

# Frequently asked questions about forming and leading an Essential Practices group

## What is an Essential Practices group?

An Essential Practices group is a group that is small (3-5 people is ideal), usually same-gender, and closed (once it's formed, new members aren't added).

It's a group that meets once a week so members can share stories about the experiences they're having as they learn and use the six spiritual practices in a volume of Essential Practices of the Faith.

The weekly meetings are usually a great experience because:

- **They are different**—they don't involve any teaching or studying, just the sharing of stories.
- **They allow for flexibility**—if someone needs to miss a meeting, the group still stays on track.
- **They are short**—they usually last 30-45 minutes.

The challenge is to put together a meeting schedule that works for everyone in the group. Most Essential Practices groups spend two weeks on each practice. Below are two different suggestions for mapping out a schedule.

Break the learning into two different six-week periods. The group learns practices 1-3 during the first six-week period, takes a break, and then learns practices 4-6 during the second six-week period. The length of the break is of the group's choosing; it can be as short as two weeks or it can be as long as a couple months.

Break the learning into three four-week periods. The group learns practices 1-2 during the first four-week period, takes a break, learns practices 3-4 during the second four-week period, takes a break, and then learns practices 5-6 during the third four-week period. This option can be helpful if the group is trying to work around holidays or vacations.

A good rule of thumb is to get through all six practices within a six-month period. This will maintain momentum and keep all members engaged.

## How much time will it take to lead one?

Leading an Essential Practices group takes far less time than leading a traditional small group. The main reason is that the leader has just three simple responsibilities: 1) form the group, 2) get the group started, and 3) keep the group going. These responsibilities are not time-consuming, and the preparation is made easy by the tools provided on the *essentialpractices.com* website (select the “Group tools” link in the menu bar).

Another reason that the time commitment is not great is that Essential Practices groups are groups that form for just a period of time, and when the work is done, usually stop meeting. Therefore, the leadership role lasts for just weeks, rather than for months or years.

## How do I form one?

The best way is to ask God to bring people to your mind (those whom he wants you to invite); be prepared for God to bring names to mind that you wouldn't have thought of right away.

Once you have a list of names, ask God to give you the courage to invite each person. Then contact each person, telling them about your decision to lead an Essential Practices group. Tell each person that you prayed about whom to invite and that his or her name came to your mind. Ask if they have heard about Essential Practices and direct them to the website for more information. Say that you will recontact them in two or three days to get their decision.

Remember, all you need for an Essential Practices group is you and two other people. Have confidence that God will lead you to the right people and put into their hearts the desire to join your group.

## How do I get the group started?

The first step is to make sure everyone has a book. The best way to ensure that each person has a book on time is for you to order for the group. However, you have the option of asking each person to order his or her own book from *essentialpractices.com*. The second step is to contact everyone and determine a date and time for the first meeting.

Before that meeting, go to the website, click on the “Group Tools” link, and download this document:

[Notes for leading an Essential Practices group's first meeting](#)

These notes provide everything that you will need to prepare and conduct the first meeting.

## How do I keep the group on track?

The best thing you can do to keep your group on track is to keep it small (3-5 people). The small size of an Essential Practices group fosters intimacy and trust, which makes people open to being held accountable for attending meetings and doing the work between meetings.

The next best thing to do is to make sure you stick to an agenda and avoid extraneous discussions. To make that easy, click on the “Group Tools” link, and download this document:

[Notes for leading the weekly sharing meetings](#)

But no matter what you do, problems are bound to come up—people miss meetings, people don’t always do the work, discussions get off track (or don’t take place at all), etc. When these types of things happen, go to the “Group Tools” link and download three tools that will help you learn how to resolve common group problems:

[A tool for dealing with a group member who repeatedly misses meetings](#)

[A tool for dealing with a group member who repeatedly doesn’t practice between meetings](#)

[A tool for dealing with a group member who repeatedly tries to engage the group in critiquing or discussing the practice](#)

The tools, combined with prayer, will make it easy for you to keep your group on track.

If you need further assistance, send us an email or give us a call.

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