



WELCOME TO FREEDOM GROUPS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Freedom Groups! We are so glad you have chosen to help lead this important ministry. It is no easy thing to carry the burdens of others (Galatians 6:2); but as you do, you will help facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit as he moves in the lives of each participant to bring hope and help to those who desperately need it. Many of our leaders even report that they experience change in their own lives as a result of helping to lead Freedom Groups. We pray the next 13 weeks will be life-giving for both you and those the Lord has entrusted to your care!

Before you attend the first week's session, it is important that you read through this document to get an idea of what to expect and what is expected of you. We have provided sections for both coordinators and table leaders. Table Leaders, feel free to skip to the section that is most relevant to your own role but take time to read through the notes carefully as you thoughtfully prepare for the first meeting.



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COORDINATORS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Start by reviewing the overall schedule and be sure to share it ahead of time with both your leaders and your participants. Get familiar with the flow of each session and how much time you will have available for each section. Be prepared to facilitate transitions between sections if needed. The following is a suggested schedule for the first night:

- Welcome, orientation, and prayer – 10 minutes
- Icebreaker (at tables, session 1 only) – 20 minutes
- Teaching Time/Testimony – 40 minutes
- Table Discussions and Assign Homework – 40 minutes
- Wrap-up and reminders/housekeeping – 10 minutes
- Total – 2 hours (not a hard rule)

We suggest you break up future sessions into the following sections:

- Welcome – 5 minutes
- Review Homework (at tables) – 25 minutes
- Teaching Time/Testimony – 40 minutes
- Table Discussions – 30 minutes
- Breakout into accountability and prayer – 15 minutes
- Assign Homework and closing prayer – 5 minutes
- Total – 2 hours (not a hard rule)

Think about the tone you will set and how it can help make sure that everyone feels welcomed and cared for. Remember, many who come to Freedom Groups may be hurting, struggling with sin or suffering, and anxious about even showing up. Personally extend yourself toward them and be encouraging. Yes, your table leaders will be shouldering most of the burden of care, but you will likely be the first contact participants have with the group.



Be sure to remind everyone that Freedom Groups meets for 13 sessions (plus any added breaks for holidays and/or planning purposes). Encourage them to take full advantage of this time and commit themselves to participating in the entire experience. They should plan to be present for all 13 sessions and should try their best to actively participate in the discussions and weekly assignments.

It is a good idea to send out the Freedom Groups Covenant ahead of time so participants can have a chance to read it through and understand what it is about. As you introduce the participants to this, you may want to point them to the right page so they can turn there if desired. You can either have everyone bring a signed copy to the first session or have them sign it there. Either way, be sure to stress the importance of the covenant and the seriousness of their commitment to upholding its standards.

TABLE LEADERS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Be aware – As you head into your first week, take into consideration the size of your group. If you have fewer participants at your table, it will give opportunity for more focused attention. If you have more participants, make sure you intentionally keep the discussion moving. Whatever the group size, make sure you care for those at your table. That likely means connecting outside of the table time. Set up times to call, text, or meet during the week, following any procedures put in place by your church/ministry for such meetings.

Be real – During your table discussions, cultivate an environment where people feel loved and safe to share their struggles in life. Your transparency will be important in setting the bar early on. A good way to set the tone for this for the first session is to start with personal introductions or some sort of icebreaker.

Be discerning – During your first meeting, pay close attention to the dynamics of your group and try to get an accurate sense of the types of people around your table. For example, are they followers of Christ or unbelievers? Does someone like to talk a lot? Is someone quiet and difficult to draw out? Take care to lead discussions accordingly, especially when considering their primary struggles, emotional pain, strengths, and weaknesses.



Be enthusiastic – Graciously, but clearly, encourage and challenge people to be all in. Give them hope by reminding them that change is coming if they stay invested and put effort into their participation within the group.

Be clear – Participants may not know what to expect at first during the table time. They may be shy or anxious and may not know what to expect from you or what is expected of them. Clearly lay out for them the function and purpose of table groups:

- Everyone should bring their Freedom Groups workbooks, a journal, and a Bible each week. Each person should be taking some notes in their workbook during the teaching and should use the journal for weekly assignments. Encourage them to use their workbooks and journals as a way to see progress throughout the 13 weeks and to look back, reflect, and reference things they have learned.
- Everyone in the group will be working to memorize Scripture together. This comes more easily for some and can be difficult for others, so encourage the group by letting them know that you are all in it together. It is a way to encourage one another, bond together as a group, and remember God's commands and promises. No one will be upset with you if you are struggling, but a reasonable amount of effort is expected.
- Encourage the group to utilize their newfound community by participating in discussions and holding each other accountable throughout the week. No one should feel isolated or alone in their struggle. Facilitate this interaction between group members when appropriate and possible.

Be direct – Let those in your group know that you are invested in them personally. You are committed to showing up, being there for them, following up with them outside of group, and praying for them. Remind them that you are looking to walk and grow alongside them, and that you are willing to be transparent and accountable as well. But this also means that you will expect them to be real with you and that you may ask them tough questions from time to time. You will expect them to work diligently on the homework assignments (not just completing them at the last minute) and will hold them accountable to that. The goal is never to hurt or embarrass anyone, but to gently restore and encourage one another as we build one another up to the change God is calling us to.



Be trustworthy – Explain and review the Freedom Groups Covenant. Answer questions about how the group will function. Confidentiality and reciprocal disclosure will be of concern until you establish these as commitments. If anyone in your group still needs to sign the covenant, have them review, sign, and return the covenant by the second meeting.

Be prepared – Some may be unsaved, so be ready to share the gospel clearly and succinctly with someone either at the table or after the group time – we should always be ready to lead people to Christ. As you prepare for each session, ask the Lord to lead you to the questions which are most pertinent to your group in this season as you will not always have time to work through all of them.

Be Dependent – Only God can heal and change the hearts of his people. Prayerfully look to the Lord to lead, guide, and use you in whatever way He sees fit.

Thanks again for your willingness to lead. The first session will be a bit different with more time to break the ice and orient. Future sessions will have more time for homework review. Know we are praying for you, and don't hesitate to go to your coordinator or pastor for help if you have questions or needs.

