



LEADER TRAINING

August 24, 2024

2024/2025 LOOP Important Dates:

Every weekend between now and Sept 29th - LOOP sign ups and promotion. Wear your shirts on September 1st. Be in the lobby any weekend you're able with your shirt on to answer questions and sign people up for LOOPS.

Week of Sept 29th - All LOOPS begin

Week of December 1st - Last week that LOOPS meet (LOOP Party Week)

Week of January 12th - LOOPS resume for the Winter Semester

Week of June 1st - Last week that LOOPS meet (LOOP Party Week)

WHY ARE LOOPS IMPORTANT?

Fresh Start Mission Statement:

“To Connect the Love of Jesus to the Heart of our Community.”

Your LOOP is an [extension](#) of Fresh Start Church out in the community.

*They **worshiped together at the Temple** each day, **met in homes** for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity – all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved.” – Acts 2:46-47*

Small groups are the backbone of the Church.

In the first few hundred years of the Church, these kinds of groups were basically the only way the church gathered. People would meet on their own to fellowship, learn, and grow.

Small groups were crucial to the development and maturity of believers then and now.

Strong small groups start with strong small group leaders. That's why it's important to understand the significance of small groups and their power to help transform people's lives.

Life change happens in [circles](#) not rows!

People come to Fresh Start Church on the weekend and love the service, the music and the teaching but walk away and aren't able to talk about what they heard or learned and have a chance to grow.

That's what a LOOP does...it gives them a chance to discuss, ask questions and be challenged with what they heard on the weekend at Fresh Start.

It's not enough to just come to church on the weekends and it's not just enough to go to a LOOP. You need BOTH!

In order to effectively shepherd and lead a LOOP, it's important to understand what a LOOP is and what it is not.

A LOOP is NOT:

1. A **TEACHER** Driven Setting
2. A **CONFESSIONAL**
3. A **SUPPORT** Group
4. A **GRIPE** or **GOSSIP** Session

A LOOP IS...

1. Where people are **CARED** for

1 Corinthians 12:24-26 24 while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. 25 This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. 26 If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

2. Where people are **ENCOURAGED**

"Small Group leaders need to understand that many of the people they will lead don't believe in themselves. They need a leader who sees potential in them and is willing to do what it takes to direct them to become all they were created to be."

3. Where people are **CHALLENGED**
4. Where people find **PURPOSE**
5. Where people **GROW**

What Does a LOOP Do?

1. **MEET** together once a week or every other week.
2. **STUDY** the weekend message via an online study guide. The guide can be downloaded at FreshStart.Church/LOOPLeader
3. **SERVE** together at least once a semester.

What Does a LOOP Leader Do?

1. **PRAY** for LOOP members daily.
2. **LEAD** the LOOP every week or every other week.
3. **RAISE UP** others in their LOOP to become LOOP Leaders.

What does it take at Fresh Start Church to be a LOOP Leader?

1. **Be a Born Again Believer** - You've accepted Jesus, have been Scripturally baptized and are doing everything you can to grow in your relationship with Christ.
2. **Faithful and Dedicated to Fresh Start Church** - You're part of the Core at Fresh Start. You're attending on a regular basis, using your spiritual gifts to honor God and faithfully contributing financially through tithes and offerings.

FOUR F'S OF LEADING A LOOP

1. F - **FILL UP**

- Take ownership in filling up your LOOP.
- Weekend sign ups / online sign ups
- Talk to people at church or in Next Steps area in the lobby
- Outside of church: friends, neighbors, co-workers

List 4 people you can invite to join your LOOP:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

***Challenge:** Ask one person who does not go to Fresh Start to join your LOOP.

2. F - FOLLOW UP

- Immediate follow up (email with all pertinent info)
- Pre-LOOP Communication (at least one phone call and a reminder email right before the first meeting)
- On-going communication (minimum of 1 weekly email). Send out prayer requests and reminder emails about when you'll be meeting.

***Challenge:** Don't let ANYONE slip through the cracks.

3. F - FOCUS

- Pray for your LOOP and the individuals who sign up. God led them there for a reason. You're there to shepherd and lead them.
- Have a plan for your first meeting. Think about things like snacks, ice breakers, get to know you questions, etc.)

***Challenge:** Place your LOOP list in a place where you will see it every day.

4. F - FACILITATE

- Begin and end on time every time!
- Encourage everyone to participate in discussion
- Don't let one person ruin it for everyone else
- Provide the "2 C's" - Care to LOOP members and Communication to staff.
- Lead your LOOP in serving once a semester together (reach out to others in the community or serve at one of our partner organizations.)

***Challenge:** Be present and active in your LOOP and lead your LOOP in accomplishing the mission of Fresh Start Church.

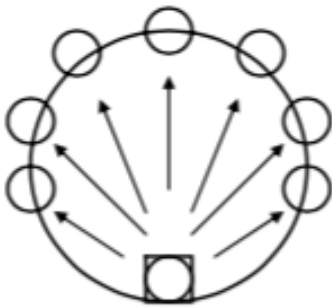
Leading a LOOP Discussion

A key element for building a LOOP into a community of disciples of Jesus Christ is having effective discussions. Discussion leading involves asking good questions and helping the group grapple with these questions and their answers - as a group. Your role is to keep the discussion biblically focused in order to lead men and women in greater understanding of Scripture and application of its principles to their lives.

An Important Role of the LOOP Leader: To facilitate discussion.

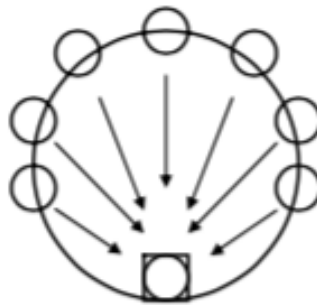
One of the main jobs of the LOOP leader is to facilitate discussion. There are times when the facilitator might do more talking to explain something in the material, but then they must transition to open discussion. Leaders must create an open atmosphere that invites participation of LOOP members and values their input. The following diagrams show two negative examples of LOOP dynamics to avoid and one positive example of Small Group dynamics.

NOT THIS:



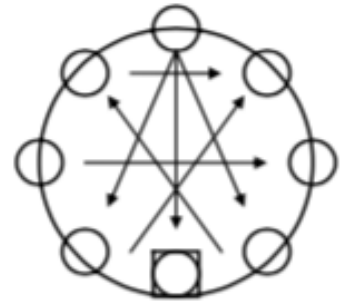
LEADER DOING
ALL THE TALKING

NOT THIS:



GROUP
RESPONDING ONLY
TO THE LEADER

BUT THIS:



GROUP INTERACTING
AS THE LEADER
GUIDES DISCUSSION

Leading Discussions

The following suggestions will aid you in leading discussions and fostering healthy group dynamics:

- **Arrange the group in a circle, if possible, so that everyone can see each other.** If someone separates him/herself from the group, encourage them to join in (“Make some room so John can squeeze in here.” etc.).
- **Let the group know that you don’t have all the answers.** If a question is asked to which you do not know the answer, tell the person you don’t know. Offer

to do some research (or ask a member to research the question) and come back the next time with a response for that person.

- **Let the group know that it's okay to interrupt you at any time if they have a question** and that there is no such thing as a dumb question.
- **Ask for input and feedback to what you have shared.**
- **Direct responses or questions back to the group when they are initially directed only to you** (“Let me hear what some of the rest of you think about that first. Anyone care to respond? Betty, what would you say?”).
- **Try to include everyone.** Ask a more reserved person what they think about the topic you are discussing. Let them know they don't have to share if they don't want to (“Let's hear from someone who hasn't had the chance to share yet... Linda, how about you?” etc.).
- **Ask “open-ended” questions as opposed to “yes or no” questions.** Not, “Did you like the Bible passage for this week?” but, “What did you like about the Bible passage for this week? or What did you get out of it?” Open-ended questions tend to promote discussion.
- **Ask for clarification or dig deeper into an answer to make it come alive** (“Does that work in a different situation too?” or “That's a good answer, but how easy is it to really do that?” or “Do any of the rest of you find that hard to do?” or “How does that work in everyday life?”).
- **Allow tangents, but refocus if necessary.** The group may wander off from the material, but the discussion may be what's on the heart of the group at that time. If the tangent is trivial, refocus the group back to the material (“Well, let's get back to our material... what do you think...”).
- **Acknowledge everyone who participates** (a nod, eye contact, or verbal encouragement, etc.).
- **Refer back to a point that someone else made** (“That's similar to what Jane said a little while ago about letting God have control...”).
- **Use summary statements to clarify discussion** (“So, what I hear you saying is...” etc.).
- **Ask questions in a conversational tone.** Do not simply read them out of a book, or say, “What did you put for question number five?” Rephrase the question to ask the same thing in a different way.

Guarding Discussions

While leaders are not to dominate discussions, that does not mean they are to back out of them. Appropriate input at appropriate times can help the discussion stay on track, add depth to the discussion, or tie the discussion back in to the lesson for that evening.

It is the leader's responsibility to guard the discussion—stepping in to stop inappropriate sharing. Below are a few situations to watch for...

- **Don't allow people to confess anyone's faults (particularly their spouse's) but their own.** Gossiping or griping about another person is not appropriate.
- **Don't allow doctrinal discussion to become divisive or argumentative.** Healthy discussion, even disagreement, regarding the tenets of the faith is to be encouraged, but must always be attended with charity.
- **Don't entertain negative attitudes toward the church.** The LOOP leader is expected to support the mission (*Connecting the Love of Christ to the Heart of Our Community*) and the vision (*A Fresh Start For You and the Ones You Love*) of Fresh Start Church, its philosophy of ministry, and its leadership. Encourage anyone with a specific concern to bring it to church leadership. Concerns for the church can be talked about by the LOOP in a healthy, positive way that encourages ownership ("Is there something we could do to help in this area?" etc.).
- **Don't allow one person's continual problem to be the focus of the group.** There are bound to be persons in groups that require extra care. Some of these people can be cared for and ministered to within the context of the LOOP; others may need help from someone professional or someone outside the group. Sound judgment is required here.

Effective Small Group Leadership

An effective small group leader ministers to others by promoting easier access to God. Let's take a closer look at what this means.

An effective small group leader is ...

Accessible

A welcoming environment sets the stage for effective small group ministry. We as leaders play an important role in establishing and promoting this foundation. By being aware of and willing to assimilate new members, we contribute to a welcoming environment.

You may want to have your group brainstorm ways you can help everyone feel welcome and included. Again, as a leader, you can model an attitude of openness that fosters inclusion.

We're accessible when we model transparency, honesty, and vulnerability. When we do this, we follow the example of Jesus as He served His disciples and all of us. We can be open with what we share and how we respond during discussions. When we practice accessibility, we not only invite members into our group; we also invite them into our lives. Specifically, we can include group members in discussion by referring back to comments they have made.

Caring

When we interact with group members' comments, we show we hear and care about them as individuals. Reuben Welch said it this way:

"Love says I care for you as a person. Love says in word and response I see you, I hear you, I know you are there. I am aware of you — I see you, I hear you, I know you are there."

An effective leader communicates love and care through words and actions to everyone in the group.

This genuine care will show itself as we acknowledge group members as individuals. Your group might celebrate special days together, such as members' birthdays. You may choose to guide a discussion about what the group wants to do for special occasions, which might include holidays. These celebrations don't need to be formal; it's more important that they serve as a vehicle for group members to care for one another.

Connected

Effective small group leaders take advantage of the many options for helping group members stay connected. Some small groups include a place on a group roster for members to indicate their preferred method of contact.

For example, as a parent, I communicate with my children using whatever method they're focused on at the time. At one point, we called each other on the phone. Then for a while, we used email. They had a brief fascination with social media (Facebook).

Once we all had access to text messages, we used that. Now we use any and all methods to stay connected. With your group, you may wish to find one way that works best for everyone.

We find examples of this level of connection in the life of Jesus as He walked among the people, not restricting His ministry to the synagogue on the Sabbath. The apostle Paul is another example as he worked and approached people in ways he believed they could relate to, for the purpose of sharing the good news about Jesus. He said, "I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel."

Staying connected keeps members engaged between group sessions. This is especially important when anyone misses a meeting.

Equipping

Effective small group leaders equip those in their group. They come alongside members, providing tools that equip them in their personal growth. The greatest way we can equip and assist our group members is to point them to the Answer: "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." As we offer Scripture in context, we encourage those in our group to read and discover the truth in God's Word for themselves.

When we actively listen as people share during group conversations, we equip them to engage with everyone, not just the group leader. We promote effective discussion when we encourage the group to ask and answer questions. Effective questioning strategies include asking open-ended questions and questions that help participants clarify their understanding of the discussion topic.

Sensitive

One question that often comes up in small group ministry is, what should I do if one member dominates the conversation? Some leaders have members take turns answering questions. One tip from the education community is that a random approach

keeps people more engaged, since they don't know when they might be called on to contribute. To keep participation random, you could have members pass a "baton" to another person for the next question or discussion point.

On the other hand, some group members may have quieter personalities. A sensitive leader considers their comfort level and encourages them to participate as they want to. Many people are willing to share once invited if they feel they'll be heard. Others may feel uncomfortable sharing aloud but may be active listeners, encouraging other members through eye contact and other positive body language.

Effective small group leaders understand the value of "wait time." Ideally, this pause lasts at least three seconds. Wait time allows participants to think about their responses. Since some people need more time to process than others, wait time gives everyone equal opportunity to interact with the content, even if only a few verbally respond.

A small but tangible way you can show sensitivity to group members is in your approach to group sharing or prayer time. During our last small group meeting, the leader said that no one needed to feel pressured to share or pray aloud. I believe a visible reminder of this guideline will be helpful. Next month I plan to take a small object for group members to use as a token when they wish to "pass." As it's passed around the group, it will serve as an outward expression of their desire to not speak, allowing other members to keep track of who will speak next.

Supporting

We support our group members when we maintain an environment that facilitates discussion. You could divide the group to maximize participation. At first people may not want to split the group, thinking that cliques will form or some people will feel left out. An effective leader will explain the benefits of different approaches to group discussion. You can reassure members that smaller groups will help everyone get to know one another better. You could also remind people that group dynamics change with each combination of individuals, even as attendance changes from week to week.

Another way to support individuals is to pace the discussion to allow everyone time to speak. In a small group I attend, everyone is committed to participating, which presents its own challenge: having enough time for everyone to share. At our last meeting, we used a timer so that each person has an equal amount of time to share. This worked well and supported everyone by balancing the amount of feedback and input each person gave and received.

It's exciting to participate with God in His business of loving people and drawing them closer to Him. Our effectiveness as small group leaders begins with this truth we can claim before interacting with anyone from our group: the access God gives each of us to Himself.

“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.... He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”

Any doubts or fears we have as small group leaders are calmed by the peace God gives. As we look to Him, He enables us to effectively lead our small groups and guide them to access God as we are

Accessible
Caring
Connected
Equipping
Sensitive
Supporting

LOOPS

Fall 2024 Semester

Possible Itinerary for your 1st LOOP

- Allow people to arrive, talk, and snack – 15 min.
- Pray – 1 min.
- Have everyone introduce themselves and share what they do, where they are from, and why they decided to join the group. Have everyone wear name tags the first night so they can remember each others' names. – 10 min.
- Introductory game...have everyone tell 3 things about themselves (2 being true and 1 being false). Have everyone else try to guess which one is false. Any other interactive, fun game. – 10 min.

Check out https://insight.typepad.co.uk/40_icebreakers_for_small_groups.pdf for a list of other easy icebreakers to use.

- Explain that each week your LOOP will discuss the weekend message at Fresh Start. Emphasize the importance of attending church each weekend and even taking notes so you can have good discussion about the message. Answer any questions – 15 minutes.
- Explain and ask for volunteers for the different roles within the group: Play Coordinator, Food Coordinator, Recording and sending out prayer requests, etc. – 5 minutes.
- Share prayer requests and pray together – 10 minutes.
- Talk and eat – 15 minutes.
- Take Attendance - This is as simple as clicking a button in your email after your group meets.

Access and Manage your LOOP Online:

- FreshStart.Church/LOOPLeader is where you will go to get the weekly study guides you'll use in your LOOP. You can download them and print them out (just for you, the leader) or you can use them on your phone or mobile device. Each week you'll use these to guide discussion and lead your LOOP.
 - Key Idea
 - Key Scriptures - give these out to different people to read.
 - Discussion Questions - don't feel like you have to hit every question.
 - Things coming up - Be sure you inform your LOOP of what's happening next and encourage their participation.

Use the Church Center App to organize, communicate and manage your LOOP:

- Add your LOOP Meeting days and times so those who sign up for your LOOP know when you're going to be meeting.
 - Go to the Events tab and click 'Actions'
 - From there you will add in when you're going to be meeting.
- Add resources for your LOOP to access
 - These can be website links or even documents that you'd like to share with your LOOP.
- The Members tab will show you who's in your LOOP. From here you can email them all and even add new people into your LOOP.
- From the main tab you can start a new LOOP chat and interact with your LOOP right from within the Church Center App.
 - This is a great way to send out Prayer Requests, meeting notifications, etc.
- When you meet, you'll get an email to take attendance. You'll simply go into the Church Center app and check all those that showed up to your LOOP.

The Church Center app is a great resource to help you be as successful as possible with keeping up with your LOOP. This saves you the time and effort of having an email list or long text threads. We highly recommend you use it often!