

Growing Authentic Community

From Strangers to Family

It Can Really Happen

The beauty of the gospel is that while we were yet sinners—objects of wrath, rebels against God, as far from him as we possibly could be—Jesus came to make us his family, to unite us with both him and one another, former enemies and strangers.

Two key pillars that cultivate rich community in our small groups:

1. **Humility & Sacrifice** (Phil 2:6–8) – We are called to reject transactional relationships. Our calling is to be selfless and engage in relationships with those different from us.
2. **Vulnerability** (2 Cor 12:9–10) – There’s a beauty and strength that comes from admitting our faults and struggles. It’s where we are most aware of our need for God.

The Art of Friendship

1. **Invite God into Friendships** – Prayer is the first step in finding friends we can really connect with.
2. **Be Intentional** – When friendships don’t just click, be interested in the other person and try things they enjoy.
3. **Make Time** – Intentionally set aside time for friendships in your group. Whether spontaneous or planning ahead of time, think about what might best serve the other person.
4. **Give & Listen** – Scripture reminds us that we are secure in God’s love and therefore we can put others before ourselves. Actively listen and give others the opportunity to open up and share.
5. **Embrace the Awkward** – Sticking with people through awkward moments can help us grow closer.

While we aspire to have a tight-knit small group that feels like a second family, we recognize that this won’t always happen. At the same time, don’t be too quick to write off the possibility of becoming friends with someone who’s different than you. Be open to the unifying work of the Holy Spirit.



Intimacy & Mission

Rhythms of Intimacy

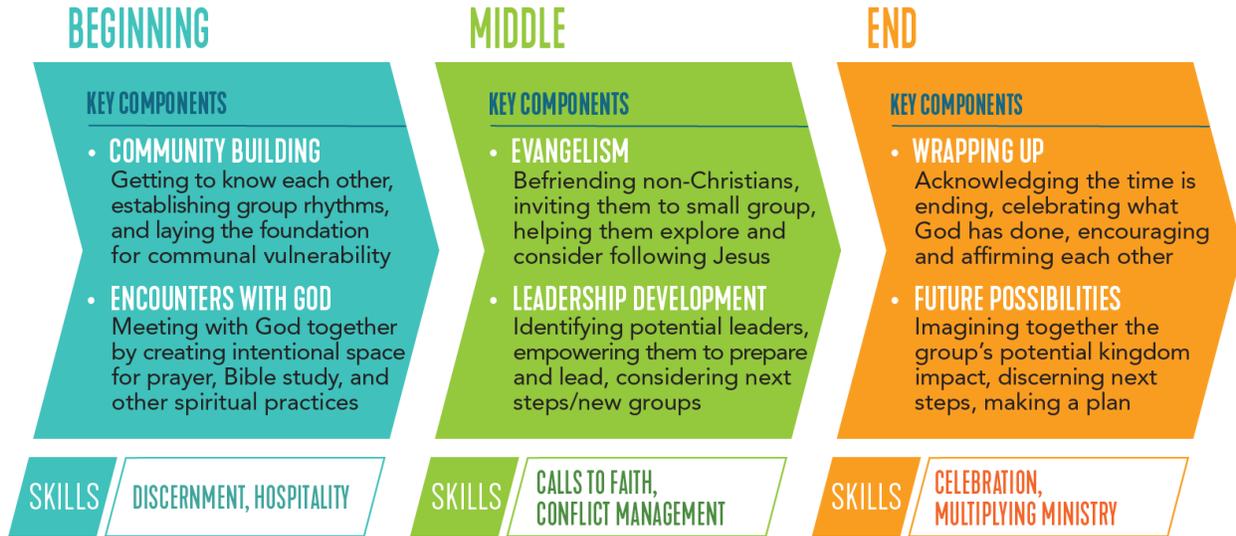
- Use the first few weeks to get to know what’s important to each person
- Set up regular hangouts
- Share and pray for prayer requests regularly
- Plan a day trip or go to a conference like Urbana together

Rhythms of Mission

- Schedule monthly events where everyone can invite a new friend
- Host a Proxe Station (a public, interactive display that uses interesting visual designs and contextualized topics to spark spiritual conversation)
- Bake cookies to hand out to your dorm
- Schedule a time to make a call to faith
- Pray for and invite non-Christian friends



Community in the Life Cycle of a Small Group



Common Small Group Pitfalls

- **Nobody Shows Up** – It's not the end of the world! Contact people in case they forgot or come up with a new game plan, like rescheduling or promoting the event on social media.
- **Shallow Conversation** – Start the conversation and share deeply. Ask one of the other members to help you by opening up a little more in future conversations.
- **Managing Conflict** – If conflict arises, take time to cool off and prepare before sharing, listening, and then finding a solution. Make sure to affirm the process and forgive where needed.
- **Navigating Diversity & Inclusion Issues** – Sometimes conflict will extend beyond differences in opinion or temperament. This a much more nuanced topic, which is discussed in the Ministering Across Cultures course.

Diagnosis & Next Steps

Take time to reflect on a current or past small group experience to help you take the next steps in building community as a small group leader.

1. **Charting Out the Life Cycle** – If you're currently in or leading a small group, determine which stage your group is in. If you're thinking about a past small group experience, try to chart the life of the small group and how it matched up with the skills and dynamics we talked about.
2. **Highlights** – What were some of your favorite moments, helpful rhythms or activities, or things that helped you encounter God more deeply? Dig deeper when thinking about why they were highlights to help you create moments like these for other people in the future.
3. **Lowlights** – Think about some of the struggles in interpersonal relationships, group dynamics, or your growth. Take time to think about what skills or resources would've been helpful, and how you can be prepared for the future.
4. **Intimacy & Mission** – Where would you place your group on the graph above? What could you do to grow towards becoming a thriving small group? For a past small group, what did you learn from that experience and what could you do differently next time?
5. **Action Steps & Takeaways** – What stands out to you based on this reflection? What can you take away from these past or current experiences to help shape the future? Be specific!

Related Resources

- [Group Icebreakers](#)
- [Having Fun / Building Community Online](#)
- [Life Stages of a Small Group](#)
- [Navigating Small Group Conflict](#)

Recommended Courses

- [Growing My Networks](#)
- [Inviting Well](#)
- [Ministering Across Cultures](#)

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