

GROUP LEADER ORIENTATION

| NEW GROUPS KIT

 GROUPS

USER GUIDE

Hello, group leader! We are so excited that you have seen the value of community and have taken the courageous step in leading a group that will allow you to share that community with others. Of course, we know you probably have many questions, and that's okay! We are here to help. What you have before you now is Rush Creek's Group Leader Kit. In it you will find:

Role Description

This is a quick introduction into helping you understand the role you have taken on at our church. It also includes a covenant for you and your group to help you understand who you are and what you will be as a group.

Base Camp Training

These videos and documents will help provide you with a foundation for the mission and vision of community at Rush Creek.

Leader Orientation

This document contains the foundational information for being a group leader at Rush Creek, including mission and strategy, roles and responsibilities, best practices for leading a group, as well as a group covenant.

Curriculum Pathway

This will be your guide in selecting the studies that you choose for your group to journey through together and how to get the most out of each of them.

Groups Calendar

This will provide you with all the dates of upcoming events and training that Rush Creek provides for its group leaders.

Four Stages of Community

This document will help you understand the typical journey of a small group and what to expect during each part of the journey.

Conflict Guide

This is a tool written by Watermark Community Church pastor Todd Wagner that will guide you through how to approach conflict both individually and as a group.

Leader Development Plan

This chart will show you the path that every Group Leader at Rush Creek will follow in order to become the best leader they can be.

Groups Roadmap

This chart will show you the big picture vision of the journey your group will take, from your identity and growth to the multiplication of your group.

God bless you and we look forward to walking with you on your journey into leading biblical community!

GROUP LEADER ORIENTATION

I. Our Target & Strategy

A. Our Target

To become more like Jesus through small group community.

B. Our Strategy

To pursue our identity in Christ as Learners, Family Members, and Missionaries in the context of community.

Our Groups Roadmap provides direction for all groups (see page 7)

C. Small Group Values / Habits

These should be practiced at every meeting:

- Growth
- Authenticity
- Safety
- Confidentiality
- Help
- Priority

D. Groups Ministry Design Features

- Agreement Driven (see appendix)
- Curriculum Pathway Driven (see appendix)
- Invest and Invite
- Leader-led groups
- Leader designed form of meeting
- Strategic Coaching
- Open Groups

II. Leadership Model, Roles, and Responsibilities

A. Leadership Model



- Role description (see appendix)
- Group Leader Covenant
- What is the process for stepping down?

A. Groups Definition and Group Types

Families of learners on mission with God to the overwhelmed, under-resourced, and far away. At Rush Creek we have different types of groups because...well people are different!

• Gender-specific

Meet weekly or bi-weekly throughout the week and all over the DFW metroplex. These groups focus on consuming God's word, confessing sin, praying for lost friends, and high accountability to follow Jesus.

• Study & Discussion

Meet weekly or bi-weekly throughout the week and all over the surrounding communities of all Rush Creek campuses. Study & Discussion groups primarily anchor around the study of God's word, encouraging one another, serving the community, and living life together.

- **Mission & Outreach**

Meetings might not be weekly and the location of meetings could vary depending on the type of mission or outreach. These groups focus on putting faith into practice by accomplishing a missional task or regular outreach for the purpose of being Jesus to the overwhelmed, under resourced, and/or far away. Mission & Outreach groups could meet for years at a time or for a short time until a project or season is complete.

- **Outdoor & Activity**

(not bound to Rush Creek Curriculum Pathway) Meet weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly depending on the activity. These groups center themselves around an activity outdoors as a means for discipleship. Outdoor & Activity groups can function as simple as occasional gatherings for deepened community or as intentional evangelistic opportunities.

- **Care & Recovery**

(each uses a unique curriculum) Meet weekly and most use a seasonal curriculum. These groups have a defined beginning and end point (ReGeneration does not have a set beginning and end point. Participants may join at any time).

- Divorce Care
- Shiloh
- Grief Share
- ReGeneration
- Embrace Grace
- Embrace Life

C. Groups are not:

- Social Clubs
- Therapy Groups
- Lecture Environments
- Your Next Client

D. Group Coaches serve the Group Leader

- Your first phone call
- A resource for you

- Provides encouragement & guidance
- They type of interaction with your coach will depend on your skills and experience

E. Leader Development Plan is the vehicle by which we equip you to master essential leadership skills (4 D's of leadership)

- Leader Resource Website
- GroupChat Podcast
- Fortify E-Newsletter
- Blog/Vlog
- All Groups Training Events
- How to guides

III. Group Practice

A. Defining the Win

A win for a group leader is when group members take a step towards becoming more like Jesus through small group community.

In order to determine the win your Groups Pastor will conduct a variety of measurements (surveys, interviews, focus groups) throughout the year. However the most accurate measurement is your assessment because you are their shepherd.

Achieving Group Success

- Every group should use a Group Agreement.
- Every group should complete the notecard exercise Why Are We Here and align on the statement "Our group has come together so that..."
- Every group should revisit their statement a few times per year.

B. Basic Meeting Plan for Group (excluding Outdoor & Activity)

- Fellowship & Food
- Discussion-based study
- Prayer
- Accountability

C. First Three Months

- Build relational capital
- Cast Vision

- Clarify expectations
- Start with 'Small Group Essentials' curriculum

D. Following Months

- Review Group Agreement
- Identify a future leader
- Contact Coach as needed

IV. Assimilation/Birthing a New Group

- We will raise awareness, but it's your job to invite others to your group.
- At Rush Creek we multiply leaders. Splitting groups is a last resort.
- Future Leader development is our primary leader development tool.
- Group multiplication should never be done in private. Always include your coach/groups pastor. We want to help you!

V. Data Management

A. Touch Point

- Used to track attendance, communicate with your group, and maintain your group profile
- Guests to rushcreek.org can view your profile and request information from you about your group
- Ways to respond to group inquiries
- When you receive your first group meeting report, sign in using _____

B. Surveys

We use Survey Monkey to collect feedback on various aspects of Groups Ministry

C. Focus Groups

We utilize focus groups at Rush Creek as research methodology to better understand the complexity of group member/leader/coach/lead partner's thought and feeling about groups at Rush Creek. These are initiated by our Core Team (the team charged with Rush Creek ministry strategy and effectiveness) and might include you and/or your group members. Participation in Focus Groups is voluntary and is

not a requirement for leadership.

VI. Ten Ways To Kill A Group

- Don't meet regularly
- Have too few members
- Have too many members
- Don't use a group agreement
- Don't deal with a problem member
- Allow prayer request time to become storytelling time
- Don't follow the Rush Creek Curriculum Pathway
- Ignore the personal needs of group members
- Never multiply to form a new group
- Not allow members to bring new people on any given week

VII. Additional Resources

www.groupcurriculum.org

www.rightnowtraining.org

www.smallgroups.com

VIII. Appendix

A. Icebreakers

Icebreakers are an essential tool for life groups. Begin with light, informational questions and then move to deeper, more personal level as the group progresses together. If used well, icebreakers can move the group to experience greater community!

Level 1-Information: What you know.

- What is your favorite movie? Why?
- What is your favorite city? Why?
- What day of your life would you most like to relive? Why?
- What does your name mean? Why were you named that?
- If your house were on fire, what three items (not people) would try to save?
- What was the best gift you ever received as a child?
- If you suddenly lost your eyesight, what would be the thing you missed seeing the most?

- What was your first job? What do you remember most about it?
- Tell the group a brief story from your wedding day.
- If you could go to college (again), what would you study?
- If you were given a year sabbatical from work, what would you do?
- What is one of the greatest adventures you have ever been on?

- When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? Were there any surprises?
- For what do you want to be remembered?
- An emotion I often feel but don't usually express is _____.
- Where do you go or what do you do when life gets too heavy for you? Why?
- In what area of your life would you like to have greater peace? Why?
- What is one of your biggest fears about the future?

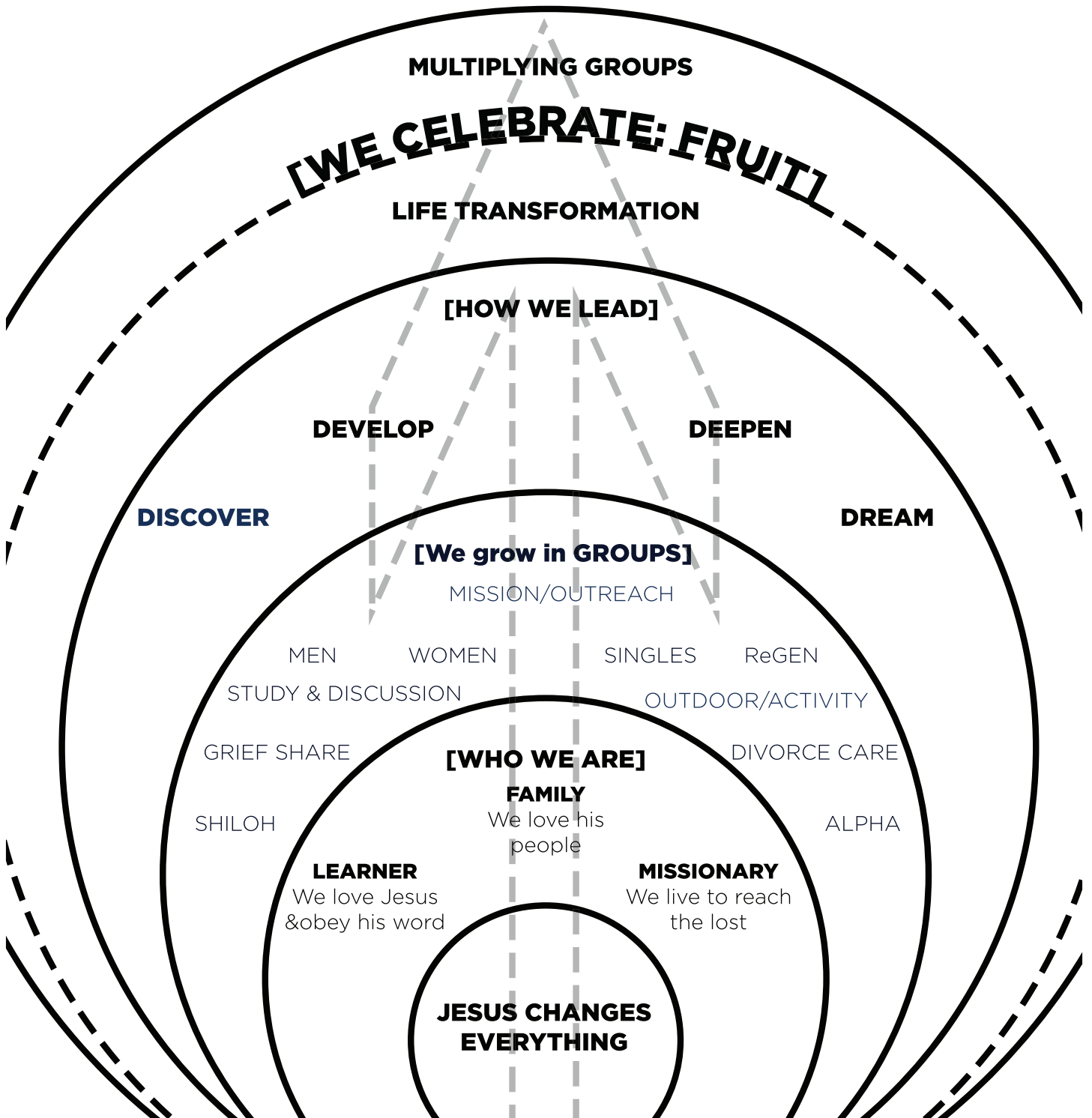
Level 2-Opinions: What you think.

- Who is one of your heroes? Why?
- Who is your number one advisor in life? Why?
- My favorite way to spend time is _____.
- Just for the fun/thrill of it, before I die, I'd like to _____.
- I was (or would have been) voted "Most likely to" _____ in high school.
- I wish that before I got married someone would have told me _____.
- If you were going to leave the world one piece of advice before you died, what would it be?
- Who is one of the most interesting people you or your family ever entertained?
- Who is the best boss you ever had? What made him or her so good?
- People might be surprised to find out that I _____.
- Describe a grade school teacher that made a big impression on you (for good or ill).
- Each person in the group answer for the person to your right: _____
I am so glad God made you because _____.

Level 3-Feeling: Who you are.

- What is your biggest fear about death?
- What do you miss most about childhood?
- I am most like my mom/dad in that I _____.
- One of my biggest pet peeves is _____.

[OUR ULTIMATE GOAL]
 BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS AS WE BE JESUS
 TO THE OVERWELMED, UNDERRESOURCED AND FAR AWAY.



GROUP AGREEMENT

| *Option 1*

Growth

I am open to taking growth steps while in this group, such as growing in my relationship with others and in my relationship with God.

Authenticity

I will strive to share my true feelings (thoughts, concerns, fears, questions, etc.) during our discussions and will not say anything to cause another person embarrassment. Everyone has a voice in our discussions.

Safety

I will strive to be an encouragement to others by having a listening ear, an open heart, and grace-filled attitude towards others. In LifeGroups we are all on the same team.

Confidentiality

If anything is said during our groups of a personal nature, I will not repeat it outside of our group. Please note that if you or someone else shares in our group his/her intent to harm themselves or others, it will be reported to the proper authorities.

Help

I will strive to be a dependable friend with those in this group by being ready to serve during times of need, providing encouragement and praying for the needs of others.

Priority

I will make this group a priority in my life by doing my best to attend group meetings unless I am sick or out-of-town, participate in group discussion & group activities, and arrive at group prepared.

GROUP AGREEMENT

| Option 2

The purpose of the group agreement is to ensure that members of the group have shared expectations and values for their small group community. Rush Creek's desire is that each member of the group would be of one heart and mind as they enter the group, and that each individual shares ownership and responsibility of the vision and purposes of the group. A group agreement helps avoid unmet expectations and confusion among members.

We agree to the following:

Discussion Time

To discuss the Bible or a Bible-based resource as a group for the purpose of spiritual transformation. We're not interested in having a pleasant or even vibrant "chat" about the Bible. We want to study it, know what it says for the ultimate purpose of following Jesus better.

Share and Care

To know each group member and how they are doing, to partner with them through life's challenges and triumphs, to be a place where we can spur one another on, and to pray consistently with them and for them

Clear Purpose

To participate in helping each other become learners sitting at the feet of Jesus, participating in a new family, and being a missionary where we live, work, and play.

Commitment and punctuality

We agree to attend all group gatherings unless we are sick or out-of-town and to respect others by being punctual, or by notifying the group leader & host home if we will not be able to attend or will be late.

Respect and Acceptance

We agree that this group will be a place where we

can each be open, honest, and authentic in who we are and how we are struggling. We will not run from conflict but will follow Matthew 18:15-17. We will respect each other's viewpoints but ultimately will submit to the Word of God.

Confidentiality

What's shared in the group stays in the group! The only exception is when someone threatens to injure themselves or others. Scripture calls all of us to flee from gossip. Information shared in the group will go beyond group only in the event of the threat of physical, emotional or spiritual injury and under the guidance of your group leader.

Multiply

To always have a heart for the unconnected by maintaining an open chair and developing one or more future leaders in order to launch more groups. The Kingdom of God is bigger than one group and demands that those the Spirit equips, be sent out to start more groups. This can be painful relationally but is required spiritually.

Other _____

We agree to the following items:

- This group will meet from _____ (date) through _____.
- The group will meet on _____ night.
- The group sessions will begin at and end at _____.
- The group time will generally consist of _____ minutes of Bible study discussion, and _____ minutes of shepherding one another (prayer/share).
- This semester we will study _____.
- The childcare arrangements for our group will be _____.

- The dinner arrangements for our group will be _____.
- Our group will support the use of Group Champions (see below).
- We will revisit this Group Agreement on the first meeting of next semester.
- Champions: (see below for descriptions for each)
- Fellowship: _____
- Worship: _____
- Discipleship: _____
- Ministry: _____
- Evangelism: _____
- **Worship:** This champion may lead the singing in the group, choose songs for the meeting, or delegate these tasks to others. This person may also oversee the prayer time for the group, lead in Scripture reading, and handle other similar activities. Worship can be expressed in other ways, such as prayer walks, candlelit readings of Scripture, communion, and foot-washing ceremonies.
- **Fellowship:** This person usually coordinates meals or refreshments for group gatherings. He or she may be responsible for organizing celebrations or parties and planning other social activities. This person might also be just the one to start the group with fun ice breakers or even choose games for game night.
- **Discipleship:** People who are passionate about discipleship naturally encourage others in the formation of spiritual habits, so this champion can help ensure the group has a balanced spiritual diet. He or she can encourage group members to take a periodic Spiritual Health Assessment and develop a Spiritual Health Plan to make sure they each have a spiritual next step they are working on.
- **Ministry:** This champion can help the group find opportunities to serve together within the church (believer to believer). He or she may also coordinate meals and support for group members in crisis (sickness, death in family, birth

of new child, and so on). Ministry champions ask group members questions such as: What are your spiritual gifts? Where/How are you going to use it/them? Have you attended First Step Experience? We discovered that a group that does a project together, regardless of what the project is, builds a bond that holds them together.

- **Evangelism:** This person oversees outreach plans and helps the group partner and participate in mission projects personally, locally, and globally (believer to nonbeliever). Each of these three areas of outreach has a different target group; Personally, Locally, Globally

GROUP LEADER POSITION DESCRIPTION

Leader Qualifications: Love God and Love People

- I confess that Jesus Christ is my Forgiver and Leader (Savior and Lord)
- I affirm Rush Creek's statement of faith. (see rushcreek.org)*
- I am committed to grow in my walk with Jesus Christ.
- I love to see people 'win' in life and become better in their daily walk with Jesus.

- I will make my Group/Coaching team a priority in my life.

*Until you complete First Step Experience and turn in your partner covenant your group will not be promoted publicly.

Below are all resources borrowed from Watermark Community Church

Life Group Leaders:

- I will pray for my group regularly.
- I will lead my group to constantly look for ways to reach out to those who are un-connected and/or far from God.
- I will encourage and model biblical community in my group.
- I will empower others in my group by enlisting and training a future leader.
- I will fully participate in Rush Creek's Leader Development Plan and communicate with my coach regularly.

Group Leader/Coaches Covenant

Thank you for serving as a Group Leader/Coach at Rush Creek Church. During your time as a leader you will be viewed by those in your group as a leader in our church. As a result, we ask that you enter into a covenant with other Group Leaders and the Groups Coaching Team by making the following commitments:

- I will make every effort to conduct myself in a manner that glorifies God in public, private, and on social media (ex. facebook, twitter, Instagram, snapchat, blogs, youtube etc.).
- I will follow the leadership of the church staff and if I have disagreements with leadership decisions I will address those privately with church staff.
- I will make attending worship and serving Rush Creek a priority.

FOUR STAGES OF COMMUNITY

There are four different stages of community. As you begin to do life together, you'll begin to see that there is a natural progression. The tendency will be to stop at Stage 2 when conflict arises, and either leave the group or retreat to Stage 1. If however, your group matures to Stages 3 and 4, you'll see how God designed community as His provision for us.

Stage 1: Honeymoon

This stage is primarily characterized by a fun sense of “us.” Since the members of the group are just getting to know each other, the relationships will be somewhat shallow. This shallowness is perfectly acceptable for this season.

Similarities between the members of the group will be highlighted and will be the first step in moving toward a deeper sense of “togetherness.” Typically during this stage there is uncritical acceptance of everyone in the group.

Members might think other members are “quirky” or have personality traits that seem a little odd or different, but these thoughts are usually not verbalized and are not brought into the light.

Members who are “new” to community and members who struggle opening up their lives to others will most likely love this stage of group life. Members who have had a good experience with authentic community or are very comfortable opening up about the details of their lives will most likely struggle with this stage and want to move “deeper” as quickly as possible.

The key to this stage is to make sure the group finds similarities upon which to move forward. During this stage it's good to ask what each member wants most out of a community group. Most likely, members will mention their desire for a “safe” and/or “accepting”

environment. This is a great similarity to build upon as the group moves forward.

Stage 2: Differentiation

This stage is primarily characterized by recognition of the difference between each group member. As the group spends time together, differences will naturally arise which impact each member uniquely, depending on their personal experience with handling conflict.

For those members who are comfortable engaging in conflict, these differences will be seen as a natural hurdle to overcome as the life of the group progresses. For those who are not comfortable engaging in conflict, these differences will be viewed as a threat. For those who feel threatened by the differences, there is potential for members to develop a “win versus lose” posture and start to doubt whether or not they are going to fit in and whether or not this group is going to be successful.

The key to this stage is to make sure the group understands that it is at a critical juncture. Path one is to go back to the honeymoon stage of lighthearted fun. Although this may seem like a good idea, understand that this is a step backwards and will not produce the experience of community that they desire in their hearts. Path two is to develop a biblical standard of conflict resolution that will enable the members of the group to safely and maturely deal with their differences and draw the group closer together. Path two is really the only option if the group desires to continue moving forward into real community.

Stage 3: Acceptance

This stage is primarily characterized by each group member realizing the value of the group's diversity. As Paul discusses in 1 Corinthians 12, diversity among

the body of Christ is essential and is to be valued and respected. The group benefits by each member having different strengths and weaknesses, especially when they have unity of purpose.

Hopefully, during this stage the group will understand that the one similarity they all share in common is their brokenness and need for Jesus.

The key to this stage is to successfully practice the conflict resolution standard and stay engaged despite differences. This will help build trust and help members grow in their appreciation of the group's diversity. As the group continues to progress, intimacy will continue to deepen and the members' love for one another will continue to grow.

Stage 4: Community

This stage is primarily characterized by each group member sacrificially loving one another. As the group practices the conflict resolution standard and intimacy in the group grows, the group will move to a point where each member is mutually submitting to the others out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21). Each member of the group, out of love, sacrifices for the other member without expecting anything in return (Philippians 2:1-11).

The depth of the trust experienced in this stage is special, and the love shown to one another is Christlike.

The key to this stage is each member's acceptance of personal responsibility for each relationship. This stage is what everyone's heart long for when it comes to community.

CONFLICT

| A CONSTANT OPPORTUNITY

*****This is an abbreviated version of Conflict: A Constant Opportunity Field Guide, which is produced by Todd Wagner and Watermark Community Church**

Fully devoted followers of Christ should be committed to resolving conflict in a way that glorifies the Lord, edifies the body of Christ, and reflects the principles laid out in Scripture. Since all relationships – including those among believers – will be faced with disagreements at different times, as followers of Christ, commit to the following biblical principles as a guide for resolving these issues. We trust that the following information will serve as a continual resource for you as you strive to serve others, grow personally, and glorify the Lord in the context of conflict.

Scriptures to remember:

- Proverbs 6:16-19
- Proverbs 17:14
- Proverbs 20:3
- Matthew 5:23-24
- 1 Peter 5:5-7
- Ephesians 4:1-3
- Proverbs 18:19

Our Commitment to Biblical Conflict Resolution:

As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe we are called to respond to conflict in a way that is remarkably different from the way the world deals with conflict. We also believe conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve other people, and become more like Jesus. Therefore, in response to God's love and in reliance on His grace, we commit ourselves to respond to conflict according to the following principles:

GLORIFY GOD – Instead of focusing on our own

desires or dwelling on what others may do, we will seek to please and honor God – by depending on His wisdom, power and love; by faithfully obeying His commands; and by seeking to maintain a loving, merciful and forgiving attitude.

GET THE LOG OUT OF YOUR OWN EYE – Instead of attacking others or dwelling on their wrongs, we will take personal responsibility for our own contribution to conflicts – confessing our sins, asking God to help us change any attitudes and habits that lead to conflict and seeking to repair any harm we have caused.

GO AND SHOW YOUR BROTHER HIS FAULT – Instead of pretending that conflict doesn't exist or talking about others behind their backs, we will choose to overlook minor offenses, or we will talk directly and graciously with those whose offenses seem too serious to overlook. When a conflict with another Christian cannot be resolved in private, we will ask others in the body of Christ to help us settle the matter in a biblical manner.

GO AND BE RECONCILED – Instead of accepting premature compromise or allowing relationships to wither, we will actively pursue genuine peace and reconciliation – forgiving others as God, through Christ, has forgiven us, and seeking just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences.

By God's grace, we will apply these principles as a matter of stewardship, realizing that conflict is an opportunity, not an accident. We will remember that success, in God's eyes, is not a matter of specific results but of faithful, dependent obedience. And we will pray that our service as peacemakers brings praise to our Lord and leads other to know His infinite love.

#1 AT THE TRAILHEAD: LEARNING THE LANDSCAPE

See Conflict as an Opportunity

Conflict is not necessarily bad or destructive. Even when conflict is caused by sin and causes a great deal of stress, God can use it for good (Rom. 8:28). As the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, conflict actually provides three significant opportunities. By God's grace, you can use conflict to:

- Glorify God by trusting, obeying, and imitating Him
- Serve other people by helping to bear their burdens or by confronting them in love
- Become more like Jesus

These concepts are totally overlooked in most conflicts because people naturally focus on escaping from the situation or overcoming their opponent. Therefore, it is wise to periodically step back from a conflict and ask yourself whether you are doing all that you can to take advantage of these special opportunities.

Glorify God

When the Apostle Paul urged the Corinthians to live “to the glory of God,” he was not talking about one hour on Sunday morning. He wanted them to show God honor and bring Him praise in day-to-day life, especially by the way that they resolved personal conflicts. As mentioned above, you can glorify God in the midst of conflict by trusting Him, obeying Him and imitating Him. One of the best ways to keep these concerns uppermost in your mind is to regularly ask yourself the focusing question: “How can I please and honor the Lord in this situation?”

PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

Get the Log Out of Your Own Eye

The most challenging part of peace-making is set forth in Matthew 7:5, where Jesus admonishes us to “...first take the log out of our own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”

There are generally two kinds of logs you need to

look for when seeing your part in the conflict. First, you need to consider your own attitudes and biases. Critical, negative, or overly sensitive attitudes easily lead to unnecessary conflict.

The other log you must deal with is actual sinful words and actions. Because we are often blind to our own failures, we must have honest friends who will help us take an objective look at ourselves and face up to our contribution to a conflict.

The most important aspect of getting the log out of your own eye is to go beyond the confession of wrong behavior and face up to the root cause of that behavior. The Bible teaches that conflict comes from the “desires at war within you” (James 4:1-3). Some of these desires are obviously sinful, such as wanting to conceal truth, bend others to your will, or have revenge. In many situations, however, conflict is fueled by good desires that you have elevated to a sinful place, such as an unhealthy craving to be understood, loved, respected or vindicated (1 Peter 2:23).

Any time you become excessively preoccupied with something, even a good thing, and seek to find happiness, security, or fulfillment in it rather than in God, you are guilty of idolatry. Idolatry inevitably leads to conflict with God. It also causes conflict with other people. As James writes, when we want something but don't get it, we kill and covet, quarrel and fight (James 4:1-4).

Having done the hard work of discovering your part in the conflict, it is time to take action. Below is a clear, seven-step process to help you first examine yourself and them forward as a peacemaker:

- Ask the Lord and other for help with self-awareness (1 John 1:8)
- Ask God to show you where you have been guilty of “wrong worship,” which is to say where you have been focusing your attention and love on something other than the Lord and His desires.
- Specifically identify and renounce the desire contributing to the conflict

- Deliberately pursue right worship. Fix your heart and mind on God and seek joy in Him alone.
- Give others permission to speak into your life, and regularly ask them to help you see any “logs” both in attitude and action.
- Address everyone involved as soon as possible (Matthew 5:23-24; Prov. 6:1-5)
- Avoid if, but and maybe. (Don’t make excuses; be specific when possible with both attitudes and actions) (Luke 15:17-24)
- Apologize. Express sorrow for the way you affected someone. (Luke 15:21)
- Ask for forgiveness. (Proverbs 28:13)
- Accept the consequences. (Luke 19:1-9)
- Alter your behavior. (Eph. 4:22-32; John 8:11)

As God guides and empowers these efforts, you can find freedom from the idols that fuel conflict and be motivated to make choices that will please and honor Christ. This change in heart will usually speed a resolution to a present problem, and at the same time improve your ability to avoid similar conflicts in the future.

#2 – BEGINNING THE JOURNEY: HITTING THE TRAIL TO LOVE YOUR FRIEND

Go and Show Your Brothers His Fault

DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

Overlook Minor Offenses

Another key principle of peacemaking involves an effort to help others understand how they have contributed to a conflict. Before you rush off to confront someone, however, remember that it is appropriate to overlook minor offenses. As a general rule, an offense should be overlooked if you can answer “no” to all the following questions:

- Is the offense dishonoring to God?
- Has it damaged a relationship?
- Is it hurting other people?
- Is it hurting the offender himself?

DON'T SPREAD THE BIG STUFF

Talk in Private

If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, an offense is too serious to overlook, in which case God commands you to go and talk with the offender privately and lovingly about the situation (Matt. 18:15). As you do so, remember to:

- Pray for humility and wisdom (1 Peter 5:5)
- Plan your words carefully – think of how you would want to be confronted (Proverbs 15:1-2; 16:23)
- Anticipate likely reactions and plan appropriate responses – rehearsals can be very helpful (Proverbs 20:18)
- Choose the right time and place – talk in person whenever possible (Proverbs 16:21; 27:12)
- Assume the best about the other person until you have facts to prove otherwise (Prov. 18:17)
- Listen carefully (Proverbs 18:13)
- Speak only to build others up (Ephesians 4:29)
- Ask for feedback from the other person (Proverbs 18:2)
- Trust God (Psalm 37:3)

DON'T STOP IF YOU'VE BEEN STIFFED

Take Others Along (Matthew 18:17)

If an initial confrontation does not resolve conflict, do not give up. Review what was said and done, and look for ways to approach the other person more effectively. Then try again with even stronger prayer support.

If you have done all you can to share your concern and the matter is still unchanged in that it is “too serious to overlook,” you should ask one or two other people to meet with you and the person you have approached to help resolve your differences. (Matthew 18:16-20).

DON'T STOP IF IT GETS STICKY

As unfortunate as it is, there are times when the only solution left is to expand the circle of accountability and wisdom to include an even wider community within the body of Christ. It is imperative that the process is not stopped short of any Scriptural admonition to diligently preserve the unity that the

Lord intends. Where conflict persists, it is the job of the wider community of faith to speak boldly into the matter and where necessary separate itself from hard hearts that refuse to deal with matters “too serious to overlook,” (Matthew 18:17a; 1 Cor. 5:1-2) even when that includes necessary separation until such a time as when the sin issues creating the conflict are acknowledged and dealt with.

GO AND BE RECONCILED

One of the unique features of biblical peacemaking is the pursuit of genuine forgiveness and reconciliation. Even though followers of Christ have experienced the greatest forgiveness in the world, we often fail to show that forgiveness to others. To cover up our disobedience we often use the shallow statement, “I forgive her – I just don’t want to have anything to do with her again.” Just think, however, how you would feel if God said to you, “I forgive you; I just don’t want anything to do with you again.”

Praise God that He never says this! Instead, He forgives you totally and opens the way for genuine reconciliation. He calls you to forgive other in exactly the same way: “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Col. 3:12-14). One way to imitate God’s forgiveness is to purpose to live with these actions and attitudes when you forgive someone:

- I will not dwell on the incident.
- I will not revisit this incident or use it against you.
- I will not talk to others about this incident.
- I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.

Remember that forgiveness is a spiritual process that you cannot fully accomplish on your own. Therefore, as you seek to forgive others, continually ask God for grace to enable you to imitate His wonderful forgiveness toward you.

#3 - ENDURING DIFFICULTIES ON THE JOURNEY: WHAT TO DO WHEN THE TRAIL GETS ROUGH

BE PREPARED FOR UNREASONABLE PEOPLE

Whenever you are responding to conflict, you need to realize that other people may harden their hearts and refuse to be reconciled to you. There are two ways you can prepare for this possibility.

First, remember that God does not measure success in terms of results but in terms of obedience. He knows that you cannot force other people to act in a certain way. Therefore, He will not hold you responsible for their actions or for the ultimate outcome of a conflict.

All God expects of you is to obey His revealed will as faithfully as possible (Rom. 12:18). If you do that, no matter how the conflict turns out, you can walk away with a clear conscience before God, knowing that His appraisal is, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Second, resolve that you will not give up on finding a biblical solution. If a dispute is not easily resolved, you may be tempted to say, “Well, I tried all the biblical principles I know, and they just didn’t work. It looks like I’ll have to handle this another way” – meaning, the world’s way.

A follower of Christ should never close the Bible. When you try to resolve a conflict but do not see the results you desire, you should seek God even more earnestly through prayer, the study of His Word and the counsel of His Church. As you do so, it is essential to keep your focus on Christ and all that He has already done for you (Col. 3:1-4). It is also helpful to follow five principles for overcoming evil, which are described in Romans 12:14-21:

- Control your tongue
- Seek godly advisers (do not become isolated)
- Keep doing what is right
- Recognize your limits (instead of retaliating, stay within proper biblical channels)
- Use the ultimate weapon: deliberate, focused love

At the very least, these steps will protect you from being consumed by the acid of your own bitterness and resentment if others continue to oppose you. And in some cases, God may eventually use such actions to bring another person to repentance (1 Samuel 24:1-22).

Even if other people persist in doing wrong, you can continue to trust that God is in control and will deal with them in His time. This kind of patience in the face of suffering is commended by God and ultimately results in our good and His glory.

GET HELP FROM ABOVE

None of us can make complete and lasting peace with others in our strength. We must have help from God. But before we can receive that help, we need to be at peace with God Himself.

Peace with God doesn't come automatically, because all of us have sinned and alienated ourselves from Him. Instead of living the perfect lives needed to enjoy fellowship with Him, each of us has a record stained with sin. As a result, we deserve to be eternally separated from God. That's the bad news.

The good news is that "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Believing in Jesus mean more than being baptized, going to church, or trying to be a good person. None of these activities can erase the sins you have already committed and will continue to commit throughout your life. Believing in Jesus means, first of all, admitting that you are a sinner and acknowledging that there is no way you can earn God's approval by your own works.

Second, it means believing that Jesus paid the full penalty for your sin when he died on the cross. In other words, believing in Jesus means trusting that He exchanged records with you - that is, He took your sinful record on Himself and paid for it in full, giving you His perfect record.

When you believe in Jesus and receive His perfect record of righteousness, you can really have true peace with God. As you receive this peace, God will give you an increasing ability to make peace with others by following the peacemaking principles He gives us in Scripture, many of which are described above.

GET HELP FROM THE CHURCH

As God help you to practice His peacemaking principles, you will be able to resolve most of the normal conflicts of daily life on your own. Sometimes, however, you will encounter situations that you do not know how to handle. In such situations, it is wise and appropriate to turn to others in your community or to spiritually mature persons around you who can give you advice on how you might be able to apply these principles more effectively.

When individual advice does not enable you to resolve a dispute, you should ask one or two mutually respected friends to meet with you and the other person to help you settle your difference through mediation or arbitration.