

3 Steps to Start Your New Small Group

Ready, set, go!

Amy Jackson

Every small-group leader has been there: anxiously preparing for the very first group meeting. We're here to walk with you through this exciting time. These three steps will get you ready for your first meeting:

1. Decide what your group will be about.

Why do you want to start your group? Is there a need you see? Do you want to study a particular book of the Bible? Are you looking to connect with people? In other words: What is the purpose of your group—and why should others join?

There are all sorts of small groups. Some focus on missional living, and others focus on discussing the weekend's sermon. Some groups focus on short-term studies or felt needs, and others want to form relationships for the long haul that extend outside the group meeting time. There's value to all of these types of groups. But your group can't be all of these things. Bring some focus to your group by establishing what it *will* be about.

In order to establish your group's purpose, you may need to know ahead of time what you're studying because it's central to the group's purpose. For instance, if your group will primarily be about studying through the Bible and doing an [inductive study of James](#), you need to know that beforehand.

On the other hand, it may be wiser to wait to choose what you'll study. If your group's purpose is to connect young parents for support, for example, the study may not be as important. Once you're together, you could present a couple of options—like discussing the sermons, a parenting study, or even following along with the kids' ministry lessons. Even if you don't decide ahead of time exactly what you'll study, it's important to come up with a few appropriate options to present to your group once you're meeting.

2. Gather people.

Every church fills groups differently. If your church leaders prefer to have everyone sign up and then assign people to groups, follow their lead. If that's not the case, however, I highly suggest personally inviting people to your group. Even if your church lists groups in a group guide or on their website, the most effective way to fill a group is by personal invitation. After all, groups are about relationships and connecting, and personal invitations express that value from the very beginning.

Not sure who to invite? Think about your group's purpose. What kind of person would enjoy your group? Are you looking for people in a certain life stage (such as young families or retired folks)? Or would people looking for in-depth study be a better fit? Perhaps your group would attract new believers. Consider: who do I know who fits in these categories? It's also a good idea to ask: Who in our church knows people who fit into these categories? For instance, if you're looking for young parents, talk to the kids' ministry leader about potential people.

One of the hardest things, especially for introverted leaders, is walking up to new people—or people you don't know—to ask them to join your group. That feels inauthentic to me, and honestly, that kind of cold invitation won't work on many. Rather than think first about inviting people to my group, I think, *Who do I need to meet and get to know?* When I focus on meeting people for the purpose of welcoming them and potentially forming a friendship, it's easier for me to step outside my comfort zone and say hello.

3. Brush up on your skills.

When you're a new leader, there's a ton of training that could really help you. The biggest thing you can do, though, is set out to love people and build relationships. There's no training that can help you there—it has to be something that you've already decided to do, something you feel passionate about.

Beyond that, though, I highly suggest working through some training that can help you understand your role as a leader and effectively facilitate discussion. SmallGroups.com offers lots of [great tools](#). I'd recommend starting with our [Small-Group Leader Orientation Guide](#) and [Leading 101](#). Whether you're brand-new or a veteran leader, you can learn something from these two practical tools. Oh, and I recommend working through these tools *before* your first meeting. Maybe even at least 24 hours before. (What? You don't procrastinate like I do? Okay, never mind then.)

If your church has a small-group pastor and/or small-group coaches, check in with them. They'll likely have some great suggestions for you as you begin your group.

Ready to Hold Your First Meeting?

As you prepare to lead your first meeting, take a deep breath. It's going to be okay! Every small group starts with a first meeting, and every small-group leader has felt that anxious turn in his or her stomach.

My biggest tips for your first meeting? Focus on fun, and get everyone talking within the first 10 minutes. They don't have to say anything serious or life-changing—just get everyone to open their mouth and contribute something to the conversation. No matter what kind of group you're starting, the foundation must be built on relationships, so the first meeting should focus on getting to know each other and having some fun. The best part? That time spent having fun will pave the way for honesty and vulnerability later on. Believe it or not, fun and laughter often create the kind of environment for tears later on.

Best wishes!

—Amy Jackson is managing editor of SmallGroups.com