

STARTING A H.E.A.R. GROUP

Starting A H.E.A.R. Group -

A QuickStart Guide

Note

Don't have time to read the whole document? Here's the quick version for those who just want to get going:

1. Pray and find 2 other people who are interested in learning more about following Jesus.
 - They may be at church, or at your workplace or school, or a family member or friend.
 - Ideally all three people are the same gender as this will usually enable more honest discussion with struggles etc.
2. Pick a start date and a Bible plan
 - The Bible plan will ideally have about a chapter of the Bible each day that you're reading.
 - You're going to be meeting for six months, so you'll either want a six-month plan or a number of smaller plans.
3. Have your first weekly H.E.A.R. group meeting:
 - Connect - catch up
 - Accountability time - how did everyone go with last week's commitment from the Bible? (obviously not at the first meeting)
 - Read a chapter of the Bible and do a H.E.A.R. journal individually
 - Highlight - what verse in the chapter stood out to you most?
 - Explain - what does that verse mean in the context of the chapter and book?
 - Apply - what do I feel like Jesus is saying through that verse to me?
 - Respond - what will I commit to doing this week as a result of reading this verse?
 - Share your insights and especially what you're committing to this week
 - Find out and pray for any needs in the group or needs that you're aware of
4. Each day for the rest of the week
 - Read a chapter of the Bible (good to do it as part of a plan that you're all working on together)
 - Do your own H.E.A.R. journal based on what you read.
 - Maybe share it with the group online to help with accountability and action (eg take a photo of the page and upload it to a group chat)

5. Each member of the group takes turns at 'leading' subsequent weekly group meeting so they get used to it
 6. After six months, finish up the group, and then each member starts the process again with another 2 people.
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Starting A H.E.A.R. Group

The longer, more detailed version!

What Is A H.E.A.R. Group?

A H.E.A.R. group is a small group of 2 or 3 members who want to grow in their walk with God and commit to

- meeting together each week for connection, accountability, reading Scripture, and prayer
- daily reading the Bible, journalling, and putting their reading into action
- at the end of 6 months, prayerfully considering starting their own new discipleship group with 2 new people.

H.E.A.R. refers to the method of studying the Bible that the participants do daily individually and weekly together.

Why Do A H.E.A.R. Group?

- Jesus calls every one of us to make disciples.
- In order for us to reach the world, a viral/exponential approach is needed. Rather than trying to get people to 'come', it's more effective to empower Christians to 'go'!
- It's often an easier pitch to invite someone to read the Bible together than it is to invite them to come to church or a small group (although we eventually want them to come to church too!)

Who Can Lead A H.E.A.R. Group?

Anyone who has:

- a desire to read and apply Bible teachings to their life
- a desire to walk alongside and help other people get to know Jesus

You don't have to know everything about the Bible. In fact, it's probably better if you don't! The emphasis is on reading and obeying what Jesus says, rather than sharing knowledge.

What is the life-span of a H.E.A.R. group?

We encourage H.E.A.R. groups to last for about 6 months. It should be long enough for:

- New believers to learn how to read the Bible and apply it to their lives
- For each member to have the chance to facilitate the group a number of times
- For the members to feel confident in how the group runs so that they could do it with someone else.

How is a H.E.A.R. Group different to a Bible Study group?

In the Western world, we have a tendency to equate spiritual growth with knowledge. If we know more, then we think we grow more.

But the Bible makes it clear that spiritual growth is actually about obedience - *doing* something with what you know.

A H.E.A.R. group is focussed not just on people learning about Jesus and the Bible's teachings - but actually obeying them and putting them into practice.

The outcome of a H.E.A.R. group is less about a journal full of notes, and more about a transformed life that is actively applying the teachings and commands of Jesus and the Bible.

How many people are in a H.E.A.R. Group?

- The recommendation for a H.E.A.R. group is either 2 members, or 3 members. It is not recommended to have more than 3.
- If more people are interested to join, rather than extend the group, the encouragement is start new groups of 2 or 3.
- The reason for the 2 or 3 limit is both practical and spiritual.
 - People are more likely to open up and be more honest and vulnerable with one or two other people than when more are present.
 - It's much easier to organise a meeting time with 2 or 3 than with more.
 - Group meetings take much longer with more than 3 people, if you're going to actively give time to each person to share.
 - Every family begins with 2 people who then become 3 (or more).
 - Groups of 2 and 3 have been scientifically proven to be transformational for people's lives. Bigger groups can be good for pastoral care, community and having a sense of belonging to something greater.
- There are also numerous advantages of a micro (2-3 member) group over a traditional church small group (6+ member) group when it comes to making disciples:

Small Group (6+)	H.E.A.R. Group (2-3)
Need suitable leader	Anyone can lead
Doesn't really work with low attendance	Only needs 2 people
Need enough people to start one	Can start with one other person
Hard to plant	Easy to plant

Small Group (6+)	H.E.A.R. Group (2-3)
Need to work around lots of schedules	Work around a few schedules
No clear ending	Definitive ending
Hard to get a vision beyond the group meeting	Preparation for vision beyond itself

What Do I Need To Start?

- A group of 2 or 3 people (including yourself) who are committed to reading and journaling daily and meeting weekly.
- A weekly meeting time and location
- A Bible Reading Plan
- A H.E.A.R. journal for each participant (this is just a notebook either physical or digital where they can journal what God is speaking to them)
- A way of communicating during the week (FB Messenger, WhatsApp, text, phone call etc)

The METHOD -> How To Start A Discipleship Group

Sow

In this first step, you go about your life and you aim to bring Jesus and your faith into conversations, looking for opportunities to share. This step will help you identify people who might be open to the message of Christ, and ready for you to share.

It's important in your day to day life that people know that you have a Christian faith so that you're identified as someone that people might want to talk to, to learn more.

Seek

As you go about sowing, you're seeking for someone who could potentially be discipled. Some discipleship methods call this person a 'Person Of Peace'

Jesus ministered to, loved, and helped everyone he came across - and we're supposed to do that too. But when it comes to choosing someone who will be part of a discipleship process and go on to disciple others, the criteria above becomes really important.

Seek At Church

The people that you're looking for might be in your church already - perhaps a new Christian, or struggling in their faith. Or perhaps they're already a strong Christian, but showing them this method of discipleship could prove helpful for them in discipling others. If you're just

starting out in your discipleship journey, then beginning with other Christians is a great way to 'learn the ropes' before starting with a new believer.

Seek At Work / School

The beauty of the H.E.A.R. group model is that you don't have to get someone to church to start off with. You can begin with them perhaps in a lunch break, or in a cafe before work or school. Anyone who's open to learning more about Jesus could be a potential disciple.

Look for F.A.T. people!

People who have done a lot of discipling encourage those who want to start groups to look for F.A.T. people! Obviously this is not to do with their physical weight - but an indication of their attitude and heart:

- Faithful - look for someone who follows through on their commitments.
- Available - someone who has (or can make) the time to follow through with discipleship (this will become evident in the Share part of the process.
- Teachable - someone who is actually willing to learn and grow.

While you can literally disciple anyone, you will generally find that people who fit the above criteria are able to follow through with the commitment of a H.E.A.R. group and have a better chance of then taking it to others too.

Look for people who are the same gender as you

While this is not hard and fast and may not be a 'PC' thing to say, it is still helpful to think about having the members of your H.E.A.R. group being the same gender. Reasons for this include:

- Your invitation to join a Bible study group could be less interpreted incorrectly as you being 'interested' in them!
- Discussions in the group can sometimes be more authentic and honest when people are talking to others of the same gender.
- If a husband and wife join separate H.E.A.R. groups then not only can they receive help and support for issues in their marriage, but if they have children then one can look after them while the other attends a H.E.A.R. group. This solves a problem that many small groups face when they have married couples attending.

Pray Hard!

Just like Jesus prayed all night before he chose his disciples - it's so important that as a discipler, you really take the time to pray and seek God before approaching someone to offer to disciple them. Make sure that you've got a sense from God that this is the right person to ask.

Share

When you've identified someone who could be a potential person for a H.E.A.R. group - share the vision with them. Here's an example:

"Hey, I've noticed that you seem to be really interested in God and spiritual things. I was wondering if you might like to read the Bible together with me - we can discuss what we're reading and learn together?"

It's important that at the start, they understand what commitment would be involved:

"The plan would be that we'd each read a chapter of the Bible each day, and write our thoughts in a journal - which I'll show you how to do. Then we'll get together once a week and talk about what we've read"

Sessions

The 'sessions' part of the method is when you actually get into the daily reading and journaling, and the weekly meeting process. These elements are explored further below

Send

As the group begins to reach the 6month mark, you'll want to start talking about finishing up and then all starting new groups with 2 other people.

Of course, the relationships that have been built can continue on after the 'official' end of the group. But the reason for concluding the groups is so that more people can be reached and sent.

Start Again

Once the group concludes, then each member begins the process again of 'sowing' and 'seeking' to look for 2 new people to start a new H.E.A.R. group with.

The MEETING -> What Happens In The Weekly Meeting

There's not 'one right way' to run an H.E.A.R. group. It's more about the outcome of obedience and growth in life that comes from it, rather than the teaching focus in it. But I include this as a 'starting point' with some notes along the way. The timings are just examples, and would need to be curated for each group.

WEEKLY MEETING OVERVIEW – 1.5hours

☰ Example

- 20 min Connection Time (Personal Connection)
- 20min Accountability Time (Opening Prayer, Accountability, Journals)
- 30min Scripture & Discussion Time (Scripture Reading & Discussion)
- 20min Next Steps & Prayer Time (Commitment To Action, Practical Opportunities, Prayer For Each Other)

PERSONAL CONNECTION

There needs to be a 'how are you going' moment at the start of the group meeting so that the initial sense of connection is established_

Important

The snare for discipleship groups is that they can easily just dissolve into 'life catchups'. So while it's important to take time to feel connected, it's more important for the purposes of discipleship that the growth and accountability takes place. The facilitator needs to take responsibility for guiding the group through the material.

Example

6m each - highlights / lowlights of the week

- Ensure this happens quickly and note down potential items for prayer at the end

OPENING PRAYER

- Facilitator starts with prayer to open

ACCOUNTABILITY

There needs to be an 'accountability moment' that links into the last meeting, and your Christian life during the week. The accountability is an important key to growth and the element that is missing from most Connect Groups and definitely church services.

Example

How did you go with what you felt God calling you to do last week? (3mins each)

JOURNALS

Because the group members are expected to be taking time on a daily basis to read their Bible, pray and journal, it's important within the group that they can share their results from the last week. It's also part of the accountability.

Example

3m each - Share progress on daily journals, and one highlight from your weeks reading

This could also be augmented with, for example, a Messenger chat between the members sharing insights on a daily or every few day basis.

SCRIPTURE READING & DISCUSSION

The point of meeting together is not just for accountability and prayer, but to discuss and grow together in God's Word too. So reading a passage of Scripture together and discussing it is vital. This also doubles as a training ground for new believers to learn how to hear from God through the Scripture.

- Read passage together. Take 3mins to go through the HEAR process (Highlight, Explain, Apply, React) and write the notes down in your journal (3mins)
- Discussion together on the passage (20mins)

Important

The facilitator needs to ensure that discussion is restricted to 'what's in the passage'. It's not helpful for the group if people start linking it to a message they heard preached, or a great insight that they read in a book etc. This is for two reasons:

1. It alienates new Christians in the group and makes them feel like their contributions aren't as insightful or good
2. it perpetuates the culture of Christian growth being linked to 'how much you know' rather than 'how much you obey'

The facilitator needs to continually draw people back and say 'but what does the passage say to YOU'. Make it in the moment and personal application.

COMMITMENT TO ACTION

This is important because it lays the commitment to life change that the participant is going to make over the coming week. They have to tell the others what they're going to do, so that there's a level of accountability and intentionality to it.

- Based on what you've read today – what specific change is Jesus calling you to make in your life THIS WEEK?

Important

This needs to be something that will be able to be 'done' by the next time the groups meets. Eg. Show compassion for someone, pray for healing for someone, bring my anger to God and not give in to it. RATHER THAN – love Jesus more, be a good person etc.

PRACTICAL OPPORTUNITIES

Many groups put a section like this in, to keep the group not just a spiritual but a practical group, and to be a constant reminder that we need to be Jesus' hands and feet.

Example

Are there any practical needs in the group or beyond the group that we could look to assist with this week?

PRAYER FOR EACH OTHER

Based on the highlights/lowlights shared at the start, and the commitment to action that's been made during the meeting – participants then finish by praying for one another

The MATERIALS -> What you need to start a H.E.A.R. group

A Weekly Meeting

As described above.

A Bible Reading Plan

- The Bible plan will ideally have about a chapter of the Bible each day that you're reading.
- You're going to be meeting for six months, so you'll either want a six-month plan or a number of smaller plans.
- There are some sample plans and ideas at <https://www.theriver.org.nz/discipleship>

A H.E.A.R. Journal

- This is just a notebook either physical or digital where participants can journal what God is speaking to them. It can be as simple or bespoke as each participant wants it to be.
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