



UNIVERSITY CHURCH

WALLA WALLA UNIVERSITY CHURCH OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

U Grow Groups Facilitator Guide

The Why

Genesis

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Genesis 2:18

From the beginning of creation, God desired that humankind live in community.

Two Are Better Than One

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

Solidarity and accountability are so important. We need each other.

The Incarnation

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

John 1:14

God knew that humans would find great hope in Solidarity, which is why He came down to be with us and why as followers of Christ, practice incarnational ways of being.

Jesus' Prayer

I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

John 17:11

In a world that is so divided, Jesus' prayer for his followers was that we would be one like the union between Jesus and his Father. Spiritual Growth can only take place when we listen, get curious and converse with people who are different than us.

The Acts Model

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

First followers of Christ met together in homes and in church buildings, practicing the principles of what it meant to be a diverse community bound together by a common love and devotion to Jesus.

Facilitator Role

1. Be Aware of the People in Your Group

"Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds."

Proverbs 27:23

2. Do A Spiritual Assessment of Members

- Attendance
- Physical and Mental Health
- Other Challenging Circumstances
- Finances
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Additional Support

3. Setting Group Norms

In order to keep groups running smoothly set up some group norms or values that the entire group agrees upon.

Here's a few suggestions to get you started:

- Refrain from interrupting the person who is talking
- Refrain from dominating conversation
- Get curious rather than critical in a disagreement
- Confidentiality
- Practice Active and Reflective Listening

- Agree on how and when you will communicate with one another outside of the group.
- Legitimize and normalize rather than fix.

4. Encourage Spiritual Development

- Make prayer an integral part of what you do.
- Talk about what is meaningful in your own spiritual journey and invite other members to do so.
- Share books or passages of scripture that have been meaningful to you.
- If group members want to join the church, get baptized or ask Christ into their heart, pray with them and then direct them to a pastor to help them facilitate these requests.

5. Encourage Connection

- Encourage and legitimize vulnerability.
- Set up a group text or e-mail where you communicate.
- Encourage group members to pray for and connect often with one other outside of the group.
- Be willing to go off script if a member is in crisis, while maintaining some structure.
- Invite the group and or individuals to other church gatherings, picnics, potlucks or community events that might be uplifting to them.
- Be aware of power differentials and emphasize the fact that everyone has something to share.

6. Encourage Member Participation

- Providing snacks
- Helping with set-up and clean-up
- Leading small groups in prayer
- Communicating changes or details of the group with other group members
- Lead the discussion
- Thinking of a fun icebreaker question
- Timekeeper
- Recording prayer requests, attendance, etc.

What a Grow Group Looks Like

1. Grow Groups Will Meet in Three 9-Week Sessions Throughout the Year.

We have found that people are more likely to join a Grow Group if they know they are not committed indefinitely. We also want people to find the right group for them, and thus the start and end date gives them a chance to try a new group if they desire to do so. New groups starting each quarter in the Fall, Winter and Spring.

2. Groups Meet Weekly or Bi-Weekly During Each 9-Week Session.

This consistency gives your group the best opportunity to connect and build healthy relationships.

3. Groups Meet in Various Locations

Meeting in a casual setting or home sets a relational atmosphere. Groups meet all over our city in homes, parks, restaurants, coffee shops and office buildings. Feel free to choose a location that feels comfortable and accessible to the people you are hoping to reach.

Four Components of a Group

- **Human Connection**

This is laid back time for group members to talk and get to know each other.

- **Activity or Conversation**

This will vary based on what kind of group you're leading. It could be an activity like Pickle Ball, outreach or a conversation about a book or Sabbath sermon.

- **Prayer**

Ask for prayer requests from group members and pray at the beginning and/or the end of each group meeting.

- **Spiritual Component**

Whether it's through activities or discussion, always find a way a spiritual component. Allow this to be organic. Spiritual conversation includes subjects such as meaning and purpose and peace. It can be as simple as sharing something that is nurturing your spiritual life or sharing a Scripture you read that meant something to you.

Cultivating Healthy Group Dynamics

1. Set Clear 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.

2. Apply the 70-30 Rule

About 70% of talking should come from members and 30% from the facilitator. Avoid the temptation to preach or lecture and allow others to share freely.

3. Keep Discussion Constructive

If conversation takes a negative or destructive turn ie. gossip, critical comments, gently guide the group back to a more constructive place. If someone needs to talk about a sensitive or complex issue, feel it out. Will this encourage more vulnerability and trust within the group? If so, you may choose to continue, if not, assure them that you want to continue the conversation after the group or at another time. If the issue is complex encourage them to speak to a pastor or trusted advisor.

4. Strive for Accessibility

Don't make assumptions. Remember people in your group will be at different places in their spiritual journey and knowledge of the Scriptures. Be thoughtful when you talk about spiritual or Biblical concepts or nomenclature that might be unfamiliar to new Christians or new Adventists.

5. Set Clear Boundaries

Maintain healthy and appropriate boundaries within your group. Model appropriate vulnerability within the group and one-on-one with group members.

6. Cultivate Compassion

Curiosity cultivates compassion. While it is so much easier to be critical or to shut down conversation, curiosity will be the sunlight and water for your Grow Group. It is vital that people feel heard and are honored, respected, and accepted without exception. Get curious about your own knee-jerk-reactions or the temptation to be critical. Get curious about group members that you disagree with or don't understand.

7. Encourage Confidentiality

Confidentiality is vital. This is a small town and people need to know that they can be vulnerable without their personal business being shared outside of the group.

Note: The exceptions are if someone's life or safety is at risk or there is suspected abuse.

8. Joy

People will be much more likely to show up and be vulnerable if there is laughter and authenticity. Enjoy each other's company, laugh together and foster a down-to-earth atmosphere.

9. Be Mindful of the Time

Begin and end your groups on time. People will feel more comfortable coming back next week if they know their time is respected.

10. Stick to the Script

Grow Groups are for spiritual growth, support and connection. Grow Groups are not a place for:

- Business dealings
- Political Agendas
- Complaints, criticism and/or gossip of people, or the church, etc.

11. Openness to New Members

Each 9-week session, we encourage you to consider ways to make room for new people whether it is 2 or 10.

12. Prayer

Prayer connects us with one another and the Divine and is foundational to everything we do at the Walla Walla University Church. Our Grow Groups are no exception and we invite you to pray for your group members, your gatherings, and for hope to thrive in solidarity.

Cultivating Warmth and Connection

1. Create an Environment of Warmth and Authenticity

Be intentional about connecting with group members at the door and taking a genuine interest in them. These first encounters can set the tone for the entire gathering. Remember they are taking a risk by showing up.

2. Prep Ahead of Time

- If you are leading a sermon discussion or a group with questions and answers, review the questions and write down your answers, questions, and reflections.
- Send a message to group members reminding them about the first meeting and the day before each week's meeting.
- Arrive early to set up a welcoming environment.
- Consider having name tags available to help everyone learn names for the first few weeks.

3. Prayer Partners

Invite people to pair up into partners who will commit to praying for one another in and outside of the group. Make time for people to exchange phone numbers with their partners. One of the easiest ways to foster inter-group communication and relationship building is through prayer.

4. Patience with Pauses

Get comfortable with silence, it can be a great catalyst to vulnerability. Sometimes people need a moment to think, so don't be too quick to fill the silence.

Affirm the group member's response with an honest answer like, *"I'd never thought about it in that way,"* or *"Thank you sharing,"* or *"Would someone who hasn't shared like to add anything?"* Be sensitive to new members or those who are reluctant to participate. Give them time and respect their boundaries. If someone in your group does not engage or interact, consider engaging them privately or sending them questions ahead of time. Some people prefer having more time to think and respond and might be more apt to share if they have some time to reflect.

5. Extra Care

- Send a text or e-mail message to group members reminding them about the first meeting and the day before each week's meeting.
- Arrive early to set up a welcoming environment.
- Consider having name tags available to help everyone learn names for the first few weeks.

6. Conversation Starters

It's helpful to plan a question or two each week to help the flow of talking get started. Especially when new people join in, starting with simple, lighthearted questions opens the door for deep conversation as the group progresses. When there is some group trust and continuity, consider a deeper question as a launch pad to your topic. Sometimes it's helpful to go around the circle and have everyone share their answer to a question.

Here are a few suggestions:

- Tell us something not everyone knows about you?
- If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?
- Tell us about a time you needed help.

For more conversation starters consider purchasing [A Game of Storytelling](#) presented by The Moth.

Facilitator Support

We have a variety of support resources designed specifically for you. Just like you are encouraging your group members to stay connected to you, as a leader, it is important to us that we stay connected to you! Throughout the 9 weeks, we would love to hear about group attendance, potential new Grow Group Leaders, and how the spiritual development of group members. We are so appreciative of what you are doing to minister to this community and want you to feel supported in every way possible!

Know that you are not alone as a facilitator. We have pastors and leaders who are working alongside you to invest in building community at the Walla Walla University Church. Please don't hesitate to call or email if you have any questions or need support.

Email: jaci.cresssolis@wallawalla.edu

Phone: 509-527-2857.

Grow Group Facilitator Resources

Our website features a section just for Grow Group leaders. We will keep this page updated with current and helpful resources, including a list of suggested curricula to help you get started.

FAQ

How Can I Invite People to My Group?

- Start with people who are already in your sphere of influence (co-workers, friends, and neighbors).
- Find people around you who are new to the community, are new believers, or have shown interest in getting involved.
- Be prayerful about those who might need a community like yours.

Where Can My Group Gather?

We encourage Grow Groups to meet outside the church building in places where you like to spend your time. Some common meeting places are homes, restaurants, parks, coffee shops, and office buildings. If you would like to schedule a room to meet in at the church, please call the church office for availability at 509-527-2800 or e-mail at church@wallawalla.edu.

How Often Does My Group Have to Meet?

We encourage meeting weekly or biweekly each semester in order to build genuine relationships. Because it is a 9-week session, we encourage weekly meetings if possible.

How Do I Foster a Culture of Discipleship?

Make it part of conversation in the group or individually. Some suggested questions are:

- How did you get connected to this Grow Group?
- What are you most looking forward to in the group?
- Do you attend the Walla Walla University Church?
- What brought you to Walla Walla University Church?
- Where have you seen God show up lately?
- What are your doubts, challenges and fears?
- What are you focused on in this season?
- How can I be supportive of you in this season?
- How can I pray for you?
- Have you considered leading a Grow Group?
- How can we help connect you with other ministry opportunities?

What If I Don't Have the Answer?

Fight the urge to answer every question. Often times people ask questions not for answers but to connect. There are many things in the spiritual journey that don't have easy answers. Trite or cliché answers can often do more harm than good. Encourage curiosity, conversation and Biblical exploration and if your member

wants to talk or study further, encourage them to schedule an appointment with a pastor or with you.

What if Someone Shares Something Privately or in the Group that Goes Beyond My Expertise or Ability to Help?

If you encounter a difficult situation within your Grow 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 reach out to Pastor Jaci Cress Solís or another pastor on the staff or the group member can contact the Walla Walla University Church Office.

Phone: (509) 527-2800

Email: church@wallawalla.edu

What If my Group Is Full?

It is important for most groups to have a capacity level due to either space limitations or the type of group. Before a new group begins each facilitator will identify their group's capacity. We will update your group page on the website to reflect the most current numbers.

Finally . . . Living in Community is Good and it is Hard

We need each other and yet, it is hard to live and work and do life together in such close proximity. This is the challenge of human relationship, to stay open and curious, listening and learning from one another. This was the beauty of early followers of Jesus. Young and old, slave and free, male and female, Jew and Gentile figuring out how to do life together. Thank you for committing to building community at the Walla Walla University Church! Wishing you peace and every good in this endeavor!

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Hebrews 10:23