

*Owner's Guide*  
*To*  
*The Student Life Group Ministry*  
*Atmosphere Church*

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# Part 1

## What Are Student Life Groups?

### **Altogether one—**

Atmosphere exists to bring glory to God through the leading of souls to Christ and their growth in His Spirit. As you begin to work with the different ministries of Atmosphere Church, you will notice that we are all headed in the same direction. It is our goal that the lost be found, the broken find hope, and the hungry be fed. As you continue through the leadership of the small group, I hope this is your mission.

Joining Atmosphere as a Student Life Group (SLG) leader means that you have heard God's calling on your life. You have either felt the prompting of the Spirit and volunteered, or have been asked to join by a member of the leadership. Either way, you are joining a team that is diverse, energetic, and passionate about saving lost people, and watching them grow in the Lord.

As the many ministries are, and will continue to be, woven together, we are all responsible for each other, and need each other, but we are not in charge of one another. Atmosphere Church recognizes many different talents within the ministry. With this said, you can be a part of the production crew or one of the bands while being a SLG leader. Throughout the history of SLG's we have a number of leaders that have been involved in both. In the same sense, it is highly encouraged that everyone in the ministry be involved in a small group.

### **We Need Each Other—**

First Corinthians 12 talks about the necessity of each person in the Church. Here we see that every member of Christ's body (every Christian) is important. To put a modern day spin on this, you as a small group leader are in no position to approach a member of a worship band and tell them that they are not important. In the same sense, you should never feel that you are not an important part of Atmosphere Church just because you don't preach, teach, or sing on the weekend. Everyone is equally important to the life of the ministry. So in this, comes a need for balance.

We all have many different roles in our every day lives. However, don't ever feel that you are the only one around and that you must fill every role there is in order for God to be using you as you should. In this ministry (and your life) you will notice that there are many things that are important and that there are people who can be in your life to help you fill the roles that you need to fill. With everything that you are involved in, you must learn to balance life accordingly, and sometimes say no to certain activities that are good to do, but not in the right timing. Below I have included a good (but cheesy) diagram of what this sort of looks like in my life.

Depending on the day and the week, one thing may need to take more priority than another, but one thing is certain- God is always in the center. He is not something that you give less to if you have a project due, He is central to life. Notice that things may be given different priority, but are all still centered on and must flow from God

## **Discussions---**

The topics that you will be following are diverse as the different leaders within Atmosphere. Some of you will be further discussing what was talked about at Atmosphere the week before. This is something that we would highly encourage. But we realize that not everyone in your group attends Atmosphere, we also realize that individual needs are different in each group. For your groups then, we set up resources on [atmospherechurch.com](http://atmospherechurch.com). Here, we will put study guides to books, sermon-following discussions, along with other potential topics that will be useful to your group.

Here, again, is where you need to be a community of SLG leaders. When one leader makes a new topic, talk amongst yourselves about it. There is no need to re-invent the wheel. If you talk to the other leaders you can get good ideas about what to study and it will cause you to become closer with each other as you continue on in your ministry. So make your own topics, run it by an adult leader, and run with it; let the Spirit lead!

## **Bereans versus Thessalonians---**

Acts 17:11 says- *“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”* This is the exact picture of what your groups should be doing. In Thessalonica, the people came to the Synagogue every Saturday to hear the Word of God. Paul and Silas came and would preach the truth about Jesus. Yet the people there seemed not to care, they just heard the words and went about their daily life. The Student Life Group ministry at Atmosphere is devoted to this very thing. It is easy for people to come in and out of any Church service and not care or get into study, but your small group is there for you to study the Word more in depth as you all grow in your faith.

You, as a leader, are the head of your group of Bereans. You will help them study the scriptures, as they need to in order to grow. Who you are as a leader is something that you need to ask God to reveal to you. It is the story of your salvation and your life.

## Part 2

# Who you are as the leader

## Your Roles:

### Preparation---

As we move from what the SLG is to what the leader is to be, we see five things that are very important to your job as a leader.

#### 1. Knowing the Word-

In all that you do in your leading of these groups, you need to spend time in God's word. There is nothing (besides prayer) that is more important than being in His Word on a daily basis. Jesus said *"If you continue in My Word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"* (John 8:31-32). In your groups you will be faced with many different questions that you will need to know the answers to, or know when and how to turn things over to God. The true disciples of Jesus know His Word and what He says. If you do not have one, get a Bible reading plan. A good one can be found at [www.Bible-Reading.com](http://www.Bible-Reading.com), but there are plenty of other really great sites that are good for knowing the word. Also it is important to begin to memorize Scripture that you come across. When you begin to actually care about what the Word of God says the Spirit will move you to read what you will need in your future meetings. When reading, do not just breeze through what the Word says. But digest it until you understand, then digest it more.

#### 2. Praying-

The thing that closely accompanies the lifestyle of being in the Word of God is continuously being in a state of prayer. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 tells us to *"pray without ceasing."* What does this mean exactly? It means, that we always remember where we have come from, who we are, and what we are doing in Christ. But, that is not the end of it. You do need to constantly keep open the lines of communication between you and God on a daily basis. This should go before, after, and during your Bible study. Pray for the group that you are over, along with the other groups. Pray for your leaders, and those around you that you may not like being near. Below are a few practices that I have found helpful in my praying. For more on the need, method, and usefulness of prayer, read 1 Timothy 2:1-8 and Ephesians 6:1-18.

- Set up landmarks- when you go down a road where you know some one lives. Find their house and remind yourself to pray for that person every time that you pass by. This will then bring to mind more things that you need to pray for.
- Make a list and stick it on your wall- Countless times I have told people that I would pray for them, remembered for a week and then stopped.

This is not a good practice. It is better, instead, to write down what the needs are around you, kind of taking notes on life.

- When you tell someone that you will pray for them, do it right then and there. If you are not comfortable with doing it out loud, then do it silently. Your prayers do not always need to be long and drawn out. Matthew 6:5-15 deals more with this.

### 3. Your Own Journey-

This point is the consummation of the previous two points. Basically, when you pray, pray open mindedly about the happenings around you, and when you read the Word, read it with purpose. Reading the Bible is pointless unless you actually are taking it in and trying to understand it. The Spirit was sent on Pentecost (Acts 2) to equip the believers in the truth and knowledge of the scriptures. They knew the Word, had been taught how to pray, and now had been empowered by the Spirit to do what God called them to do. Ephesians 2:10 says that we are saved for good works that have been prepared before hand for us. God will equip you for what He has called you. Your job is willingness. In this, never lose sight of the Cross of Christ for which we must live and the Resurrection which we must always proclaim.

### 4. Knowing the Topic-

Within Atmosphere we have begun to be more intentional about looking ahead and finding out where we are going with the sermons each week. We have done this to the extent that it is currently the beginning of March and we are already working on sermons for next year. It wouldn't hurt to do this in your small groups. In my own small group, I go through series of Bible books or topics and half way through the series, I begin working on the next series. All this is to say that we need to be very prepared with what ever you are going to talk about.

### 5. The People-

Perhaps the most important and most challenging part of this ministry is that it deals with people and their souls. As they are the most important part, you as the leader need to be invested in their lives. This can only happen if you are connected to them throughout the week. However, if nobody comes to your group, don't be discouraged. There is no secret to bringing people to your group. If God sends them, they will come. But part of your job in this is seeing people come. Ask those that already come to your group to find those that may come. Ask people yourself, that is one way to get people to come- by your interest in them, they may have interest in the group. Always remember though, it is better for one devoted person to come then for ten who are looking to tear the ministry down.

## **Your Role at Atmosphere—**

As a leader at Atmosphere, it is your job to be observant. One of the things that drives people away from the Church is the hypocrisy that they see within it. It is our goal to look and find people that need Christ. This can only be done if our leaders do not “clique off” before or after the service. I was at one of the services (2.9.08- when we took the element of worship music out of the service) and afterwards, I was amazed to see everyone in conversation. You may say, “well, yeah, people always talk after Atmosphere”. But the cool thing was that the people that were talking to each other were not ones that would usually do so. I was amazed to see everyone talking to someone that they did not know. This is a part of your job at the service.

The first thing that you need to learn is to pay attention. This is a broad subject. We are to pay attention to everything that goes on. First it is to the message. If you are building your topics off of the message each week then you need to actually listen to what is being spoken at the service. Pay attention to the message, prayer, announcements, and even the music for things that God says to you for your life and use in your topic each week.

Another thing that needs to be focused on is the moods and attitudes of the people around you. Take notice if there are people at the service from your group that look down and don't really have the air about them that they usually do. Don't just do this with people that you know; if you see people that you have never met, or barely know, and they look down or like they are bored, talk to them. A common thing for us to remember is that people usually decide within the first five minutes and the last fifteen if they are coming back to the service or not. The decision is usually based on how welcome they felt the first time.

Lastly, what nobody likes hearing is that you need to be the leader at Atmosphere. If you see things that shouldn't be happening, then say something about it to one of the adult leaders. It is not what people like doing, but we have a call and a responsibility to do that. If you do not like being a leader at Atmosphere, people will not feel the desire to come to your group. They will see you as someone that does not deserve attention, and will not want to listen to you. But, do not be too harsh with your leadership, but always speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

## **Finding Members—**

There are two places where you will find members for your groups.

**In the shadows** at Atmosphere or at your schools, at the mall, wherever you are to go—there are going to be people that are hurting and need to be involved with your groups. Your attentiveness to this will be what will call you to ask them to the groups. There is just the issue of opening up the lines of communication. How do we do it? We ask God that He would guide our talk. In a way, those that are hiding in the shadows are easier to face. They may be the ones that really want human contact. It is easy to go to these people and be interested in them and ask them how they are doing. God will direct your

part of the conversation to asking them to your group. However true all of this is for you- it is still your place to ask.

**Out in the open** are the ones that really are excited to talk to people. They may also be the ones that may be difficult to ask to a group as you may be feeling that they are not really interested. But, the thing is, they may really be interested in the group. The fact that they are talkative makes them really key to getting conversations going in your groups. They may also be the ones in your groups that open up those that are not talkative at all. Whoever it is that you find trouble asking, they need to be invited. If you don't think that you personally can invite a certain person, then find someone that already goes to your group and ask them if they could ask the person.

If the person does not seem too interested, let them be, and ask them again the next week. A good 'rule of thumb' is to ask the person five times before they start coming. If they tell you to never ask them again, then respect that. That will speak so much louder than you asking over and over again. And if they say that they will come, but then don't, do not leave that hanging. Find them again and ask them why they didn't show. Your interest in the person will make them want to come more.

One of the things that we as small group leaders have always struggled with is keeping in touch with each other. Whether it is communicating with fellow leaders or communicating with those in your groups- the fact is that nobody is good at it, at least not at first. Ideally what we would like to see is every leader calling their members each week somewhere between two to four days prior to the next meeting and checking on the following:

- 1) How their week is going
- 2) What you could be praying for in the member's life
- 3) Find out if they are coming to the next meeting
- 4) If they are not coming, ask why

The problem is, not all of the leaders like talking on the phone and not all of the members like talking on the phone and get down right annoyed with the leader calling each week. So really, what would be good is to do what is good for each member. Not all members like getting calls- but you may see some at school. If that is the case, talk to them in the halls, before class, after class, during lunch etc, just some communication would be great. If you don't see them at school- email them, IM them, or text them. If they don't like talking on the phone, then they may like another form of communication. Another way is to talk to them at Atmosphere. This is especially good for those that are shy. In most occasions those are the same person. The whole point is to realize that each person is different and you need to decide what form of communication would be best for them. Most important in this is that you take interest in the other person's life. You are a community of believers in your small group, and must invest in the lives of the others in your group.

## **Your Members:**

### **Where they are coming from—**

Sensitivity is sometimes the hardest thing as a leader. You look at those that are in your groups and you sometimes try to hold them up to your standards and what your life looks like. We cannot do this. It is very dangerous and detrimental to your group if you expect people to mimic you exactly. We as leaders need to not only see where they are in life, but also where they are coming from. The point of these groups is to get people to come to know Christ more and more and treasure Him in a community of others who are doing the same. For the believer, it means growth in love and knowledge of Christ, for the unbeliever, it means coming to know Him. Jesus said that those that are healthy do not need a physician, but those that are sick do (Luke 5:31). The sick (unsaved) are coming from terrible home environments, terrible school environments, etc. The goal of the leader is to be able to meet the people where they are at. All need to have some sort of small group of fellow warriors to help them grow, mature, and keep them accountable. At this point there is no formula, no set way, and no “trick” to being sensitive to their needs. Everybody does this differently. The best thing that I can say is be Biblical in what you do and how you speak. A good way to learn how to act and respond to those in need is to study leaders that God has put in your life. These leaders will help you grow to where you are helping others grow in the same way. As in the case of Barnabas in the book of Acts, we cannot be afraid of a Paul coming along and growing past us in love, faith and knowledge of Christ.

### **What they need to see in you—**

The Bible tells us that we should not all presume to be teachers because teachers will receive much harsher judgment (James 3:1). This is not to say that those who teach poorly are going to hell. But we need to understand that as leaders we need to teach what the members need to hear not what they want to hear.

Your members need to be taught how to live for God, how can they do so if what you say and what you do don't match up? This makes the two essential to your walk and theirs. If one of the students sees you at group and at Atmosphere telling of the need for repentance of certain sins in the lives of people, they are going to start to get a certain view of who you are. However, weekend services, and two hours during the week, are not enough for them to learn about the Christian walk. People need to see and hear you doing and saying what you tell them to do wherever they see you. This means at school, at work, at sporting events, at the mall, and any other place you go, you need to be living and speaking as Christ would. This means your Saturday night speech and Tuesday morning speech need to match. It also stretches to the internet. As a believer warning people how to live your on line networking sites cannot be full of questionable things. Your actions as well cannot fluctuate to where you are insensitive to the needs of those around you. Be consistent in your ministry, it is not easy, and many will fail, but that is why we are warned to not all be teachers. It takes a special person called of God to fulfill this role.

If we as leaders fail to warn people about where their lives are headed, they will walk down those ways and have to learn for themselves. So in teaching, do not be forceful, because that will lead them to rebel and be driven from Christianity. Also, do not be too soft. This will cause them to not only think that as believers they can continue to live in the ways of this world, but also that anything goes and truth is relative with all ways leading to heaven. This will displease God. We must learn the difficult task of being in between with people. Meet them where they are at, not expecting them to live up to your standards, but trying to get them to where they are walking with Jesus faithfully. He will bring them to where they need to be.

**How you need to see them—**

Look at the example of David, the humble shepherd boy who, with some encouragement, became the second and greatest king of Israel in the Old Testament. First Samuel 16:7 says, “*Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*” This is our charge when it comes to our group members. Do not, as Samuel did at first, look at who they are in the eyes of the world. Instead, look at people and see what God sees. This is incredibly difficult! We, as humans, are programmed to see the outward appearance, and even get a bad impression from their attitudes. So how do we look past these to see what Christ sees? As with many things in ministry, there is no set way to do things. And in everything that you do, all that will be consistent is the need for prayer and listening to God’s Will and Word for your life and ministry.

So when you are talking to people, as you will need to do in your ministry, keep in mind that God has a special plan for each one in your group. It is not your plan; God lets you in on it not the other way around. If you have an idea, write it down, pray over it for at least a week, and let others in leadership over you know so they can pray as well. After that, you will begin to get a sense of whether or not you should carry through with the idea. This includes appointing new leaders as well. If you see someone that could be a leader, do not approach it without humbly praying that God would show you His Will in it all.

That is how I would like to end this. There will come a day when you need to turn your small group over to another. This is never easy, but must be done with humility. No one will ever do things the exact way that you do them, but will bring their own ways in. This is not bad! God works in many ways but in the *same Spirit*. If they are preaching the truth, don’t try to change them. As you are training a replacement, they will keep running, all you need to do is point them towards Christ who is the purpose behind the entire ministry.

## **Good Resources on Small Groups (and the Church in general)**

Vintage Church- Driscoll and Breshears

Total Church- Chester and Timmis

City on a Hill- Ryken

Stop Dating the Church- Harris

Why Small Groups?- Mahaney

[www.atmospherechurch.com](http://www.atmospherechurch.com) – check out the SLG page and click on

*Resources* at the bottom