



ETERNAL CHURCH

What are Small Groups?

*The following material is taken from Eternal's **Small Group Leader Handbook**, and is designed to introduce and explain why we do small groups, how groups function, and qualifications for leaders.*

For more questions about Small Groups, please contact:

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Eternal Small Groups

Purpose and Goals

1. To build loving, supporting, Christian community by investing in relationships with God and each other.

Acts 2:42-47 *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

2. To disciple each other, encouraging our fellow group members to grow in their personal relationships with Christ, gain a deeper love for and knowledge of scripture, discover their spiritual gifts, develop a heart for people (including unbelievers), and provide an opportunity for confession and accountability.

Hebrews 10:24-25 *And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Matthew 28:19-20 *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*

James 5:16 *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*

3. To help keep our growing church "small" by providing opportunities for us to pray together, share life together, and bear one another's burdens.

Galatians 6:2 *Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*

4. To give members a context in which they can serve the Body of Christ in a variety of ways (e.g. CARE projects, community outreach, etc.)

Matthew 25:40 *'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'*

Please Note: Eternal church membership is **not required** to join a small group. Everyone is welcome to attend!

Qualifications for Spiritual Leadership

from the Pastoral Epistles

The following qualifications are taken from 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and they apply specifically to those occupying the church offices of deacon and elder. However, these passages also provide a good general guide when considering the kind of characteristics we would hope to be present in anyone acting in a spiritual leadership role. Since the role of Small Group Leader does involve leadership and shepherding, leaders should strive, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to demonstrate the following characteristics. Please understand that this is not a complete list of leadership qualities and no one but Jesus has every strength.

1 Timothy 3:2-7 (elders), 3:8-13 (deacons), 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Titus 1:6-9 (elders)

1. Social Qualifications

- a. To those within the church: above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2, 3:10; Tit. 1:7)
- b. To those outside the church: a good reputation (so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil) (1 Tim. 3:7)

2. Mental Qualifications

- a. Prudent (sound-minded) (1 Tim. 3:2)
- b. Respectable (well ordered, harmonious) (1 Tim. 3:2)
- c. Sensible (Tit. 1:6)
- d. Holding to the mystery of the faith with a clean conscience (1 Tim. 3:9)
- e. Able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2, 2 Tim. 2:24)
- f. Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict (1 Tit. 1:9)
- g. Correcting those in opposition with gentleness (2 Tim. 2:25)

3. Moral Qualifications

- a. Husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2, 3:12; Tit. 1:6)
- b. Temperate (1 Tim. 3:2)
- c. Not addicted to wine (1 Tim. 3:3, 3:8; Tit. 1:7)
- d. Free from love of money (1 Tim. 3:3)
- e. Not fond of sordid gain (1 Tim. 3:8; Tit. 1:7)
- f. Not accused of dissipation or rebellion (Tit. 1:6)
- g. Loving what is good, just, devout, self-controlled (Tit. 1:8)

4. Personality Qualifications

- a. Not pugnacious (1 Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7)
- b. Not self-willed (Tit. 1:7)
- c. Not quick-tempered (Tit. 1:7)
- d. Not contentious (1 Tim. 3:3)
- e. Gentle (1 Tim. 3:3; 2 Tim. 2:25)
- f. Kind (2 Tim. 2:24)
- g. Patient (2 Tim. 2:24)
- h. Dignified (1 Tim. 3:8)

5. Domestic Qualifications

- a. Husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2, 3:12; Tit. 1:6)

- b. Manages own household well (if he can't manage his own household, how can he manage the household of God?) (1 Tim. 3:4, 3:12)
- c. Keeps children under control with all dignity (1 Tim. 3:4)
- d. Has children who believe (Tit. 1:6)

6. Maturity Qualification

- a. Not a new believer (lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil) (1 Tim. 3:7)¹

More Practical Guidelines for Leaders

The following are some spiritual and practical guidelines for Small Group leaders at Eternal. Please take time on a periodic basis to review these in honest self-analysis.

- Must be members of Eternal Church (or actively pursuing membership).
- Must be spiritually mature, demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
- Must be emotionally stable in order to be able to lead with consistency, patience, and grace (no unresolved anger, bitterness, etc.).
- Must have a desire to build into new leaders to encourage group multiplication².
- Must have a love for people and a desire to invest in the lives of group members.
- Willingness and ability to facilitate a focused discussion and prayer time.
- Must be committed to supporting the Purpose/Goals for Small Groups and the overall Mission of Eternal Church.
- Willingness to commit to a minimum amount of time (i.e. a semester or a year) in order to ensure continuity among groups.
- Must make every effort to attend all training and organizational meetings scheduled by Eternal Leadership.
- Must meet/train with Small Group Coordinator prior to leading a group.

¹ The categories in this section come from J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Moody Press), pp. 48-61, as cited in David Livingston, *Bethlehem Baptist Church Shepherd's Training*, pp. 6-7.

² See *Multiplying Groups and Leaders* document for additional information

The Functioning Small Group³

Four Components central to a healthy small group:

- 1) Bible Study
- 2) Fellowship, Accountability and Care
- 3) Prayer
- 4) Missional Focus

Bible Study- receive the Word as God-breathed and authoritative; choose a bible study that spurs each individual in your group to deepen his/her understanding and beliefs.

- The Bible is essential for life transformation; serious, focused study is crucial.
- Include and ask for personal, specific application and prayerful responses to the Scripture you are studying

Fellowship, Accountability, and Care- by sharing lessons learned about God and how He is at work; devote time to hearing the genuine state of each other's heart.

- At the core of genuine fellowship is sharing with others what God has shown you.
- Accountability is not merely targeting one another's sins; it is even more tracking down evidences of grace in one another.
- Pursue ministry for those inside your group, striving to meet their physical, emotional and spiritual needs⁴.

Prayer- far from a minor add-on, prayer is an essential part of small group meetings. Reserve adequate time each week to lift up one another and the world.

Missional Focus- to multiply joy, encourage your small group to be others oriented in nature.

- Spend time praying for the "empty chair" and strive for a welcoming environment.
- Pray that the Lord expands Eternal's Small Group Ministry through **Invitation, Multiplication, New Leaders** and **Improved Quality**.⁵
- Pursue ministry towards those outside your group (C.A.R.E. supported ministries like The Crisis Pregnancy Center or Gary's Circle Neighborhood, the elderly, those with disabilities, the homeless, etc.)
- A great prayer request: "Lord, reveal to us how you want to use us to minister to your church and our community this week/semester/year.

³Materials from this section have been adapted from David Livingston, *Bethlehem Baptist Church Shepherd's Training*.

⁴ For additional information see *Resources for Struggling Group Members*, p. 12.

⁵ For additional information see *Multiplying Groups and Leaders: Small Groups with a Missions Focus*, pp. 16-20.

Deepening Small Group Relationships

through probing questions and effective group dynamics

The “one another” passages in Scripture urge us to have depth of relationship that can only happen by the Spirit of Christ. Only those filled with the Holy Spirit can fulfill the commands to:

- Know** Accept one another (Romans 15:7)
- Serve** Bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2)
Teach the Bible to one another (Colossians 3:16)
Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)
- Encourage** Honor one another (Romans 12:10)
Build up one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
Encourage one another (Hebrews 3:13)
- Sharpen** Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16)
Confront one another (Romans 15:14)
- Reconcile** Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16)
- Worship** Pray for one another (James 5:16)

Getting Personal- during your group meetings, don’t be afraid to get personal. When conversations seem shallow, insert deeper questions.

Examples:

- How would what we are talking about affect you personally?
- Have you ever struggled with this issue personally?
- We are often abstract when discussing Scripture: how does this affect you daily?
- Are there things you have been convicted about? How did this conviction come about? What steps have you taken to deal with those things? How can we help encourage you?
- What have you heard in the sermons (or study material) recently that has been particularly convicting, comforting or encouraging?
- What areas of obedience have you been asking the Lord to help you with recently?
- Where have you recently experienced God’s kindness and love in your life?

Overview of Group Dynamics

- A. **Types of Groups**—At Eternal we offer both gender-specific (men’s or women’s) and co-ed groups (open to both married couples and singles). Each type of group offers different benefits. For example, the co-ed groups may allow a husband and wife to spend more time together and to develop deep relationships between their family and other families. On the other hand, gender specific groups may offer an environment for sharing and accountability on a deeper level since there are not members of the opposite sex present. As a church, we recognize the value in both types of groups.
- B. **Size of Your Group- Five** is an optimal number with which to start for single gender groups; if the number grows beyond about twelve, the group dynamics deteriorate rapidly. Two smaller groups are more vital than one large group. Co-ed groups tend to be a bit larger, and they grow faster (a new married couple joining a group means two new members). One way co-ed groups can work around large numbers is to periodically spend some time splitting up the genders for specific types of discussions.
- C. **Room Set-Up-** A few simple adjustments will make your room welcoming, hospitable and interactive.
1. The group should sit in a circle. Put chairs close together, but not in each other’s lap. Every person should be able to see everyone else, and don’t let anyone sit in a second row behind others.
 2. Have people all sit on the same level, not some on the floor and some in chairs to promote eye contact and encourage participation.
 3. Be mindful of where you sit- trying to be somewhat central so that you can see everyone and communicate that you are accessible to everyone in your whole group.
 4. Make sure the room is sufficiently lit so that people can see each other and easily read their bibles and study materials.
 5. If providing refreshments (or group members are eating during the meeting) do so at the beginning as you wait for others to arrive. Do not let snack time become distracting or exceedingly long.
 6. Anticipate distracting noises and eliminate them (turn off phones, tv etc.)
 7. An occasional meal together is a great way to turn strangers into friends. Recruit others to help. Keep your planning simple, and aim to make it fun!
- D. **Get your group TALKING!** Here’s another set of questions to use in an on-going way after the group is past its get-acquainted stage:
1. What was an important event in your life this past week? Take one minute to fill us in on the details.
 2. What is one of the better things that happened to you this week?
 3. What was a significant thing that happened to you this past week?

4. Who had the greatest influence on your life since the last time we met?

- E. **Sharing Testimonies** – Many newly forming groups have found that taking a few weeks to allow group members to share their testimonies has been an effective way to help them get to know each other and plant the seeds for lasting friendship.
- F. **Beginning and Ending on Time**—While we want our groups to be Spirit-led and not excessively rigid in operation, we've found that out of respect to your group members' time, it is wise to try as much as possible to begin and end your group on time. Often, the last few minutes of a session (when people are sharing prayer requests and praying for one another) are the most fruitful. If one member has to leave at the agreed upon ending time, but the group routinely runs over time, that member may consistently miss out on the good stuff! Remember, it's always OK for individual group members to linger and talk after the group has been properly closed. Just be respectful of the host if you are meeting in someone's home.

G. Prayer Time Ideas

Have you ever struggled to incorporate prayer into your small group meetings? Do you find it difficult to keep your group focused when they share prayer requests or have a tough time encouraging your members open up? Here are some ideas:

- **Prayer Cards:** Group members are given an index card to write prayer requests. Cards are traded at the end of the meeting and members commit to praying for the requests on the card they received for the following week.
- **Once a Month Prayer Meeting:** On the first meeting of the month group members share praises and prayer requests, then spend the rest of their meeting praying for one another.
- **Praying in Pairs:** Group members devote the first 15-20 minutes of their meeting to share prayer requests and pray in pairs or small groups in various locations of the home.
- **"Prayer and PJ Night"** Every other week one group gets together in their comfy clothes to share prayer requests and pray for one another. (Somehow we've never had a guys' group do this one!)
- **Prayer Requests Online:** Another group shares their requests during the week online on a Google group site they created. (for more info visit <http://groups.google.com/>)

Colossians 4:2-4 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

Choosing a Location

When choosing a location please refer to the information provided in the Room-set-up section of *The Functioning Small Group (p. 8)* for additional guidance. Choose a location that will provide your group a safe and private environment for sharing. While rotating homes is sometimes necessary we recommend choosing a consistent and predictable location whenever possible. Additionally in an effort to lighten the load for the Small Group Leader, consider meeting in a location other than his/her home.

Four options are currently available for Small Group meeting locations:

1. Members' Homes
2. The Eternal Office
3. The YMCA
4. Local Restaurants

To reserve a meeting space at the office, please contact our administrator, Laura Frame, at Laura@eternalchurch.net.

To reserve a meeting space at the YMCA, please contact our YMCA liaison, Bob Lee at bob.lee007@gmail.com.

As always, your Small Group Coordinators are available to provide help in determining the best location for your group:

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