



# **SMALL GROUP MINISTRY**

## **HOW TO START, RUN AND GROW MARRIAGE SMALL GROUPS**

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## HOW TO SMALL GROUP



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### Introduction

Genesis 2:24 Ministries has been helping married couples for more than 20 years. Those years of experience have taught us that couples involved in three things increase their ability to live happily ever after. They must develop a deep and personal relationship with Christ, individually and as a couple. They must regularly apply the Word of God to their personal and married lives. And they should be involved in a Christ-based community. A community where fellowship around the Word and encouragement to do marriage God's way are essential. All four Gospels and the book of Acts describe how the early church members achieved all three.

It was common for Jesus to meet in a house with his disciples in a small intimate group. His disciples would sit close to him, hear his words and, form a more personal relationship with him and other followers (Luke 10). This idea of an intimate community with Christ continued in the early church. The book of Acts tells us that the disciples and the new followers continued to meet together in their homes (Acts 2:46). Today we call these gatherings, Small Groups or Life Groups and sometimes House Church. We want to invite you to be a host, leader, or member of a Marriage Small Group.

The purpose of this document is to describe the small group ministry of Genesis 2:24 Ministries and to provide a how-to guide for those who might conduct a small group. We will explain how to get started, what to teach, and who should attend, lead and host. Be encouraged; getting started is easy. Conducting the Group requires no particular skill or training, and the benefits to you, your community, and those in your Group are genuine and eternal.

Genesis 2:24 Ministries Marriage Small Groups should meet in a home, will aim to make sure the fellowship is not about the food, and always start and end on time. This design will help many who may be intimidated by preparing for a "pitch-in" every week or worry about what time they will get home on a weeknight. The curriculum is the Bible, so there is no book to buy or any doctrine to judge. The Group's size will be limited to keep the Group intimate and allow for deep trust-building and accountability.

We hope that you will consider hosting or leading a Marriage Small Group. If you consider yourself a disciple of Christ, you are qualified. If you ever have questions, need help or advice, and just want to witness what God is doing in your Marriage Small Group, let us know how we can help. Please refer to "Helpful Links and Contact Information at the end of this document to help answer your questions or find out how to contact us.

## Marriage Small Group Description

The mission of Genesis 2:24 Ministries is to restore marriage to the place of honor described in God's Word. A growing and vital part of getting this done are to expose married couples to the Word of God and to help them work out how to incorporate the Word into their marriages. One of the best ways to do that is for a group of cohorts to form a small group of believers working on the same mysteries. A small community of believers gathered regularly with the same purpose.

Each Small Group's purpose is to read, study and apply God's Word to marriage. The Small Group is expressly gathered in Jesus' name to offer encouragement, read, pray, and be open to the Holy Spirit's leading. These groups will cause fellowship among the believers but should never devolve into being for fellowship only. Some of the suggestions and guidance provided here will help the Group stay honest to its purpose. It may seem odd or even hard to follow at times, but these guides will advance the Kingdom and benefit couples' relationships in attendance.

### ***Who should Lead or Host a Marriage Small Group?***

The short answer is you and your spouse should be. We believe this is a ministry opportunity that must include a husband and a wife as a couple. They should agree about meeting each week and their role in those meetings. However, as you consider this call, it is essential not to try to count on how worthy you are but instead measure the worthiness of God's call to see marriages improved.

In the familiar story we often call "the feeding of the 5,000," we read that there were many hungry people out in the middle of nowhere with no food. Jesus told the disciples, "You give them something to eat." They thought he was crazy and even said so. But Andrew introduced a boy to Jesus who had packed a lunch of five loaves and two fish. Somebody offered a small lunch. Somebody fed 5,000 with that small lunch, and there was food leftover.

We pray that you are reading this because you feel called to leading or hosting a Marriage Small Group. We pray that you will not be hindered from that call because you are not enough of a Bible Scholar to lead or that your home is not adequate to have ten guests over. Just like 5,000 people being fed, there are plenty of husbands and wives in your area that need a small group like this one. They need a place to fellowship and develop with others that need fellowship and development. They need a safe place to hear God's Word and be open and unashamed. We find that the best leaders and hosts are not the ones that have enough for the 5,000 but the ones with just a little food they will share and allow God to multiply. So, what do Marriage Small Group Leaders and Hosts do? We have laid out much of this in a later section of this document. But first, we need to establish the small Group.

### ***A note about Fellowship nights***

The Marriage Small Groups should not be about the food served or just socializing. We know an essential part of growing relationships between couples in your Marriage Small Group are those times when you are simply relaxing around a meal or other fellowship time.

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We recommend that you set aside the Bible study once in a quarter or every six weeks and have a night of just fellowship. Fellowship night could be a dinner or time around the fire pit or the backyard pool (or all of these). These nights are usually well attended. It can be on the same night and location or another mutually agreed time and place. You might invite the children to come along (although most parents get used to the night out with no kids and veto that idea). Fellowship night may go long or start early. The point is to stay informal and to have fun with one another. Relationships are constantly improved when we have fun with each other.

## Forming a Marriage Small Group

You have decided to start a Marriage Small Group; where do I start? It is easier than you think. Here are seven easy steps to getting started.

1. Who will lead the Group? Is that you? If so, excellent you are ready to get rolling. If it is someone else, be sure they have read through this document and are prepared to take on the responsibility.
2. Who will host? The host couple is willing to have up to 14 people in their house at once.
3. Decide what time and day your Group will meet. Make your meeting on a day and time that works for the Host and Leader couples first. It is vital to your Marriage Small Group's success that there is consistent support for these two key roles.
4. Pick a date to start the Group meetings. We suggest it be a date at least a month in the future so the Host and Leader will have time to invite others and for those others to clear their calendars as well.
5. Pray for the Group. We assume you have already been praying for this life-changing event, but please do not forget this critical ingredient while you are busy launching your small Group.
6. Determine where you would like to start. Possibly use a book of the Bible or materials from our website.
7. On the appointed night, execute using the "How to Host" and "How to Lead" in this document.

## Who is in a Marriage Small Group?

A small group can form from just about anywhere. Perhaps there are two couples in your church you would like to invite, and they have friends at work that need such a group. We often talk with other couples at sporting events and community organizations. The bottom line is that Jesus instructed us to go into ALL the world and invite them. Let's apply that principle here with the following qualifications.

### ***Married Couples only***

This study is for married couples only. The idea is to set up a dynamic for marriage discussion amongst a community of people currently experiencing it. Including single and pre-married persons will reduce the Group's transparency and cause the married couples to want to advise the unmarried persons. Both will limit the participants' ability to grow in their relationship with each other or within the Group.

### ***Size of the group/Growing the Group(s)***

A small group should be limited to six couples in any one group (12 people). A group more extensive than this will be hard to manage and keep on track, discussions will not include everyone, and it will be hard to accommodate more in most homes. It is essential to continue to invite Couples to join the Group at any time and at all times.

When a group grows beyond six couples, the Group should split. At least two couples should volunteer to meet at a new location and perhaps on a different day. Both groups will continue to invite others to join in. Both groups should feel free to help both groups grow beyond six couples and grow.

### ***How to invite Couples***

The curriculum is the Bible and can be repeated, taught in any order, and is always appropriate; this means couples can join when they are ready. When you know of a married couple that would like to fellowship around the Word with other like-minded couples, you should invite them to join one of the small groups.

The invitation should be made personally and to the husband and the wife. Ask them to attend your Group with you even if there are already six couples in your Group. It may be time for your Group to reproduce another group. Glory to God!

When inviting couples to attend, be sure to prepare them to succeed. Let them know:

- They should bring their Bibles and Pen and Paper to take notes
- Make sure they know there will be homework. They and the Group will get more from the study if everyone does the homework
- Let them know that only light refreshments will be available (Perhaps Coffee and water).
- Let them know you intend to start and end on time to help them plan.

### ***Small Group IS NOT Marriage Counseling***

Attending a small group is not a replacement for marriage counseling. When inviting couples to your small group, be sure you tell them it will not solve their marriage problems. Marriage Small Groups help couples develop a more profound love for one another but may not be the answer to all your marital issues. If a couple needs marriage counseling, please refer them to us for help AND invite them to your Marriage Small Group.

### ***A Note About Childcare***

Couples must not bring their children to the Marriage Small Group. Couples will be distracted by the children nearby. Sharing will be hindered (and should be<sup>#</sup>) by children's presence. Most parents have a support system that allows them to get childcare for other events to exercise that support system for this one. It is unwise for childcare to be a part of setting up the Marriage Small Group. A notable exception for this guidance would be for nursing mothers, but it should be limited.

The best support for the Marriage Small Group Leader and Host for couples with children in childcare is to begin and end the meeting on time. The babysitter can rely on the child dropped off and pick up

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<sup>#</sup> Sharing of grown-up problems with children not yet ready to understand should never been done. The small group setting may bring about a discussion not suitable for children.



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consistently. Ending late may cause them to need to leave early and feel like they are missing part of the Group.

## Tools for Small Group Leaders and Hosts

The full name of the book of Acts is "The Acts of the Emissaries of Jesus Christ." When you lead or host a Marriage Small Group, you act out an excellent call from Christ to help people come closer to him. When you prepare for your small group, keep in mind that it is God you are introducing to the Group, not your home or ability to teach. Be sure to allow the Holy Spirit to do the calling, the words to be God's and the host to be Christ. When we try too hard, we put our fingerprints on it, and we risk reducing the value of God's gift. Here, the ideas and tools make the preparation easy so that the leading and host do not become a chore. Thank you for answering the call, and know that His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

### *How to Host a Marriage Small Group*

God has already moved on your heart if you are ready to do this. Please take time to pray a prayer of thanksgiving for the privilege of hosting Christ in your home. Jesus promised that where two or three are gathered in my name, he would be in there with them (Matthew 18:20). Good news, but there are some practical matters as well.

- 1) You want to prepare a room where you can gather 12 people. The location matters little; just have enough chairs to seat everyone.
- 2) You will not be serving drinks or food to the Group, so no need to prepare a place for this service.

NOTE: This is not a hard and fast rule but rather an effort to keep the hosting simple, and the Group focused on the meat of the Word and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The church is hardwired to have food at gatherings, so you may have group members show up with food items occasionally. As the host, you can handle how you like, but it is essential not to be rude or rebuke them.

Encourage them to bring what they like to drink if you do not have it. If someone needs to bring dinner occasionally because of time or dietary needs, encourage them to do so.

- 3) Your home:
  - a. Ensure that outside walkways are clear and well-lit. Clear away anything that will trip your guests or that they might have to be stepped over.
  - b. Inside is the same thing: lit and clear.
  - c. If possible, have small tables beside the chairs so guests can have somewhere to lay their belongings. This is not required but is nice to do.
  - d. Make sure the bathroom that any guest will be using is clean and well-stocked.
  - e. If you have any pets, make sure that this is communicated in the invitation. Some people are allergic to or fear dogs or cats, birds, reptiles, and small animals. This is the person's responsibility to let you know, but it's always nice to ask.
  - f. If your home has any special rules or instructions, make sure that your guests know. Such as, "The door handle to the bathroom sometimes sticks, so just jiggle it a bit. The

light switch in the bathroom is on the left, not the right. Please watch when you come or go that you don't let the cat/dog out.

- 4) Hosting should not be complicated, nor should it be something that causes stress. Make sure that as a couple, you pray in agreement for peace in your home before couples arrive and after they leave. Always remember this is not about you, your home, or what you don't have. It is about a closer relationship with God, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, and your spouse.

### ***How to Lead a Marriage Small Group***

The leader's responsibility is to start and end the group meeting on time and help present the evening's subject matter. It helps a small group to stay focused when they expect some routine. The following proposed plan is a guide, not a rigid rule. You will find your community will grow faster when connected to a reliable structure.

The following example assumes that the Marriage Small Group meets from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM. Please keep in mind that if your Group likes a different time of the day, adjust accordingly. We have found that 90 minutes is enough time to cover the Bible study.

6:30 – 6:45 Gathering time and fellowship. You will find that some couples will arrive early, others a little later. You mustn't wait on late couples. The initial 15 minutes is to provide that grace. Couples that come after 6:45 should be greeted but do not restart the lesson.

6:45 - The leader asks the Group to pray for today's teaching.

6:45 – 7:00 Review the last session and encourage sharing about marriage. The hope is that couples applied the Bible verses studied last time to their marriage and will witness the blessings God provided.

7:00 – 7:45 Presentation of tonight's scripture or other materials. Be sure to read the Bible verses to be discussed out loud. Have the couples take turns reading from the Bibles they brought with them. This usually allows the Group to hear different Bible translations being read and increases understanding. Allow for much discussion during this time. Ask leading questions like:

- Who can share what this scripture makes you think?
- When have you heard this spoken about?
- How does it make you feel when we read this?
- How can you apply this to your marriage?

7:45 – 8:00 Prayer focus. Ask, "What are you praying about?" This is a time when you want to hear from everyone in attendance. Not from each couple but from each person (12 people in 15 minutes). You must let folks know that you want to hear from them and keep the prayer requests focused.

8:00 PM Dismiss group with prayer

Feel free to adjust this in any way you need but be sure you are following some sort of repeatable structure

### ***Notes about leading this small Group***

- 1) We recommend not have a meal in conjunction with this small Group. The focus needs to be on fellowship around the Word and applying the Word to ourselves and our marriage.
- 2) Work hard to start and end the small Group on time. If you tell folks that you will be meeting from 6:30 PM to 8:00 PM, for example, be sure that you start the Q&A, prayer requests, and any follow-up items by 7:45.
- 3) When the Group finishes, the leader dismisses the couples. Encourage them to leave and be a couple. By encouraging this, couples will have a better chance to digest what they just experienced into their marriage relationship rather than the group relationship.
- 4) Be sure to keep the discussion focused on the subject at hand. The atmosphere of the Group should be relaxed and intimate. It is easy for the Group to start talking about the day's news rather than the Word's good news in an atmosphere like that. The group leader may occasionally have to bring the Group back to the subject. Don't apologize, but simply say something like, "Let's save that for one of our fellowship times." And then read from the lesson or scripture being studying. Doing this can seem abrupt but should never be rude.
- 5) Be sure to have the Group read from their Bibles. If you are reading a particular chapter, perhaps each person read five verses until everyone in the Group has read aloud. Each person reading from their translation of the Bible (the one they carry) allows each to participate and contribute.
- 6) The lesson's presentation should be completed within 30-45 minutes, even allowing some discussion and allowing the Group to look up scripture references.

## *Helpful Links and Contact information*

Email: [info@genesis2-24.net](mailto:info@genesis2-24.net)

The contact form on the web site: [www.genesis2-24.net/contact](http://www.genesis2-24.net/contact)

Materials you are allowed to use or reproduce: [www.genesis2-24.net/downloadable\\_tools](http://www.genesis2-24.net/downloadable_tools)

Lessons that can be used as group study: [www.genesis2-24.net/blog](http://www.genesis2-24.net/blog)

(812) 530-7292 or (812) 528-2596

To request Marriage Counseling: <http://genesis2-24.net/coaching/request-marital-guidance/>

## My prayer for all Christians

God – your love for me is unconditional. I do not know why you only had one son or why you created me in the fashion you did. I only know that you did, and that is the truth.

You sent your son to die for my sins, and I am glad. I am delighted that you are a God that cannot have sin in your presence, and I am glad that you provided a way for me to be in your presence even with the sinful nature I have.

I know you care that I am dirty and that I sin, and that I hurt and cry when I am hurt. I know that it makes you sad when these things happen to me. If I am created in your image, perhaps you get disappointed when I say I will do one thing and do the opposite. I think that it must be awful to watch me when I make choices that will hurt not only me but others around me; choices that risk our ability to fellowship together; choices that risk the life you gave me.

Thank you, Lord God, for loving me unconditionally. You love me when I am in the worship service and when I am in the bar too drunk to remember my wedding vows. You love me when I am serving the needy in the street and when I am cursing the politician that does not vote the way I want them to, when I love my neighbor AND when I hate him.

You love me on all the days of the week, not just Sunday, when I remember to come to church and raise my hands with my friends. Yes, that means you love me when I get up early to make a golf outing and miss my prayer time – when I let my work creep in on my family time – when I look at movies that do not honor you.

I say I am sorry; you forgive me, and sometimes I actually repent and don't do that again. Maybe one day I will understand how you can love me as much as you do. Thanks

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