

Launching Your Small Group

Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20) is foundational to our calling as small group leaders. Jesus promises to be with us, so as you launch your small group, remember you're not alone!

Prepping for Launch

Establish a Clear Vision

Think and pray about the big picture of what you'd like to see happen. God's vision for you and your group will be what sustains you through the launch and beyond.

Your vision should include:

- **Who** are you hoping to reach? What specific group is on campus?
- **What** are the main things you'll be doing in small group? Studying Scripture, praying, and helping people in your community are great places to start.
- **How** will your group affect other people and the campus and even the world?



SAMPLE VISION STATEMENT

I would love to see athletes from all different teams gathering together to study God's Word and encourage one another as we learn to be more like Jesus on and off the field and court.

Make "Come and See" Invitations

Jesus gives the disciples a personal invitation to encounter God in John 1:35–39. As you follow Jesus' example and invite others, don't be limited by the fear of rejection. Invite everyone! We might just find that the people we assumed would say "no" actually become the most passionate of the whole group.

Tips for making invitations:

- **Lead with vision.** Emphasize what you're inviting them to and the why you're starting the group. Don't focus on logistics, since if they're unsure if it's worth it to come, the details won't help.
- **Use simple, clear language.** Avoid using too much "Christianese" or insider lingo.
- **Don't forget to actually make an ask.** Otherwise, it'll be as if they didn't receive an invite at all!

Make it personal! Here are some ways to ask (best option first):

- Face-to-face invite
- A verbal ask, preferably over video
- A personal text or DM
- Mass text or mass email (the least effective, only to be used after the above strategies)

SAMPLE INVITATION

Hey, I'm starting a new group on campus and wondered if I could share a little bit more about it with you. [Pause for response.] I've found more and more people on campus who are interested in thinking about spiritual things and learning about God. And I've found groups like this have been a real lifeline for me personally, given all the ups and downs of the last couple of years. We're going to start meeting together to study the Bible, learn about Jesus and put his words into action. Would you be interested in coming to our first meeting happening at [place and time]?

Turn Up the Hospitality

A good host can help you walk away from the event feeling welcomed, seen, and cared for. That's why the role of a host is critical in the early stage of your small group. It means taking time to prepare and think through ways to create a fun and safe space for people to be fully present with each other and God.

- Prayer & Support
- Space
- Content
- Food
- Location
- Time
- Reminders

Lift Off! Your First Meeting

Meeting #1

1. **Cast vision** – Share your passion for what God’s doing on campus
2. **Introductions** – Get to know each other through introductions and icebreakers.
3. **Have fun!** – Small group should be something people enjoy and look forward to.
4. **Group expectations** – Make sure everyone is on the same page on what’s expected of them. You can come up with these expectations together.
5. **Study the Bible** – Make this a routine practice early on since it will set the tone.
6. **End on time** – This can help to build trust, especially for the first meeting.



Post Launch

Debriefing Meeting #1

After your first meeting, take time to do these four things:

1. **Celebrate** – Take time to do something you enjoy and praise God.
2. **Debrief** – Talk with a close friend or coach about what went well, how people responded, what could be changed next time, and how you saw God at work.
3. **Follow Up** – In-person or through text, thank each person for coming, mention specifics they said in the group, ask if they have any suggestions for next time, and invite them to the next meeting.
4. **Building Community** – Help people feel more connected by setting up another time to hang out and encourage your group to connect with each other on social media



Troubleshooting the First Few Meetings

- **What if it was really awkward?**
Try pinpoint specific moments where the awkwardness was at its highest point. A lot of awkwardness can be remedied by being extra clear about directions and expectations.
- **What if I was really nervous?**
Remember that the more we do something, the more comfortable we get. You can also invite others to help in areas that are especially hard for you.
- **What if someone has an issue that I can’t handle?**
If someone expresses a concern that is greater than your ability, walk with them to your school’s counseling center to see someone and contact your InterVarsity campus minister if you have one.
- **What if no one showed up?**
Don’t read into it too much! Move forward by reflecting on the time and location of the meeting, following up with people, or brainstorming more ways to promote the meeting.
- **What if no non-Christians came?**
Intentionally invite (more) non-Christians next time! Be authentic and avoid “Christianese.”
- **What if the “wrong” people showed up?**
Maybe your ideal small group didn’t pan out. That’s okay. God is ultimately the one drawing people together. Be open to what’s happening instead and adjust accordingly.
- **What if “too many people” showed up?**
Celebrate and take time to think about splitting the group into groups of five or six and appointing discussion leaders. Help your discussion leaders by sending questions beforehand.

Future Small Group Stages

Take time to look ahead to the future stages of your small group. This will help you set specific goals for the group and be encouraged about what’s to come. Consider focusing on one of these areas: developing leaders, growing in evangelism and mission, or handling conflict well.

Course Worksheet

- [Small Group Launch Checklist](#)

Related Resources

- [Navigating Small Group Conflict](#)

Recommended Courses

- Focusing on Developing Leaders: [Developing Leaders](#)
- Growing in Evangelism & Mission: [On Mission as a Small Group](#)
- Handling Conflict Well: [Growing Authentic Community](#)

Visit the Ministry Playbook to learn more about leading, planting, and building Kingdom movements on college campuses: <https://www.theministryplaybook.com/>