

CONNECTION GROUP

LEADER PLAYBOOK

2025 • 2026

To our incredible Connection Group Leaders,

I'm compelled to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to each of you. You embody the very answer to the plea in Luke 10:2 – “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” And truly, God has responded by providing you! We lift this prayer daily at 10:02 am, and it's truly remarkable to see how God has blessed our community with leaders like yourselves.

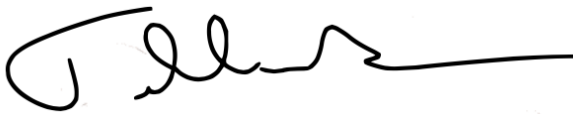
May you find abundant joy in witnessing the transformation and growth within your Connection Groups. Your unwavering commitment to fostering genuine community, living out God's teachings, and extending a hand to others is profoundly inspiring.

As our church experiences significant growth here in Ankeny, it's clear that we need more exceptional Connection Group leaders just like you. With an expanding leadership, clear and consistent communication of our vision is more important than ever. This playbook is intended to serve as your roadmap for success as a Connection Group leader. Much like a playbook guides a sports team, following these principles will lead us collectively to victory.

Know that you are never walking this path alone. We are committed to supporting and encouraging you every step of the way. Should you encounter any challenges or require assistance, please don't hesitate to reach out. Together, we will continue to grow and create a meaningful impact in the lives of those God has entrusted to our Connection Groups.

Once again, thank you for your invaluable contributions. Your dedication is making a significant difference in Ankeny and the surrounding areas. May God pour out His blessings upon you and fill you with renewed strength and encouragement as you serve Him faithfully.

I am so very grateful for each one of you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Todd Wallace', followed by a long horizontal line.

*Todd Wallace and the Elders
Keystone Church of Ankeny*

OUR MISSION

A Connection Group Leader's mission is to create environments conducive for joyful, spiritual family, where Christ-followers are actively applying God's word, and living on mission. Practically speaking, these values are lived out in **3 ways**:

BE A FAMILY

- Healthy families:
 - spend time with each other
 - share food with each other
 - get real with each other
 - take care of each other
 - encourage and challenge each other
 - serve together (Serve Our City)

APPLY THE WORD

- Facilitate weekly discussions around the sermon using the “script” outline and CG weekly as a guide. Always get to practical next steps of application.

PLANT NEW CONNECTION GROUPS

- Cast this vision: Just like healthy churches plant new churches, healthy connection groups plant new connection groups
- Planting new CGs requires new leaders who are ready to lead. Therefore, always be looking for Co-Leaders!
- Encourage your group members to invite people to your group!

A TYPICAL LIFE-CYCLE OF A CONNECTION GROUP

While every leadership experience is different, there is a typical life-cycle that most connection groups will go through:

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|------------------|--|
| 1st year: | Create “Spiritual Family” |
| 2nd year: | Grow in “Life Application”
Focus: Pray for / Seek Co-Leaders |
| 3rd year: | Live out “Life on Mission”
Focus: Empower Co-Leaders |
| 4th year: | Rest on “Sabbatical” |

This life-cycle isn’t a policy or a rule, but a guide. Naturally, there will be variations that emerge, and these will be discussed and addressed on a case-by-case basis.

SUCCESSFUL LEADERS DO THESE 7 THINGS:

1. Take Attendance.

Submit group attendance every week through the Church Center App. Getting visitor and new member contact info is key for following up and building real relationships.

2. Share Responsibilities.

Work to share responsibilities and empower new leaders. Don't try to do it all yourself!

3. Communicate Regularly.

Communicate with your group using the Church Center App with the aim of making meaningful connections with the group outside of your normal group time.

4. Model the One-Anothers.

The New Testament lists 59 one-another instructions. Challenge your group to live them out!

5. Reach Out for Help.

We are here to help! Reach out to the CG staff or Support Team with any questions!

6. Create Intentional Spaces for Relationships.

Do whatever will best facilitate family and connection!

7. Keep Jesus the Focus!

LEADING YOUR FIRST MEETING

SETTING THE STAGE: INTRODUCTIONS

- Leaders Share First:
 - A brief personal testimony about your faith journey.
 - Express your heartfelt passion for Jesus and His Kingdom.
 - Communicate your dedication to the group's success.
- Group Members Introduce Themselves:
 - Name, occupation/year in school, length of attendance at Keystone.
 - Engage with an open-ended question like, "What has your attention in life right now?"

UNDERSTANDING OUR PURPOSE: THE VISION

- Outline the core purpose of connection groups: To facilitate knowing and following Jesus.
- Key elements include:
 - **Spiritual Family:** Cultivating a sense of family and belonging.
 - **Life Application:** Applying biblical teachings to everyday life.
 - **Life on Mission:** Multiplying impact by planting new groups.

CLARIFYING EXPECTATIONS: WHAT TO EXPECT

- Ensure clarity on the group's dynamic and what members can anticipate.
- Cover logistics such as:
 - Regular meeting schedules and formats.
 - Meal/snack arrangements.
 - Childcare options.
 - Social gatherings and specialized meetings (men/women splits, etc.).
 - Serving Our City

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

- Establish clear communication channels:
 - Sharing weekly prayer requests.
 - Utilize the "Church Center" app (or an alternative) for group announcements and discussions.

SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES

- Encourage group participation by delegating tasks, which may include:
 - Administrative tasks and communication management.
 - Collecting and distributing prayer requests.
 - Organizing meals, desserts, and snacks.
 - Planning social events.
 - Hosting meetings in personal homes.
 - Exploring opportunities for shared leadership and apprenticeship.

FINAL INVITATION: THE ASK

- Cultivate a strong spiritual community through:
 - **Regular Attendance:** Emphasize the value of consistent participation.
 - **Vulnerability:** Encourage openness and honesty among members; model this as leaders.
 - **Biblical Foundation:** Highlight the importance of "One-Another" principles from scripture.

OTHER HOW-TOS:

HOW TO GET PEOPLE INTO YOUR GROUP:

- **Recruit.** Recruiting can happen at any time, and is the most effective way to get people into your group. Ask your co-workers, the people at your gym, your neighbors, people during our meet and greet times.
- **Respond to email requests from Church Center.** Stepping out in faith to try a connection group is hard; therefore, respond as quickly as you can when people reach out.
 - Don't be offended if they don't come back! We tell everyone to visit multiple groups.

HOW TO STRUCTURE A CONNECTION GROUP GATHERING:

- **Define your monthly rhythm.** There are plenty of variations in ways that leaders lay out their groups. Share with your group what a typical month will look like.
- **Divide a typical night into thirds.** You have freedom to change things up, but most CGs spend about a third of the time hanging out, a third of the time discussing the sermon, and a third of the time getting life updates, taking requests, and praying together.
- **Food always makes CGs better.** Whether it's dinner, light snacks, or dessert, food creates the family-style environment that helps gel the group together.
- **Watch the clock.** Most groups meet somewhere between 1 ½ to 2 ½ hours. End on time. This gives people permission to leave if they want to, though oftentimes they'll stay and keep hanging out!
- **Make relationships the key.** If you're going to lean too hard one way or another, lean towards being too relational. The most successful CGs are the ones that do a really good job at being a family.

SPIRITUAL FAMILY

HOW TO CULTIVATE A HEALTHY SPIRITUAL FAMILY CULTURE:

- **Make the "One Anothers" the core of what you do.** Continually get creative on how to implement the 59 one-another commands in your group.
- **Schedule intentional time for relationships.** Whether it's weekly time around dinner, a guy / girl split night, or a once a month social gathering, be intentional about letting go of the schedule and just hanging out. Do whatever will best facilitate family and connection!
- **Create a way to communicate during the week.** Start by using the Church Center app. If necessary, use other common methods of communication: email, text threads, GroupMe threads, etc.
- **Serve Together.** At least once a semester, serve with your group in one of our partner organizations. Utilize the "Serve Our City" material provided. Does someone have a need in your group? Go meet that need together!

LIFE APPLICATION

HOW TO HELP PEOPLE APPLY THE WORD:

- **Successful discussions usually center around these main points: (The “CG WEEKLY EDITION” is a suggested guide to this kind of discussion)**
 - Read and review the basic background of the text.
 - What were the major points of the sermon? Where do you find each point in the Bible?
 - Do you understand what each point means?
 - How should we live this out this week?
- **The goal is to get *THEM* to talk, not you.** You are leading a small group discussion not teaching a Bible study class. We still encourage you to share during the group! Chances are, you will encourage others to open up.
- **Never skip the application.** You might not get to every discussion question each week, but always ask the application questions.
- **Split the group.** Sometimes people will talk more if you split the group into even smaller groups. Oftentimes people will go deeper when you split the group into guys and girls. This should be a relatively regular practice!

HOW TO HANDLE CHILDCARE:

- **Decide on if and how you will host children.** Following are suggestions to help you think creatively about childcare. Use the option that you decide would work best:
 - Hire a babysitter by combining resources
 - Rotate two people together to watch the kids, either at home or at another house. This approach offers a secondary opportunity for fellowship!
 - Partner with another group that meets on a different night to swap childcare responsibilities
 - Have an occasional “Family” night where children can experience the community created within a Connection Group.
 - Utilize guy/girl splits to help offset childcare needs (all men one week, all women the next week)
 - **Option:** You can decide that you don’t want to offer childcare. Just make this clear from the start so families can arrange childcare on their own.

LIFE ON MISSION

HOW TO KNOW WHEN YOUR GROUP IS READY TO MULTIPLY:

- **Not a group.** A group that has 0-5 people on the roster is not yet a group. We will not start a new group that does not already have 2 leaders and a core of 4.
 - Main Objective: Recruit
- **Room to grow.** A group that has 6-10 people regularly attending has room to grow.
 - Main Objective: Invest in Relationships
- **The sweet spot.** A group that has 10-16 people regularly attending is healthy as long as it’s continuing to grow.
 - Main Objective: Empower others with responsibilities and future leadership
- **Ready to plant!** A group that has 16+ people regularly attending should be thinking about multiplying.
 - Main Objective: Raise up new leaders

HOW TO PLANT A NEW CONNECTION GROUP:

- **Decide the best time to plant.** *Most often, groups will be planted in conjunction with a sabbatical rotation.* But if Jesus brings a ton of people to your group, it will be a good idea to have a plan in place before that time.
- **Raise up Co-Leaders.** Fill out the [Leader recommendation form](#).
- **Encourage your co-leaders to recruit a core team.** New leaders should recruit at least 4 other people to be part of their committed core.
- **Give your co-leaders the freedom to recruit from your group.** The best core team is one that has people you already know and have invested in. Be open handed with the people in your group!

SABBATICAL

HOW TO BE READY FOR YOUR SABBATICAL YEAR:

- **Have Co-Leaders ready to lead in your absence.** If you don't have leaders ready to take your group, wait a year to go on sabbatical.
- **Give time for your Co-Leaders to practice leading while in your group.** Be intentional about giving your co-leaders opportunities to lead in discussions, event planning, shepherding, etc.
- **Cast the vision to the group for returning in January.** Explain the vision to start a new connection group the following year with some of the current members. Plan to return to your group as a participant, or even as co-leaders.

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR SABBATICAL YEAR:

- **Be Intentional with resting.** As leaders, you know that it will be very easy to let other things fill up your time. Resist this urge by learning about and practicing what biblical resting looks like.
- **Return to your previous group the second semester.** In some cases, it may be better to take the second semester off as well. Feel the freedom to do so.
- **Plant a new group the fall after your sabbatical.**
- **Strategize with your previous group on how to plant a new group together.** Doing so will give your previous group ownership in the mission to plant new groups.

PUT THESE KEY DATES ON YOUR CALENDAR:

CG Leader Launch	August 17th	5:30-7:30 pm
Kickoff Week	September 7th	
Connection Group Discovery Event	September 7th	
First-Year Leader Meeting	September 28th	Following 2nd Service
All Leader Meeting	November 9th	4:00-5:30 pm
First-Year Leader Meeting	February 8th	Following 2nd Service
All Leader Meeting	March 1	4:00-5:30 pm
Final Week of meeting	First Week of May	
Welcome to Sabbatical	April 19	Following 2nd Service



TO FIND ALL OF THIS INFORMATION AND MORE, VISIT:

keystone.life.com/CGRESOURCES