



# CHOOSING, EQUIPPING, AND EVALUATING SMALL GROUP LEADERS

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I still remember my first time attending a small group during my sophomore year at California State University in Chico. I had begun getting involved with Christian Challenge by attending large group meetings, but hadn't yet tried a small group. I walked into someone's house, hoping this would result in lasting relationships that could thrive on a personal level. It did. God used that experience to shape my understanding of fellowship, cultivating comfort and openness with other believers that I hadn't quite felt before. That "community group" atmosphere is just what I needed. Six years later, I'm a full-time staff member with Challenge CSUC, now leading our Life Groups on a logistical level. From then to now, the overall importance of small groups hasn't changed, nor has its special value to me.

The success of a group depends much on its leaders, their equipping, and consistent evaluation. I've had the opportunity to see this process in action through my time with Challenge, interacting personally with our leaders and encouraging them. Below is an overview of how we manage those leaders in a way that we've seen God use to bring success to this pivotal component of our ministry. I hope that some of these tools and thoughts can be of use to you!

## Choosing Leaders

In my senior year of college, I was asked to lead Challenge's freshman/sophomore Life Group. I had minimal experience with leading groups at the time, but I was excited for the task and willing to learn. I was given about five key questions to ask in regard to every chapter we covered that year—and that's it. Challenge staff has been more than content to appoint similarly willing and (mostly) able student leaders to these roles, in hopes that they will latch onto the vision and proper functionality of their Life Group. We have staff members that could lead these groups, but we choose to have students lead so that they can obtain valuable experience. There are, of course, inherent risks in appointing students to these key positions in your ministry—but if you ask me, the benefits far outweigh the risks. The responsibility of leading a Life Group is nothing to be taken lightly, and by assigning it to someone with a lot of potential, we can test the mettle of that individual. The question of "are they qualified?" *almost* takes a back seat to "do they have potential?" In fact, throughout a few aspects of Challenge's ministry model, we apply a mindset that emphasizes a student's prospective, rather than current, skill. We are more interested in what they can become later than what they can accomplish now. We believe that this approach is legitimized by God's own practices throughout scripture. God employs those who are of lesser skill in order to lead, for the purpose of His glory. "God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty." (1 Corinthians 1:27)



## Equipping Leaders

Once we've chosen leaders with the right combination of qualification and meekness, equipping them becomes priority. We start by making sure student leaders have a clear grasp on the vision for Life Groups. I always say, "To get closer to each other and closer to God." This tells my leaders that they should always be looking for how they can improve the community and spiritual depth of each meeting. We also equip the student leaders to ask good questions that apply to the chapter we're reading that week. "What's something that stands out to you?" works, but they need more than that. The two methods that I emphasize are "[SPACEPETS](#)" and the Chapter Summary Method. Both are developed by Rick Warren, and the latter is from his book, *Bible Study Methods*. I require our Life Group leaders to go over the week's passage ahead of time and apply one of these two tools to the text. From there, they are free to come to their own (biblical) conclusion for what themes to draw out and emphasize that week, as they guide the discussion with their questions. The tool, "[Preparing And Leading Small Group Bible Studies](#)" by [StuMo](#) is really helpful, and at this point I make sure that all of our leaders are familiar with it. On top of the Bible Study component, we equip the student leaders to make Life Groups happen every week: this includes making the location suitable, having a snack, coordinating rides, coming up with a mixer, and delegating assistant leaders to do these things effectively. We are essentially equipping students who are leading a ministry within a ministry.

## Evaluating With Leaders

The process is far from over, however, even after the leaders have been chosen and the groups are functioning. In fact, we never want to nestle into a state of total comfort as we lead and organize our Life Groups. No, my Life Group leaders and I are careful to continue dialogue throughout each semester regarding the overall quality of their groups. I'm talking about evaluation, and that starts with each leader's personal contemplation over how Life Group went that week. We have a sheet that the leaders fill out each week and send to me—[here's a PDF of what that looks like](#). For best results, they should complete that evaluation within a day of that week's Life Group meeting.

We've also found a weekly meeting with the leaders to be effective for evaluation. Throughout the semester, every Friday (the day after Life Group) I have a meeting with the Life Group leaders on campus—at the moment, that's seven people including myself. It's a lot of people to get together for a fairly mandatory weekly meeting, but I do what I can to line up everyone's schedules to enable them to all meet at the same time. We use this time (which ranges from 15 minutes to an hour) to discuss, simply, how Life Group was last night—what went well, what didn't go well, whether anything out of the ordinary occurred. We try and solve any problems and work to make successes replicable. The whole meeting gives the leaders a sense of camaraderie as they engage with each other, joke with each other, and seek the overall improvement of Life Group. I'm just there as a facilitator. These meetings are highly vision-driven, as an overemphasis on task tends to lead to a lack of zealous drive, which leads to less results.

I think that any good small group system needs a stellar balance between organization and organicity. We want Life Group to be organized so that the leadership is "competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and we want Life Group to be organic so that we can constantly consider our room to grow, evaluating it from a student's eye view. The values and methods that we employ at Challenge CSUC are the result of compiled thoughts and experiences which we have cobbled together over the course of a few short



years. Through our Life Groups God has blessed us with proficient student leaders, consistent new attendees, and a [weekly atmosphere that provides students with the tools and community](#) for lively transformation. I hope that the application of some of these principles leads to game-changing excitement within your community groups, and leaders of these groups who are filled with vision to be greatly used by God to further His Kingdom on the college campus and beyond.

### Reflection Questions

- Do you have any potential leaders in your ministry who could benefit from a role like leading (or helping lead) a community group? What's holding you back from giving them more opportunity to grow and lead?
- Do you want to alter the way you equip the leaders of your community groups? If so, is there a method or piece of vision from the article that could aid that process?
- What's missing from the way you evaluate community groups? What more can you do to be in the loop for your leaders and groups?