

PLANNING YOUR FIRST GROUP MEETING

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The length of a Life Group Semester can vary slightly, but typically will average 12-14 weeks, allowing ample time for significant study and discussions on spiritual topics as well as time built in for socials, a missed week for a holiday, and etc.

While leaders should always be open to promptings of the Holy Spirit, an intentional and purposeful plan for weekly gatherings will bring stronger relationships and greater spiritual fruit than a group with no plan.

To get started, consider these suggestions for your first meeting:

Have Fun, Get Acquainted & Set Expectations

Food & Fun

Goal #1– Get them back to Week 2! (Smile).

Your first meeting should be designed as a fun, relaxed gathering for people to simply get acquainted. Anything involving food is always a winner. Keep energy and lighting high and your background music upbeat!

Use an Icebreaker

Being prepared with a couple of ice-breaker questions in case you need them to spur on the conversation is wise, but approaching this evening without a driven agenda is fine. Making

everyone feel they are a part of your group is the key tonight. If conversation lags, try one of these questions. Hopefully, participants will begin to connect with other's stories right away.

- How long have you been attending Reality Church and how did you come to be attending with us (invited by a friend, web, sign, etc.).
- What is it about Reality Church that has kept you coming back?
- If money, education, and time were not a factor, what would you like to do?
- What are you really, really, really! passionate about?
- What do family & friends say you are good at?

Discuss Expectations

People come into Reality Church and into a Life Group with all kinds of past experiences. Some good, and some bad. Some people are churched, some are not. Some have been in Sunday school, some in Bible Studies, and some in similar Life Groups. Any of those experiences, or lack thereof, can create false expectations of what might happen in this new group. Take significant time to ask each person to share their expectations.

Try writing their answers on a flip chart or poster board as they are shared, so you are building a visual composite of expectations for all to see. If your own values are missing, ask if they expect some of those things as well, such as

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encouragement, authenticity, accountability, prayer and the big one – commitment! Be sure everyone understands that commitment is a decision and necessary in the journey. Ask them for commitment to the group and to your meetings by signing the **Life Group Agreement**.

To promote trust and respect in your group, it's helpful to agree on a few ground rules. Mention these, and you'll likely get quick affirmation while setting the stage for a safe environment for sharing:

- A safe place where confidentiality is maintained*
- Not confessing the sins of others
- Healthy conflict resolution (Mt. 18:15-17)
- Don't try to "fix" people. Focus on your own needs and issues.

*Exception: If you sense a life is in danger, inform your Group Leader immediately

Share Leadership / Promote Ownership of the Group

Discuss that everyone's input is needed in order to have a successful group experience. You are not here to teach every week, but rather to lead them in their journey. Active group members promote ownership of the group and keeps you from managing all aspects of leadership. Encourage members by letting them know when they are absent the entire group suffers. Not only do they miss out on the community offered by the group, the group misses out on their input had they been present.

Close with Prayer

Offer the opportunity for others to speak out and pray for specific needs. Close your first evening by giving thanks to God for all things, asking Him to guide your group as together you seek to create a Life Group environment that will foster the spiritual growth you each desire.

Between Meetings

Invest in developing these new relationships. Take time to call them, check in on any serious prayer request issues, ask about family members, invite them to Sunday brunch, and express sincere interest in their lives. Let them know you enjoyed getting to know them and look forward to seeing them the following week!

Utilize Technology to Save You Time

Log into your My Reality account to access Group participant contact info, send group messages back and forth, and easily track attendance.

My Reality can be accessed by going to our website and choosing the 'Next Steps' tab.

In addition to My Reality, we also have a mobile app version which will allow you to quickly access your group's contact info, take attendance, see special dates such as anniversaries and birthdays.

To access this app search for "Small Group Leader" by Church Community Builder in your favorite app store.