



Covenant Group Leader Guide

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All Scripture is from the New International Version
unless otherwise noted.

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WHY COVENANT GROUPS EXIST

Covenant Groups have one, simple purpose — to bring people together for the glory of God. 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 **relationships**.

Meaningful relationships can be hard to find, and Covenant 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**

Hillcrest Church Covenant Groups Model

At Hillcrest Church, we believe our church must grow **larger** and **smaller** at the same time.

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

We base our Covenant 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**

Covenant Groups offer people:

1. A Place to connect

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 Covenant Groups provide a place to connect with others, share life, and grow in faith together.

2. A Place to protect

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**

It is through life together that our problems become smaller, and God uses others to bring support and encouragement to our lives.

Covenant Groups become a place where others don't just 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 grow

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. Covenant Groups are a place you can grow with others to become more like Jesus and reach the potential God has put inside you.

1. Scripture

Whether it's through activities or discussion, 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.

2. Community

Laid back time for group members to talk and get to know each other. Fellowship and connection to others in the body of Christ is a primary focus of Covenant Groups. It could be an activity like Frisbee or an outreach or a discussion about a book or Sunday message.

3. Outreach

This will vary based on what kind of group you are leading. Be intentional about creating space for the Great Commission to penetrate hearts and motivate others in taking real steps to introduce those who are far from God to Jesus Christ.

4. Prayer

Ask for prayer requests from group members and pray at the beginning and/or the end of each group meeting. Remember, the spiritual component is what differentiates your Covenant Group from your neighborhood supper club. Prayer time is a time of vulnerability for many people, and creates an opportunity for great impact within the group.

5. Equipping

Smaller group gatherings create opportunity to identify and develop new leaders in the group. Be intentional in allowing others the opportunity to stretch themselves and praying for the group, leading a discussion, organizing an outreach, recording attendance, etc.

Covenant Groups are not a place for:

- Gossip
- Business
- Offerings
- Unapproved materials or speakers
- Controversial topics or Theological Discourse

Your Role as a Covenant Group Leader

God has a part for all of us to play in the church, and Covenant Group Leaders come alongside the pastors and staff of Hillcrest to help care for people.

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 Covenant Group Leader is to help group members **move one step** in their walk with God.

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

People in your group will be at different places in their spiritual lives and each person will have different next steps to take. Here is a guide of some next steps you can help people take:

- Start faithfully attending Sunday services
- Start reading the Bible regularly
- Start praying regularly
- Be water baptized
- Complete the Hillcrest Church Connect Track Class
- Start serving others and utilizing their gifts
- Start tithing
- Invite a friend or neighbor to church or a Covenant Group
- Attend a Covenant Group Leadership Training to become a Covenant Group Leader

How to be a successful Covenant Group Leader:

1. **Pray daily** for the members of your group.
2. Consider partnering with a **co-leader** to help share the responsibility of caring for and leading your group. If co-leading then clearly assign responsibilities and tasks so no one in your care slips through the cracks.
3. **Connect** with group members between 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 **fun** through laughter and by creating an enjoyable environment.
5. Respect people's **time** by beginning and ending your group on time.
6. **Encourage** group member participation in church services, special events, conferences, or outreach opportunities.
7. **Rally** the group around a member going through a crisis. Use wisdom and be sensitive.

The Importance of Prayer

Prayer is a **foundation** of our church, and your Covenant Group

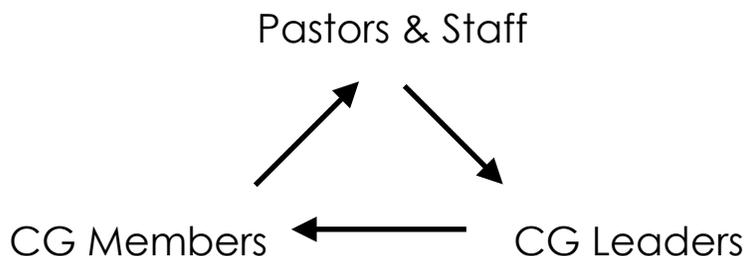
If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

—**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.

The prayer covering is one of the greatest benefits provided to those who participate in Covenant Groups. Mention the prayer covering weekly and provide resources for equipping your group to fulfill their assignment in the prayer wheel.



Confidence as a Covenant 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 Covenant 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. Spiritual warfare will come, especially as you begin to lead others.

1. When you feel like you don't have the time, remember **God has created you for this**, 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 **God has equipped you**.

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 **God uses imperfect people**.

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

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

- E:** Encourage
- S:** Share Scripture
- P:** Pray
- N:** Next Steps

Leadership Support

As a Covenant Group Leader, you are never alone in creating community. We have pastors, staff, and elders who are all working alongside you to invest in great Covenant Groups at Hillcrest.

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 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 leaders 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 Covenant Groups. These boundaries will help protect the leaders and group members from entering into an uncomfortable or inappropriate situation.

Stay Connected

Throughout the semester, report to your Covenant Groups leadership about group attendance, concerns, needs, potential new Covenant Group Leaders, and how members are moving one step.

Preparing to Lead

All Covenant Group Leaders complete the following steps before leading:

- Complete the Connect Track
- Become a member of Hillcrest Church
- Attend a Covenant Group Leadership Training
- Complete the Covenant Group Leadership Application
- Complete a Covenant Group Leadership one-on-one interview
- Sign the Covenant Group Leadership Commitment & Honor Code

HOW TO START YOUR COVENANT 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 with Hillcrest Connections Pastor for promotion so people can sign up 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 Covenant Group.

Preparing for your group meetings:

- Send a message to group members reminding them about the first meeting.
- Arrive early to set up a welcoming environment.
- Consider having name tags available & ice breaker activities to help everyone learn names for the first few weeks.

Conversation

Here are a couple conversation starters to help get people talking as your group gets to know each other:

- What are you looking forward to this year?
- What brought you here?
- What are you hoping to get out of this Covenant Group?

Move One Step

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 sit in a Sunday service with you.
- Share your personal story and what God has been teaching you.
- Share how the Connect Track can help them discover their place and invite them to attend.
- Invite them to consider being water baptized. Invite your 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 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, prayer, and spiritual warfare by listening to past messages on the myHillcrest app.

Frequently Asked Questions:

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 Covenant Group meeting. Do some personal research and call your leadership 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 Covenant 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 leadership. Also, you and/or the group member can call the church office at (423)781-5033, if needed.

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

If you have stories of life change happening in your group please share with your leadership, so that Hillcrest Church can celebrate the goodness of God with you and your Covenant Group.

HONOR CODE

As an essential part of the Hillcrest Church Leadership family, you have a responsibility to develop and exhibit mature Christian behavior. This should be the heart of your desire to serve in a leadership position here at Hillcrest Church.

While serving the Body of Christ as a Covenant Group Leader at Hillcrest Church, 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 can influence 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, Hillcrest Church leaders are to maintain a disciplined life of Bible reading, prayer, and fasting. You must also refrain from 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 Hillcrest Church family. We should regard it as an essential part of our development, not as an imposition or restriction.

Signature _____ **Date:** _____

LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT

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 3:8-10 MSG

Qualifications:

- Sincere, worthy of respect, and of a good reputation.
- Have a genuine desire to serve and minister to other people.
- Able to lead, motivate, and teach other people.
- Able to create positive group dynamics, and deal with conflict resolution within the group.

Signature _____ **Date:** _____

ABUSE POLICY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I understand that Hillcrest Church is a safe place for children and vulnerable adults and that Hillcrest complies with all Federal and State laws regarding reporting suspected child abuse. As a Covenant 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 investigate and in no instance will I confront a parent or care giver if abuse is suspected. As a Covenant 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.

Signature _____ **Date:** _____

HELPFUL SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

At Hillcrest Church we believe ministering through the Word of God is the most powerful way to care for people. As you pray over a Covenant 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 NKJK**

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**