



CORNERSTONE
COMMUNITY CHURCH

BILLINGS, MONTANA

Fall 2026

CORNERSTONE

GROWTH GROUPS

LEADER GUIDE

Intimate Christian relationships, cultivated around
God's word, regular fellowship, intentional
accountability, and mutual prayer.

ACTS 2:42-47



WHAT'S INSIDE

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Part One is the working guide, short enough to reread before a meeting. Part Two is the training behind it.

GROWTH GROUPS?

THE PURPOSE

Growth Groups exist so that intimate Christian relationships can be cultivated around God's word, regular fellowship, intentional accountability, and mutual prayer. Sunday worship alone can't accomplish everything God intends for His church. Growth Groups give us the time and setting to live out the "one anothers" of Scripture, use our gifts to serve one another, and grow together as disciples.

MATT 28:18-20 · COL 1:28 · 1 COR 12:12-26 · JOHN 13:35 · 1 PET 5:2

The marks of a healthy group

ACTS 2:42-47

Biblical
teaching

Fellowship

Prayer

Unity

Generosity

Consistency

Gladness

Praise

A good
reputation

Growth

The target isn't perfection. It's a group genuinely devoted to these things.



WHAT WE'RE ASKING OF YOU

Would you shepherd eight or ten people well for one season, and help them discover that Jesus is better than everything?

GROUP FORMAT

ABOUT 90 MINUTES

A shape to work from, not a script to obey. Keep the rhythm, and adjust the minutes to the people in the room.

15-20

MINUTES

FELLOWSHIP

Greet one another, welcome newcomers, and share food or a drink to encourage conversation.

10-15

MINUTES

CHECK-IN & PRAYER REQUESTS

Hear the joys and trials of the week. Have someone record the requests and send them out.

5-10

MINUTES

SINGING

One or two songs of worship together.

30-35

MINUTES

DISCUSSION

Use the provided questions to apply Sunday's message. You are a facilitator, not a lecturer.

5-10

MINUTES

PRAYER

Pray as a whole group, or break into smaller clusters.

A NOTE ON THE CLOCK

Start on time and end on time. People give you their evening more freely when they know when it will finish, and a group that regularly runs long quietly loses the members who can least afford it.

YOUR WORK AS A LEADER

03

LEADER GUIDE

FIVE THINGS TO DO

Cultivate

MEANINGFUL DISCUSSION

Come prepared, apply Sunday's message, and feel free to set the questions aside when a real need arises.

Compel

PEOPLE TOWARD SERVICE

Know our ministries well enough to connect people to a place to serve.

Communicate

WHAT THEY MISSED

Pass along church-wide information your group may have missed, and keep the lines open between your group and the elders and staff.

Create

A CULTURE OF INVITATION

Make it a habit to invite people into the group, and plan things that build fellowship and maturity.

Call

PEOPLE TO OBEDIENCE

Encourage baptism, membership, and a growing obedience to Christ in every area of life.

The seven marks of a next-level leader, pages 16 to 19, expand each of these.

CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF CARE

Genuine care means entering into one another's lives. Three things make that possible.

Transparency

Model honesty about your own joys and struggles, ask good questions, listen well, and create a safe place to share.

Humility

It takes humility to ask for help and to offer it well. Lead your group in that spirit.

Accountability

Speak the truth in love when it's needed, and follow up during the week on what you've prayed about together.

COMMITMENTS

OF A HEALTHY GROUP

Worth reading aloud at your launch meeting. These are what every member is agreeing to, not just the leader. The church-wide commitments behind them are on page 15.

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- | | | |
|----|------------------|---|
| 01 | Show Up. | Your presence benefits your own spiritual health and your group's. |
| 02 | Speak Up. | Your contribution is genuinely valuable. Silence helps no one grow. |
| 03 | Build Up. | Take personal responsibility for one another's spiritual growth. |
| 04 | Lift Up. | Foster encouragement and care, not competition or indifference. |
| 05 | Open Up. | Be humble, transparent, even vulnerable, especially in prayer and discussion. |
| 06 | Keep Up. | Come as a team member, not a consumer. Share ownership of the group. |
| 07 | Offer Up. | Offer up praise and glory to God. The goal above all is that God would use this season to grow us as His disciples. |
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DISCUSSION

A SCIENCE AND AN ART

THE SCIENCE

Ask good questions relevant to the sermon or topic. Balance them between understanding, open-ended, and application questions, and aim every discussion toward real-life change.

THE ART

Know when to depart from the plan, ask a good follow-up, correct errors graciously, and discern the difference between good silence and awkward silence.

Draw people in by directing questions to individuals when it helps, and by opening a group member's question back up to the whole group. More on the qualities of a good conversation on page 23.

How to Sink a Discussion

FIVE RELIABLE METHODS

- Lecture instead of facilitating, or work through the questions like a rigid script.
- Answer your own questions too quickly, or expect everyone to answer every question.
- Let one person dominate, or let the group run long past its time.
- Ask only yes or no questions, or long, unfocused “questions” that are really statements.
- Stay only in the text's meaning and never reach personal application.

THE ONE THING TO REMEMBER

You are a facilitator, not a lecturer. Your job is to get the word of God and the people in your living room into the same conversation.

GROUP DYNAMICS

FOUR COMMON SITUATIONS

Rabbit trails

Kindly interrupt as early as possible. With good rapport, keep it light: "Let's stay on track." With someone you don't know well, redirect with a question instead.

Someone dominates

Call on others by name before they take over. Interrupt warmly: "Thanks. What do you think, [name]?" Then address it privately and kindly afterward.

Silence

Make clear that thoughtful silence is welcome. Don't rush to fill every pause after a few seconds.

Someone is off biblically

Stay gracious and thank them for what they shared. Restate the part that's in error without being harsh, and keep it on the main point rather than the fine details.

WHEN SOMEONE SHARES DIFFICULTY OR SUFFERING

Depend on the Spirit to discern what to do: how long to stay with someone in their sharing, when to gently redirect to the lesson, and when to point them toward pastoral or counseling resources beyond what your group can offer. You don't need to have the answers.

Our instinct is to fix things, or to rescue people from discomfort. Instead: listen well, validate where they are, ask good questions, and point them to the One who does have the answers.

WHEN IT'S HARD

AND WHAT TO LEAVE UNSAID

WAYS TO VALIDATE

"That took a lot of courage to share. Thank you."

"I can tell how much you're struggling. That is so hard."

"I'm so sorry that happened. Can we pray for you right now?"

"We are here with you in this."

GOOD QUESTIONS TO ASK

"What is the hardest part of this right now?"

"Do you have other people coming alongside you?"

"How can we support you best?"

"Can we meet for coffee and talk one-on-one?"

BETTER LEFT UNSAID

"I know exactly how you feel."

You don't. Everyone experiences things differently.

"Here's what I did."

Along with "my friend went through that too." Don't make it about you.

"God is working all things for your good."

True, but not always the right moment to say it.

"At least ..."

Don't minimize what this has cost them.

IF SOMEONE IN THE GROUP RESPONDS UNHELPFULLY

It's a kindness to the person suffering when you, as leader, gently speak up in their defense, or follow up privately with the group member who spoke.

CONFIDENTIALITY

A LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY

When someone opens up about a struggle, a sin, a marriage difficulty, or a painful season, they are trusting your group with something costly. That trust is what makes real transparency possible, and protecting it is a leadership responsibility.

WHAT'S SHARED IN THE GROUP STAYS IN THE GROUP

Don't repeat someone's story, struggle, or prayer request outside the group without their permission.

SET THE EXPECTATION EARLY

At your launch meeting, tell your group plainly that what's shared is confidential, and that this is what makes it safe to be honest.

PRAYER REQUESTS DESERVE THE SAME CARE

Whoever records requests should check first if one is sensitive, and keep written records secure.

ASK BEFORE YOU SHARE ANYTHING FURTHER

Treat anything personal as confidential unless they say otherwise, and ask first before repeating it, even to a spouse or a pastor. If a confidence does get broken, be honest with both people involved. When you follow up on something sensitive, do it where no one can overhear.

CONFIDENTIALITY DOESN'T MEAN SECRECY AT ALL COSTS

If you hear of a safety concern, including abuse, abandonment, suicidal thoughts, or harm to a child, bring it to a pastor right away. Say up front that you may need to break confidence to get someone real help.



When in doubt, loop in an elder. If you're carrying something heavy and aren't sure what to do, you don't have to carry it alone.

PRAYING TOGETHER

SIX HABITS

09

LEADER GUIDE

Split by gender sometimes, but not always. There's real blessing in praying as a whole group, and in husbands and wives praying together.

Pray through the passage you studied, or through the ACTS pattern: adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication.

Follow up on requests during the week. People ask for prayer more freely when they know you actually care.

Try breaking into groups of three or four to focus prayer and cover more ground.

Keep a prayer list, but refresh it regularly so it doesn't grow stale.

Spend more time praying than sharing prayer requests. Pray your requests.

Launching Well

YOUR FIRST MEETING

Your first meeting sets the tone for the whole season. Take time to introduce yourselves, share what everyone is looking forward to, and walk through your group's logistics together.

MEETING DAY & TIME

LOCATION

FIRST MEETING & FINAL DATE

DATES WE WON'T MEET

FOOD

CHILDCARE

HOW WE COMMUNICATE A MISS

WHO RECORDS PRAYER REQUESTS

That's the working guide. Part Two goes deeper.

PART TWO

LEADER TRAINING

Our shared vision and purpose, seven marks of a next-level leader, and the practical nuts and bolts of running a group well.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT GROUP

COMMON VISION

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LEADER TRAINING

PART ONE OF THREE

OUR VISION

We are worshipers and witnesses of the Triune God who gather, grow, and go for the glory of Christ and the joy of the nations.

OUR MISSION

To help everyone flourish by seeing that Jesus is better than everything, in every way.

THE 5 SPACES OF DISCIPLESHIP

Five spaces that reflect Jesus' own discipleship strategy. Growth Groups are the middle space: six to fourteen people combining worship, fellowship, friendship, teaching, prayer, feasting, and service.

Sunday Worship

CORPORATE
WORSHIP

Flourish Fellowship

INSTRUCTION

Growth Groups

RELATIONSHIP

Personal Discipleship

DEPTH

Abide

INDIVIDUAL
WORSHIP

Our vision for Growth Groups: enough great groups for every member.

Flourish together

Mature, mobilize & multiply disciples

Grow a group, develop a leader, plant a group

No single Growth Group has to do it all. Groups work together as part of the whole, not in isolation.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT GROUP

COMMON PURPOSE

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LEADER TRAINING

PART TWO OF THREE

Every group needs a clear, compelling purpose. Without one, confusion, uncertainty, and mismatched expectations move in to fill the space. A good purpose is specific enough to hit a target, not a generic wish for community.

FIVE PURPOSES, WRITTEN SPECIFICALLY

- Help men grow in sexual purity through serious accountability and biblical teaching.
- Grow in grace together by vigorously discussing and practically applying the sermon.
- Help fathers grow in leading their home through family worship and ministering to their children.
- Grow in the ability to study God's word accurately and joyfully.
- Grow the personal discipleship space by pairing eager Christians who can invest in other eager Christians.

A vague purpose invites confusion. A specific purpose gives people something to commit to.

WHAT MAKES A GREAT GROUP

COMMON COMMITMENTS

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LEADER TRAINING

PART THREE OF THREE

What every Cornerstone group holds in common. The seven commitments on page 6 are how a group lives these out week to week.

We Pursue Spiritual Growth

COL 1:28-29 · ROM 15:14

We Do Real Life in Loving Relationship

JOHN 15 · 1 COR 13

We Provide Mutual Care

NT ONE ANOTHERS

We Have Meaningful Conversations

EPH 4:29 · 2 TIM 3:16-17

We Use Our Spiritual Gifts

EPH 4:11FF · ROM 12:4-8 · 1 PET 4:7-11

VALUES WE AIM FOR, AND WHAT WE AVOID

AIM FOR

God-focused

Devoted

Genuine

Givers

Participants

Punctual

Humble

Honest

NOT

Us-focused

Flaky

Fake

Takers

Spectators

Late

Proud

Hiding

NEXT-LEVEL LEADER

MARKS ONE & TWO

1 Watch Their Walk with Jesus

1 TIM 4:16

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Leaders are watched by their group whether they intend it or not, so self-awareness and integrity matter.

LIFE

Know yourself: your strengths and weaknesses, your personality and struggles, your tendencies and temptations.

DOCTRINE

Know your level of knowledge: primary, essential doctrines versus secondary issues, and your own limits.

2 Own & Hone Key Traits

WHAT PASTORS LOOK FOR

Integrity — trusted to do the right thing

Teachability — a lifelong learner

Maturity — a vibrant walk with God

Versatility — able to adapt in multiple directions

WHAT MEMBERS WANT

A real Christian who knows God and His word

A caring person, genuinely interested in others

A humble, approachable leader

A skillful facilitator who listens well and reads the room

NEXT-LEVEL LEADER

MARKS THREE & FOUR

3 Anchor the Group to Its Purpose

TITUS 1:5

Get specific and clear about your group's purpose, then continually clarify and recommit to it. A catalytic leader prioritizes what matters most and keeps refocusing the group there, gently redirecting drift rather than letting the group lose its way: "I appreciate that, let's come back to it later. Our aim right now is..."

4 Set the Stage for Success

Leaders provide both the structure and the space for deeper engagement.

Group size & type

The physical
environment

Hospitality

Structure that
supports the
purposeClear
communication
norms

Prepare to win. And preparation always starts with prayer.

NEXT-LEVEL LEADER

MARK FIVE

5 Cultivate Shared Ownership

The work of this mark is moving a group from “me” to “we” in four places.

Inclusion & Contribution

Conflict & Resolution

Trust & Respect

Productivity &
Flourishing**INVITE**

Ask members to deepen their commitment, share life with one another, and communicate often. Over a season they should be taking on leadership roles, not just attending.

STIMULATE

Ask great questions, then let your members shine instead of dominating the conversation yourself. Aim for the whole group engaged, not three people talking.

EMBRACE

Don't avoid or suppress conflict. Cultivate mutual accountability and put healthy tension to work, so the group learns it can come through a hard conversation together.

NEXT-LEVEL LEADER

MARKS SIX & SEVEN

6 See Obstacles as Opportunities

SIXTEEN TO ANTICIPATE

Anticipate these, and you'll meet them with grace instead of surprise. Most are answered earlier in this guide, on pages 7 to 10 and page 24.

Childcare	Lack of commitment	Talkers & silent members	Heresy hunters
A bad or wrong answer	Lack of transparency	Someone in serious sin	Someone suffering terribly
Not clicking personally	Difficult “stumper” questions	Shutting down gossip	Unmet expectations
Chronic tardiness	Silence when asked	Silence during prayer	Fear of saying it wrong

7 Minister, Mobilize & Multiply

MINISTER

Practice the New Testament “one anothers” (1 Thess. 5).

MOBILIZE

Help others discover and use their spiritual gifts.

MULTIPLY

Disciples make disciples, churches plant churches, and groups grow toward planting new ones.

THE NUTS & BOLTS OF GROWTH GROUPS

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LEADER TRAINING

TYPES, LOGISTICS & YOU

TYPES: GENERAL & TARGETED GROUPS

Sermon

Abide

Life

Men

Women

Marriage

Family

Parenting

Singles

College-Age

Seasoned Saints

Prayer

Theology

Sexual Purity & Accountability

New Believers

Evangelism

Book Club

Coffee & Conversation

LOGISTICS: WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY

Five questions to settle before, and while, you launch a group. Write your answers on the launch worksheet, page 11.

Who

Is in the group

What

It will study or do

Where

It meets

When

It meets

Why

It exists

LEADERS: KNOWING YOURSELF ACCURATELY

Identify your own leadership type, and know your particular strengths, weaknesses, tendencies, and preferences. Self-assessments can help you understand your leadership style and how you tend to handle conflict.

Organizer

Preacher

Prayer Warrior

“Hands-Free” Facilitator

Detail & Accountant Type

THE NUTS & BOLTS OF GROWTH GROUPS

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LEADER TRAINING

YOUR PEOPLE & THE ONE ANOTHERS

PEOPLE: KNOWING YOUR PEOPLE DEEPLY

Spend time together, study the word together, and pray together. Ask thoughtful questions, and learn each person's story, including through shared testimonies.

A RELATIONAL-SKILLS RESOURCE

RW360 offers free training and a set of conversation question cards built to strengthen relational skill. Worth building into your own preparation as a leader.

RELATIONSHIPS: LIVING THE NT “ONE ANOTHERS” WISELY

The New Testament holds roughly thirty-five “one another” commands. Work through the full list as a practical relational framework, the glue behind who is in your group, how it functions, its structure, and its challenges.

Love One Another

JOHN 13:34-35

Honor One Another

ROMANS 12:10

Greet One Another

ROMANS 16:16

Welcome One Another

ROMANS 15:7

Be at Peace with One Another

MARK 9:50

Show Hospitality to One Another

1 PETER 4:9

Bear with One Another

EPHESIANS 4:2

Comfort One Another

2 CORINTHIANS 13:11

Pray for One Another

JAMES 5:16

Encourage One Another

1 THESSALONIANS 5:11

Sing with & to One Another

EPHESIANS 5:19

Exhort One Another

HEBREWS 3:13

Confess Your Sins to One Another

JAMES 5:16

Forgive One Another

EPHESIANS 4:32

Serve One Another

GALATIANS 5:13

THE NUTS & BOLTS OF HOSPITALITY

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LEADER TRAINING

CREATING A WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

Hospitality is a biblical qualification for eldership, and it applies broadly to every leader serving the saints.

Starts in the Heart

Posture matters more than space. The right attitude matters more than the right furniture.

Starts Before They Arrive

Prayer, expectancy, thoughtfulness, and preparation, all before anyone walks in.

Starts with a Smile

People should sense you're genuinely glad they're there.

A CHECKLIST TO THINK THROUGH

Neighbors & parking

Shoes & coats

Room temperature

Bathroom

Food & drinks

Allergies

Seating

House rules

What's visible in your home

An open-hearted, warm-hearted posture. Think in terms of the sights, sounds, and smells of the space.

THE NUTS & BOLTS OF CONVERSATIONS

20

LEADER TRAINING

SIX THINGS TO WATCH FOR

The mechanics of facilitating are on page 7. These are the qualities to listen for while you do it.

Personal	Watch pronoun use. “I / me / my” signals ownership; “we / they,” “Christians,” and “the church” can signal distance.
Vulnerable	Draw people out: “Say more...”, “Would you share an example...”
Spiritual	Aim for substance, robustness, and edification, not just niceties.
Interactive	Members should be talking with each other, not only answering the leader. Aim for full-group engagement.
Resistance	Be willing to create productive tension and engage conflict, heat and light, rather than avoid it.
Resolution	You're responsible for guiding the group to a wise conclusion or landing point.

The Tardy Party

Give it about two weeks, then address it directly. Discern whether it's one person's habit or a group-wide drift.

Childcare

A dedicated space, older kids joining the group, church teens serving, rotating responsibility among members, or a paid sitter.

Guys & Gals

Going deep can be harder in mixed company. Consider breaking into gender-specific subgroups periodically.

Decisions Without the Group

Before a significant shift in time, location, or direction, check in with the group rather than deciding unilaterally.

Inappropriate Behavior

Leaders are mandatory reporters where children are concerned. Use caution around any situation that could appear inappropriate, and don't speculate: ask directly, with humility and charity, if something seems off.

THE NUTS & BOLTS OF **HELP & LESSONS**

22

LEADER TRAINING

YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN THIS

LEANING INTO SUPPORT & ACCOUNTABILITY

Reach out with questions about specific situations or needs in your group. Expect regular check-ins and improvement suggestions, and, if it's ever best for you or the group, the possibility of a leadership change.

CLASS TEACHER

DAVID KELLY

THE ELDERS

JAKE PANCHEAU, EIT

LESSONS: LEARNING FROM MISTAKES & SUCCESSES

Reflect on and share your own group's mistakes and successes as part of our ongoing peer learning. No leader gets this right by themselves, and no leader has to.



Thank you for leading. May God use this season, and the next, to grow us as His disciples.
