

Revive Our Hearts™

Small Group Leadership

MADE SIMPLE



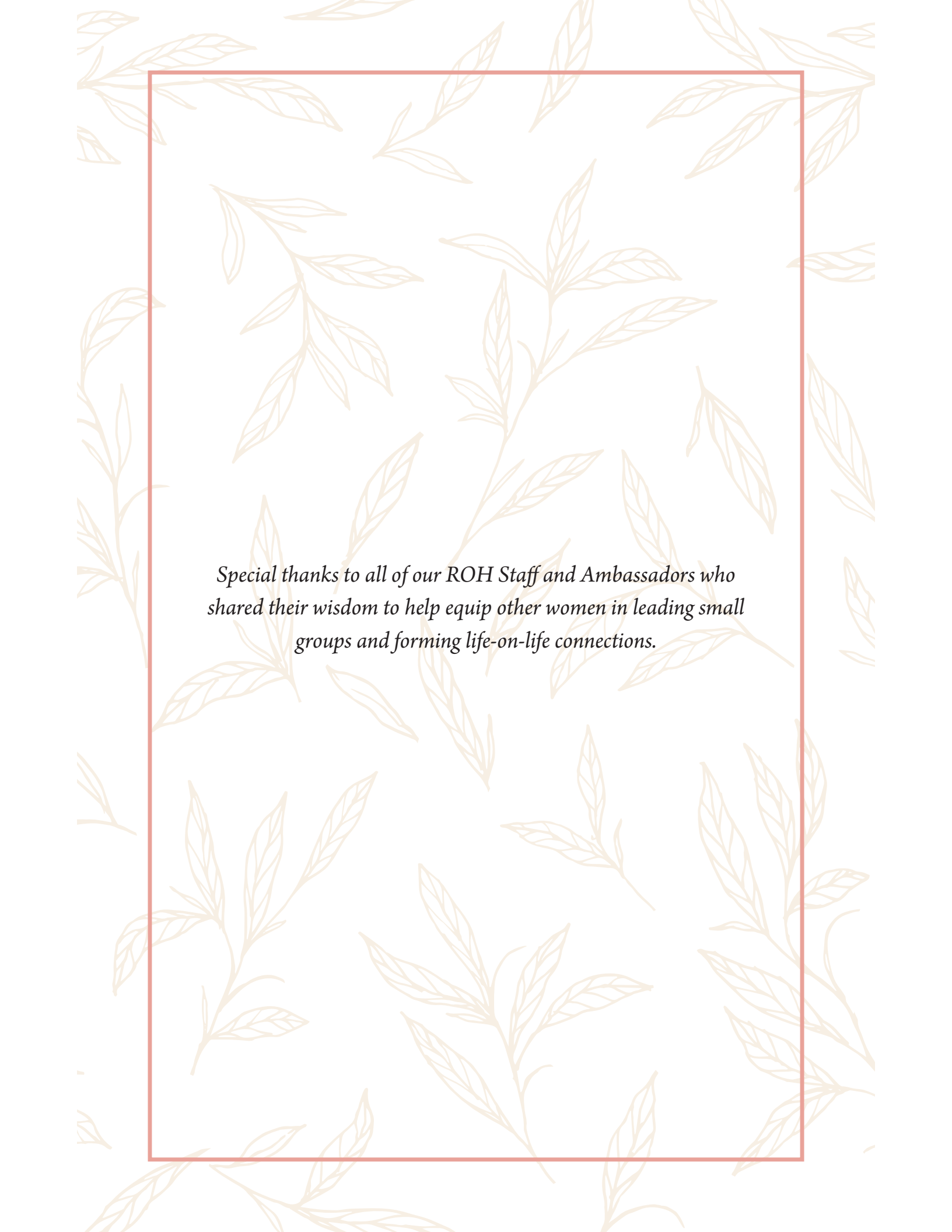
BY MINDY KROESCHE



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Special thanks to all of our ROH Staff and Ambassadors who shared their wisdom to help equip other women in leading small groups and forming life-on-life connections.

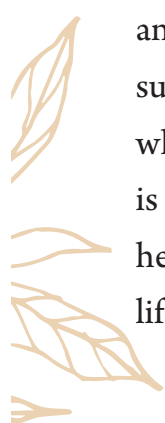


Foreword

I was a new believer, a sophomore in college, when I joined my first small group. I didn't know what to expect, other than I was excited and wanted to know more about Jesus and how I could live out my new faith. My friends who had helped lead me to Christ were all in small groups, so it seemed like the thing to do.

Since that time, I've been involved in a lot of different small groups, both as a participant and a leader: college Bible studies, women's Bible studies, moms' support groups, book discussion groups, and life groups made up of other adults from my church. The good ones have drawn me deeper into God's Word, developed relationships where there's been mutual encouragement and support as we've done life together. The okay ones have left me wishing for more—more discussion, more time in prayer, more opportunities to connect with my fellow group members.

Leading a small group is tricky. You're trying to take the study at hand, present it in a way that's beneficial to the participants' walk with Christ, while also making it interesting as you present to people with varying personalities—all the while trying to build relationships. Whew! It's enough to make any potential small group leader sweat.



And while there's no tried and true method for success, there are techniques and approaches that can help your small group grow and thrive. I've gathered suggestions from our *Revive Our Hearts* Ambassadors and staff members on what they've learned both in leading and being part of a small group. My hope is that through their experience, you'll find ideas to tailor to your own group, helping it be a place that glorifies our Lord Jesus Christ and helps women form life-on-life relationships.

So read on! And as you do, may you be encouraged in the role that God has called you to as you seek to draw women closer to Him and display the beauty of the gospel to the surrounding world.

Serving Him together,

Mindy Kroesche

Writer/Editor, *Revive Our Hearts*





Step 1: Getting Started

THE NUTS AND BOLTS

I know you're excited to start meeting with your group, digging in to God's Word, and forming meaningful relationships. But before you even have your first meeting, you need to think about the logistics. Just as a construction team needs a blueprint to build a solid building, you need a plan for creating a thriving small group that will have a meaningful impact on women's lives.

As you create your plan, consider the 5Ws:

- **Who**—Are you asking a specific group of women to meet together, or are you advertising to a larger population at your church?
- **What**—What will you do in your meeting time? Will you study a particular book of the Bible, a topic that's pertinent to the women in your group, or a curriculum or Bible study? (For a list of recommended resources arranged by topic, click [here](#).)
- **When**—If you're meeting with a specific group of women, you'll most likely arrange the time with them. But if the group will be open for enrollment, think about your target audience and what times might work best. If the group will primarily be mothers of young children, then a morning time (with child care provided!) might be ideal. If the group is a mix of ages and life-stages, then an evening or Saturday morning might be better. Another question to consider is how long your group will meet. Will you follow a study that lasts a certain number of weeks? Do you plan on meeting for a semester? A year?
- **Where**—The space where you meet should not only accommodate everyone but also provide an environment where women can feel comfortable talking and sharing, whether it's at church, a home, or even a special reserved room at a restaurant.
- **Why**—What's the overall purpose of your group? Do you want women

to walk away with a better understanding of biblical womanhood? Do you want them to go deeper into a book of the Bible and learn how to apply it to their lives? Is your aim to connect women and help them form deeper relationships? Whatever your main purpose, always have it in the forefront of your mind as you plan each meeting.

Once those details are nailed down, you can figure out other practical aspects and how you want to structure your time.

- Will you provide child care?
- Will you have refreshments each week or only on special occasions?
- Will you include an icebreaker or get-to-know you questions at the beginning of your meeting?
- How long will you spend on the lesson?
- Will you have time for the sharing of prayer requests and actually praying for one another?
- Will there be time for fellowship?

As you plan the logistics, cover everything in prayer. Seek God's wisdom for what your group should study and what your meeting times should look like—and continue to pray as much as you can!

OTHER TIPS

- When you decide upon a beginning and ending time for your group, make sure you stick to it. Everyone appreciates when you respect their time commitment.
- If you choose to use handouts, make sure they have a purpose and aren't just another sheet of paper.
- Change up the format of your group from time to time—this helps keep women engaged.

COMMUNICATING EXPECTATIONS

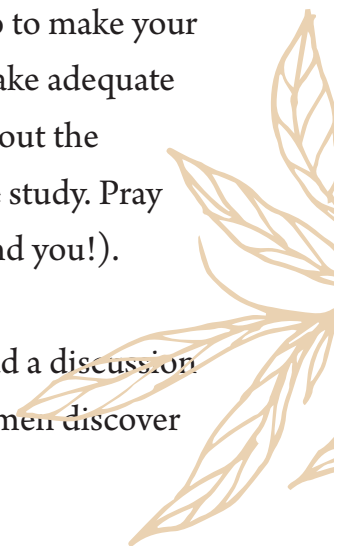
Having a successful group means not only taking time to plan, it requires communication of expectations and guidelines. One way you can do this is by having a **Small Group Covenant**, which allows each member to see the expectations of confidentiality and the guidelines of your specific group and asks them to sign in agreement. Here are some suggestions as to what your covenant could include:

- Agreeing to hold in confidence what is discussed within the group.
- Agreeing to stick to the topic.
- Agreeing that every member should have time to talk, if they so desire.

When you first announce the group, clearly communicate the goal. Then before the first meeting, send each person an introductory email with all of the details and encouragement for what's to come. Let the women know what they need to do to prepare for each meeting, for example read that week's chapters, answer the study questions, memorize Scripture, look at other recommended reading, etc. Share how they can get their own copies of the study materials and what they need to do, if anything, to prepare for the very first meeting. If possible, put together a sheet with everyone's contact information so women can start forming their own connections outside of your meeting time.

As the leader, there are also several helpful things you can do to make your meeting time go smoothly and be beneficial to your members. Take adequate time to prepare your lesson, developing questions that will draw out the women, point them to Scripture, and actively engage them in the study. Pray for each woman by name, and expect God to meet with them (and you!).

As you prepare your questions, think about how you can lead a discussion (rather than lecturing) and allow time for interaction, letting women discover the truth of God's Word for themselves.



OTHER TIPS

- Send a meeting reminder each week, either by text or email, and include some sort of encouragement.
- Think about ways to engage all the members of the group, even if it's just having some of them read a passage of Scripture out loud. But also be mindful of those who absolutely don't want to be called on.
- Incorporate a system to help refresh your mind on previous conversations you've had with your group members so you can ask follow-up questions the next week.
- Anticipate and be ready to address questions on challenging passages and topics.

BREAKING THE ICE

It can be a challenge to get the attention of everyone in a group and start your meeting on time—especially if they're chatting and having fun. That's where icebreaker activities can be a valuable tool. Whether your goal is to have fun, get conversation started, or spur the women on toward getting involved in each other's lives, here are some great suggestions:

- Ask a question at the beginning of your meeting. Rotate the tone of the question each week so that sometimes it's funny, serious, thought-provoking, etc.
- Incorporate Minute-to-Win-It Activities. There are tons of [ideas on YouTube!](#)
- Ask about a high/low experience of trying to live out the biblical truths your group is learning about.
- Ask the group who likes what (coffee or tea, shower or bath, etc.) and have the women stand up or move to either side of the room according to their preference.

- Have each woman tell you two things that are unique about themselves (but ask them not to tell anyone else in the group). For instance: I used to have a pony; I played the cello when I was younger; I tamed a bird, etc. Read these unique traits out loud to your group and then have them guess who the individual is.
- Share stories related to a specific question. For example: What was your best birthday and why?
- Ask for examples of worldly influences the women have experienced that are counter to God's truth.
- Have a basket of random get-to-know-you questions to use before each meeting.

Whatever activity you choose, structure it so it can get started quickly and fit within a specified amount of time so as not to take away from your main study. However, sometimes you may want to let an activity go longer than normal to let the women in your group make deeper connections.

OTHER TIPS

- Do a purse scavenger hunt or a fun quiz with a prize at the end.
- Print out several cards with different Bible characters or happenings on each one. Divide the women into two or more teams, and give them each the same set of cards. They then have to put the cards into chronological order as fast as possible without using Bibles.
- Do a quick craft that helps introduce what you are talking about.

STEP 1 RECAP:

- Decide on the logistics of your group, and consider the 5Ws.
- Nail down the practical aspects, such as childcare, refreshments, and other details.
- Pray, pray, and pray some more!
- Set parameters or a covenant.
- Prepare yourself as a leader.
- Come up with icebreaker ideas.

A PERSONAL INSIGHT

After serving as a small group leader for a few seasons, I realized that women really needed a handy reading schedule printed out for them. Even when a schedule was presented to them at the initial meeting, I began to hear a familiar excuse for not being able to complete the lesson: "I wasn't sure which chapter we were on." So I began to make bookmarks out of colored cardstock and ribbon for each of the members, with meeting times and which chapter we would cover.

Over the years, I've made lots of these bookmarks, and they have become not only helpful tools of order, but to my sweet surprise, have been received as thoughtful gifts. When we take the time to make a purposeful and pretty handout, it says to the member, "You are special" and "I'm here to help you as we walk this journey together."

-Peggy





Step 2: Making the Most of Your Study Time

PROMOTING DISCUSSION

One of the most frustrating aspects of being a leader can be having a great study that helps people go deeper into God's Word, but when you ask a question . . . crickets!

While you don't want to force people to talk who absolutely don't want to, you do want to encourage women to share their thoughts, experiences, and what God has taught them. You want them to feel comfortable enough to be vulnerable and open up their hearts.

For the group as a whole, at your first meeting stress the importance of everyone sharing as God prompts them—they never know if someone will leave blessed and encouraged because of what they said.

Fostering an environment of sharing generally starts with you as a leader, as you are vulnerable and talk about your own struggles. This lets the women in your group know this is a safe place to share. Don't shoot down anyone's questions and allow room for healthy disagreement, establishing a gracious environment where people can express their dissent or difficulty with what the leader or book says.

Ask clear, open-ended questions that are thought-provoking rather than ones that require only a "yes" or "no" answer. And be willing to entertain questions that don't necessarily pertain to the specific topic at hand—not all rabbit trails are bad; sometimes they provide needed insight.

The trick is for you as a leader to know when to let the conversation go off-track and how long it should go. If you sense you need to return to the main

topic and the conversation is still going strong, suggest the group put aside that discussion for another time—maybe even inviting the most animated participants out for coffee to continue the debate.

OTHER TIPS

- Keep the conversation moving, with just a few responses to each question and then move on to the next one.
- Let everyone contribute, even if they're immature in the faith. (Read the section, "Focusing on Truth," for suggestions on what to do if someone's answer is biblically wrong.)
- After you ask a question, give the women a little bit of time to think before jumping in yourself.
- For more ideas, check out the article ["Techniques to Stimulate Small Group Discussion."](#)

DRAWING OUT INDIVIDUALS

You may have a great discussion each week but want to encourage women to speak up further or go more in-depth on an answer. Here are some good questions to ask:

- So what I'm hearing you say is . . . ?
- What most stood out to you from the chapter/lessons this week?
- Where do you see this lesson intersect with your life?
- What did we discuss this session that will be most difficult for you to apply?
- What do you learn about God from what we've studied?
- How does what we've talked about tonight affect your relationship with God?
- What is God telling you to do about what we've discussed?
- If you lived out what you have learned this session, which member of your family do you think it would affect most?

- How will you create an action step for this verse or passage?
- What truth did you learn tonight that you will remember as you go about your week?

If you're trying to draw out someone on a one-on-one basis, start out light and then go deeper. First ask questions about their families, hobbies, etc. Then you could move into how they've seen God's faithfulness that week, a favorite attribute of God, or their life verse and the story behind it. Here are some other questions that can help:

- What is God showing you?
- What do you think God is trying to do in you through this?
- How are you praying about that?
- How can I help you right now?
- How can I pray along with you?
- What would it look like to glorify God in that situation/relationship?
- How do you see God changing you?
- How does the gospel give you hope in that instance?

To help individuals stay engaged, give others in your group the chance to lead. Appoint women to serve in various roles, such as keeping up with who's present or missing, recording and communicating prayer requests, hospitality, co-leading, etc. You want to help each person understand how vital her contribution and participation is to the overall group. This will not only help draw them out during your meetings, but it will keep them involved in your group and excited about coming.

OTHER TIPS

- If someone doesn't share on a consistent basis, you could say, "I'd love to hear from you, (name). You always have great insights to contribute."

- However, be wise about this. If you know someone is quite shy or introverted, try not to put them on the spot. It could just make them even more uncomfortable.
- For more ideas on handling specific situations, read ["Handling Challenging Discussion Issues."](#)

FOCUSING ON TRUTH

An important, but challenging, part of your job as the group leader is to effectively point women to the truth of God's Word rather than opinions, feelings, or experiences. One way you can do that is by how you start off your discussion time.

As we study Scripture, most of us tend to think first about how the passage affects us. What does this say about our lives? How are we supposed to take these truths and apply it to everyday? But the purpose of Scripture is for God to reveal something about Himself. Shift the focus in your group by asking these questions after reading a section of text out loud:

- What does this tell us about God?
- What was the author seeking to communicate to the original audience?
- What does this tell us about us (the Church collectively)?
- What should we do?

As you continue your discussion, be gracious if someone's answer is off theologically while tactfully guiding the conversation back to the truth. Be careful not to be offensive, abrupt, or make the other person feel small.

Acknowledge where the person's heart is, then lead her into the Word. You could say, "I understand why you feel that way. Let's turn to the Scripture as our authority to find the truth that will help." Or "On the topic of _____, let's open the Bible to see what God says."



If the group as a whole gets off track, ask, “What do we see about this elsewhere in Scripture?” Then encourage them to use God’s Word to help think through the issue. For more suggestions on how to point women to God’s truth, read [“Four Wise Steps for Answering Difficult Questions.”](#)

When the women leave your group, you want them to walk away with a better understanding of God’s Word and how they can apply it to their everyday lives. One way to encourage application is by asking what’s going to change when they leave the room. Challenge them to look for opportunities to apply God’s Word and the lesson throughout the coming weeks and then share the results at a future meeting.

OTHER TIPS

- Be ready with Scripture to back up your reasoning for what you’re discussing as a group.
- Leave room for people to wrestle through what God is trying to teach them. They don’t need to leave having everything figured out.

STEP 2 RECAP:

- Encourage women to share what God has taught them.
- Foster an environment of sharing by doing so yourself.
- Come prepared with questions to help draw out individuals.
- Give other women in your group the opportunity to lead.
- Focus your study on God first and application second.
- Be gracious and tactful as you point women to God’s truth rather than opinions, feelings, or experiences.
- As women leave the group time, challenge them to look for ways to apply God’s Word throughout the coming week.

A PERSONAL INSIGHT

To help create a culture of grace in our women's ministry, I began by sharing my story—the good, bad, and ugly. In sharing my story, others would start sharing bits and pieces of theirs. They began to feel safe with each other.

I think at the beginning it was an exercise to help them clearly articulate their faith journey. But what happened was pretty amazing. When the women would share their testimonies at different events, whether it was at Bible study or a women's gathering, they received such affirmation and love—not condemnation. Jesus wanted the women to know that they were loved, accepted, and belonged to His Father unconditionally. Because we lived life out of the gospel, critical spirits began to diminish and grace became more and more evident. In this culture of grace, women openly shared their lives with each other. It was a beautiful thing to see happen.

- Sara



Step 3: Growing Your Group

BUILDING TRUST

Building a community of trust is vital to the health of your group—and it all starts with you as the leader. You have to earn women's trust by being trustworthy yourself!

For the group as a whole, set clear-cut boundaries of confidentiality, like through your small group covenant. Make sure you communicate often that what's said in the group stays in the group. Women need to know your group is a safe place where they can share their hearts and burdens and not be judged or gossiped about later. If the issue arises of someone in your group breaking the covenant, be prepared to address it, either privately with the individual or with the group as a whole if necessary.

Another way to build trust is to model transparency and be open, honest, and vulnerable. When you trust your story with the women in your group, they will follow suit. Let them see that you're all learning together by sharing about your own struggles and areas where God has given you victory over sin. You want to be a model of someone who is trying to live out a life of brokenness, surrender, and holiness—albeit not perfectly!

Hebrews 4:16 reminds us that we can have confidence as we draw near to the throne of grace. As we come alongside women and walk with them to the throne, we're not ahead of them, as if we're looking back at them, and we're not behind, as if we're pushing them. We walk beside them, because we need Jesus, too, and are eager to receive His mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

At the beginning of any group, most women will be a little guarded. But as the relationships grow, they'll start to open up! You can help this process by building your own relationships with them. Pray with them. Spend time with



them. Show that you care about their lives outside of the group by checking in during the week, especially if you know they're struggling. And most of all, love them.

OTHER TIPS

- Show your group they can trust you by sticking to your plan. If you say you're going to meet on a certain day for a certain time, then follow through on that plan.
- However, if your original plan isn't working, be flexible and adjust it to your group's needs. Your goal is helping women to grow in their faith not adhering to a plan.
- Make sure you don't forget women's prayer requests.
- Encourage women to write out their testimonies and share with the group—and then affirm the Holy Spirit's work in their lives. This can help them take the next step and share other personal things later.

HANDLING GROUP DYNAMICS

Whenever you get more than a few people together, you're going to have a mix of personalities. That can make your group dynamics interesting—but definitely not boring!

It can be difficult to balance out the discussion in your group among the talkers, the thinkers, and those who are shy. That's why it's important to always be in prayer about how to handle this and encourage and help each woman right where she's at.

One way to do this is to include some guidelines in your small group covenant. Ask women to agree that they will show respect at all times for each other and each other's insights. While unity is expected in the group, uniformity is not—but showing respect and grace always is.



Encourage your members to participate in but not dominate the conversation. For those who are more talkative, enlist their help to encourage the quiet ones in your group to talk. Privately ask for their help to see if they would be open to waiting for two to three other people to answer before they do.

Encourage those who are quieter by asking questions like, “Does anyone else have anything to share?” or “Could someone who hasn’t spoken up yet share?” Also, don’t make eye contact with those who are the most talkative—that way they will be less likely to answer every question.

As the leader of the group, your job is to be a facilitator of the discussion rather than running a monologue. Start conversations with a comment or an insight from what you read that week. Ask for other women’s perspectives. By teaching the art of conversation—demonstrating short sentences that allow others to respond—you’re showing that listening is just as important (if not more so) than speaking.

For more ideas, check out “[10 Essential Tips for Handling Small Group Dynamics](#).”

OTHER TIPS

- As the leader, show the same respect to everyone. Don’t let your frustration or annoyance be visible to the group.
- If someone starts sharing too much or going on a rabbit trail that’s not productive, politely refer back to the lesson and get the group back on track. Although it feels uncomfortable, good leaders know when to politely interrupt.
- Deal with conflict in the group right away rather than avoiding it.

ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY OF PRAYER

Prayer is a vital part of helping to connect the lives of the women in your group together, as well as deepening their relationship with God. But it can often get left out if your discussion goes long. Or there's the potential that the sharing of prayer requests could take up your entire meeting—with no time left for study or actual prayer!

To ensure that you have time to pray, make it a regularly scheduled part of your group, either at the beginning or end of your meeting—and then stick to your agenda. As far as the sharing of prayer requests go, there are several approaches you can take. You could have women verbally share their requests, give them a few minutes to write down their prayer requests, or have them text/email the requests ahead of time and let the leader share them with the group verbally or in a handout.

During the meeting time, you can assign women prayer partners—someone they will pray with at that time and connect with throughout the week. Depending upon the size of your group, you could also have everyone pray for the person to their right or left.

If someone shares a request some other time throughout the meeting, don't wait to pray for them. Stop whatever you're doing and lift them and their concerns up to the Lord.

Outside of group, encourage your members to pray for one another. Type up the requests and email them out to everyone. Encourage women to share requests through texting or emails throughout the week, especially if something urgent comes up. Another idea is to create a group text or Facebook group where everyone can share requests, updates, Scripture verses, and praises for how God is providing for their needs.

One thing to consider is that for some women, praying out loud in front of others can be incredibly intimidating. For ideas on how to help someone grow

in this area in a sensitive and caring way, check out the article “[Overcoming Fear of Praying Aloud.](#)”

When women pray with and for each other, their hearts are knitted together in a unique way as they lift up one another’s concerns before the Lord. And when He answers, you can all rejoice and celebrate together!

OTHER TIPS

- Let God’s Word direct your prayer time—choose a Scripture verse each week for your group to pray together.
- Keep a prayer journal for your group and use it as a way to help everyone reflect back on how God answered their prayers.
- Host a special time of prayer in someone’s home outside of your normal meeting time.

STEP 3 RECAP

- Earn women’s trust by being trustworthy yourself.
- Set clear boundaries for confidentiality.
- Incorporate group guidelines asking women to show respect for others at all times.
- Encourage women to participate in the discussion but not dominate it.
- Come up with creative ways to encourage quieter members to participate.
- Make prayer a regular part of your meetings.
- Decide on a method for sharing prayer requests.
- Encourage women to pray for one another both inside and outside of the group.

A PERSONAL INSIGHT

As the women in my group shared their lives and burdens, God led me to hold a gathering specifically for prayer. However, I thought only a few women would come.

We coupled the event with a nice breakfast in someone's home, and I was amazed—all but one from our group arrived! Following breakfast, we gathered for prayer. I encouraged the women to initially not ask God for anything but look to His character and His worthiness. Praising Him for His greatness and goodness drew humble responses. Hearts were real, tender, and broken. Heavy burdens were surrendered; women's faith and strength in God was stirred. Each person was encouraged, revived, and refreshed by the love, unity, and encouragement of His Word and Spirit by being in prayer together in His presence.

-Anne





Step 4: Developing Relationships

WITHIN THE GROUP

Let's face it: You only have so much time in your meeting. You want to do the important stuff—studying God's Word, having time for discussion, praying for one another. And then, before you know it, your meeting time is over and everybody goes home, except for maybe a few stragglers who stick around to chat for a few minutes. So how can you encourage the women in your group to develop deeper connections?

A few ways you can do that within your group time are breaking into groups of two or three for discussion and/or prayer. Ask women to change it up each week and sit next to someone different. Utilize different icebreakers or short activities, and get women moving around the room and talking to as many people as possible.

Have women pair off (preferably with someone they don't know well) and chat for ten minutes. Then they can introduce each other to the group. You can also encourage the women to find one or two people to connect with throughout the week (via text, in person, etc.) to ask questions about the study and keep the conversation going.

Author and speaker Susan Hunt highly recommends a weekly box talk—basically a grown-up show and tell—as a way for the women in your group to get to know one another. Each week, a different woman in your group would place objects into some kind of container (box, bag, basket, etc.) that are representative of her and her life. Then, in front of the entire group, she would bring out each object one at a time and share why she included them—giving a glimpse into who she is and what she loves. This is a non-threatening way for women to share about themselves and provides a catalyst for further conversations.

For more guidelines on how to give a box talk that's both interesting and lively, click [here](#).

Other ways you can encourage women to connect are by having a fellowship time either before or after the meeting. Even if you can't do this every week, you could offer it on a monthly basis. And when you include that magic component of food, it encourages people to linger and talk some more.

OTHER TIPS

- Plan to have the women get there early enough to get settled and catch up a bit with each other.
- Find someone in the group who enjoys introducing and connecting women together, and assign her to help make connections within the group each week. For example, "Lisa, please meet Anna. You both have recently been on a mission trip." Or "Stacey, I'd like you to meet Susan. You both work as speech therapists."

OUTSIDE OF THE GROUP

The reality is that deep friendships probably won't happen just in the group time. To help develop a true community, where you do life together, you need to encourage women to get together outside of your regular meeting, either all together or one-on-one.

As a leader, try and meet with individual women outside of the group to get to know them better. Send them an encouraging text or a card, just to let them know you care and are praying for them.

To help foster a spirit of unity and friendship, you could consider holding a special retreat for your group at the end of your study or once a year. Whether it lasts an afternoon, twenty-four hours, or a couple of days, this uninterrupted

time away from the demands of daily life allows for everyone to connect in a deeper way and spend time in God's Word.

Organize some fun activities that the whole group can do together, like once-a-month social get-togethers. You could go out to a restaurant, share a potluck meal, make crafts, etc. Here are some suggestions to get your creative juices flowing:

- Go out for coffee or a meal at a restaurant.
- Make some kind of craft. Usually while people create, they talk and share light things but can sometimes also get into deeper heart needs.
- Bake Christmas cookies together or have a cookie exchange.
- Make apple pies. Each person makes three pies—one to serve their family the next day, one for the freezer, and one to give away.
- Take time during one of your first meetings to make a placemat that has get-to-know-you questions: What's your favorite food or drink? Who are your family members? List something that would surprise us about you. Each woman would bring a picture of herself and/or her family to put on the placemat, which would then be laminated. At following meetings, alternate the mats among different tables for each other to read about another woman in the group.
- Have a time where each woman can share her expertise. For example, maybe one person is a born organizer, another knows how to cook healthy on a frugal budget, another loves gardening, another has organized running a 5k for a special cause, etc.
- Plan a service project that everyone can do together, like serving a meal at the homeless shelter, helping out at your local Crisis Pregnancy Center, collecting personal items for a woman's shelter and then delivering them, or hosting a spa day for women in a Christian-based drug/alcohol treatment program.

When you spend time with each other outside of the group, it brings out conversations and connections that would take longer if you were only meeting

for the study. Some activities may have a large turnout, while only one or two people could show up for another. Don't let that discourage you! Connections happen in both scenarios, and sometimes God uses the smaller settings in the sweetest ways.

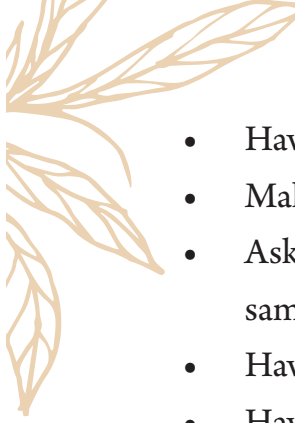
OTHER TIPS

- Ask other women to plan activities for outside your regular group time. This gives them a sense of ownership and excitement—which will come through as they ask others to join them.
- Find out what practical needs are within your church or neighborhood (providing meals for someone who has just had surgery, moving, home renovation projects, etc.) and help fulfill those needs.

BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

Eating together was an important part of fellowship in the early church ([Acts 2:46](#)), an example that we can model within our own groups. Adding food into your meetings is a way to bring people together and encourage relaxed conversation—fostering connections and a spirit of community. And while there are unlimited options for what you can do, here are some favorite group activities involving food from our Ambassadors and staff:

- Serve a breakfast buffet, with items like breakfast casseroles, quiche, breakfast burritos, fruit, yogurt, croissants, or pastries.
- Have a small snack, like popcorn or energy balls.
- Serve different types of bread, like cornbread, banana bread, pumpkin bread. Make it even more fun by offering flavored butters!
- Have a “dip” night, where half the group bring dips and half bring something to dip with.
- Ask everyone to bring an easy weeknight dish that works for families.

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- Have a fondue night.
 - Make homemade waffles and offer fun toppings.
 - Ask each person to bring some fruit and make a fruit salad, or do the same with a lettuce salad (chicken Caesar, southwest, etc.).
 - Have a sundae bar.
 - Have a tea party.
 - Make s'mores and get creative with the ingredients.
 - Have a baked potato bar.

We all have to eat sometime, so why not incorporate it as a fun time within your group? When you ask women to bring food, it gives them a chance to share their favorite recipe and bless others with their cooking skills. And if someone can't cook well? Encourage them to help set up and clean up, or just sit back and enjoy being blessed by others!

OTHER TIPS

- Make food activities within the group something that's easy to do. Have ingredients prepped ahead of time, make it a buffet style, assign different people to be in charge of bringing one ingredient, etc.
- Have a team of women who are in charge of planning all food activities and getting everything ready at the meetings.
- Encourage women to bring copies of their recipe with them so that others can make the same thing at home. They could lay the recipes on the table by their dish or share it via a group text or in a Facebook group.



Here are a few favorite recipes from our Ambassadors and staff members to get you started.

HAM AND CHEDDAR QUICHE

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bake the pie shell for 5 minutes. Remove from oven. In layers, cover the pie shell with half the cheese, bacon, and onion. Repeat the layers. In a medium bowl combine the flour, salt, and pepper. Gradually pour in milk, blending well. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Pour mixture into pie shell. Bake 45–55 minutes or until a knife inserted in center comes out clean. Cool 5 minutes before cutting.

1 9-inch deep dish pie shell
2 cups grated cheddar cheese
1½ cups cooked, chopped ham
¼ cup finely chopped onion
⅓ cup flour
½ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. pepper
1 cup milk
4 eggs



APPLE BREAD



Mix the apples, water, and oil together in a blender. Add the sugar, egg, and vanilla, and mix well. In a separate bowl, mix the dry ingredients together. Add the apple mixture from the blender, and mix well. Stir in walnuts and raisins, if using. Pour into a greased and floured loaf pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 50–60 minutes. Yields one loaf.

*If doubling recipe, use three eggs.

1 cup sliced apples, packed well
1 oz. water
½ cup vegetable oil
1 ¼ cups sugar
1 large egg*
1 Tbsp. vanilla
1 ½ cups + 2 Tbsp. flour
½ tsp. soda
½ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. baking powder
1½ tsp. cinnamon
walnuts and raisins (optional)



JALAPEÑO CHEDDAR BACON DIP

Mix together and chill for 2 hours.
Serve with crackers, chips, or veggies.

16 oz. sour cream
3 oz. package of real bacon bits
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
1 can of drained corn
6 oz. jar chopped jalapeños (add more if you like it extra hot!)
1 pkg. dry ranch mix

STEP 4 RECAP:

- Encourage the building of relationships by having smaller discussion groups or pairing women off to talk and pray both inside and outside of the group.
- Incorporate a weekly box talk.
- Have fellowship times before or after the meeting.
- As the leader, connect with women one-on-one outside of the group.
- Hold a weekend retreat.
- Organize fun activities to do together outside of group time.
- Add the component of food into your meetings to encourage relaxed conversations.



A PERSONAL INSIGHT

At a mothers' support group, we encouraged women to bring two of their favorite things to share with others (with a price limit of \$5). Not everyone participated, but for those that did, we put their names into a basket. The first person drawn shared about her favorite things, and then drew another name to give those items to. That woman then shared her things, drew another name, and so on.

Not only did this help us gain insight into people's personalities and give ideas on fun items to purchase for ourselves, it offered the opportunity to minister to one another outside the group. Fast forward to two years later when my mother passed away from brain cancer, one of the women in that group offered her sympathy and support through a meal and the gift of my favorite things. It meant so much that she remembered and reached out this way during a time of deep sorrow and loss.

-Mindy



Finding Joy in Your Role as Leader

Being a small group leader can sometimes feel like being on a roller coaster. As you go along, you can experience a whole gamut of emotions:

- Excitement to get started.
- Stress as you try and fit leading the group into an already busy life.
- Encouragement as you connect with other women.
- Frustration as you manage personalities and potential conflicts.
- Sadness as you grieve with others for their losses.
- Satisfaction as women gain a deeper understanding of God's Word.
- Joy as you watch God work mightily in both your life and that of the women in your group.

Through the ups and downs, the thrills and the anxiety, it's ultimately worth it, as you build into the lives of others and seek to present them "mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28).

If you're currently leading a group, then I hope you've found helpful tips and encouragement for your role. If you're thinking about starting, then may this booklet be the factor that encourages you to take the plunge.

No matter where you are on your journey, remember that the most important thing you can ever do as a leader is to guard your own walk with the Lord. As you grow in your intimacy and personal relationship with Him, it will overflow into ministering to others.

And don't forget to pray—a lot! Be mindful of Paul's words in Colossians: "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (4:2). Pray over every aspect of your ministry, holding your plans loosely as you

seek the Lord's wisdom, guidance, and direction. Strive to be a servant to all, showing the spirit of Christ in your words and actions so that you glorify Him and make His gospel believable and beautiful to those around you.

May the Lord bless you as you seek to serve Him!

For more help on leading a small group, check out the [Revive Our Hearts Leader Resources](#).





RESOURCES FOR

Women's Ministry

LEADERS

Whether you're planning an event, starting a small group, or just need regular encouragement . . . we're here to serve you.

Our *leadership resources* will help you scale mountain peaks and cross deep valleys so together we can build up the Church and glorify the name of Jesus.

United in Him, let's reach thousands with the life-giving truth that sets women free.

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Revive Our Hearts is an outreach of Life Action Ministries.

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