



**CONNECT
GROUP
LEADER
TRAINING**

Hope City

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GROUP LEADER OVERVIEW

Win for Group Leaders

As group leaders, our win is to create a small group environment where authentic relationships can be formed so that people can find freedom and take next steps in their faith.

*The same goes for those who want to be servants in the church: serious, not deceitful, not too free with the bottle, not in it for what they can get out of it. They must be reverent before the mystery of the faith, not using their position to try to run things. Let them prove themselves first. If they show they can do it, take them on. No exceptions are to be made for women—same qualifications: serious, dependable, not sharp-tongued, not overfond of wine. Servants in the church are to be committed to their spouses, attentive to their own children, and diligent in looking after their own affairs. Those who do this servant work will come to be highly respected, a real credit to this Jesus-faith. **1 Timothy 3:8-13 MSG***

Qualifications For Group Leaders

- Have a personal, growing relationship with Jesus.
- Agree with Hope City's beliefs (<https://hopecity.com/about/beliefs/>).
- Tithe regularly to Hope City.
- Have completed all steps of Growth Track.
- Have Small Group Experience (preferably).
- Have a genuine desire to serve and minister to people.
- Able to lead, motivate, and teach others.
- Able to create positive group dynamics and deal with conflict resolution within the group.
- Have the time, emotional health, and moral discernment to lead a group.

Expectation Of Group Leaders

- Recognize the influence associated with group leadership. You represent Christ and Hope City.
- Agree to only use and promote Hope City approved books and resources.
- Lead the group by facilitating the group meeting, monitoring its health and duration, and promoting participation among group members.
- Take attendance and keep your roster up-to-date.
- Commit to engaging in leadership development opportunities provided by Hope City (including your coach and other campus leadership).
- Participate and serve at our seasonal group launch.
- Live consistent with the membership honor code (see below) and leadership covenant that was agreed to in Growth Track.
- Live with integrity, being mindful that as a leader you represent not only yourself, but your group, and Hope City.

HONOR CODE

In Growth Track you agreed to attend church and Connect Groups faithfully, live a Godly life, and give regularly.

As an essential part of the Hope City leadership family, you have a responsibility to develop and exhibit mature Christian behavior. This should be the basic premise of your desire to serve in a servant/leader position here at Hope City.

While serving the Body of Christ as a Connect Group Leader at Hope City, you pledge to present a good appearance at all times. In both attire and behavior, you should strive to demonstrate Biblical standards in all situations.

As Christians, the way we present ourselves is of vital importance to the way others perceive Christ. Our conduct should never be an embarrassment to Christ, but should exemplify the best qualities of a mature believer and servant-leader.

Exemplifying the highest moral commitment, Hope City leaders are to maintain a disciplined life of Bible reading, prayer, and fasting. You must also refrain from such things as:

- Profanity
- Smoking or chewing tobacco
- Gambling
- Indulging in much wine or other alcoholic beverages
- Dishonest gain
- Illegal drugs
- Pornography
- Sexual immorality, and all behaviors which might cause Christ to grieve and others to stumble

By providing an example in speech and action, we encourage others to grow in Christ and become servant-leaders themselves. This is a way of life measured by the heart and commitment of each leader in the Hope City family. We should regard it as an essential part of our development, not as an imposition or restriction.

WHY CONNECT GROUPS EXIST

Connect Groups have one simple purpose—to build community. We believe God created us to live in community with others and only then can we experience the full life He intends for us.

We believe life change happens in the context of _____.

Meaningful relationships can be hard to find and Connect Groups exist to make life-changing relationships relevant and accessible to you.

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12***

Hope City Connect Groups Model

At Hope City, we believe our church must grow _____ and _____ and at the same time.

We grow larger to reach as many people as possible with the life-giving message of Jesus. We grow smaller by gathering in Connect Groups to build community and care for people.

Hope City is a church _____ Connect Groups, not a church _____ Connect Groups.

We base our Connect Group model on the early church as described in the Bible in the book of Acts. In Acts, you can read about the tremendous growth of the first church in Jerusalem, where small group meetings in homes helped lay the foundation.

*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. **Acts 5:42***

Connect Groups Offer People:

1. A Place to _____.

*Yes, whatever a person is like, I try to find common ground with him so that he will let me tell him about Christ and let Christ save him. **1 Corinthians 9:22 TLB***

We were not made to do life alone. God created us for community, and Connect Groups provide a place to connect with others, share life, and grow in faith together.

2. A Place to _____.

*We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. **1 John 3:16 NLT***

God intends for us to live life together; for all of us to bring support and encouragement to each other. Connect Groups become a place where others just don't know your name but care about what is happening in your life and want to support you in your spiritual journey.

3. A Place to _____.

*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. **Proverbs 27:17***

We believe every person is created with God-given potential to make a difference in the world. Connect Groups are a place you can grow with others to become more like Jesus and reach the potential God has put inside you.

WHAT A CONNECT GROUP LOOKS LIKE

Your Life is Your Group

At Hope City, we use a free market approach to Connect Groups. This means we want people to gather together based on the things they enjoy and are important to them. Essentially, the things you are already doing in your life are the things that can make up your Connect Group!

Free market leaders form their group around their _____ or _____.

From sports groups to lunch groups, mom groups to student groups, Bible study groups to creative arts groups, our groups are as varied as we are. All groups fall within one of five hubs:

- Men
- Women
- Freedom
- Everyone Welcome (Married & Co-Ed)
- Youth

Group Structure

Groups can meet throughout the year but are structured into three semesters.

January - April

June - July

August - November

Winter/Spring - 12

Weeks Summer - 6

Weeks Fall - 12 Weeks

Groups meet _____ during each semester.

Groups meet in a variety of places such as homes, parks, restaurants, coffee shops, office buildings, and virtually on Zoom or Google Meets, etc.

New groups start every semester making it easy to build community and enjoy different types of groups. However, we empower groups to extend beyond the structured semesters. We have learned from experience that longevity breeds deeper intimacy and measurable growth. Talk to your coach about how that would look.

Although most groups find the greatest success meeting weekly, some activity groups meet bi-weekly. It's important to note, the less often a group meets, the greater intentionality is necessary to connect outside of the group setting.

No matter what your group meets about, each meeting should be made up of four things:

1. _____

Laid back time for group members to talk and get to know each other.

2. _____

This will vary based on what kind of group you're leading. It could be an activity like Frisbee, an outreach to the homeless, or a sermon discussion.

3. _____

Ask for prayer requests from group members and pray at the beginning and/or the end of each group meeting.

4. _____

This is what differentiates your Connect Group from your neighborhood game night. Whether it's through activities or discussions, always find a way to include the Word of God. This can be as simple as sharing something God is teaching you with the group or talking about a verse you read that week.

The important thing is that you make it intentional and meaningful. Then you can continue the conversation throughout the week through email, text and phone calls. When communicating with your group, remember that email is for passing along information, text messages are great for reminders & quick encouragement, but phone calls and face-to-face conversations are best for building relationships.

Note: Most activity groups are not designed to include spiritual components such as Bible study and prayer, etc. In reality most activity groups reach people who are far from God. With this in mind, it's okay if Bible study and prayer time are not done during the times when the group meets AS LONG AS you are intentional in building relationships OUTSIDE of your group time so that you can leverage spiritual influence. In those times outside your group, you can share your story of life change, invite them to church, offer to pray for them, etc.

Connect Groups are not a place for:

- Business
- Offerings
- Unapproved materials or speakers
- Controversial topics

YOUR ROLE AS A CONNECT GROUP LEADER

Within the church, every individual is assigned by God a unique role to be fulfilled. Connect Group leaders serve as invaluable partners, working in tandem with the pastors and staff of Hope City, to provide comprehensive care and support.

*Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. **Ephesians 4:11-13 NLT***

The primary role of a Connect Group Leader is to help group members

_____ in their walk with God.

*Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds; **Proverbs 27:23***

In your group, individuals will be at varying stages of their spiritual journey, each with their unique path to explore. To uncover their next steps, it is crucial to establish personal connection and engage in meaningful conversation, perhaps even directly asking them about their aspirations. By mid-semester, aim to have a clear understanding of their individual progress. Take a moment to mark a reminder in your calendar and be purposeful in your approach.

Here is a guide of some next steps you can help people take:

- Start attending Sunday services
- Start doing the First 20 each day: 5 minutes in the Bible, 5 minutes in prayer, 5 minutes in worship, 5 minutes of gratitude.
- Be water baptized
- Complete the Hope City Growth Track
- Join the Dream Team
- Start tithing
- Invite a friend or neighbor to church or a Connect Group
- Attend a Connect Group Leader Training to become a Connect Group Leader

How to be a successful Connect Group Leader:

1. _____ for the members of your group.
2. Consider partnering with a _____ to help share the responsibility of caring for and leading your group.
3. _____ with group members outside of weekly meetings through phone, email, text, social media, or face-to-face. Encourage group members to connect with each other throughout the week as well.
4. Have _____ through laughter and by creating an enjoyable environment.
5. Respect people's _____ by beginning and ending your group on time.
6. _____ group members to attend church services and events with you like weekend services, conferences, or outreach opportunities.
7. _____ the group around a member going through a crisis. Use wisdom and be sensitive.

The Importance of Prayer

Prayer is a _____ of our church, and it is important for your Connect Group.

*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. **2 Chronicles 7:14***

How to pray for your group:

- Pray for any requests group members share.
- Ask for the presence of the Holy Spirit in your group.
- Pray that God will open people's hearts to hear His truth.
- Pray for authentic community to develop.
- Pray for wisdom and strength to lead your group well.

CONFIDENCE AS A CONNECT GROUP LEADER

If you only do what you feel comfortable doing, you don't need God. God's best is often found outside your comfort zone.

When you serve God and people by leading a Connect Group, He will equip you and give you the strength and wisdom to lead well.

*For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. **Philippians 4:13 NLT***

*For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. **2 Timothy 1:7 NLT***

When you feel uncertain about leading a group, use Scripture to overcome the lies of the enemy:

1. When you feel like you don't have the time, remember _____
_____, and His timing is perfect.

*If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done. **Ecclesiastes 11:4 TLB***

2. When you feel unqualified, remember _____.

*It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own. Our qualification comes from God. He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant. **2 Corinthians 3:5-6 NLT***

3. When you feel like your past disqualifies you, remember _____.

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. **2 Corinthians 1:3-4***

4. When you feel like you don't know how to help someone in your group, remember ESPN:

E: Encourage - Demonstrate compassion, inspire them with courage, and let them know that there is hope.

S: Share Scripture - Show them Biblical truth concerning their situation.

P: Pray - Don't just say you will pray for them. Take a moment and do it right then.

N: Next Steps - Help them put feet to their faith by coaching them to discover what their next step can be.

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

As a Connect Group Leader, you are never alone in creating community. We have pastors, staff, and the Connect Groups Team who are all working alongside you to invest in great Connect Groups at Hope City.

Your Coach

As a Connect Group Leader, a Coach will be assigned to support you throughout the semester.

Your Coach's number one priority is to _____ daily. Reach out to your Coach if you have a need, prayer request, or concern.

You will maintain regular communication with your coach throughout the semester. They will play a vital role as you lead your group. It is of utmost importance that you promptly respond to them, as they are dedicated to you as a leader and are readily available to provide support and guidance. Together, you will address and report on various metrics such as group attendance, the identification of new leaders, and the progression of both you and your group member's spiritual journey.

HOW TO CREATE GOOD GROUP DYNAMICS:

Set expectations

A key to helping people feel comfortable in your group is to let them know what to expect. Take time to share how the group will flow from week to week. This can include things like explaining the times you will begin and end the group, how discussion or group activities will happen, and how group members can share prayer requests or best engage in the group.

Follow the 70-30 rule

Give the members of your group room to speak up instead of doing all the talking yourself. About 70% of the talking should come from members and 30% from the leader. Keep discussion positive. If conversation takes a negative or destructive turn, guide it back to a healthy place. If someone needs to talk about a sensitive or complex issue, you can follow up with them after the group or call your coach to help you respond well.

Keep the conversation relevant to everyone

Remember people in your group will be at different places in their spiritual journey. Be thoughtful when you talk about spiritual concepts or church terms that might be unfamiliar to new Christians or new church-goers.

Respect boundaries

Men should minister to men and women should minister to women. A couple may minister to a single person. We want to maintain integrity and purity in our Connect Groups. These boundaries will help protect the leaders and group members from entering into an uncomfortable or inappropriate situation.

HOW TO START YOUR CONNECT GROUP

1. Ask God for direction about what group to lead and who to invite.
2. Once you decide on a topic or activity for your group, choose a place and time to meet.
3. Register your group in the online Connect Groups Directory at hopecity.com/lead-a-group/ so people can find it and contact you to attend.
4. Invite people you know or meet to come check out your group.
5. Pray for God to do great things through your Connect Group.

Preparing for your group meetings:

- Send a message to group members reminding them about the first meeting. If meeting virtually, be the first to join the video call and welcome participants as they arrive.
- Arrive early to set up a welcoming environment.
- Consider having name tags available to help everyone learn names for the first few weeks. If meeting virtually, invite everyone to put their full names on the screen and keep their cameras on.
- Conversation: Here are a couple conversation starters to help get people talking as your group gets to know each other:
 - How did you learn about our group?
 - What are your hobbies?
 - What are you looking forward to this year?
 - What brought you here?
 - What are you hoping to get out of this Connect Group?

Thank you for being an important part of Connect Groups at Hope City!

ABUSE POLICY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I understand that Hope City is a safe place for children and vulnerable adults and that Hope City complies with all Federal and State laws regarding reporting suspected child abuse. As a Connect Group Leader, I understand that suspected abuse is to be reported to the staff member who oversees the area in which I serve. I also understand the 4 types of abuse defined below:

Physical: A physical act directed at a child or vulnerable adult that causes injury.

Sexual: Contact or interactions between a child and an adult, or another child, when the child is being used for sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person. This includes exploitation through photographs, videos, or other communication methods.

Emotional: Acts or omissions by the parent or other caregivers that have caused, or could cause, serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional, or mental disorders.

Neglect: Failure to provide for the child or vulnerable adult's basic needs. This includes adequate adult supervision, medical attention, housing, food, and clothing. Most cases of physical neglect involve inadequate adult supervision that has caused harm to the child or vulnerable adult, or places them in danger of such harm.

I understand it is not my responsibility to inquire and in no instance will I confront a parent or caregiver if abuse is suspected. As a Connect Group Leader, I agree to comply with this policy and report any suspected abuse to the staff person who oversees the area in which I serve as soon as possible.

APPENDIX

GROUP LEADER TOOLKIT

Start Strong, Finish Well

Hello Connect Group Leaders,

Welcome to a new season of Connect Groups! Whether it's your first time leading or you have been leading for a long time, we are grateful for your willingness to serve. Your "yes" will bring others together and help them take the next steps in their faith journey.

In this Toolkit you will find helpful information and resources to prepare you for this season of leading.

The Group Development Plan is our leadership roadmap to a successful Connect Group. It helps leaders articulate what they would like to accomplish while leading their groups. Not only does this facilitate better leadership for you, it also aids your coach in providing the resources and support you need to achieve your goals.

The Connect Group Commitment will help set the expectations for your group (leader and member copy included).

The First Night Agenda is a resource to assist you in launching your group with an impactful first night experience. (Think of it as a template to build upon.)

Pastoral Support will provide resources for those with needs that go beyond your abilities as a group leader to assist with.

Serve Projects will help you find or create the right project for your Group.

Additional resources can also be found on our Group Leader Resource page at hopecity.com/lead-a-group/.

Thank you so much for all you do as a Group Leader. We are praying that God richly blesses and anoints you as you lead your Group.

— Hope City Connect Group Team

GROUP DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Roadmap for Group Success

If you want people to follow you, you must first know where you're going. The Connect Group Leadership Development Plan will become your personalized roadmap to a successful connect group. Make it your own and get started as soon as possible. Feel free to reach out to your coach or hub coordinator if you need help getting pointed in the right direction.

My Vision for our Connect Group is:

Need help filling in the blank space? That's okay. Your vision is God-inspired, important to Hope City, and vital to your group. It's worth getting right. Take some time now to pause, pray, and listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Remember, groups are all about helping others make connections, find freedom, and take next steps in their faith. Use the questions below to prayerfully discover your vision. After you do, write a brief vision statement in the space above.

What are my unique experiences, passions, and gifts that can be used to help others take next steps?

What do I think relationships should look like in my group?

How will people in my group become better versions of themselves?

What impact will my group have on Hope City and the community where we live?

When we get together, my connect group will:

The foundation of Groups at Hope City is built on the **ESPN** model: Encourage, Scripture, Prayer, and Next Steps. Below are some common elements that make up a Connect Group and some information to help you fill in the space above. The format for your group is up to you. Mix and match the parts to write a brief description of what you will do when you get together.

Eat Together - Some groups enjoy coffee, a light snack, or even a meal together. What will that look like for you? Are you meeting at a restaurant or coffee shop where people can treat themselves? Will you be meeting at your home (or someone else's) and ask people to bring something to share? Eating together leaves room for casual conversation and personal relationships to grow.

Have Fun - Some groups are activity-based and participate in things like bike riding or ultimate frisbee. Even Bible study and discussion groups can engage in an icebreaker or game before digging into the content. These activities open the door for folks to let down their guard and relax.

Grow Together - All groups make time to “spur one another on to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24) through intentional discussion. What will you discuss?
Discussion options:

- Hope City Sermon Discussion: <http://hopecity.com/cglt/sermons>
- Hope City Featured Curriculums: <http://hopecity.com/cglt/leaders>
- Resources found on Right Now Media: <http://hopecity.com/cglt/rightnow>

If you want to use a curriculum that is NOT included in one of these resources, please submit it to our Campus Groups Director for approval before beginning.

Serve Together - Groups that serve together, grow together. The strongest groups serve together at their campus and with our local mission partners. <https://hopecity.com/missions>

There are a number of ways you can make a difference in your community together! Here are some serve project ideas: <http://hopecity.com/cglt/serveproj>

Pray Together - Prayer is the foundation of everything we do at Hope City and so it should be in our groups as well. Healthy groups share their needs with each other and pray together each time they meet. Not everyone needs to pray out loud, but that would be a great goal as you grow together.

Are we open to having children attend our group? If so, what will that look like?

Our connect group will meet at a great place:

Our connect group will get together on these days at this time:

Our connect group will not be empty because we are going to:

Here are some tips to fill in the space above and your connect group.

1. Invite people you already know.
2. Sign up to serve for the connect group launch at your campus and personally invite people.
3. Invite people with shared interests. People you serve with, work out with, pick up kids from HCKids with, or share a hobby with.
4. Register your Group at <https://rock.hopecity.com/LeadAConnectGroup> and respond quickly and personally to people who inquire. Sample: <https://bit.ly/3LpJTrp>
5. Post it on all of your social media outlets: FaceBook, Instagram, LinkedIn, NextDoor, etc.

I'm going to own my growth. Here's my development plan:

Our personal growth is essential. We have provided some ideas to help you fill in the space above. But you must take ownership of your growth first. You will grow most when you get into the game and begin to lead your Connect Group. As you encounter challenges and opportunities, we want you to have access to the resources you need.

- Commit to daily spiritual habits: prayer, worship, Bible reading, journaling, sharing your faith
- Make use of our leadership tools: <http://hopecity.com/cglt/leaders>
- Make arrangements to meet with your coach regularly
- Commit to discover who God created you to be:
 - Refer to the assessments that you completed in Growth Track. These can be found in your Rock profile.

I need to follow up with my Coach concerning:

Thank you for your YES! Connect Groups are foundational to Hope City, and they don't happen without people like you. You have boldly stepped up to open your hearts, homes, and schedules to those around you. We believe in you and will be with you every step of the way.

*Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track. **Proverbs 3:5-6 MSG***

CONNECT GROUP COMMITMENT

Commitment is an important piece to any relationship. The purpose of this document is to help clarify our group's goals, expectations, and commitment to each other over the next few months.

Connect Group Purpose

We believe that Connect Groups function to connect people, help them find freedom, and bring them to next steps in their faith. We accomplish this by focusing on four priorities that we intentionally plan for at each group gathering (ESPN).

ENCOURAGE

Each week we will demonstrate compassion by having open and meaningful conversations about what is happening in our lives. We will withhold judgment, choose to inspire courage, and let each other know that there is hope.

SHARE SCRIPTURE

Scripture is God's love letter to humanity. It is the very breath of God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that you and your group can be thoroughly equipped to live out your faith and make a difference in the world (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Regardless of the type of group we are, we will always use Biblical truth to guide our conversation and point us to the answers for all of our life situations.

PRAYER

We believe that God hears and answers the prayers of the righteous. We will make time at each group gathering to listen to prayer requests and pray together. We will also carry those requests in our heart and pray throughout the week for each other.

NEXT STEPS

We are all a work in progress being perfected in the image of Christ. No matter how long we have been a Christian, we all have next steps. Together, we will support and resource everyone as they discover and take their next steps in faith.

Marks of a Healthy Connect Group

There are many signs that a group is healthy, but here are a few that we will look for and measure.

- **Centered on Christ:** regardless of the content or activity of the group, Christ is central, the gospel is promoted, and God is honored in all that takes place.
- **Authentic Community:** Committed to make everyone feel loved, accepted, and cared for. Committed to attend and participate in the group.
- **Maintain Health:** Willingness to receive feedback, be held accountable, and work to maintain one's relational, emotional, physical and spiritual well being (REPS).
- **Promote Growth:** Seeks to stir up one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24) and move others to their next steps. (Prov 27:17)
- **Looks to Serve Others:** Demonstrating love in action by intentionally serving others on the Dream Team or through Serve projects.

GUIDELINES AND COMMITMENT

1. We will meet on _____ nights for _____ weeks. Our final group meeting will be on _____.
2. We can arrive between _____ & _____ but we will begin at _____. We will end our night no later than _____.
3. We will end our time together in prayer for one another.
4. Our group will focus on _____. If our group requires a book: _____.
5. Joining our Connect Group requires a commitment to attend each meeting time (and complete the homework ahead of time if applicable). Of course we understand that life happens, and you can't always make it. If you can not attend a meeting, please call or text _____ at this number _____ no later than 30 minutes before the meeting.
6. Concerning Children: _____
7. Food: _____
8. Serve Projects: Our groups will perform at least one Serve Project during the semester and our goal is for everyone to participate. As a group we will agree on the details and work together to serve our community.

We agree to honor this commitment throughout the semester. Have your members each sign it.

LAUNCH NIGHT

Preparation

We firmly believe that everything begins and ends with the foundation of prayer. However, we also need to prepare for what happens in between those moments. You must prepare yourself spiritually (heart), physically (body), and mentally (mind). A failure to plan is a plan to fail. Flying by the seat of your pants is not a spiritual gift.

Now that your roster is being filled, you need to communicate with them about the details - the when, where, why, how, and who. Here is Hope City's standard for accomplishing this: Join Requests (<http://hopecity.com/cglt/join>).

Next, you need to prepare for your participants by thinking ahead about how you will engage their five senses. It's about the atmosphere. How will you cater to their 5 senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, & taste? Think about what they will see as they approach your driveway: is your location visible? What will they hear, see, and smell as they walk into your home (or location)? Who will greet them at the door? What refreshments will be offered (taste)?

Goals for the First Meeting

- Connect & Build relationships
- Review vision, purpose, expectations, and commitments
- Have fun

Items Needed

- Refreshments
- Printed copies of the Connect Group Commitment (1 page double sided)
- Name Tags
- Pens
- Icebreaker Game

Three Essentials

1. First impressions are lasting impressions.

Within the first seven seconds that a person arrives at your Group, the individual is assessing whether you're likable, trustworthy, and competent. Again, prepare the atmosphere. Smile. Introduce yourself. Keep eye contact. Learn their name. Thank them for coming. Then, mingle and chat with everyone while you eat.

2. Diving In

After about 20 minutes of mingling, bring everyone together to officially begin your meeting time. Use an icebreaker or game to calm any nervousness and help the group get to know each other a little better. If you need some ideas you can click Ice Breaker Ideas (<http://hopecity.com/cglt/games>).

Some groups also like to add worship into the mix. It is optional but a great way to connect spiritually as a group. You can use live musicians or take advantage of some great resources found on YouTube.

Hand out copies of the Connect Group Commitment and review it together. As you go over each section, ask if anyone has any comments or questions. On the back page, you will have them fill in the blanks accordingly and discuss what you will do as a group regarding refreshments, child care, and a potential Serve project.

In the discussion time, remember the 70/30 rule. The leader does 30% of the talking and the participants handle the other 70%. Setting the tone for this on the first night is very important. Use the open ended questions provided in the leader's notes (<http://hopecity.com/cgl/t/toolkit>) to promote conversation and responses.

3. Prayer

For some, the group prayer time is the scariest part of groups. Sometimes that's because of negative past experiences, and other times it's just because they have never done it and they think they are going to be asked to pray in front of others. Remember, you will most likely have people at various stages of spirituality and experience, so put their minds at ease and don't make it weird.

You can say something like this:

"We believe that prayer is fundamental to faith. It's a simple conversation between us and God. We also understand that prayer in a group setting is something that many may not have done. We will never force you to pray. We will, however, always make room for everyone to ask for prayer. Then, those willing can lead us in prayer for the needs mentioned."

At that point, you can receive prayer requests and offer the opportunity for others to lead in prayer to close out the time.

Another option is to split into smaller groups for your prayer time. A few points to consider with this option:

- Give the groups a time limit
- Break into gender groups
- Ensure that there is at least one person in each group that is comfortable to pray out loud with others
- Play some soft instrumental worship music to set the atmosphere

Additional Tips

- Never underestimate the significance of the time after the meeting
- Start giving jobs away from day one: greeter, attendance, refreshment planner, co-leader, etc
- Send out a summary email within 24 hours and include action items or next steps
- Visit the Leader Resources web page for additional tools

MEMBER CARE

The Member Care Team is available to minister to people who need more help than what they can get in a prayer line or Connect Group. We help people who are going through a personal crisis with problems such as:

- Marriage & family problems
- Financial issues
- Domestic violence & abuse (current or previous)
- Employment
- Counseling
- Inner healing
- Trauma
- Mental health
- Substance addictions - sexual addictions
- Senior services

They are not here to replace the Connect Group Leaders but are here to come alongside them. Text **HCHelp** to **448448** for assistance.

You may also contact me personally at 713-899-3149 with information about the person in your group who needs help. This number should only be used by the Group Leaders. We love you and we are here for you!

Kandace Della Femina
Hope City Member Care Coordinator

PROJECT IDEAS

There are a number of different ways you can make a difference in your community. Start by asking yourself these questions:

- Who in your community or neighborhood has a need?
- What individuals, ministries or organizations around you could benefit from your skills?
- Are there any needs in your community that stand out?
- What project types best suit your group's ages and abilities? (physical labor, prayer, outreach, worship, teaching, etc)

General Ideas

- Host a free garage sale
- Provide yard clean up/beautification for elderly, widowed, or single mom
- Bring free lunches to serve people in your area
- Give out free bottled water
- Kids host a free lemonade stand
- Provide home repairs for elderly or disabled
- Kids host a free toys and games giveaway/garage sale

Remote and Virtual Ideas

- Decorate lunch bags for your local Meals on Wheels program
- Create fidgets/sensory toys for local organizations
- Write/Decorate a hope note or card for nursing homes, hospitals, etc
- Host a Shoe Drive (Samaritan's Feet)
- Create no-sew blankets for hospitals, homeless shelters, care facilities, or pet shelters
- Put together goody bags for service members

Community Outreach

- Assemble and deliver hygiene packs to people experiencing homelessness in your community
- Do a community prayer walk and trash clean up
- Renovate a run-down park or playground in the area
- Host a clothing drive for a local shelter
- Trash pick up in your community or neighborhood
- Volunteer at a local food pantry
- Landscaping and Minor Home Repairs
- Adopt a block/trail in your neighborhood, local park, or community
- Clean and decorate for a single parent, elderly, or widower
- Indoor or outdoor painting project for elderly, disabled, single parent, or community partner

Skilled Construction

- Home renovation projects for single parent, elderly, or widower
- Fence repair for single parent, elderly, or widower
- Built a wheelchair ramp for elderly or disabled

Local Partners

- HoustonFoodBank: <http://hopecity.com/cglt/foodbank>
- Heights Interfaith Pantry: <http://hopecity.com/cglt/heights>
- The Beacon: beaconhomeless.org/schedule
- KidsMeals, Inc: <http://hopecity.com/cglt/kidsmeals>
- Wesley Community Center: <http://hopecity.com/cglt/wesleycc>
- Westbury Community Garden: <http://hopecity.com/cglt/westburycg>

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How can I recruit people to come to my group?

1. Start with people who are already in your sphere of influence (co-workers, friends, and neighbors).
2. Find people around you who are new to the church, are new believers, or have shown interest in getting involved.
3. Post it on your social media platforms.
4. Look for people you think you can help realize their potential.
5. Ask God to send the right people to your group.

Where can I hold my Connect Group?

We encourage Connect Groups to meet outside the church building in the places where you like to spend your time. Some of the most common meeting places are homes, restaurants, parks, coffee shops, and office buildings.

If you are meeting virtually, we recommend using Zoom or Google Meets.

Where can I find Connect Group Curriculum?

You can visit hopecity.com/connect-group-leader-resources/ to use one of our featured curriculums.

We have a variety of curriculum suggestions available to you on RightNow Media.

You can get your free membership by visiting: <http://hopecity.com/cglt/rightnow>

Does my group have to meet weekly?

We encourage meeting weekly each semester in order to build authentic relationships.

How do I measure if group members are moving one step?

Ask! Make it part of your discussion whether in a group setting or individually. Here are some great questions to guide your conversation:

- How did you get connected to this Connect Group?
- What are you most looking forward to in the group?
- How long have you been attending Hope City?
- What brought you to Hope City?
- Which campus do you attend?
- Have you ever been part of a Connect Group before?
- What do you feel like God has been doing in your life lately?
- Are you familiar with 21 Days of Prayer & Fasting?
- What areas of your faith are you hoping to grow in the coming months?
- What are you focused on in your life right now?
- Have you been through the Hope City Growth Track? Do you remember what your personality type is or what your spiritual gifts are?
- Have you ever served on the Hope City Dream Team?
- How can I pray for you?

Everyone in your group will be at different places spiritually. The vision of helping them “move one step” is not to get them to do everything at once. It’s to help identify where they currently are spiritually and offer a practical next step to help them grow.

Here are some examples of next steps you can share depending where a group member is spiritually:

- Invite them to attend a Sunday service with you.
- Share your personal story and what God has been teaching you.
- Share how the Growth Track can help them discover their purpose and invite them to attend.
- Invite them to consider being water baptized. Invite your Connect Group to be there to celebrate anyone getting baptized.
- Share how you find time regularly to pray, worship, and read God’s Word and encourage them to make their own plan for time with God.
- Tell them about the Hope City app and One Year Bible reading plan.
- If they are ready to receive Christ, offer to pray with them.
- Encourage them to learn more about areas like tithing, the Holy Spirit, and prayer by watching past messages at yourhopecity.com.

What should I do if someone asks a question I can't answer?

It's okay to not have all the answers. Thankfully, we can find guidance through prayer, God's Word, and the Holy Spirit. Encourage them to spend time reading the Bible and praying. Also, let them know that you will do your best to get some information and get back with them at your next Connect Group meeting. Do some personal research and call your coach to get advice.

What should I do if someone in my group shares something with me (or the group) that requires attention beyond what I (or we) can provide?

If you encounter a difficult situation within your Connect Group, please know that you are not alone. If a member is going through a crisis, you can rally the group around them to provide prayer, encouragement, and support. Use wisdom and be sensitive to the situation. If you are unsure of what to do, don't hesitate to ask your Coach. Also, you and/or the group member can email the Connect Groups Ministry Team directly at connectgroups@hopecity.com. You can also refer them to our Member Care team, <https://hopecity.com/resources> or they can text HCHELP to 448448.

How can I share stories of life change from the Connect Group semester?

We love hearing about lives that are changed through Connect Groups. You can share your stories with your Coach or text **STORY** to **448448**.

You can also share your own personal stories through social media and tag [#HopeCityGroups](https://twitter.com/HopeCityGroups).

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE REFERENCE

At Hope City we believe ministering through the Word of God is the most powerful way to care for people. As you pray over a Connect Group member, try inserting that member's name in the Scripture to make it more personalized.

As a leader, we encourage you to find and memorize at least three Scriptures, which will equip you when you are walking someone through a tough situation as well as give you strength as a leader throughout the semester.

Here is a list of powerful Scriptures that you can apply to any situation:

“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” **Mark 12:30-31 NKJV**

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. **Philippians 4:13 NKJV**

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. **Proverbs 3:5-6**

My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts. **Isaiah 55:8-9 NLT**

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. **1 John 5:14-15**

No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue which rises against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me,” says the Lord. **Isaiah 54:17 NKJV**

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. **Ephesians 6:10-28**

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. **Romans 8:28 ESV**

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. **Ephesians 2:10 NLT**

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." **Jeremiah 29:11**

You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. **Matthew 5:14-16**

No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:39 NLT

Stay away from the love of money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never, never fail you nor forsake you." That is why we can say without any doubt or fear, "The Lord is my Helper, and I am not afraid of anything that mere man can do to me." **Hebrews 13:5-6 TLB**

Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. **Isaiah 41:10 NLT**

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Philippians 4:6-7**

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. **James 1:2-4**

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17 ESV
One day the apostles said to the Lord, "We need more faith; tell us how to get it." "If your faith were only the size of a mustard seed," Jesus answered, "it would be large enough to uproot that mulberry tree over there and send it hurtling into the sea! Your command would bring immediate results!" **Luke 17:5-6 TLB**

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. **Hebrews 11:1**

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. **James 1:5**

*Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety. **Proverbs 11:14 ESV***

*So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. **Romans 8:1-2 NLT***

*“Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. **Isaiah 1:18***

*Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14***



