

# THE STATE OF GROUPS

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Trends and Best Practices for  
Groups Ministry in Churches

Lifeway<sup>®</sup> research  
Insights Report

A church without discipleship is just a gathering. And groups ministry is key for making disciples in the local church. Although Sunday School goes by many names today, it is still a time-honored and effective ministry for teaching the Bible, reaching people for Christ, assimilating them into the church, and growing them as disciples. But many churches are asking how their Bible study groups are doing after the disruptions of the past few years. Recent data from Lifeway Research provides valuable insights into the state of groups, leading to practical steps for fostering vibrant and healthy groups.

**Lifeway Research conducted a comprehensive study on how churches are conducting groups in the United States. The State of Groups study surveyed 1,021 adult Bible study groups ministry leaders in Protestant or non-denominational churches.**

This research takes a close look at the key elements shaping small group ministry today. If you've ever wondered how your church's groups compare to others or how to optimize your group structure for growth and connection, this report is for you.

Inside, you'll find the most up-to-date research on everything from group logistics and makeup to meeting frequency, locations, group size, and organization. We also dive into the issue of leader training—an essential aspect of building thriving, discipleship-driven groups. Whether you're already leading a vibrant group ministry or looking for ways to jumpstart one, the actionable insights throughout this report will help you apply best practices that can take your groups to the next level.

We hope this report will not only provide you with helpful data but also inspire new ideas for enhancing your ministry. As you read, consider how these trends and strategies might serve your church and equip your leaders to deepen relationships and grow disciples in meaningful ways.

Thank you for all you do to lead and care for your congregations. We're excited to see how these insights will help you continue to build strong, Christ-centered communities through your groups.

**Ken Braddy**

Lifeway's Director of Sunday School

# KEY FINDINGS

## » SUNDAY SCHOOL IS STILL PREVALENT

More than half (56%) of churches say the label “Sunday School” describes at least part of their groups ministry.

## » BUT GROUPS GO BY MANY NAMES

Almost 3 in 4 (72%) churches say they’re comfortable with others referring to their groups as adult Bible studies. Around 2 in 5 (39%) say small groups. Fewer say the terms adult Bible fellowships (13%), life groups (13%), or connect groups (10%) fit their ministry.

## » BIBLE STUDY IS CENTRAL TO GROUPS

Almost half (46%) of adult Bible study groups ministry leaders say Bible study is the highest objective for their groups.

## » LESS THAN HALF OF WORSHIP ATTENDEES PARTICIPATE IN SMALL GROUPS

Around 2 in 5 worship attendees at the average church (44%) also typically participate in small groups.

## » MOST GROUPS MEET AT LEAST WEEKLY

Almost every church leader (93%) says their ongoing groups are meeting at least weekly, including 85% who say once a week and 8% who say more than once a week.

## » MOST GROUPS MEET IN CHURCH FACILITIES

More than 9 in 10 leaders (92%) have groups gathering at the church building or whatever location the congregation meets in for worship.

## » MOST CHURCHES DO NOT LIMIT GROUP SIZE

Nine in 10 churches (90%) say they do not limit the size of ongoing adult Bible study groups, although smaller groups are recommended for more effective discipleship.

## » THERE IS LITTLE TURNOVER AMONG GROUP MEMBERS

Almost 9 in 10 leaders (89%) agree most group participants have been in the same group for at least two years.

## » THERE ARE DIVERSE ORGANIZATION METHODS FOR GROUPS

Almost half of leaders (45%) say their groups are organized by an interest in the topic being studied. Around 3 in 10 organize around age (31%), life stage (29%), and gender (28%).

## » THERE IS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT IN MONITORING GROUP ENGAGEMENT

Around half (53%) of churches say they track attendance in their adult Bible study groups. Only slightly more (56%) say they maintain a roster of who is in each group.

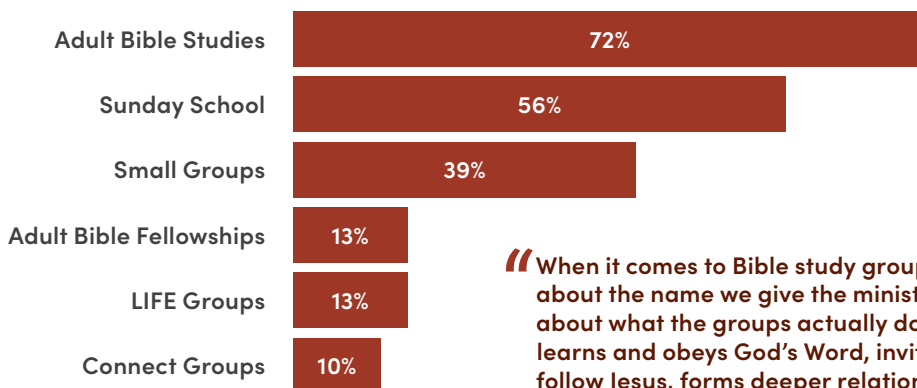
## » GROUP LEADERS NEED MORE TRAINING

More than 1 in 3 (36%) churches say they do not provide any training for their small group leaders.

# GROUPS LOGISTICS

More than half (56%) of U.S. Protestant churches say the label “Sunday School” describes at least part of their groups ministry. Almost 3 in 4 (72%) say they are comfortable with others referring to their groups as adult Bible studies. Around 2 in 5 (39%) say small groups. Fewer say the terms adult Bible fellowships (13%), life groups (13%), or connect groups (10%) fit their ministry.

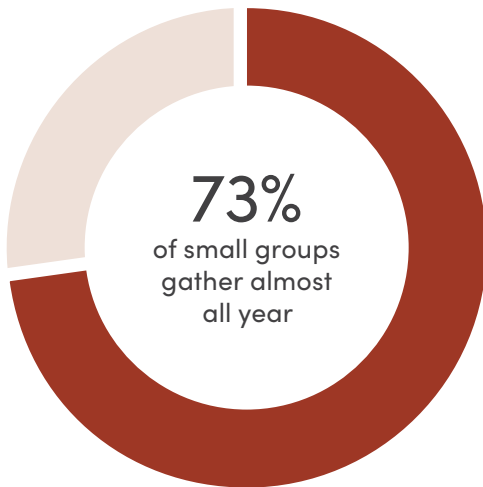
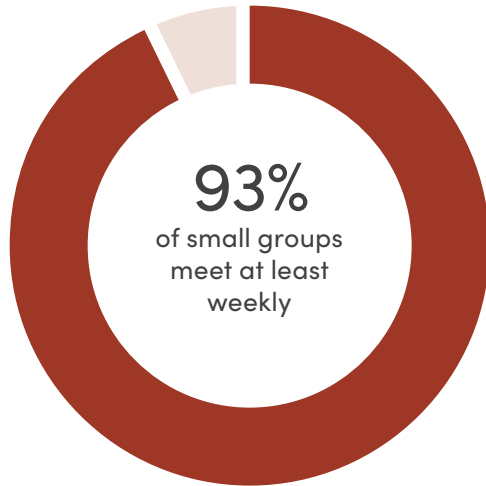
## If someone used these generic labels for types of groups, which would fit your church’s ongoing groups?



“When it comes to Bible study groups, it’s less about the name we give the ministry and more about what the groups actually do. If a group learns and obeys God’s Word, invites others to follow Jesus, forms deeper relationships, and engages in acts of service inside the church and out in the community, you can call a group ministry whatever you like.”

— Ken Braddy, Lifeway’s Director of Sunday School

Almost every church leader (93%) says their ongoing groups are meeting at least weekly, including 85% who say once a week and 8% who say more than once a week. Fewer say they gather every two weeks (5%) or once a month (2%).



For around three-quarters (73%), those gatherings happen basically all year long. Almost half (47%) say they meet all year, while another 26% say they meet all year except for a few holidays. Around 1 in 5 (19%) take the summers off but otherwise meet the rest of the year. Fewer groups ministry leaders say they meet for two semesters of two to three months (3%) or three similar length trimesters (2%). Only 3% say their church has some other type of meeting schedule.

More than 9 in 10 leaders (92%) have groups gathering at the church building or whatever location the congregation meets in for worship. Fewer than 1 in 3 (31%) say at least some groups meet in homes, while 13% use various off-campus locations. On average, 4 in 5 groups (79%) meet at the church building.

Three in 10 leaders (30%) say their groups exclusively meet before or after their weekly worship service. Another 35% of churches say their groups meet any day or night of the week other than when they regularly gather for worship. A similar percentage (36%) say they have groups gathering both before or after services and other times during the week.

**“The way churches choose to operate their adult ongoing groups fits their focus. Leaders of adult groups ministries prioritize Bible study, relationships, and intentional disciple making as objectives of ongoing groups. It’s not surprising that these groups meet frequently, break infrequently, and stay together, reinforcing their goals of living in disciple-making relationships.”**

— Scott McConnell,  
Executive Director  
of Lifeway Research

# 7 WAYS TO PREPARE YOUR CHURCH'S SMALL GROUPS FOR SUMMER

## 1 SHARE THE TEACHING RESPONSIBILITIES

Summer is a great time for recruiting people to teach single sessions (or perhaps even a month-long series of studies). Group leaders can include others in a teaching rotation, giving the group leader some rest and helping people discover they are more capable than they think when it comes to leading a Bible study group.

## 2 PLAN SEVERAL FUN FELLOWSHIPS

Summer movies, barbecues, baseball games, golf outings, a day at the lake, and day trips to places in your area can be fun diversions and occasions to gather members and potential members. Summer has a fun, relaxed feel and is the perfect time to get creative.

## 3 CONTACT CHRONIC ABSENTEES

Every group has them—people who are absent more than they are present. Summer months can be spent contacting people you haven't seen in a while. Divide up absentees' contact information among willing group members and allow others to play a part in a summer reclamation ministry.

## 4 ENLIST AN APPRENTICE TEACHER

Summer months are the perfect time to recruit a member of your group to become the group's apprentice leader. Churches often provide training and encouragement in August around back-to-school time. When a potential apprentice can expect support and training, it's a lot easier to say yes to the opportunity to co-lead the group.

## 5 CLEAN UP YOUR MEETING SPACE

Why not use the summer months to do some belated spring cleaning? Most on-campus classrooms tend to accumulate items that aren't needed, and truth be told, too many classrooms have become more cluttered than they should be.

## 6 ESTABLISH A SUMMER OF LOCAL MISSION PROJECTS

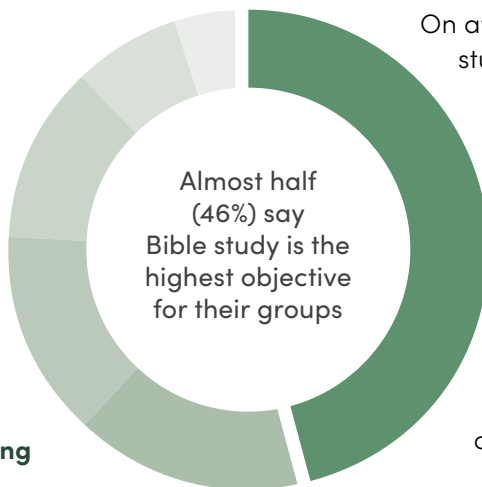
If you prepare early, your Bible study group could make a real difference in your community by scheduling a local mission project each month. The sky's the limit. Get creative but get going. The time to prepare for this is right now.

## 7 ENCOURAGE GROUP MEMBERS TO SERVE

Summer is when church staff are searching for new group leaders in all age groups. Remember the real goal is to help your church in its mission of making disciples. Encouraging people in your group to leave and serve others as group leaders themselves is a game-changer in most congregations.

# THE ROLE OF GROUPS IN THE CHURCH

When ongoing adult Bible study groups gather, leaders are most likely to say they want the primary focus to be on studying Scripture.



On average, churches say Bible study is the top objective for their groups, followed by relationships/community/fellowship and intentional disciple making/equipping. There is a noticeable difference in emphasis between these first three and the last three objectives—ministry/service, worship, and outreach/evangelism.

## The average ranking of objectives for ongoing adult groups:

1. Bible study
2. Relationships/community/fellowship
3. Intentional disciple making and equipping
4. Ministry and service
5. Worship
6. Outreach and evangelism

A church cannot expect their adult groups to do all the work of the church well. Bible study groups focusing on a few objectives allow other ministries in the church to take the lead in other areas. Your adult Bible study groups' objectives are not just something good to have on a document. These goals provide a vision you must regularly cast to group leaders and your congregation.

Around 2 in 5 worship attendees at the average church (44%) typically participate in small groups. A third of churches (33%) say at most a quarter of their worship service attendance is involved in an ongoing adult Bible study. Another third (34%) say they have more than a quarter but no more than half. The final third (33%) have at least half of their worship attendees involved in their small group ministry, including 14% who say more than 3 in 4 attend both the worship service and a small group.

**“Involvement in worship and small groups are not in competition. Studies have shown participation in ongoing Bible studies bolsters worship attendance. The higher a church’s percentage of weekend worship attendees involved in a small group, Sunday School class, or similar group, the greater likelihood of five-year worship attendance growth.”**

— Scott McConnell, Executive Director of Lifeway Research

### What does the average church small group look like?



44% of worship service attendees are also involved in a small group.

## LIFE: 4 THINGS EVERY GROUP NEEDS TO BE SUCCESSFUL

Here are four things that will make any Bible study group successful, all built around the acronym “L-I-F-E.”

### LEARN AND APPLY GOD’S WORD

Learning God’s Word is important, so plan to teach interactively, using two or three of the [eight learning approaches](#) per session. Answer the question, “What now?” at the end of each Bible study so participants have specific ways to apply the Bible passage to life.

### INVITE OTHERS TO BECOME CHRIST FOLLOWERS

Groups exist, and the church exists, to make disciples. So, make sure each session is Christ-centered and casts the evangelistic net. Even if no one responds or everyone in the group is already a Christian, connecting the lesson to the gospel message teaches group members how to share the gospel.

### FORM AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Groups are about sitting in circles, sharing life, praying for one another, and carrying each other’s burdens. Use group activities in class plus time set aside at the beginning of the study to accomplish this. Schedule regular fellowships (date nights, Sunday lunch, day trips, etc.) to give members and guests the opportunity to connect relationally.

### ENGAGE IN SERVICE TO OTHERS

Lead group members to engage in service to others inside the group and push them to serve inside the church by leaving the group to teach another class or engage in a ministry that needs leaders. Encourage the group to work together in the community and set aside days to reach out to others by serving their needs in practical ways.



# 6 STRATEGIES FOR MOVING WORSHIP SERVICE ATTENDEES TO SMALL GROUPS

## 1 TALK ABOUT GROUPS OFTEN FROM THE PULPIT

One way pastors can help create movement from the worship service to the church's small group Bible teaching ministry is to regularly speak about the importance of belonging to a group from the pulpit.

## 2 PROMOTE YOUR UPCOMING BIBLE STUDIES

To create movement out of the worship service, promote attending groups when new studies start. Emphasize that you'd love to help connect people to a group at the start of one of these new studies and that you believe a specific group would fit them.

## 3 INTERVIEW INDIVIDUALS AND COUPLES ABOUT GROUP LIFE

Attending a group can be intimidating for people who don't have a background in church life. From time to time, a pastor can really help people understand what happens in Bible study groups by interviewing an individual, a couple, or both.

## 4 EMPHASIZE GROUP INVOLVEMENT AT YOUR NEW MEMBERS' CLASS

During your new members' class, emphasize how important it is to be involved in a Bible study group.

## 5 CLEARLY PRESENT THE OPTIONS

Many people who attend your church begin their journey by looking for information on your church's website. It's wise to make sure people who come to the church's website find clear information about when and where groups meet.

## 6 HAVE A WELL-STAFFED WELCOME CENTER

When guests journey into your church, they quickly look around for key things like the worship center, restrooms, and an information center. When guests drop by the welcome center to get connected to a group, make sure information is available about each of your groups, including time, location, and a brief description.



# ORGANIZATION

Most churchgoers find a group and stick with it. Half of groups ministry leaders (51%) say most of the people at their church stay in the same group for years, while 43% say the makeup of the group changes slowly over time. Few say most people find a new group each year (2%) or multiple times a year (<1%). Almost 9 in 10 leaders (89%) agree most group participants have been in the same group for at least two years.

The lack of change may be due to the lack of new options. Only around a third (34%) of leaders say they started new ongoing adult Bible study groups in the first half of 2024. Two-thirds (66%) have not.

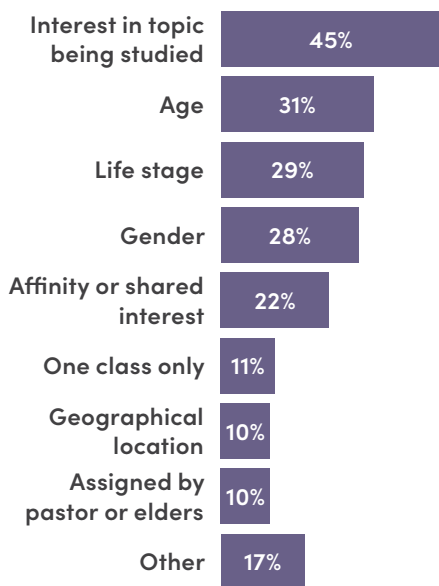


## Most churchgoers stay in the same small group for years



Group participants may also remain in the same groups because they've found other churchgoers with whom they share similarities. Almost half of leaders (45%) say their groups are organized by an interest in the topic being studied. Around 3 in 10 organize around age (31%), life stage (29%), and gender (28%). Another 22% have an affinity or shared interest, while 10% meet together because of their geographic location. Just 1 in 10 (10%) are organized based on an assignment by the pastor or elders. For some (11%), their church only has one class. Around 1 in 6 (17%) have some other organization method.

### How are your ongoing adult Bible study groups organized?



## 5 STEPS FOR STARTING NEW GROUPS

### 1 KNOW YOUR POSSIBILITIES

This first step is all about seeing the possible future of your groups ministry. Do you have a group for every kind of person who wants to study the Bible? In essence, you are determining the target audiences for the new group(s).

### 2 ENLARGE THE ORGANIZATION

How many new preschool, children, student, and adult groups do you plan to add to reach the new people you identified in step one? Once you've listed all the new groups, determine which ones you can actually start. List those new groups along with the existing groups, and this becomes your new organization.

### 3 ENLIST AND TRAIN LEADERS

New leaders must know what's expected of them, what curriculum resources the church will provide for them (and how to use them correctly), and when regular training will take place.

### 4 PROVIDE THE SPACE

Perhaps you have empty rooms on your church campus. Or you may want to start new groups at an off-campus location. Your church might even need to begin a second hour of Bible study on Sunday morning. No matter what, groups must have places to meet.

### 5 GO AFTER THE PEOPLE

Make calls, visit potential new group members in their homes, use social media to announce the start of new groups, send out mailers, and encourage your church members to tell their friends and neighbors that your church is starting new groups.

# 8 STRATEGIES FOR GUIDING PEOPLE TO THE RIGHT GROUP

## 1 GUIDE PEOPLE TO GROUPS BASED ON A STARTING POINT

When you have a couple or an individual seeking to connect to a Bible study group, one approach is to ask the person how they prefer to study the Bible. People generally prefer one of three starting points for Bible study: a biblical text, a life issue, or a theological concept (including a chronological plan).

## 2 GUIDE PEOPLE TO GROUPS BASED ON THE TEACHING STYLE

A legitimate question to ask a potential group member is, “What kind of teaching do you prefer?” Some prefer to sit under a teacher who predominantly lectures and guides the group’s study, while others prefer a more interactive approach to learning.

## 3 GUIDE PEOPLE TO GROUPS BASED ON SIZE OF GROUP

One size may not fit all, so if your church has groups of varying sizes, you might consider guiding people based on this preference. Small, medium, and large groups all have advantages and disadvantages.

## 4 GUIDE PEOPLE TO GROUPS BASED ON THE AGE RANGE OF GROUP MEMBERS

This is a classic approach to placing people in groups. It works best when the group has an age range of 10 years or fewer.

## 5 GUIDE PEOPLE TO GROUPS BASED ON LIFE STAGE

Offering groups such as parents of preschoolers, singles, college/career, empty nesters, and other kinds of life stages will place people in groups who are at a similar life stage. These people will bond quickly since they share much in common through their life stage.

## 6 GUIDE PEOPLE TO GROUPS BASED ON AFFINITY

Do you have groups for people who are golfers, bikers, hunters, or newer believers? Sometimes gathering with people who have similar interests helps connect people to the body of Christ more quickly than another kind of group.

## 7 GUIDE PEOPLE TO GROUPS BASED ON THE GROUP’S AGE

It’s a tried-and-true fact of group life that newer groups grow faster than older, established groups. If you really want people to “stick” when they visit a group, send them to one of your newest ones.

## 8 GUIDE PEOPLE TO GROUPS BASED ON THE GROUP’S LOCATION

You’ll have some potential group members who want the convenience of an on-campus group. Others will prefer the benefits of more intimate, off-campus home-based groups. If your church offers both, ask your potential group members if they have a preference.

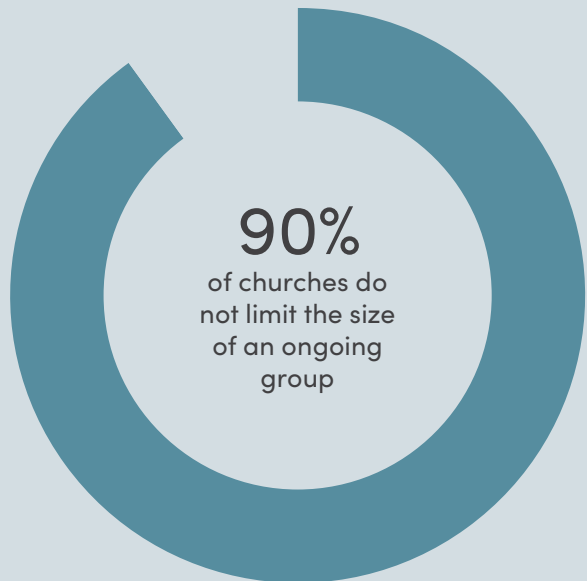


# GROUP SIZE

If a group starts to grow, most leaders aren't going to intervene. Nine in 10 (90%) say they do not limit the size of ongoing adult Bible study groups. Experts, however, suggest groups that grow too large should be split to form new groups for several reasons. In general, Sunday School and small group leaders agree the right size for a group is eight to 16. However, small, medium, and large groups all have advantages and disadvantages.

**“Churches would be wise to strongly encourage groups to remain small to medium-sized. It’s easier to recruit new group leaders, because larger groups are intimidating to lead. Discipleship happens best within a smaller group of people. Jesus had a group of 12 and an inner group of three. And group members often have deeper relationships in smaller groups because they are known. It’s hard to hide in plain sight, but people can disappear in larger groups.”**

*— Ken Braddy, Lifeway’s  
Director of Sunday School*



Some leaders may not be looking to split up larger groups because they aren't sure exactly who is in their church's groups. Around half (53%) say they track attendance in their adult Bible study groups. Only slightly more (56%) say they maintain a roster of who is in each group.

**“Caring requires intentionality. Tracking adult small group attendance provides an easy prompt to a group that when someone has missed multiple meetings, they should be told they were missed. This data also provides groups ministry leaders a view of how engaged people are in their groups.”**

— Scott McConnell, Executive Director of Lifeway Research

For those who do have a roster or take attendance, most are doing so using the most traditional means. Around 2 in 3 (64%) say their record keeping involves paper, including 37% who say it is all on paper and 28% who say they use paper and spreadsheets. Three in 10 (30%) say they use some type of group management software, including 20% who have a phone app.

## 5 BENEFITS OF LIMITING GROUP SIZE

### 1 IT MAKES IT EASIER TO ENLIST A NEW PERSON TO LEAD A GROUP

While it seems appropriate to give a growing group a larger space in which to meet, a larger group makes it harder to recruit a new leader when the current one steps down, moves away, or needs a break. Most people feel confident and comfortable leading a group of 10. But when they're asked to lead a group of 20, 30, or more, few people feel capable of providing leadership.

### 2 IT ALLOWS THE GROUP LEADER TO BECOME A BETTER SHEPHERD-TEACHER

Teachers become shepherd-teachers when they regularly interact with group members and guests beyond the Bible study. This is almost impossible when a group grows and becomes a larger group.

### 3 IT HELPS GROUP LEADERS BECOME BETTER DISCIPLE MAKERS

Discipleship requires proximity, and proximity happens best in the context of a smaller group. While someone can teach a large group of adults, it's virtually impossible to truly disciple a large group.

### 4 IT LIMITS PEOPLE'S ABILITY TO HIDE

The people who liked to hide in a larger group are missed when absent, contacted by the group, and encouraged to return as soon as possible when in a smaller group of 10 to 12. Close the proverbial "back door" through ministry and relationships.

### 5 IT ENCOURAGES NEW GROUPS

It has been proven over and over again that new groups bring growth. Could it be that limiting the size of groups could lead to greater ministry impact?

# 10 BEST TIMES TO START NEW GROUPS

## 1 AT THE BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR

Many people come back to church after the busy holiday season. They are ready to get back into the swing of things. Others are making resolutions as they start the new year. New groups started at the beginning of the new year can reach people who are trying to reconnect with the church.

## 2 WHEN A GROUP HAS BEEN TOGETHER LONGER THAN 24 MONTHS

It's hard for guests to break into classes that have been together for longer than 24 months. Relationships have been formed and life has been shared. When a group approaches its second birthday, it's time to think: "Start a new group."

## 3 WHEN A GROUP'S SPACE IS FILLED TO OVER 80% OF CAPACITY

When a group exceeds 80% of its seating capacity, the room is visually full to guests. Any group that exceeds 80% of its seating capacity for long will almost always drop to an attendance level less than the 80% it once exceeded.

## 4 WHEN THE AGE SPAN OF THE PEOPLE IN THE GROUP IS MORE THAN 10 YEARS

Although the idea of a "multi-gen" class sounds like a good idea, in reality, it's hard to pull off with excellence. The age range in any group should not be more than 10 years. If it is, then it's time to start another group (or groups).

## 5 AS SUMMER ENDS AND FALL BEGINS

There's no doubt your church experiences the "summer slumps" as members take vacations in June and July. But just wait until August—the people return in large numbers, excited about the start of school, football, and autumn. Group ministry often heats up when the weather cools off.

## 6 WHEN AN APPRENTICE GROUP LEADER IS READY TO START A NEW GROUP

If you have an apprentice group leader ready to launch a new group, don't feel like you have to wait for the "optimal" timing. If the leaders are ready and the need is there, launch the group and trust the Lord's timing.

## 7 A WEEK OR TWO AFTER EASTER

Among the many people who attend an Easter worship service are people who are not connected to any group. Imagine promoting to your Easter guests the establishment of a post-Easter group that will focus on parenting, marriage, finances, or other felt needs. These short-term groups can morph into ongoing ones as they come to an end.

## 8 WHEN YOUR CHURCH'S ATTENDANCE SPIKES

Most of our churches see spikes in attendance in January and August or September. Keep good records and track your group ministry attendance. If your church sees a consistent annual spike in other months, consider launching new groups then to give them the maximum opportunity to reach new people.

## 9 WHEN YOU DISCOVER GAPS IN YOUR GROUPS MINISTRY

You may become aware there are underserved people groups in your community or congregation, such as the need for a new young adult group or the need for a "single on Sunday" group for women whose husbands don't attend. When you become aware of gaps like these, it's a good time to start a new group.

## 10 WHEN THE SPAN OF CARE EXCEEDS THE GROUP'S ABILITY TO MEET NEEDS

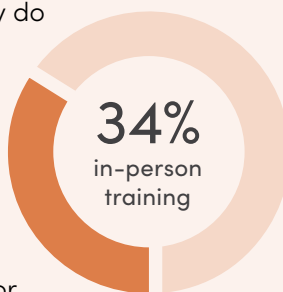
The larger a group grows, the more people it has who need care and ministry. The larger the group, the more people fall through the cracks. The solution will be to start a new group, ask group members to move to it, and give each of the two groups a fighting chance to get organized in order to care for members and guests.



# GROUP LEADER TRAINING

Groups ministry depends on volunteers who lead each small group. In many cases, these small group leaders do not necessarily have formal theological training or educational experience. So, what training do these leaders receive?

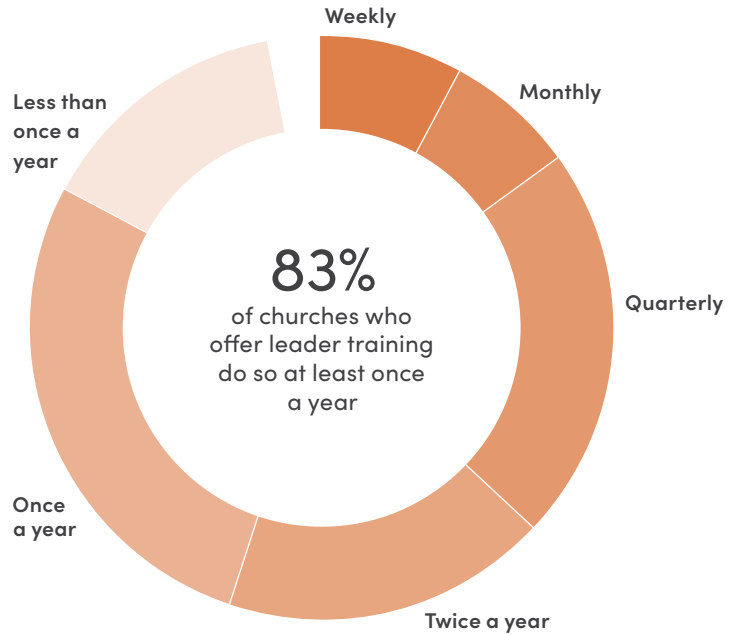
More than 1 in 3 (36%) churches say they do not provide any training for their small group leaders. Another 1 in 3 (34%) say they provide in-person training. More than 1 in 4 say books are available (28%). Fewer say only new leaders are trained when they start (14%) or video training is available (12%). One in 5 (21%) say they provide other training for ongoing adult Bible study leaders.



Groups ministry leaders at the smallest churches, those with fewer than 50 in attendance, are the most likely to say they do not provide any training for group leaders (46%), while leaders at the largest churches, those with 250 or more in attendance, are the least likely (17%). The largest churches are also the most likely to say they offer in-person training (65%) and video training (25%).



Among those that offer in-person leader training, churches are most likely to offer such training once a year (28%). Around 1 in 5 offer training twice a year (18%) or quarterly (22%). Fewer train leaders monthly (7%) or weekly (8%). Fewer than 1 in 5 (14%) offer training less than once a year.



Churches have addressed a variety of topics in their training for leaders over the past two years, but they are most likely to have offered encouragement for leaders (69%). Churches are also likely to have emphasized spiritual development for leaders (61%). Around half of churches that offer in-person leader training have addressed how to use the curriculum provided for teaching (52%) and how to teach a group (49%). Others have addressed how to move to a deeper discipleship relationship (45%), group dynamics (45%), and learning styles (40%). Another 14% say they have addressed other topics in their training with adult Bible study group leaders.

Whether they already offer training for leaders or not, most churches (76%) agree their church needs to make more training available for Bible study leaders, including 32% who strongly agree. Fewer than 1 in 5 (18%) disagree—either somewhat (12%) or strongly (6%). And 6% say they aren't sure if their church should make more training available.

**“Every group leader can use encouragement and equipping. Larger churches with more staff or resources can invite small churches nearby to join them for training. Smaller churches can also utilize online video training or encourage their denomination or church network to conduct a joint training in their area.”**

— Scott McConnell, Executive Director of Lifeway Research

# 7 QUESTIONS FOR CREATING A TRAINING EVENT FOR GROUP LEADERS

## 1 WHEN WILL THE TRAINING TAKE PLACE?

Friday night. Saturday morning. Sunday after morning worship. Sunday afternoon before evening activities. Wednesday evening. There are pros and cons for each. Determine which will work best in your context.

## 2 HOW LONG WILL THE TRAINING LAST?

The maximum time allotted for training shouldn't exceed two hours. While it may be tempting to schedule training for three or four hours, take the long view and schedule more training events at two hours each instead of one big three- or four-hour event.

## 3 WILL ADULT GROUP LEADERS MEET WITH LEADERS OF OTHER AGE GROUPS, OR WILL AGE GROUP LEADERS MEET SEPARATELY?

If all group leaders are together for training, you must think in terms of big principles that work in every age group. Breaking up your group leaders into smaller groups that meet by age division allows for much more specific training. It's not a bad idea to alternate between these two kinds of training options.

## 4 WHO WILL LEAD THE TRAINING?

If you provide a training in which all leaders are together, you might invite the pastor, a ministry specialist in your denomination or network, or another pastor or staff leader from a neighboring church to lead the training. If you divide group leaders into age group specific training, you'll need to recruit ministry leaders from your church, denomination, or network to lead those groups.

## 5 WHAT WILL BE THE TOPIC AND THEME OF THE TRAINING?

Whatever you decide, make it relevant for your group leaders—all of them. People will give their time if they know the training will help them succeed as group leaders.

## 6 HOW WILL YOU PROMOTE THE TRAINING?

Pull out all the stops and promote the event through your church website, email blasts to group leaders, worship service announcements, your church bulletin, text messages, and promotional posters placed around the church campus.

## 7 WHO WILL HELP CREATE A TRAINING EVENT?

Allow people in the church to use their spiritual gifts to help you plan and execute a great training event for your group leaders. There's strength in numbers, and there are people in your congregation who are just waiting to be asked to serve.

# The Bottom Line on the State of Groups

What do these numbers mean for you, your church, and your groups ministry?

Groups remain a vital part of disciple making in the local church. These ongoing adult small groups go by a variety of names depending on the church. However, what churches call their teaching ministry isn't as important as what those groups do. And churches are most likely to say they want the primary focus of their groups to be on studying Scripture.

Even as churches focus their ongoing adult Bible study groups around Scripture, there are some key challenges they face in ministry. But equipped with practical tools for navigating these challenges, leaders can step into opportunities to grow their groups ministry and increase the discipleship impact in their churches.

If your church is struggling to see movement from rows to circles—worship attendance to small group participation—know that you're not alone, but don't accept this as the settled fate of your church. Lean into the ideas presented in this report to help worship attendees become small group participants. This will produce a spiritual impact in the lives of those moving into small groups and will have lasting ramifications in the life of your church.

For churches with a groups ministry that feels stagnant, consider the opportunity to start new groups. If small group participants are staying in the same group for more than two years, it's likely your church isn't starting new groups, thus limiting opportunities for new members to join and connect. Look for ways to limit group size and multiply the number of small groups available.

But at the end of the day, groups ministry is reliant upon volunteers to lead the groups. Are your group leaders healthy and effective? What is your church doing to equip these leaders for success? What training can you provide that will better prepare them to teach and disciple their group members?

■ For practical tools to resource your church's groups ministry, visit [Lifeway.com/SmallGroupLeaders](https://www.lifeway.com/SmallGroupLeaders).

## About the State of Groups Study

The online survey of 1,021 adult Bible study groups ministry leaders was conducted May 27 – June 27, 2024. Contact lists of adult Bible study groups ministry leaders and pastors were developed from both Lifeway's lists and outside lists. Each interview was conducted with the person most responsible for Bible study groups for adults at the church. Each respondent was screened to ensure they were able to describe their church's Bible study groups for adults and that their church is Protestant or non-denominational Christian in the U.S. Southern Baptist churches were oversampled.

The 639 SBC responses were weighted down to reflect their correct proportion of Protestant churches. Responses were weighted by region, church size and denominational category to more accurately reflect the population. The completed sample is 1,021 surveys. The sample provides 95% confidence that the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 4.6%. This margin of error accounts for the effect of weighting. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.

Limitations: Probability samples for Protestant adult Bible study groups ministry leaders do not exist. When representative sampling is not possible, it is important to obtain as wide a variety of respondents as possible. Three broad sources were used:

- Protestant pastors who have opted in for future research on previous probability surveys
- Southern Baptist ministers of education, Sunday School directors, and discipleship directors shared by congregations as part of the Annual Church Profile census
- Adult Bible study groups ministry leaders who have interacted with Lifeway's research, events, or communications

Note that some groups are less represented because the scope of this study does not include churches that do not have adult Bible study groups ministry activities. Groups that interact with Lifeway less will be underrepresented in this study. Indications of the breadth of the sample prior to weighting include:

- Sizes of churches participating (21% <50, 25% 50-99, 25% 100-249, 29% 250+)
- Ages of respondents (33% 18-49, 37% 50-64, 30% 65+)
- Region of churches participating (5% Northeast, 23% Midwest, 64% South, 9% West).

## About Lifeway Research

Lifeway Research is a Middle Tennessee-based, evangelical research firm that specializes in surveys about faith in culture and matters that affect churches. Our work has been covered by national and international media, (Religion News Service, *Christianity Today*, NPR, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, and many others) and translated into multiple languages.

## About Lifeway Christian Resources

In operation since 1891, Lifeway Christian Resources is one of the leading providers of Christian resources, including Bibles, books, Bible studies, group curriculum, Christian music and movies, Vacation Bible School, and church supplies, as well as camps and events for all ages. Lifeway is the world's largest provider of Spanish Bibles. Based in Brentwood, Tennessee, Lifeway operates as a self-supporting nonprofit. For more information, visit [Lifeway.com](http://Lifeway.com).

