am choosing to let my authentic self shine through in every aspect of life while embracing an appearance and demeanor that brings honor to Christ.

I understand that my actions as a leader within the church hold great significance in how others perceive the message of Christ. I do not wish to grieve our Lord or cause others to stumble. Instead, I will strive to embody the very essence of a mature believer and servant leader. To this end, I choosing today to let the Holy Spirit lead my life and not my sinful nature. This dichotomy is so beautifully outlined in Paul's letter to the Galatians when he states: The fruit of the Spirit is a direct reflection of the transformational work of the spirit within each leader at Heartland Church. As I strive to let the Spirit lead my life, choose a posture of humility and curiosity as I constantly seek to be transformed by Christ. By leading through example in both my words and deeds, I am choosing to create an environment where others are encouraged to grow in their faith and aspire to become servant leaders themselves. Together, let us inspire acceptance and embrace the transformative power of living in the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

## Reporting Responsibility

It is the responsibility of all Church Leadership, employees, and volunteers to comply with all applicable laws and regulations, as well as all policies and procedures of the Church, and to report violations or suspected violations. Specifically, any behavior, activity or speech you hear or observe that could bring harm to an individual or to Heartland Church must be reported. Complaints should be shared with someone who can address them adequately. In most cases, an employee or volunteer's Direct Report (Supervisor) is in the best position to address an area of concern. However, if the reporting individual is not comfortable speaking with their supervisor or is not satisfied with their supervisor's response, the reporting individual is encouraged to report to the Senior Pastor and Church HR Director immediately, even if the incident was in the past.

# Leadership Commitment

*The same goes for those who want to be servants in the church: serious, not deceitful, not too free with the bottle, not in it for what they can get out of it. They must be reverent before the mystery of the faith, not using their position to try to run things. Let them prove themselves first. If they show they can do it, take them on. No exceptions are to be made for women—same qualifications: serious, dependable, not sharp-tongued, not overfond of wine. Servants in the church are to be committed to their spouses, attentive to their own children, and diligent in looking after their own affairs. Those who do this servant work will come to be highly respected, a real credit to this Jesus-faith.*

**1 Timothy 3:8-10 MSG**

## Qualifications

- Sincere, worthy of respect, and of a good reputation.
- Tithe regularly to Heartland Church
- Have a genuine desire to serve and minister to other people.
- Able to lead, motivate, and teach other people.
- Able to create positive group dynamics and deal with conflict resolution within the group.

# Abuse Policy

## Safety & Child Protection

It is the responsibility of everyone to assist in implementing safety measures within the Church and comply with any applicable mandated reporting statutes for the safety of all those who participate, particularly those who are vulnerable.

I understand that all Heartland Church Leadership, employees, and volunteers will submit to a criminal background check.

I understand that Heartland Church is a safe place for children and vulnerable adults and that Heartland complies with all federal and state laws regarding reporting suspected child abuse. As a member of Heartland Staff or Employee contracted by Heartland, I understand that I am responsible to look and listen for these '3 Harms' in the lives of our children, students, and the vulnerable. All suspected abuse must be reported to the appropriate Direct Report, HR Director and Senior Pastor immediately, even if they were in the past.

## The 3 Harms are:

1. Being Harmed
2. Harming Themselves
3. Harming Others

Additionally, all employees are responsible for reporting all instances of witnessed or suspected abuse which can include:

### Physical

Physical acts directed at a child or vulnerable adult that causes injury or harm, self-injury, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, reckless sex, abuse of drugs/alcohol, homicidal thoughts, destruction of property, theft, and bullying. Any sexual contact or interactions between a child and an adult, or another child, when the child is being used for sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person. This includes exploitation through photographs, videos, other media, or communication methods.

### Emotional

Acts or omissions by the parent or other caregivers that have caused or could cause severe behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or mental disorders.

### Neglect

Failure to provide for the child or vulnerable adult's basic needs. This includes adequate adult supervision, medical attention, housing, food, and clothing. Most cases of physical neglect involve inadequate adult supervision that has caused harm to the child or vulnerable adult or places them in danger of such harm. I understand it is not my responsibility to investigate, and I will not confront a parent or caregiver if abuse is suspected.

I am responsible for complying with this policy and reporting all suspected abuse as outlined above. | 16



# Statement of Human Dignity

## Acceptance of Identity

Approach people as neither inferior nor superior to you; give others the freedom to express their authentic selves without fear of being negatively judged; interact without prejudice or bias, accepting how race, religion, ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, disability, etc. are at the core of their identities. Assume they have integrity.

## Inclusion

Make others feel that they belong at all levels of relationship (family, community, organization, nation).

## Safety

Put people at ease at two levels: physically, where they feel free of bodily harm, and psychologically, where they feel free of concern about being shamed or humiliated, that they feel free to speak without fear of retribution.

## Acknowledgment

Give people your full attention by listening, hearing, validating, and responding to their concerns and what they have been through.

## Recognition

Validate others for their talents, hard work, thoughtfulness, and help; be generous with praise; show thanks and gratitude toward others for their contributions, ideas, and experience.

## Fairness

Treat people justly, with equality, and in an evenhanded way, according to agreed-upon laws and rules. Benefit of the Doubt—Treat people as trustworthy; start with the premise that others have good motives and are acting with integrity.

## Understanding

Believe that what others think matters; give them a chance to explain their perspectives, and express their points of view; actively listen in order to understand them.

## Independence

Encourage people to act on their own behalf so that they feel in control of their lives and experience a sense of hope and possibility. Use your power to empower rather than to disempower others.

## Accountability

Take responsibility for your actions; if you have violated the dignity of another, apologize; make a commitment to change hurtful behaviors.

*Source: Dr. Donna Hicks, Internationally Renowned Authority on Dignity*