

Connecting People in Gospel Community

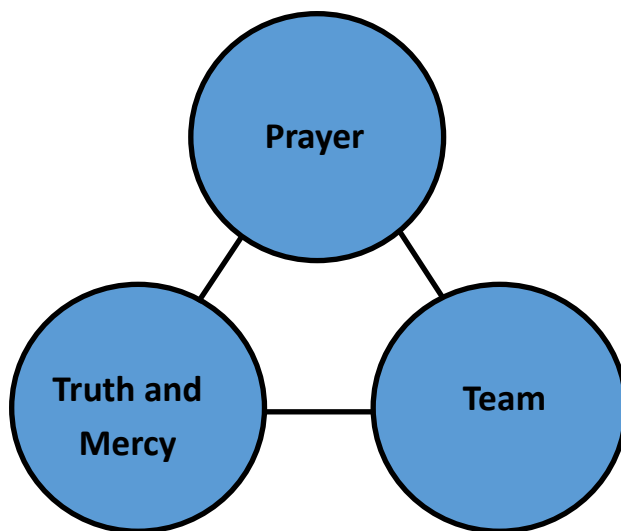


Setting up a sexual discipleship group in your church

A small group focused on sexuality issues is not your typical church small group. This kind of group presents unique goals and challenges, so here are three components to doing it well.

Find people to commit to praying regularly with you for all aspects of this ministry.

Create a safe place for a struggler to be honest, and always point to the truth of Christ's mercy.



Recruit and equip a team of ministry helpers.

1. Prayer!

It should go without saying that no real ministry happens without the active involvement of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. So, the first step in setting up an effective sexual discipleship group is to recruit a team to begin praying together. To ensure this happens, schedule regular times for the team to pray together. This is spiritual warfare; trying to set up this ministry without the King will fail.

2. Truth and Mercy!

Harvest USA has always advocated for equal commitment to both truth and mercy. A commitment to truth and mercy refers not only to a reliance on the Bible—God’s will and promises—but also to mercy in individuals’ lives and struggles. This suggests two main guidelines for an effective group: creating a safe place for struggling sinners to be honest and maintaining a focus on Christ and biblical truth.

A. Create a safe place for honest fellowship.

The Bible teaches that growth in Christ always happens in community, through the honesty, humility, love, and challenge of spiritual brothers and sisters. This principle provides the motivation for bringing sexual strugglers together in a group.

But sexual sin struggles are marked by shame and fear of exposure. Most strugglers are reticent to talk about their experiences with anyone, much less a group. Take this into account as you plan for your sexual discipleship group. Here are some pointers that will help you:

- **A safe location and time.** Try to find a meeting location and time that will not make attendees nervous about being exposed. Is there a location off of the church campus? Share the day and time of the meeting only with those who have been admitted into the group.
- **A safe way to join the group.** A sexual struggler will usually dare to talk honestly to one trusted person before opening up to several others. Identify a few spiritually mature and gracious people to be available to meet one on one with those seeking help. Their task will be to gently lead hesitant strugglers into honest fellowship, to begin the process of helping them see how to apply the gospel, and to prepare them for widening the scope of their honesty to include the small group. (Note: It may not be appropriate to invite certain people into the group. For example, a man who has a history of abusing and manipulating others may not be a safe addition to a group that includes men who are still working through having been abused themselves. This will call for some wisdom.)
- **Lead in a way that encourages safe honesty.** You will show by your own humility in community that you welcome and expect such humility and honesty from others. A blog post that explains this well is [“Helping a sexual struggler open up and talk.”](#)
- **Promise confidentiality (with exceptions).** It is essential that some assurance of confidentiality be given, in writing, both at the beginning of any one-on-one meeting and when each person

enters the group. Those seeking help will not be honest with you unless they trust your promise to keep their honesty in confidence. This need for trust is multiplied when they begin sharing precious details of their lives with multiple people in a group setting! Yet confidentiality always has limits. One limit on confidentiality is the legal requirement to report certain things, like any illegal contact with a minor (see your state's mandatory reporting laws).

Another consideration is the need to leave open the possibility of further accountability to church discipline. Generally, someone seeking help is, by that very act, expressing a repentant heart, but it is possible that a group member can work the system to conceal a heart committed to rebellion. A church-based group must love such a person through expanded church discipline or pastoral involvement. This possibility must be included in a confidentiality statement, but be very careful here: The statement and any subsequent discipline must assure men that true repentance involves serious struggles and failures and that their confession of those failures will not lead to public shame or exposure.

Below are some sample documents you can consult as examples of striking that balance. You will need to work with your church leadership to craft documents that will create the right kind of safe confidentiality for your sexual discipleship group.

[Sample group covenants](#)

B. Constantly point to Christ and biblical truth.

The truth shared in a discipleship group for sexual strugglers is not just the personal truth of the members of the group; it must also be God's truth. How do you make sure you emphasize both the truth of group members' lives and the truth of God's Word?

1. We recommend two main sections to a group meeting: one section that incorporates personal honesty in the context of focused Bible study, and another section in which the men both honestly share and pray for each other's real-life struggles. The study/discussion section is primarily focused on God's truth, but in a way that encourages relating it honestly to real life; the prayer section is primarily focused on personal honesty in a way that directs prayer to the savior.

2. Use a curriculum that relates biblical truth to the reality of people's lives. Any curriculum that does this well could work, even if it is not explicitly designed to focus on sexuality. Here are the curricula that we use:

Women's Groups

[Sexual Sanity for Women](#)

Men's Groups

[Sexual Sanity for Men](#)

[Discovery: A Biblical Support Group Curriculum for Men Pursuing Sexual Integrity](#)

Parents of Children Identifying as LGBTQ:

[*Shattered Dreams, New Hope*](#)

Wives Groups:

[*When Your Husband Is Addicted to Pornography*](#)

3. Don't do it alone!

You need a team. You need individuals willing to lead one on one meetings. You need co-leaders willing to facilitate the group. You need to regularly meet as a team to encourage each other and to pray for one another and for the members of the group. Make sure your team members understand the dynamics of applying the gospel to difficult sin struggles—that is, make sure they understand the Harvest USA Tree Model. You can find tools to train your team in the Harvest USA Tree Model in our video curriculum, [*God's Design for Sexuality in a Changing Culture*](#), and in the first two lessons of *Discovery: A Biblical Support Group Curriculum for Men Pursuing Sexual Integrity*.