

**MISSION STATEMENT:**

*Communities seeking to grow in the gospel, live as family, and live on mission for the glory of God*

**REPORTS TO:**

- Director of Small Groups

**EXPECTATIONS:**

- Meet either weekly or bi-weekly with a group of believers.
- Leads the way in the creation of a safe, clean, and hospitable environment.
- Pursue and personally live out the three components of Elmwood's small groups in the context of community:
  - **Growing in the Gospel**
  - **Living as family**
  - **Living on mission**
- Be actively involved in the rhythms of church life at Elmwood.

**TIME INVESTMENT:**

- 6-10 hours per month, depending on the amount of time your group meets (includes small group gathering time)

**COMMITMENT:**

- One year

**PREREQUISITES:**

- Be 18 years of age or older
- Demonstrates a desire to see people come to Christ and grow as a disciple
- Has an *intermediate* level of biblical literacy
- Agrees with Elmwood Church's *Statement of Faith*, vision, and culture
- Can charitably navigate people from different backgrounds and worldviews gathering together

**COMPETENCIES:**

- Can both encourage and challenge team members to grow in their role and in the Gospel
- Able to lead a discussion in a way that engages and honors each group member
- Can help build a biblical community that both functions as a family and serves those around them
- Has read through and understands the ***Small Group Quick-Start Guide***

# PREPARE

## TEAM LEADER



## CRITICISM & ENCOURAGEMENT

As a leader, you have the unique privilege of being able to walk alongside people who have been given a variety of gifts and talents. In serving together, one of the responsibilities you will have is to care for your team and help them steward their gifts through *constructive criticism* and *encouragement*. This module will focus on helping you to begin doing both of these well.

### CRITICISM:

**Faithful are the wounds of a friend;  
profuse are the kisses of an enemy. - Proverbs 27:6**

In an already critical world, it can be easy to avoid being critical of one another and to dread receiving any kind of personal correction. However, the Bible calls us to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), and sometimes the truth is that we do need a bit of guidance. However, as brothers and sisters in Christ, our goal must be to give *godly* criticism.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Think about moments in your life where you received both helpful and unhelpful forms of criticism. How was your response to each of those different?
2. What was different about the person's approach to giving you criticism in those moments?
3. How is godly criticism a good thing that helps God's people to be salt and light (Mt. 5:13-16)?

### PUT IT INTO PRACTICE:

Here are some questions you should ask yourself before talking to someone about a certain criticism:

1. Have I prayed about my criticisms of this individual, and am I certain my critique is accurate?
2. Is my relationship with God solid and the posture of my heart appropriate for this conversation?
3. How will I walk alongside this person as they seek to grow in response to my criticism?
4. How will I articulate my thoughts with gentleness and clarity?

### ENCOURAGEMENT:

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Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. - 1 Thess. 5:11

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. -Hb. 3:13

As we transition away from considering criticism, let’s now consider what it means to encourage one another. In a broken world that can be overly-critical, and with the enemy trying to discourage us in our walk with Christ, encouragement can be the fuel that keeps us pressing on through some of the most challenging times. As Jim Hamilton puts it in *The Faith Shaped Life*,

“Encouragers have Christ-like sight and a Christ-like heart. They are not blind to the sins and weaknesses of fellow Christians, but they recognize they “love builds up....Encouragers are often our great High Priest’s means of ministering his divine sympathy to our bruised and lacerated souls.”

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Think about a moment in your life where someone took the time to encourage you. What impact did that encouragement have on you?
2. When was the last time you personally encouraged someone? How did giving encouragement make you feel and how did the recipient of the encouragement respond?
3. What are some distinct characteristics that Christians should include in their encouragement of one another?

### CHRISTIAN ENCOURAGEMENT:

Here are three steps that every Christ follower should take when encouraging:

1. **Point the person to Christ.** Ultimately, it’s God’s grace in Christ, not the things we do well, that is the greatest encouragement for our hearts.
2. **Point out tangible evidences of God’s grace in their life.** Be specific when talking about the ways that you see God moving in person’s life.
3. **Remind them of God’s promises.** God is faithful and He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hb. 13:5). God’s love does an amazing job at giving our hearts the motivation they need to press on.

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## TEAM LEADER



### LEADING A DISCUSSION

Your small group is going to be made up of a variety of people, each made in God's image, with a variety of perspectives and opinions. This is a gift from God that you are called to steward well in the context of community. One of the main ways you will be experiencing this godly community will be through discussions around God's word or about daily life. As a small group leader, being able to traverse these conversations is a valuable skill that will ultimately result in a good and fruitful experience for both you and those whom you lead. In this module, we'll walk you through what you need to know to lead those discussions well, as well as some things to consider along the way.

Before you begin, we want you to know that leading a small group discussion is extremely simple and we have done much of the work for you already. Each of Elmwood's small groups is *sermon-based*, which means that the discussion will be focused on the Scripture text and content from Sunday's sermon gathering. Prior to each Sunday, you will receive discussion questions via email that you can reflect on during the service and use as a guide for your group the following week. Feel free to simply work through those questions one at a time or expound on them based on how you feel the Lord is leading your group.

#### THREE EXHORTATIONS:

In leading a discussion with your group, there are three things that we'd encourage you to keep in mind:

**1. The race you're running (Hebrews 12:1)**

In working through the discussion, you will most certainly spend more time on some questions than others, as well as go on tangents at times. That is totally okay. At the end of the day, however, your goal is that your group would gain a strong understanding of the whole text, not just a part of it. Therefore, keep an eye on the time and, if needed, you can feel free to lovingly encourage your group to "come back" to the conversation at hand.

**2. Respect for everyone (1 Peter 2:17)**

Because each person in your group is different, you might find that there are challenges with maintaining a level of respectfulness from one person to another. In those moments, we'd encourage you to talk privately with those people and bring your observation to their attention. Many times, people are not even aware of how they are being perceived and will quickly adjust accordingly. However, if there appears to be a consistent sin, consider talking to your director.

**3. The depths you're plumbing (Romans 11:33)**

God's word is simple enough that a child could grasp its basic truths, but is deep enough that one could spend their entire life plumbing its depths. As you engage in regular discussions be sure to kindly press people to go deeper than just short answers, and walk alongside them by asking them about what it looks like to live out the truths you are discovering.

Before working through the reflection questions on the back, remember to be prayerful (1 Thess. 5:17) and that you are not alone (Mt. 28:20)!

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

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1. How will you know when you've thoroughly worked through a question enough to move on?
2. How will you practically accommodate people who are introverts and extroverts?
3. What is the difference between pressing someone to go deeper and pushing them further than they are willing to go?
4. How will you handle the situation if someone says something blatantly wrong or heretical?
5. How will you manage your emotions no matter what is said within a group context?

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### BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

In a hyper-individualistic culture like our own, it can really push us out of our comfort zone to intentionally pursue community as it's portrayed in God's word. However, the truth is that we are created in the image of a God who exists in perfect community (Jn. 17:5), and so it makes sense that deep down inside of each of us there is the desire to be known by another. The good news is that God has saved us in Christ *from* certain death. But, He has also saved us *into* a community, who will walk alongside us as we follow Christ (1 Jn. 1:3). The truth is that apart from Christian community, we cannot even fully obey the Scriptures (Rom. 12:10; Gal. 6:2). Therefore, this module will ask the question, "What components should make up a community of Christians?"

#### COMPONENT 1: *GROWING IN THE GOSPEL*

Each small group is sermon-based and should provide an opportunity for growth in God's in word, as well as accountability in living out the nuances of what it means to follow Jesus.

**QUESTION:** What is the gospel? How does the gospel impact our commitment to one another?

**APPLY:** Make sure you are have a good grasp on being able to read God's word in context. Also, make a plan with your group about how you are going to create spaces of accountability for men and women.

#### COMPONENT 2: *LIVING AS FAMILY*

The Bible is very clear that in Christ we have been adopted into God's family (Gal. 4:4-5). This makes us brothers and sisters (Mt. 12:50). While it may not always be easy, we should earnestly seek to live this out.

**QUESTIONS:** What's the difference between a unified family and a uniform family? If you plan to have kids in your group, how will you include them?

**APPLY:** Brainstorm with your group about how your Christ-centered community will be unique and stand out to the world. Examples of this could be having consistent worship nights or times of encouragement.

#### COMPONENT 3: *LIVING ON MISSION*

Before Christ ascended to the right hand of the Father (Hb. 8:1), He clearly commanded us to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey Him (Mt. 28:18-20). This gives us purpose and a goal.

**QUESTION:** What are some obstacles to being missional? How will you overcome these in your group?

**APPLY:** As a group, make a plan for how you will be outward focused in each of the four seasons.

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## Small Group Quick-Start Guide

### ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF A HEALTHY SMALL GROUP

Since every small group is made up of unique individuals and families with a unique history and set of life circumstances, no two groups will look identical. ***There is no one-size-fits-all discipleship program.*** But there are essential components that must be present in every small group for it to be healthy and multiply.

#### GROWING IN THE GOSPEL

Every healthy group should have a growth component. We believe that the gospel changes everything, and that every group must create space for people to process Scripture together and learn to live in repentance and faith.

#### LIVING AS FAMILY

Every healthy group should have a community/care component. We believe that we're better together, that God has designed us to flourish in a loving, Christ-centered community.

#### LIVING ON MISSION

Every healthy groups should have a mission component. We believe that people matter to God, and that living on mission is the heartbeat of the Christian life, not an optional addition.

### SMALL GROUP REQUIREMENTS & FORMATION

These are the requirements of each small group:

1. A small group must have at least one leader who is trained by our church, and who is receiving ongoing training and development.
2. A small group must have a growth, community/care, and mission component.
3. A small group must complete a yearly plan at the beginning of every academic year.

Steps for forming a small group:

- Complete small group leader training.
- Create a small group yearly plan, identifying how your grip will live out the essential components mentioned above.
- Establish a regular huddle rhythm with your small group coach.

### CREATING A YEARLY PLAN

#### WHY CREATE A YEARLY PLAN?

- A yearly plan will provide people with a clear entrance into and exit out of the group.
- A yearly plan will give direction and clarity to members of the group.

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- A yearly plan will create a higher degree of collaboration, buy-in, and commitment from group members.
- A yearly plan will provide accountability to group members.
- A yearly plan will foster fresh vision and energy for existing small groups.

### HOW TO CREATE A YEARLY PLAN

1. Gather existing and potential members of the group and ask about their past group experiences, both positive and negative.
2. Cast vision for the three essential components of each small group. Discuss which of these components comes naturally for each of you and which ones you will have to be more intentional at.
3. Dream together about the group, considering what kind of culture, rhythms, and growth you would like to see happen in your time together.
4. Nail down the logistics of the group, including the day and time you will meet. We would suggest meeting at least every other week, but meet as often as you are able. Don't forget to get each other's contact information!
5. Talk about healthy expectations for your group's participation and how participation in the group can either help or hurt growth. Ask the group to consider committing to meeting for at least the next year.
6. Pray together, for one another and for the whole group.

### SMALL GROUP METHOD

#### SERMON-BASED

- Each group is required to engage in what is called sermon-based discussion. During this time the passage of Scripture on which the sermon is based is the subject of discussion. (The subject of discussion is not the sermon per-se, but what God is saying to us through the Scripture text and the sermon collectively). We want to be a people who are not just hearers of the word, but doers as well, as groups live as family and on mission based on the good news of Jesus Christ.