



**small
groups
@RBCC**

LEADER NOTEBOOK

Group leader(s):

Coach's name:

Coach's e-mail:

Coach's phone number:

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Introduction

You are embarking on an incredible journey to love and obey Jesus by making disciples. Thank you for your willingness to serve, give of your time, and invest in others for the glory of God. We believe that a small group community is one of the best environments to help people experience the transforming love of God, and ultimately life in Christ!

When Jesus left this earth, he gave his church a mission ...

Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

(Matthew 28:18-20)

His Goal Is Our Goal: MAKE DISCIPLES

Our passion must be our Savior's passion. We must strive to reproduce followers of Jesus who love God and obey Him out of love! Anything less is failing to obey Jesus' command to us.

A follower of Jesus does three key things ...

Loves God

A disciple has a personal and intimate relationship of love with God, where love is expressed as well as received. Spending time in God's word and in prayer becomes a key habit, because we should love to hear the thoughts and desires of the One we love, and love to communicate back to Him!

Loves Others

A disciple desires to share God's love with others through authentic relationships. These relationships help others discover and follow Jesus and become disciple-makers themselves. A disciple also recognizes that we are called to be a family, and therefore God has given us one another to help each other.

Lives Sent

A disciple understands the heart of God is for the world, and for those far from Him. A disciple lives "on mission" to take the Gospel to those who don't have it and to make disciples who also multiply and make other disciples. Our heart must be to make disciples who make disciples!

Putting it all together ...

**A DISCIPLE FOLLOWS JESUS BY LOVING GOD, LOVING OTHERS,
AND LIVING SENT, AND TEACHES OTHERS TO DO THE SAME!**

His Method Is Our Method: INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The Trinity- the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit- are part of an eternal community and they model for us that we also should be in community through intentional relationships with other believers. While Jesus was on earth, he demonstrated incredible intentionality with his disciples: loving, teaching, caring, modeling, encouraging, serving, and correcting.

Love is our call, and love cannot be shown to one another without real, authentic relationships. We cannot shortcut discipleship without relationships and we must follow his ways if we want to see more disciples fill his Kingdom. Jesus demonstrated what all effective disciple makers must do.

Disciple Makers ...

Go With Gospel Love

Disciple makers pursue to love those they disciple in the same way Jesus would love them. This love is self-less and helps others see their true identity as a treasured child of God.

Share God's Truth

Disciple makers teach those they disciple to live obedient to God's Word. Obedience is a key indicator that we trust God, and have surrendered to His leadership in our lives. Disciple makers understand that God's Word is the life-giving truth that sets us free.

Commit To Their Kingdom Future

Disciple makers walk selflessly with those they disciple to help them multiply the Kingdom of God. They make sacrifices where necessary to see followers grow and mature and fulfill God's loving design and purpose for their lives.

Putting it all together ...

**ALL OF THESE THINGS HAPPEN IN INTENTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS
AND SHOULD ALSO HAPPEN IN A HEALTHY SMALL GROUP!**

His Character Is Our Character: BE BEFORE DO

We can't give others what we don't have ourselves. At Rock Bridge, we call this "Be Before Do". If we want others to experience life in Christ and the fullness of God's plan, we must participate in that as well. This doesn't mean we won't have dry seasons, but as spiritual leaders we should pursue Jesus in our everyday lives. Jesus reminds his disciples of the importance of this in John 15:

*"Remain in me, and I in you.
Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit
by itself unless it remains on the vine,
neither can you unless you remain in me."
(John 15:4)*

Growth as a follower of Jesus occurs as we nurture our own intimacy with Him. ***It is impossible to grow into Christlikeness without consistently spending time with Jesus!*** It can be easy to slip into thinking that if we try harder we will grow spiritually, and we fail to realize that growth starts with Jesus. The same can be said of those we are leading in a small group. We can put so much effort into helping them change that we neglect to cultivate our own relationship with Jesus.

This may work for a short period of time, but in the long term, our relationship with Jesus and those we lead will begin to diminish. We must do as Jesus commanded his disciples ... “remain in me!” When we remain in Jesus, we “make a home with Jesus”. Once we do that, we can trust that our ministry belongs to God alone, and we are simply vessels for God to work through! Below are key areas where we need to “make a home with Jesus” to lead a healthy small group.

Be Before Do ...

- Loving God by having a consistent, daily time with God of Bible study & prayer.
- Regularly worshipping with the body of Christ and remaining under clear biblical teaching.
- Living a life that is “above reproach” with no serious moral issues that could cause harm to the body of Christ (sexual misconduct, chemical dependency, gossip, etc.)
- Putting my marriage and family first. If my marriage and family are suffering, all efforts in my life should be directed to that area in order to restore health.
- Actively participate as an official member of the church, demonstrating my commitment to the mission of Jesus through unity and submission to local spiritual leadership.

If any of these areas are significantly deficient (not just a rough patch), you are responsible for having a conversation with your small group director or coach about having someone else lead the group for a season. That will give you the margin and energy to focus on these foundational areas, move back to a place of spiritual health, and “Be Before Do”.

Putting it all together ...

**IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO GROW INTO CHRIST-LIKENESS
WITHOUT CONSISTENTLY SPENDING TIME WITH JESUS.**

His Power Is Our Power: GOD’S GRACE

Jesus demonstrated *radical* trust in His Father that released unprecedented peace and energy to his disciples. Jesus calls every disciple to trust in God’s love and power that is freely given. It’s the grace of God that empowers us to obey and make disciples! Jesus said it this way ...

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”
(Matthew 11:28-30)

Because we believe this is true, the greatest preparation you can do for leading your group is to ... **Pray More Than You Prepare!** As shepherds of small groups, we should commit to praying before and after our gatherings, trusting and depending on God to do in people's hearts what ONLY He can do. Committing to consistent prayer for your small group is essential to a healthy small group.

This is good news! This means that a small group's success depends less on the leader, and more on the working of His Spirit! It's not about our own abilities, planning, or extensive training. It really is about what Jesus said:

"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me."
(John 15:5)

Putting it all together ...

SMALL GROUPS ARE ESSENTIAL TO OUR MISSION OF "GLORIFYING GOD BY CONNECTING PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE TO LIFE IN CHRIST." WE HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO HELP US PARTICIPATE IN GOD'S PURPOSES; WE HAVE ONE ANOTHER IN HEALTHY COMMUNITY; AND WE HAVE A FRAMEWORK FOR SMALL GROUPS THAT IS BIBLICALLY-BASED.

Our Discipleship Path

At Rock Bridge, we want to help people take their next step on a path rather than have people involved in programs. As a leader, you play a critical role in our discipleship path. Always be on the lookout for how you can help someone in your group take a next step in their journey with Christ!



3 C's for Healthy Small Groups

“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)

Over the years, we’ve seen fruitful groups display similar habits and practices. We call these the 3 C’s and they are demonstrated in the passage above. We believe that by faithfully and lovingly practicing the 3 C’s, your small group will see God move through healthy, biblical community!

Love God: COMMUNION

Communion refers to God's communication and presentation of himself to us, together with our proper response to him with joy. At Rock Bridge, we are convinced that God is leading us to deepen our communion with and dependence on Him in prayer for what He alone can do. God’s Word teaches us to pray and shows us how God ordains prayer to advance His purposes. Be encouraged by these words: *“When God is about to do a mighty new thing, He always sets His people praying.”*

One of the most important habits you can develop as a small group is to pray together. In fact, if prayer is the main thing your group does together, we would call that a success. We passionately want prayer to be more than a moment in our small groups; we want prayer to be a movement!

Prayer → Pray Until You Pray

- **Pray Our Mission & Values:** Our mission at Rock Bridge is to “glorify God by connecting people from all walks of life to life in Christ.” We recommend that your group prays monthly for how you can practically, intentionally, and consistently live out our mission and values. You can read more about our mission and values [HERE](http://rockbridge.cc/identity) (rockbridge.cc/identity)
- **Pray Scripture:** When you pray with your group, let the words of the Scripture you read together become the words you pray together. It’s a powerful way to offer God’s words to us back to him in brand new ways. You can read an overview [HERE](http://rockbridge.cc/resources) and watch videos about praying Scripture [HERE](http://rockbridge.cc/resources) (rockbridge.cc/resources)

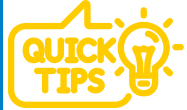


Praying for one another is a wonderful way to build intimacy with God and one another. However, we know that sharing prayer requests can often lead to more talking and less praying. You can read more about strategies to help your group pray more [HERE](http://rockbridge.cc/resources) (rockbridge.cc/resources)

Content → **Biblical and Conversational**

We believe that engaging God's Word is one of the best contributors to growth, life change, and experiencing life in Christ. Therefore, we equip groups to have Scripture-centered conversations. The Bible is God's primary method to lead and change us (2 Tim. 3:16). We love God when we grow in obedience to Him (John 14:15). As we grow in obedience, we grow closer to Him! (John 14:23)

- Many of our small groups choose to utilize our discussion guides throughout the year. They help groups stay unified under biblical teaching and have conversations that flow from our weekly sermons. You can access our discussion guides [HERE](https://rockbridge.cc/resources) (rockbridge.cc/resources)
- Periodically, your group may choose to use a short-term, Christ-centered curriculum that is specific to the needs of their group (i.e. parenting, finances). **Your small group director and/or coach should be notified BEFORE it is used with your group.** This is one way that our Elders protect the church (Acts 20:28-30). [HERE](https://rockbridge.cc/resources) are examples of curriculums your small group might use (rockbridge.cc/resources)
- The primary role of our small group leaders is to shepherd their group. Because of this, small groups should mainly be conversational, not lecture. Our goal is a relationship of sharing and listening for everyone in the group.
- For activity-based or special interest groups, a time of prayer and devotion that reminds the group of God's love and truth is crucial. Please don't skip this step because when you keep God at the center of your activity, He will draw the lost to Himself!



A small group leader should "talk" no more than 25% of the time!

Love Others: COMMUNITY

We believe that for people to grow in their relationship with God, they need to have intentional relationships with people who are moving in the same direction. As seen in the Trinity, God designed us to be in community with others for support, fellowship, and encouragement.

At the heart of healthy, biblical community is a commitment to enfold others into the community. That starts with building relationships: learning people's names, encouraging them to tell their story, sharing your story with them, including them in the life of the church, and inviting them to become a part of the church community. Here are some ways to develop healthy community:

Consistency

- Groups must have a regular rhythm of gathering and group members must know the rhythm (i.e. every Tuesday @7pm). Love for others can only grow if we spend time with one another on a consistent basis!
- Small groups should never take time off or stop meeting for longer than 4 weeks. Small groups may need to change their rhythm for the summer, but this should be communicated.

- The most effective and best small group frequency is weekly, which provides the optimum chance for community to make a real impact. The minimum frequency should be 2 times per month, except during seasons such as the summer or Christmas, when one meeting per month may be all that occurs.



A great target for gathering is 3 out of every 4 weeks. You can also encourage your group to attend or watch our First Wednesday service together.

Care → Carrying One Another's Burdens

- Small groups care for, support, and serve one another. This care is especially important when hardships happen, such as the death of a loved one or job loss, as well as when good things occur, such as the birth of a child or a marriage. Care is also helping one another defeat sin through confession and accountability. Ultimately, care occurs in an environment of transparency, grace, and trust.
- Leaders should notify their small group director or coach (immediately) when serious pastoral care situations arise so the church can respond accordingly. These include things like deaths, family tragedies, serious illnesses, and hospitalizations.



Small groups should develop a "care plan" for how they'll respond in times of need in one another's lives. A "care plan" includes: communication with the group and mobilizing to meet a need (i.e. meals, pay a bill, watch kids, household chores). Group members should know how to specifically pray, encourage, and care for one another.

Celebration → Have Fun Together

- Celebration is a way we love God and love others. God desires our praise, and because of the Gospel, we have much to praise Him for! We can also praise God when life change occurs as people respond to His grace. Remember, celebration is about having fun together!
- Examples of how to celebrate God and one another include: take communion together, sing worship songs, share praises, read a Psalm together, share stories of the "fingerprints of God" in your life, and speak words of blessing over others. You can read more about taking communion together [HERE](http://rockbridge.cc/resources) (rockbridge.cc/resources)



Groups should do something “fun” together outside of their small group gathering at least once per quarter, such as having a cookout, bowling, a game night, or going to a park.

Live Sent: COMMISSION

We are all commissioned by God to demonstrate His kingdom values, love those different from us, and declare His Gospel to people from all walks of life. Life in Christ means living sent as a missionary in the places we find ourselves daily, weekly, and regularly.

Living Sent Together

- There are many intentional ways to “live sent” as a small group. Groups should be regularly practicing one or more of these during every season of life (of course there are other ways!)
 - Having an “open chair” by creating space and inviting new people. This can be done through meeting new people at a service, relationships in your neighborhood, or investing time in a co-worker. You can read more about welcoming a new person to your group [HERE](#) (rockbridge.cc/resources)
 - Identify HOPE expressions where your group can serve together locally with one of our Rock Bridge strategic partners. These can also be great ways to involve kids! You can learn more about HOPE expressions [HERE](#) (rockbridge.cc/hope)
 - Look for practical ways for your group to BLESS others through acts of service and love, with the purpose of building and bringing people into a relationship with Jesus.



Every group should be working to develop an apprentice leader who could help co-lead the group and eventually reach more people by starting a new small group. You can learn more about identifying an apprentice leader, having an “ICNU” conversation, and developing an apprentice leader [HERE](#) (rockbridge.cc/resources)

Practical Small Group Tips

What Does a Small Group Look Like?

We believe that every small group gathering should be composed of three important parts that work together to create healthy, biblical community. These parts should typically have about the same amount of time spent on each of them. Suggestions for an hour long gathering are below:

- **Fellowship (10-20 minutes)** → There should always be time to get to know one another better, whether that's playing a quick game together, using an icebreaker question, sharing your faith story, or conversations around food. Be creative as you build community with your group!
- **God's Word (20-25 minutes)** → Every gathering should involve the reading of God's Word and discussion that is centered on it. At Rock Bridge, we believe that the foundation of our lives are built on God's Word, and we live in obedience to what the Bible says as we love God and others.
- **Prayer (10-15 minutes)** → We believe that prayer is not an "add on" or done "if there's time leftover". Prayer is a central part to our lives as Christ followers, and it should be central to the lives of our small groups also! Always make prayer a priority in your gatherings!



There are practical pieces to leading a healthy small group, such as weekly rhythms and empowering people in group roles, so we've developed resources to help you! (a tool, not a rule). You can see those [HERE](#) and [HERE](#) (rockbridge.cc/resources)

Stay Connected to Your Coach

At Rock Bridge, all of our small group leaders have a coach. Your coach is there to encourage you, be a resource for leading well, and to pray for you and your group. Your coach will meet with you several times throughout the year. We encourage you to reach out to your coach when a problem arises or you have questions about leading your group. They are there to help you as best they can!



No question about leading your group is a bad question ... you can ask your coach anything! They're here to serve YOU!

Know How Big is “Too Big”

We encourage all groups to live with a missional mindset, embracing that God can and will send new people that need your group. Therefore, do your best to keep your group open to them! However, groups that have over fifteen people on their roster may be considered “full” and should be careful of adding new people. Why do we say that?

- Smaller groups give people a sense that they’re truly needed and their presence is missed.
- A fuller group can leave members feeling like there isn’t any space to invite others.
- Larger groups tend to give people a sense that it’s okay if they don’t show up, and therefore commitment levels tend to drop as the group’s size moves over 12-15 people.

If your group is moving past the fifteen member mark:

- Have a conversation with your small group director or coach about leading your group well.
- Prayerfully consider launching another small group from your group. Remember, one way to live sent is by developing apprentice leaders in your group, so you will be ready for this!
- Make your group feel smaller and more personal by moving to sub-groups in your meeting place (i.e. men and women break off). This encourages greater intimacy and commitment!



There is no group that’s too small! As long as a few people are encouraging one another toward Jesus, that’s a small group. Groups of 3-5 people can be a catalyst for growth!

Maintain Your Group’s Roster

Every life matters to God and accountability is a part of shepherding the church, we should be concerned about who is engaged in discipleship. At the end of each month, we’ll send a “Group Attendance & Update” email. This is an opportunity to let us know who is active in the small group.

- It’s not critical if someone misses a gathering, but are they attending and participating in the life of the group on a consistent basis.
- If someone has stopped attending for several months and you have done everything you can to reach out to them, they should be listed in the update email.
- If new people begin attending your small group, they should be listed in the update email.
- If there are any stories, prayer requests, or questions to share with our leadership, this is an opportunity to do that. We would love to hear from you about any of those things!



Watch a short video about “the how and why” of this monthly update [HERE](https://rockbridge.cc/resources) (rockbridge.cc/resources)

Child Care In Small Groups

We realize that a common barrier to small group participation for parents is the availability of childcare. Because of this, some groups prefer gathering in church buildings. However, we believe that homes are an engaging environment that promote hospitality and foster community. By giving children the opportunity to observe your group prioritizing community and spiritual growth, you have the opportunity to set an amazing example for them to follow for the rest of their lives!



You can read more about how to involve kids in the life of your small group or how to creatively care for them [HERE](https://rockbridge.cc/resources) (rockbridge.cc/resources)

To encourage and support parents who need childcare to participate in a small group, Rock Bridge will reimburse them for childcare expenses. We will reimburse leaders who pay for childcare in their home OR individual parents who pay for childcare in their own home while they attend the small group gathering. Rock Bridge small groups have the ability to submit an online reimbursement form for paid childcare on a monthly basis, following our child care guidelines below. Please note that this is a reimbursement, so your group will need to pay for your child care up front. Most groups hold onto their reimbursement to pay for their child care the next month.

If your small group gathers in a church building and you would like to provide child care, **that must be requested and approved first** by your small group director and children's minister.



Submit the online form and read our complete child care policy [HERE](https://rockbridge.cc/childreimbursement) (rockbridge.cc/childreimbursement). If a small group believes more than one provider is needed, prior approval **MUST** be obtained in order to be fully reimbursed. If you need to do that or have any questions about our child care policy, please contact jill@rockbridge.cc

Let's Make Disciples!

Thank you so much for leading a small group! Be assured that we are praying for you and are here to serve you in any way. We can't wait to see how God works through your group in making disciples who bring glory to God and change our communities with the good news of Jesus!

If you have any questions or suggestions, please connect with us ... discipleship@rockbridge.cc