

# CORE GROUPS

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## **Purpose**

Core groups are gender-specific groups of 3-6 people who want to intentionally follow Jesus together through meeting regularly to put the way of Jesus into practice. These groups will focus on intentional time to share our stories with each other and to notice God within them. There will also be a chance to put the way of Jesus into practice through a focus on our relationship with God, our relationships with people, and what God is inviting us to do next.

## **Core Group Commitments:**

1. To keep our stories confidential and protect what is shared in our group by not sharing with anyone else.
2. To prioritize our meeting times by fully participating in the scheduling as well as showing up (can also discuss partial participation—if the group has at least \_\_\_ people, we will plan to keep our meeting time as scheduled).
3. To be released from the pressure to counsel each other or solve each other's problems. The gift that we give this group is our presence and our listening.
4. Any other commitments that your group wants to add? What are potential barriers to an overall healthy group that you want to address?

\*We recommend a one-year time frame for core groups, with a pause to discern next steps at the beginning of each year (i.e. will we continue with this same group for another year, will we start a new group to make room for others, will some or all of us pause for a season that capacity is full, etc.)

## **Core Group Meeting Outline: "STEP"**

- **S** State of Soul: What is going on in your soul right now? (See description)
- **T** Time with God: What has your time with God been like this week? What have you been hearing? How have you been using that time? What have been the barriers/struggles?)
- **E** Encouragement: How can we fill you with courage to do the thing or not do the thing that God is inviting you into next (and what are you discerning that is?)
- **P** Pray together

## State of the Soul Sharing

Start your core group by giving each person a chance to share the state of their soul (our soul really encompasses all that we are—our heart, body, mind, our thoughts, feelings and intentions). Notice what is going on in your soul—Is your soul longing, content, waiting, seeking, nourished, depleted, free, heavy, neglected, hopeless, anxious, fragile, strong, happy, loved, held, abandoned, ashamed, peaceful, trusting, numb, frayed, helpless, rested, known, resilient, vulnerable? What are you noticing about your soul and/or your relationship with God?

Give each person a few minutes to share what word best describes the state of their soul, and why. In addition to sharing, this is a great chance to focus on your role as a listener (both listening to the person as well as to the Spirit in your time)—to be fully engaged, working against any distractions, to value listening over speaking and asking questions over giving advice.

Pray for the person who just shared.

## Core Groups: Story Sharing

A part of your core group experience might be the chance to share stories with each other. In addition to the value of reflecting on God's movement in your own life, it also helps to lay a foundation for how you might look for God moving in each other's lives.

Decide what order you will share your stories (designate one meeting per person) and spend some time considering God's movement in your life in these 4 areas:

- Heritage (family, household, ethnicity, key relationships),
- Heroes (key people who have shaped your life/direction/influenced you),
- High Times (times of deep satisfaction/true joy, good or fruitful seasons)
- Hard Times (times of pain, anger, disappointment, injustice, prejudice, abuse—and how you experience God in those times)<sup>1</sup>.

While everyone will have an opportunity to share, be just as mindful about your role as a listener (both listening to the person as well as to the Spirit in your time); value asking good questions over sharing your opinions.

Here are a few things to focus on as the listener:

- Uphold confidentiality. Establishing trust is so critical for your core group to thrive. It's not just the information being shared that is sacred, it's also the shared experience of the whole group.
- Be fully engaged. Work against any distractions that might come up as you listen (phone, your own thoughts/responses/emotions).
- Value listening over speaking and asking questions over giving advice.
- Jot down questions or comments as they come up in your mind—if they remain relevant after the person has completed a thought, ask them. Try to avoid interrupting.
- Let them share their story without you sharing yours. If you hear something that reminds you of something in your life, wait to share it at a later time.
- At the end, simply repeat back some of the key things you heard—new things you have learned about them, insights about God and/or His work in this person's life, encouragement for them, etc. Don't feel the need to add to their thoughts or pull out your own meaning—just listening is a rare gift that you can offer them!

After each story, take turns praying for the person who has shared to close your time together.

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<sup>1</sup> Emmaus Formational Leadership, Leadership Transformations 2022