

HEARTLAND STUDY GUIDE

Life is better connected.

Circles are better than rows.

You need to connect relationally in order to grow spiritually.

You've likely heard these phrases around Heartland, and here's why – we know them to be true!

The best way to grow spiritually is in the context of community, and the small group you're meeting with is your best bet to finding that level of connection. When you move from the rows of the weekend worship experience and into the circles of a small group, you can explore what it means to follow Jesus at a whole new, more personal level.

No matter when your group meets or what series or study you're tracking with, you'll have the opportunity to take a deeper dive and explore some areas of your own life where the message or study may apply in its own unique way. We hope you find this group experience to be as rewarding as possible, and that you'll remember the three keys to your small group success.

Show up.

Join in.

Be real.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What do we do during the first session of our group?

Like all fun things in life – have a party! A “get to know you” coffee, pot-luck dinner or dessert is a great way to launch a newly-formed small group. You may want to review the Small Groups Agreement on Page 4 of this document to make sure everyone is on the same page about goals and guidelines for the group.

Where do we find new members for our group?

The best way to bring new members into your group is to open your group up to the next 10-week registration process by connecting with your groups coach or contact groups@heartland.cc to let them know you're open to more people joining. Groups sessions run 10 weeks in the fall, winter and spring, with most groups taking the summer off. However, if people in your group know who they'd like to invite, that's great too! Make sure all current members of the group are open to additions, however. All groups tend to go through healthy attrition – the result of moves, releasing new leaders, ministry opportunities, and so forth – and if the group gets too small, it could be at risk of shutting down. If you and your group stay open, you'll be amazed at the people God sends your way!

How long do Heartland Small Groups meet?

Small groups meet for 10-week trimesters in the fall, winter and spring, taking the summers off. Many groups continue to meet socially over the summer, but that's up to the individual group to decide. At the end of each 10-week session, groups will get a survey to find if they plan to continue in the group, will be taking a break, or will be looking for a new group. We also encourage new group members to give their new group a 3-week test drive to continue or to bail out - no questions asked!

Are there other resources our group can study outside of the current teaching?

Absolutely. Often times groups that have met for a long period of time are interested in exploring certain faith-based topics. Contact the Heartland groups team via email at groups@heartland.cc for more details and materials.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What if the group is not working for us?

You're not alone This could be the result of personality conflict, life stage difference, geographical distance, level of spiritual maturity, or any number of things. Relax. Pray for God's direction, and at the end of the 10-week session, decide whether to continue with the group, find a new group, or take a break. You don't typically buy the first car you look at, or marry the first person you date, and the same goes with a group. However, don't bail out before you've given the group a chance. Have an open conversation with your group leader. They are there to help guide you in situations just like these! Also, don't run from conflict or prejudge people before you have given them a chance. God is still working in your life, too!

The value of the Small Group Leader

Heartland Small Groups are led by called, well-trained leaders who have a heart for discipling those in their groups. Although some groups may be hosted by different people than those leading the group, the leader sets the tone for the small group. We encourage all our small group leaders to constantly be thinking about who might make a good "apprentice leader" within their groups, for the inevitable situation where the leaders are unable to attend. When new leaders are identified within existing groups, we want to do our best to equip them to potentially lead their own small group if they feel led to do so. And learning from good small group leaders is a good way to know if leading a group is right for you!

How do we handle the childcare needs in our group?

Very carefully. Seriously, this can be a sensitive issue. 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. One 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. 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. 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. 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.

SMALL GROUPS AGREEMENT

OUR PURPOSE:

To provide a predictable environment where participants experience authentic community and spiritual growth.

OUR VALUES

Group Attendance:

To give priority to the group meeting. We will call or email if we will be late or absent. (Completing the Group Calendar will minimize this issue.)

Safe Environment:

To help create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved. (Please, no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes.)

Respect Differences:

To be gentle and gracious to fellow group members with different spiritual maturity, personal opinions, temperaments, or “imperfections.” We are all works in progress.

Confidentiality:

To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group, and to avoid sharing improper information about those outside the group.

Encouragement for Growth:

To be not just takers but givers of life. We want to spiritually multiply our life by serving others with our God-given gifts.

Shared Ownership:

To remember that every member is a minister and to ensure that each attender will share a small team role or responsibility over time.

SMALL GROUPS AGREEMENT

OUR EXPECTATIONS

Refreshments/mealtimes _____

Childcare _____

When we will meet (day of week) _____

Where we will meet (place) _____

We will begin at (time) and end at _____

(Optional) We will do our best to have some or all of us attend a worship service together.
Our primary worship service time will be _____

Date of this agreement _____

Date we will review this agreement again _____

GROUP CALENDAR

Planning and calendaring can help ensure the greatest participation at every meeting. At the end of each meeting, review this calendar. Be sure to include a regular rotation of host homes and leaders, and don't forget birthdays, socials, church events, holidays, and mission/ministry projects.

| DATE | LESSON | HOST HOME | DESSERT/MEAL | LEADER |
|-----------------|--------|-----------------|--------------|--------|
| MONDAY SEPT, 17 | 1 | STEVE & LAURA'S | SARAH | BILL |
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PRAYER AND PRAISE REPORT

PRAYER REQUESTS

PRAISE REPORTS

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SMALL GROUP HOSTS/LEADERS

KEY RESOURCES TO HELP YOUR LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE BE THE BEST IT CAN BE.

Sweaty palms are a healthy sign. The Bible says God is gracious to the humble. Remember who is in control; the time to worry is when you're not worried. Those who are soft in heart (and sweaty palmed) are those whom God is sure to speak through.

Seek support. Ask your leader, co-leader, or close friend to pray for you and prepare with you before the session. Walking through the study will help you anticipate potentially difficult questions and discussion topics. How do we handle the childcare needs in our group?

Bring your uniqueness to the study. Lean into who you are and how God wants you to uniquely lead the study.

Prepare. Prepare. Prepare. Go through the session several times. Consider writing in a journal or fasting for a day to prepare yourself for what God wants to do. Don't wait until the last minute to prepare.

Ask for feedback so you can grow. Perhaps in an email or on cards handed out at the study, have everyone write down three things you did well and one thing you could improve on. Don't get defensive. Instead, show an openness to learn and grow.

Prayerfully consider launching a new group. This doesn't need to happen overnight, but God's heart is for this to take place over time. Not all Christians are called to be leaders or teachers, but we are all called to be "shepherds" of a few someday.

Share with your group what God is doing in your heart. God is searching for those whose hearts are fully His. Share your trials and victories. We promise that people will relate.

Prayerfully consider whom you would like to pass the baton to next week. It's only fair. God is ready for the next member of your group to go on the faith journey you just traveled. Make it fun, and expect God to do the rest.

TAKE SOME TIME AT THE END OF THE CURRENT SERIES
TO TALK ABOUT YOUR TIME TOGETHER BY DISCUSSING
THESE THREE QUESTIONS:

WHAT HAVE YOU APPRECIATED ABOUT THIS GROUP?

HOW HAS THIS EXPERIENCE HELPED YOU PERSONALLY?

WHAT IS YOUR GROUP GOING TO DO FROM HERE?