



Group Leader & Host Guide

Midtown Church Group Contact Information

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Midtown Group Guidelines.....	1
Group Leader Expectations	2
Coaches/Support	3
Selecting a Study.....	3
Group Hosts	4
Meeting Agenda	5
How to Facilitate a Discussion	6
How to Lead Prayer	7
Caring for Group Members.....	8
Childcare.....	10
Working with Different Personalities	11
Group Serve Projects	14
Why Does Midtown Livescan?	15

Midtown Group Guidelines

Group guidelines set some basic expectations for group life. The value of these guidelines is that they help people know what is expected of them and what they should expect of others. Then, we ask that everyone make a commitment to those guidelines. We recommend you discuss your guidelines during the first session in order to lay the foundation for a healthy group experience.

We Agree to the Following Values

Purpose: To grow healthy spiritual lives by building a healthy small group community.

Attendance: To give priority to the group (call/text/email if I will be absent or late).

Safe Environment: To create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved (no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes). We are not here to judge or criticize anyone.

Confidentiality: To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group. What is shared in the group stays in the group. It is a gift of trust!

Spiritual Health: To give group members permission to help each other live a healthy, balanced spiritual life that is pleasing to God. We are here to encourage one another to grow.

Participation: To invite our friends who might benefit from this study and warmly welcome newcomers.

Building Relationships: Let's look for ways to serve, pray and be in community together.

Qualities of a Thriving Group

A thriving group is good at...

- Bible study and prayer
- Friendship and authentic relationships
- Care
- Service
- Fun!

They are small enough to...

- Make meaningful connections
- Build trust and transparency
- Dig deeper into Scripture while applying specific lessons into daily lives
- Have accountability, support, and encouragement

Group Leader Expectations

As an official Midtown Group Leader, your group will be posted online for people to sign up and join. You will be trained, equipped, and encouraged as you build community at Midtown.

Group Leader Qualifications

- Committed to Christ, integrity, character, and spiritual growth
- Has love for people and a desire to help them grow
- Able to facilitate a small group discussion
- Regularly attends Midtown weekend services

Group Leader Requirements

- Has attended Groups Orientation
- Has completed the leader application and interview process
- Has completed and cleared the Live Scan process

Study the Scriptures and Pray

- Study the Bible or recommended curriculum
- Pray for the members of your group individually and collectively

Care for Members and Their Families

- Be a good listener
- Be honest and real (no one is perfect)

Participate in Service Projects

- Click [here](#) for local outreach opportunities.

Plan a Fun Activity for Your Group

- Bowling, BBQ potluck, holiday party, hiking, pool party, dinner out, etc...

Assist with Expanding and Encouraging the Groups Ministry

- Select a co-leader for your group
- Provide the co-leader with opportunities to facilitate and encourage

Attend Midtown Group Events and Trainings such as:

- Forward Conference
- Leader Trainings

Use Planning Center to Build a Roster, Follow Up, Connect, and Communicate

- Complete weekly attendance reports
- Email the members of your group any homework and prayer requests
- When necessary, refer special prayers or needs to our **Care Ministry**
- Follow up on the personal needs of group members and celebrate the praises
- Be in contact with your Group Leader Resource Team and/or Coach

Coaches/Support

Group leaders will be assigned a coach who will serve to help you get your group started. Our coaches are proven leaders who understand the dynamics of group life and are there to pray for you, as well as equip you with the resources and tools you need to succeed.

Selecting a Study

Sermon Series Curriculum

Each week you will receive an email with tips, updates and materials. Included in the email will be 5-10 discussion questions. The material will follow along with the weekend message.

RightNow Media

As a group leader or host, you have access to RightNow Media – an online library that gives you instant access to thousands of Bible study videos! Over 3,000 excellent video studies utilizing biblical leaders such as Francis Chan, Matt Chandler, TD Jakes, and Max Lucado for FREE! Your group can watch videos online beforehand and discuss or watch together and discuss.

Group Hosts

ANYONE can host a group! Gather people you already know (family, friends, neighbors, etc.) and start a group together. Use Midtown resources and go at your own pace.

How will people join my group?

Personal invitation. Who is in your life right now that would enjoy and benefit from being in this kind of group with you? Brainstorm a list of people from work, your neighborhood, your children's school, family, the gym, and so forth. If you already have a few people who would like to join – have them brainstorm the same list of people. You'll be amazed at who God sends your way! The most successful groups are those personally populated.

Group Resources

All Group Resources can be found **here**.

Who is the “leader” of the group?

Remember, you are the host. You don't have to be the expert! Allow the study videos to do the teaching – you just review it! As time goes on, ask others if they are willing to host at their home. We've discovered that healthy groups rotate hosts and homes on a regular basis. This model ensures that all group members grow, give their unique contribution, and develop their gifts.

When and Where?

All groups are a little different - it's up to you as the host to pick the start date, time and location of the group. To start, make a commitment to host the group for the duration of the current sermon series (weekend message). A Sermon Series can last anywhere between 4-8 weeks. You'll want to meet once a week for about 1.5 - 2 hours (day of the week is up to you). Most groups meet in a home. But there are many other groups that meet more casually in coffee shops, pizza parlors, apartment rec rooms, etc...

Meeting Agenda

Your first meeting will set the course for your group, and it is important to set expectations in the beginning. Here is a suggested meeting agenda:

Welcome | 7:00-7:15pm

Have the room set up (extra chairs), handouts printed, refreshments made, and pens and nametags available so that you're able to focus your attention on welcoming guests as they arrive. A friendly welcome at the door will help put them at ease.

Gather | 7:15-7:20pm

Gather everyone together. Introduce yourself and share your appreciation and excitement about everyone being there. Pray a short opening prayer, thanking God for bringing you all together and asking Him to build friendships and change lives during the study.

Introductions | 7:20-7:35pm

Spend as much time as needed in this section, even at the cost of the study for the first meeting. Have everyone share their name and answer a simple light-hearted icebreaker question (and perhaps have everyone share the names of a few friends they can invite to join you). The whole group will become more effective as relationships are built. If relationships stumble along, everything else will stumble along as well.

Establish Ground Rules | 7:35-7:45pm

We want discussions to be real and honest. We are interested in what you really feel and think about what you are learning - regardless of whether or not it's "religiously correct". We want the Bible to interact with your real life, not your pretend life. That requires trust. Have everyone review the Midtown Group Guidelines to lay the foundation for a healthy group experience.

Study | 7:45 - 8:15pm

Introduce the study. Do as much of the study as there is time for. If necessary, skip questions you think are of lesser importance. Keep the discussion focused, but not rushed. If people feel rushed, they'll feel uncomfortable and may not want to come back. Don't be anxious about covering everything. More tips below on how to facilitate discussion.

Prayer | 8:15-8:27pm

Share prayer requests and pray for one another.

Dismiss | 8:27-8:30pm

Let everyone know that you enjoyed their participation and hope they come back.

How to Facilitate a Discussion

1. Ask The Question, Then Listen

- Exception: When the question asks for personal sharing, then you may want to share first. If the leader isn't willing to share from their own personal experiences, no one else will feel comfortable doing so. Be real! Ask members to keep it brief.

2. Listen Carefully

- Use eye contact and body language
- Don't think ahead to what you are going to do next

3. Use Follow-Up Questions

- "Who wants to add to that?"
- "What do the rest of you think?"
- "Does someone else have a different viewpoint?"

4. Don't Be Afraid To Gently Probe

- Avoid generic or vague answers.
 - Exception: When the group is brand new, you'll want to let trust and relationships build over a few weeks.
- "Can you be a little more specific?"
- "What do you mean by that?"
- "Can you tell me more?"

5. Summarize

- After several people have shared, recap the answers.

6. How To Handle An "Off-The-Wall" Statement

- Avoid making the person feel stupid or judged, but provide an alternative for them to think about by saying something like:
 - "That's really interesting, I'm not sure I've heard that before."
 - "Does anyone else have a different take on that?"
 - Then summarize by saying, "Well, we heard Dan say...and Sue say... This is my own take on what the Bible says" (Or this is what I understand the Bible to be saying.)

7. Find An Assistant Leader/Facilitator

- Among your group members, find an assistant leader/facilitator.
- Every group should have one or two assistant leaders. Do they love Jesus and love people? If "yes," empower them to be an assistant leader. Your assistant leader can facilitate the group discussion if you're not available.

How to Lead Prayer

The curriculum will often offer suggestions for how to focus your prayer time for that session.

1. Set the atmosphere and expectations

- Let them know that you encourage them to pray out loud.
- However, let everyone know that there is no pressure or expectation that they have to pray out loud. The value of praying out loud is that other people who hear the prayer are often blessed by it and God can use it to trigger things in other people's minds that He wants them to pray for.
- Tell them that there are no style points in prayer. The best prayers are simple and honest.
- Tell them God is listening all the time, so they don't have to repeat the request word for word when they are praying.

2. Go around and ask if anyone has any needs or prayer requests.

3. Let people know they don't have to pray for all the requests, just the ones that touched them.

4. Tell people that it's okay to pray for the same thing that someone else has prayed for and it's even encouraged.

5. Say that you'll start the prayer and then allow time for others to pray either out loud or silently, and that you will close out the prayer at the end.

Caring for Group Members

Group members will have different needs at different times, but at some point, nearly everyone will experience stressful times or crisis and will have a need for extra care. The relationships within the group will be able to provide for the majority of people's care and support needs. Feel free to solicit someone in your group to be the "care-coordinator." It won't happen much, but when there is a need, it's nice to have meals coordinated by someone who likes to do it.

Care and Scripture

- How TO use Scripture:
 - To assure them that God cares even in times of trouble. (I Peter 5:7, John 14:1, Romans 8:28)
 - To assure them that God is with them. (Matthew 28:20, Psalm 23, Psalm 139)
 - To encourage them to draw near to God in times of trouble. (Psalm 121, James 4:8, Psalm 127:1-3)
 - To assure them that we have a God who can relate in times of trouble. (Hebrews 7:25, II Cor. 1:3-4, Matthew 6:25-34)
 - To assure them that trials do not mean that God has abandoned them. (Romans 8:38-39, James 1, Lamentations 3:21-26)
- How NOT to use Scripture:
 - As the reason for the crisis – "Let me show you why God has let this happen."
 - As a substitute for listening.
 - As a tool for guilt.

Other Examples of Care

- Be a friend. People don't expect you to be or want you to be a therapist.
- Ask questions
 - "Is something wrong?"
 - "How does that make you feel?"
 - "How can I be of help?"
- Listen empathetically.
- Keep advice to a minimum and only when requested.
- Pray with the person. Ask God how to respond and how to pray.

- Follow up with phone calls, emails and notes.
- Set boundaries. How much time/money can I offer? (if any)
- Get advice.

Groups play a critical role in helping provide loving care for group members.

However, there are certain situations where the best way to care for people within your group is to connect them with our Care Ministry staff. Here are the kinds of situations that are best handled in this way:

- Mental health issues (including thoughts of suicide and chronic depression)
- Reported or suspected spouse abuse, child abuse, or elder abuse
- Severe housing issues
- Divorce or break down in marital relations
- Life threatening diseases or hospitalizations
- Addictions
- Severe financial crisis

Contact our **Care Ministry** for assistance with these matters.

Childcare

We suggest that you empower the group to openly brainstorm solutions. You may try one option that works for a while and then adjust over time. Here are a few options:

1. Our favorite approach is for adults to meet in the living room or dining room and to share the cost of a babysitter (or two) who can watch the kids in a different part of the house. This way, parents don't have to be away from their children all evening when their children are too young to be left at home.
2. A second option is to use one home for the kids and a second home (close by or a phone call away) for the adults.
3. A third idea is to rotate the responsibility of providing a lesson or care for the children either in the same home or in another home nearby. This can be an incredible blessing for kids.
4. Finally, the most common solution is to decide that you need to have a night to invest in your spiritual lives individually or as a couple and to make your own arrangements for childcare. No matter what decision the group makes, the best approach is to dialogue openly about both the problem and the solution.

Working with Different Personalities

Your group will likely have some of the following personalities. This is not a bad thing. God created us to be a diverse body and our diversity is what helps us to stretch, grow, and accomplish all that God desires. However, we often have expectations that everyone will think and act in the ways we would. We understand our own personality, but other personalities can seem strange and uncomfortable. This can cause friction in the group and derail the learning and growing process. The personalities below are not offered so that you can stereotype people, but so that you are prepared for the diversity and know how to work with them in a group setting so the best, and not the worst of their, and your, personality will come out.

Marty Luther ("Here I Stand and I'm Not Going to Budge!")

Marty always has the last word on a subject. He feels that his word is "direct from the Lord" and expects that no one will disagree. He takes challenges as a threat to his honor and maturity and usually has a stern response. You as the leader can help by ensuring that several views on a subject are heard, especially if it's not a black and white issue. In a given situation, if Marty's conclusion is acceptable, let it go. But if it has ignored what the group has come up with in the discussion, you should try to summarize the entire exchange to set a balance. Just remember that Marty makes a valuable contribution to the group, so don't exclude him.

Tom Tangent (Going Where No Man Has Gone Before)

Whether interesting or boring, Tom never stops talking and goes on tangents faster than you can say, "What were we talking about?" You're tempted to apply duct tape, but there are more productive ways to handle the situation. Tom's always the one to answer questions, and during the sharing time usually engages in a "stream of consciousness" monologue that anesthetizes the group. Chances are, Tom has some leadership ability that you should encourage. However, you have to be sensitive to the needs of other group members. You may want to position Tom next to you when you begin the group, which reduces eye contact when you ask a question (usually a silent but effective cue to stop talking) or say gently "Let's hear what Alice has to share."

Susan Silence (The Introverted Thinker)

You'll rarely hear a peep from Susan, and when you do, she usually gets drowned out by the louder personalities in the group. Susan likes to think things through and usually isn't anxious to verbalize her thought process. There are a few ways you can encourage Susan to talk. Quite often the personal invitation works well: "Susan, what would you say to that?" Sometimes phrasing a question knowing that it is part of her experience might encourage her to answer. And be sure that you affirm her verbally (as she leaves perhaps) and appreciate her uniqueness in the group.

Gus Grumpy (The Human Obstacle Course)

Nothing pleases Gus. He only reluctantly goes along with what the group is doing. He complains about his life and usually shares from the negative perspective. Gus does not expect the best from people and has tremendous potential to offend others. Deal with Gus by establishing ground rules such as, "It's okay to disagree with opinions, but it's inappropriate to attack or put down someone if their opinions differ from yours." If he persists, confront him directly in personal conversation and speak the truth in love.

Pam Peacemaker (The Conformist)

Pam has trouble dealing with any conflict. She personally avoids controversial subjects, and if anyone disagrees with another person in the group, Pam feels the unity of the Spirit has been lost. She will go along with whatever the group says, usually without offering her own opinion. It is important to discern the motivation behind Pam's compliance. Is it because she really doesn't have a preference or because she's afraid of conflict? As you get to know her better, you'll learn how to "read" her. Keep the lines of communication open and give her permission to disagree verbally if appropriate.

Donald Dynamite (Waiting to Erupt)

Donald sits through a meeting, self-absorbed, and quiet, never sharing what's on his mind. Then, without warning, he explodes venting his feelings about his perpetual crisis. He's often unable to participate in discussions, except when they're focused on him. It's often beneficial to talk to Donald before the group meeting starts and give him the opportunity to talk through his problems or offer him a constructive plan (church counseling, etc.) to work out the crisis in his life.

Dorothy Dominator (Move Over...I'm Driving)

Dorothy is an organizer and knows exactly how to run the group or how to structure the discussion. She takes control early and wants the group to follow along. She definitely has leadership potential and can be guided constructively by giving her boundaries. Ask Dorothy to lead a portion of the discussion and help you draw others out into the discussion.

Betty Biblical ("I'll Take Bible for \$200")

Betty has been studying the Bible a long time and seems to have an answer for everything. She quotes the Bible to demonstrate her "superior knowledge" without regard to the other members of the group and how they might feel inadequate or intimidated. Betty constantly applies her biblical knowledge to everyday situations and starts almost every sentence with "According to my reading of the Bible, ...", or "I think the Bible says," Sometimes her knowledge of the Bible sends the group on rabbit trails that, although are somehow connected, miss the main point of the lesson. Try to help Betty to see that she can use her knowledge to help you "build up" and develop the rest of the group.

Allen Analyzer (“Let Me Sharpen My Pencil”)

Everything has to be “logical” and make sense to Allen or else the group can’t move on. He can cause a discussion to come to a screeching halt by digging into extraneous details that don’t have anything to do with the main point. His favorite phrases are, “This just doesn’t make sense to me” or “We need to see what’s behind this statement.” Allen needs a lot of facts and empirical proof before he believes anything. He wants to dissect every passage to the smallest detail, often obscuring the flow and message. Allen can cause paralysis of analysis in the group if you’re not careful. Appreciate Allen’s desire to learn and try to help him see how his constant analysis can obscure the main theme of the study. Agree to meet with Allen separately to answer his questions without distracting the group.

Leading Group Service Projects

Every group is encouraged to participate in one service project each season.

Why should we do Service Projects?

- It increases spiritual growth.
- It expresses the body of Christ.
- It builds friendships and significant relationships.
- It helps people discover their gifts.

Choosing a Service Project

- Pray about how and where to get involved.
- Share the vision and excitement with the group; see if there is interest.
- Pick a person in your group who will be your project coordinator.
- **Click here** for serve opportunities.
- Your group can also serve together at a Midtown event, like YTH camps, Christmas, Easter, etc.

Go for it! HAVE FUN! Don't be afraid to dream big and pursue the dream to see what God does.

Why does Midtown Live Scan?

Due to the size of Midtown and the number of volunteers, we have a responsibility to provide a safe environment where all can serve, learn, and worship.

I want to serve at Midtown, do I have to be Live Scanned?

Yes, if you would like to serve in a capacity of key leadership or plan to work with kids, cash, or keys, we require you to be Live Scanned.

What if I have already been Live Scanned somewhere else?

If you have been Live Scanned elsewhere (work, volunteer org, etc.) your information was sent to that organization. Current government standards do not allow that information to be shared.

Where do I get Live Scanned/fingerprinted?

Live Scan fingerprinting is available at select UPS Stores in the Sacramento region. Contact **groupsministry@midtownchurch.org** for more information.