

Practical Ministry Skills: Staying Connected Through the Summer



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Leader's Guide

How to use "Staying Connected Through the Summer" by SMALLGROUPS.COM in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to SMALLGROUPS.COM. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you train and direct the leaders of your small-groups ministry. The material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders, and has been selected by the editors of Leadership Resources at Christianity Today International.

Our "Practical Ministry Skills" training downloads are completely flexible and designed for easy use. Each download focuses on a practical theme that is relevant to small-groups ministry, and is comprised of brief handouts focusing on specific aspects of that theme. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for new small-group leaders or coaches.

The theme of this download is "Staying Connected Through Summer." It's designed to offer practical advice and discussion opportunities on two subjects: 1) Should your small group take a break from regular meetings over the summer, and 2) How to stay connected and maintain momentum over the summer regardless of whether or not your group has official "meetings." Each handout can be used as part of a training session for large groups of leaders and coaches, or as a way to encourage and educate people individually. Simply print the handouts you need and use them as necessary.

For example, to get a wide-angle view on the question of whether groups should meet during the summer, see "The Pros and Cons of a Summer Break," by Michael Mack (p. 4–5). Use "Keep Connected Through the Summer," by Sheila Ely (p. 6), to explore a variety of creative ways to fellowship during the summer. And "Re-Start with a Bang," by Robert Damon (p. 10), is full of practical advice for getting everything started again in September.

Our prayer is that this material will equip small groups to maintain a high level of intimacy and connection over the summer, while remaining effective in ministry.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.SmallGroups.com.

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Does Your Small Group Need a Vacation?

How to tell if and when you need to take a break

Mark 6:31

I have not always been a fan of small groups taking vacations at specific times during the year. However, the longer I am in ministry with groups, the more I relax and understand the benefit of these short or extended breaks. And the more I understand the benefits, the more I am willing to even encourage groups to take a break—under specific situations.

When Group Members Can't Attend

Your group may need a vacation during seasons of the year when group members have difficulty attending multiple small-group meetings. Such hiatuses are most common during the summer months and the month of December.

Taking a break during the month of December takes much of the pressure off the holiday season—a time filled with many other demands and activities that take place in our churches and communities. During the summer, many families take vacations, need to spend extra time doing yard work, or want more time for recreation activities that can only happen when it's warm. As a result, many groups see attendance become sporadic, at best. Rather than making people feel guilty for not showing up, a vacation may be the best option.

When There's a Shift in Focus

Small groups may also need a vacation to provide a distinct break in the purpose or function of a group. Whether we notice or not, any small group can lose sight of its original focus and purpose. Or, the purpose of a group (as determined by the group leader or larger authority within the church) can change—even when group members don't want it to. So taking a break can assist in giving the old purpose some closure and providing space between the memory of the old and the potential of the new.

When the Group Becomes Stale

Small groups may also need a vacation to keep things fresh. It's easy for groups to get in a rut, and one of the best ways to get out of those ruts is to change things up a little bit—even if only for a short time. That doesn't mean group members need to take a break from ever seeing or contacting each other; it may just mean a break from the normal meeting time and agenda.

For example, groups may consider meeting once or twice a month for fun and fellowship, instead of always focusing on a study of Scripture. The idea is just to provide something different than the norm as a kind of “refresh” button. Go camping, go to a sporting event, gather in someone's home for games, share a meal together, do an outreach project, and so on. The ideas for fun and fellowship are endless.

Not for Everyone

Not every group needs to take a vacation. If group attendance is strong and growing, and has momentum behind it, then a vacation may be counter-productive. To make the best decision, group leaders simply need to be sensitive to the collective attitude of the group—especially the level of commitment when it comes to attendance.

MARK INGMIRE; copyright 2001 by Christianity Today International. Originally appeared on Smallgroups.com.

Discuss:

1. When was the last time I was refreshed by a summer vacation? What did I do, or where did I go, that made the time so invigorating?
2. When was the last time our small group took a break from regular meetings? What were the positive and negative consequences?
3. Does our small group currently match any of the criteria above? If so, what should we do about it?



The Pros and Cons of a Summer Break

And why it's best to maintain some kind of connection as a group
Ecclesiastes 3:1

Most groups do one of two things over the summer—stop meeting until September or keep going even if attendance is inconsistent. But both of these extremes may not be healthy or very strategic.

It's true that schedules change in the summer. Vacations, sports, and other events can disrupt a normal small-group plan. Many people fill their schedules with activities through the summer months, so attendance can be shaky. Some weeks it doesn't even seem worthwhile to have a meeting. Besides, as the leader of the group, you need a rest—and there are lots of other things you'd like to do when it's warm outside!

But summer is also a great time for building relationships in relaxed social settings. Among the primary purposes of small groups is the building of relationships, caring for one another, and reaching out to unbelievers. None of these purposes cease to be important from June through August.

One of the best metaphors of a small group is a spiritual family. A family does not stop being a family during certain times of the year. But some families, like mine, do make adjustments over the summer. We do more picnics and other outdoor activities. We make new friends and build existing relationships through a variety of social activities. Eventually we begin to prepare for the upcoming school year.

Summertime can actually be the *best* time of the year for spiritual families to launch, grow, and make an impact. Whatever stage of life your small group is in, you can utilize the summer months productively.

Launching

Surprisingly, spring and summer are fruitful seasons to launch small groups because leaders have time to pray, wait, and listen to God. Here are some great ways to use the summer as a launch pad for a new group.

- Spend time praying about your group—really listening to God about his plans and purpose. Remember that the group is his, not yours, and you will lead it as an act of stewardship. Surrender it all to him and then listen for his reply. One of the first things to ask God about is who should be on your core team.
- Form a core team of three to four others and spend some quality time together barbecuing, history-sharing, praying, discussing, and planning. Take your cue from Jesus, who had a core team of Peter, James, and John within his larger group. Share leadership from the very beginning of the group.
- With your core team, begin to pray together and plan for the future of the group. As you picnic or play games together, ask God to show you who he wants in the group, what the focus should be, and what goals and plans he has for the group.
- Plan backyard barbecues and invite old and new friends to build relationships and hang out. Look at these events as opportunities to see who God will put in front of you as a potential member.
- Get ready to launch the new group toward the end of the summer or early fall. You've built a foundation over the summer. Now it's time to carry out the plans God has given you.

Growing

One of the saddest things I've observed over years of directing small-group ministries is when existing groups that have stopped meeting over the summer fail to relaunch in the fall. And I see this happen often. Even though the leader and group had all the best intentions to start meeting again in September, many find it hard to get back into the practice and rhythm of meeting together. Doing life together in community is influenced by momentum. When groups lose that momentum, they often also lose their focus, purpose, and vision.

Perhaps that is why God encourages us to “not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another” (Hebrews 10:25). Here's how to do that with all your summer plans:

- Pull out a summer calendar at your next meeting and plan to meet as many times as you can when some or most of the group can attend.

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- Plan more social events at which you can hang out together and invite some new people to join you. Here are a few ideas a group I led several years ago came up with:
 - Play games such as Pictionary on a white board on the deck or back porch.
 - Go to baseball games together and invite neighbors.
 - Go to open-air concerts in the park and invite neighbors.
 - Attend your kids sporting events together.
 - Go to a July 4 fireworks show together with neighbors.
- Suspend the deep Bible study, but still discuss where you are spiritually, do devotional studies, share what you are learning from your personal study times, or find other creative ways to grow spiritually together. Meet other times than usual. During the summer months you can be more flexible than usual.
- Go camping, or take a group retreat. Or serve together at a Christian summer camp for youth. What a practical way to deepen your relationships and have fun together!
- Many churches plan all-church picnics or other summertime social events. These are great opportunities to bring your group, invite some friends and neighbors, and enjoy the day together. Build new relationships with other people at these events, especially those who are not yet connected at your church.
- Keep praying for neighbors, both individually and as a group, whenever possible. Pray especially that the Holy Spirit will open their hearts and that you will have an opportunity to take the next step with them, spiritually. In the autumn you can work toward a harvest!

If you are a leader who needs a break over the summer months, this is a great opportunity to let others in your group facilitate whatever you decide to do as a group. Part of shepherd leadership is developing some of your group members to become leaders. Here a few strategies to try:

- As summer starts, announce that you need to take a break from leadership, but that you will remain a part of the group. As you plan your summer activities, ask volunteers to take ownership and leadership over planning and executing events.
- Help the group plan a devotional Bible study for each meeting time over the summer. Either use a devotional study guide or come up with an overall topic that each person can study on their own.
- Years ago over the summer months my group did a study of all the “one-another” passages in the New Testament. Each week a couple took a passage of their choosing and planned an action-oriented activity for it. For “serve one another” (Galatians 5:13), we washed each other’s cars. For “teach and admonish one another” (Colossians 3:16), we shared our favorite Bible verses and told why. For “be hospitable to one another” (1 Peter 4:9), we did a progressive dinner.
- As people take on leadership roles, be sure to set up debriefing sessions. Provide lots of positive feedback and watch for teachable moments.

Making an Impact

Summer is a great time for your group to make an impact in your community for Christ. Opportunities abound all around you to get outdoors and serve people with all kinds of random acts of kindness, like handing out cold water at sporting events. You can also partner with your church or other community ministries to lend a helping hand as a group. Be creative. Discuss what tools, gifts, talents, and passions God has given uniquely to your group to impact your community.

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). How will your group use the summer season for God’s kingdom?

MICHAEL MACK; copyright 2008 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. What are the potential benefits of our group continuing to meet together this summer? What are the potential dangers?
2. How can our church help and support potential leaders who want to launch a group over the summer?
3. Which of the suggestions above is best suited for our group? How can we make it happen?



Keep Connected Through the Summer

Practical ideas to help carry your group's momentum into September

Hebrews 10:25

It's fast approaching summer, and group members are increasingly absent as kids' soccer and baseball teams begin to practice and gardens—along with weekends away—begin to beckon. What's a small-group leader to do? How does a group maintain a strong sense of community, closeness, and care if they are to be apart for the better part of June, July, and August? How do they continue to respond to each others' needs?

One thing to keep in mind during this season is that small groups are about relationships—not meetings. You can break from regular meetings, but a group should never break from doing life together. Also, group members need to be intentional about making plans for the summer *before* calling a break from regular meetings. Don't wait for summer to hit and attendance to dissipate before talking over what you want to happen.

Here are several creative ways to stay in touch during the summer:

- Sending cards and notes through old-fashioned snail mail is a great way to correspond in a different and noticeable way.
- Take pre-summer photos of group members and post them on the fridge as reminders to pray for and stay in touch with one another.
- Arrange for all the members of your group to sit together in church on the weekend.
- Summer socials and get-togethers are the perfect time to include new people in your group, so don't forget to draw in neighbours or new folks from church who would like to connect.
- Put together a summer calendar with each group member's vacation schedule and availability for social events, then use it to map out evenings, days, or weekends when the whole group can get together. (Also include birthdays, anniversaries, or special occasions within the group.)

We all know the old adage that “a change is as good as a rest,” so perhaps your group simply needs to do things a little differently in order to thrive over the summer. Take into account the life stage of your group members. Change will look different for a group of retired folks, empty nesters, and families with young kids. Here are some ideas:

- Continue to meet weekly, but skip the living room in favour of a pool deck, park, or patio.
- Come together to watch the sports games of group members' children. Use the casual time to catch up, and take turns bringing cold drinks.
- Take turns planning a variety of summer socials, and make sure they are family friendly.
- If you know your attendance will be down for much of the summer, plan to meet with another small group or two in the same boat.
- One summer saw our group so close and wanting to stay connected that we continued a bi-weekly meeting all the way through. We just decided that whoever could come, would come.

Whatever you do and however you do it, stay connected throughout the summer. Some of your group members might not be crazy about the idea at first, but they will soon appreciate the relaxed contact and continued support and encouragement. And they will be amazed at the level of intimacy that carries through into September.

—SHEILA ELY; copyright 2008 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

4. How has our group approached summer in the past, and what were the results?
5. What questions do I need to ask to begin addressing our summer plans before attendance starts to drop in our regular meetings?
6. Which idea above is the best fit for our group this summer? What else can we do to stay connected?

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Take Your Group Public This Summer

Learn how going out into the community can keep your group refreshed and useful at the same time.

Acts 1:8

It's not uncommon for groups to wrap up their spring focus and feel somewhat depleted. That's why many groups view the summer as a perfect opportunity to get refreshed before school, ministries, and so many other things re-start in the fall. Consequently, the prospect of beginning a new Bible study for the summer can sound as inviting as an IRS audit. However, we're missing easy but effective opportunities for building our group-life if we only see the summer as a chance to unplug. A snapshot from our nation's history of space travel illustrates how we can use the summertime to continue building biblical community.

Two days after the launch of America's third manned lunar-landing mission, the Apollo 13 spacecraft was debilitated by an explosion that caused it to lose oxygen and electrical power. (Yes, go ahead and say it: "Houston, we have a problem.") The astronauts and NASA flight controllers knew they did not have enough power to turn around and rocket back to Earth. Their solution was ingenious, but it required a lot of skill and courage to pull off. They decided to use the moon's gravity to slingshot the little spacecraft back to Earth.

In the same way, small groups can use the summer season as a way to slingshot themselves into the fall with tremendous momentum by "going public" with their group.

Go Public

I highly recommend that group leaders take advantage of the change of pace, good weather, and increased receptivity to new things that summertime can bring and "go public." Ask the Lord to raise your group's evangelistic awareness as you branch out. He can and will open doors to reach the lost when your group seeks different ways of living out your faith together in the world.

So what can your small group do this summer to engage with the public hemisphere? One of my favorite suggestions is for groups to gather outside of their living rooms and have a conversation (or two) about God's mission in the world. If you want to try this, be sure to choose a location that's different from your usual meeting place, because doing so can inspire more creative reflection. Also, meet in a public place that experiences regular people traffic. This can prompt more outreach ideas within the discussion and can even provide immediate evangelistic opportunities.

Once everyone has gathered together, the following discussion questions can really get things rolling:

1. What do you want to see happen in our group this summer?
2. In what areas do you want our group to grow as we look ahead to the fall?
3. In what ways or areas do *you* want to grow as you look ahead to the fall? In other words, how do you want your life to be impacted this summer, and how do you want your life to make an impact?
4. As you think about our local community, what groups of people do you think would be most receptive to the gospel? (*Note: Give people the opportunity to respond to this question before you provide examples, such as those who are sick, poor, incarcerated, families experiencing a difficult season, homeless, and so on. Ask people to be specific.*)
5. How can our small group bring the light of Christ to the people living in our community? (*Note: Ask people to suggest specific and practical ideas. Set a summertime date and determine who is going to run with the initial action items.*)
6. Finally, pray about what was just discussed. Ask the Lord to open doors to reach the people you just talked about, and invite your group participants to be prayerful and share insights they might receive from the Lord about how your group can increase their saltiness and luminosity.

Before asking these questions, assign someone to take notes on the ideas that receive a positive response from the entire group. Remember, the goal here is to connect your small group with the needs and desires of the

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people in your community. And who knows—as you spend time in public dialogue and prayer, you just might stumble upon some outside observers that have an interest in your group.

Mix It Up

Of course, different groups will harmonize with summertime’s gravitational pull in different ways. Here are some other ideas that can help your group become refreshed over the summer, while at the same time maintaining positive momentum by going public.

- **Morph into a “shared-interest group.”** If your group is already organized around some affinity—such as age or marital status—there’s a good chance that many of your members have similar interests. If so, your group could become a shared-interest group for a season. In other words, you could center your group around activities or hobbies instead of a Bible study in a living room. Use these questions to find out exactly what those shared interests might be:
 - “What do you most enjoy doing with your free time?”
 - “If you could invite a few others to join you in an activity, what would it be?”
 - “What sport, creative hobby, topical study, or special interest do you love?”

Note that you don’t have to choose just one activity. You can create a “mixed shared-interest group” out of the ideas that were shared. In that situation, you might do a topical study one week and then softball the next.

- **Appoint a community liaison.** Select someone from your group to find out what’s happening in your surrounding communities during the summer—farmers’ markets, festivals, outdoor concerts, and so on. Have everyone bring their calendars to a group meeting at the beginning of the summer and commit to attending at least a few of these events as a group.
- **Engage in servant evangelism.** One great way to “go public” as a group is to meet one or more needs within your local community. And that’s the beauty of servant evangelism—it’s as simple as connecting something that needs to be done with people who are willing to do it. For ideas about specific projects, I recommend ServantEvangelism.com. Be sure to select a project that is non-threatening for the members of your group.
- **Serve where you are.** You don’t necessarily have to go somewhere new in order to “go public.” Another alternative is to bring the public to you. Consider hosting an event in the neighborhood where your small group meets, for example. You could set up a barbeque in someone’s backyard, or even an outdoor movie with popcorn at a local park. Simply put up flyers in key places and invite families to join you.
- **Piggyback on a church event.** If your church is putting a lot of time and money into planning an event, your group can benefit. Use the larger event as a bridge to interest seeking friends or coworkers and introduce them to the rest of your group. Another option is for your group to volunteer to help with the planning or execution of the event.

—REID SMITH; copyright 2008 by the author and Christianity Today International.

Discuss:

1. What most appeals to us about having a “private” small group? How can we maintain these benefits once our group decides to “go public”?
2. What are the main obstacles that will need to be overcome in order to “go public” as a group this summer? What are some possible solutions?
3. Which of the suggestions above is the best fit for our group this summer? What steps can we take right now to get things in motion?

STAYING CONNECTED THROUGH THE SUMMER**Make the Most of Your Summer Break**

Here's how to take your group beyond meetings for a season.

Philemon 1:4–7

As a small-group leader, I have found four vital activities that groups can use during summer breaks to draw closer together and build a deeper sense of purpose.

Take Time for a Deeper Connection

Over the course of a year, it's natural for small-group members to question whether their group is an effective model of a biblical community. *Are we truly a community*, they wonder, *or do we just "meet"?* *Are these meetings worthwhile? Do they produce fruit and life?* When these issues are in question, group meetings can turn into "just another obligation"—something to be prioritized out of our schedule. So it can be helpful to use the summer as a season to break from meetings, and instead to provide group members with time to focus on fellowship and connection.

As a group leader, be sure to facilitate time for the whole group to come together, but also one-on-one time to connect with group members individually. Hang out with each other and develop personal relationships. Go to the movies, to the beach, or to see a special speaker.

Bring Life to Others

Jesus said in Matthew 28:19: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." One of the most exciting things a group can do together is to fulfill this commission and disciple a new believer. God's blessing is always with a group that will open their circle to mentor a new believer, and nothing is more rewarding than watching someone bud and grow in their relationship with God. Plus, doing so gives everyone a chance to see how much they have grown—both individually and as a group.

As you "do life together"—barbeques or movies or whatever your group enjoys—simply invite the new believer to come along. Take the time to get to know them on a personal basis, and clearly communicate the message that "we accept you in our group." The new believer has probably considered small groups before, but may not feel they have time for yet another meeting. So show them that your group is not just another meeting, but a community—a lifestyle that brings worth and a sense of purpose.

Serve Someone Together

If your group lacks a sense of purpose, find someone who has a need and serve them together. It doesn't matter if the need is within your group or outside; it doesn't matter if the need is large or small. For example, some of the members from my small group recently reached out to a Christian woman in the hospital. We prayed with her, helped take care of her home, and met a variety of other needs. She benefited, but so did our group as we all recognized the power of working together.

Remember, a group that serves together stays together, because they've seen the value of true community.

Connect with Other Leaders

Being a small-group leader can be lonely at times, because group members don't always share the vision or level of commitment that leaders do. That's why I recommend group leaders get together to fellowship, minister, and teach each other. We need shared moments that keep our vision and our drive alive, and we need to be reminded not to attempt leadership from our own strength and efforts, but from the overflow of love that God has given us.

—ERIC BRYCE-JOHNSON; copyright 2004 by Christianity Today International. Originally appeared on Smallgroups.com.

Discuss:

1. When do I usually feel refreshed as a result of time with my small group?
2. What specific ways can our group serve together? What new believers can we include?
3. What steps can our church take to help group leaders connect with and support each other this summer?

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Re-Start with a Bang

Don't let a summer break turn into a sluggish fall for your group.

Proverbs 21:5

August is upon you. School days are fast approaching. Summer vacation hours and savings have been spent, and plans are being made for the winter holidays. Gasp! It's time for small group to "start up" again after the summer break, but you haven't had time to prepare. It's way too soon!

Have you ever found yourself in this situation? Are you wondering now how and when you can get your small group back together? If so, you're not the only one. Many groups take a break during the summer, either not meeting at all or focusing mainly on social events. There are benefits to these breaks, and people often prefer a defined "ending" and "beginning" to their activities for the year—including their small group. Yet such breaks do create one fundamental problem: How can we effectively re-start our groups after a break in momentum?

Build Anticipation

First, it's important for established small groups to resume regular meetings with the same energy and enthusiasm as a new group. Use phone calls and notes to generate and share your anticipation of what God will accomplish this year in your community. Start planning special events now—including holidays—and share them with your members so they can adjust their calendars accordingly and get involved.

The goal is to re-awaken a hunger for small-group community—both in you and your members—based on past experiences. You also want to begin developing an openness in the group for whatever new and exciting experiences God might have in store.

Tackle the Details

Second, start working on your group's meeting schedule by confirming the best place and times for everyone. See if group members have ideas for new people that can be invited. You want to solidify as many details as you can now, and then bring a list of the remaining items to your first group meeting. Tackling the smaller issues now means you won't clog up that first meeting with a lot of energy-draining administrative questions.

Part of this preparation includes checking out what study material your group might enjoy or benefit from this coming year. Start gathering ideas now, and research any special needs that might develop within the group. If your group hasn't been together during the summer, be ready with sample studies or ideas at the first meeting so that people will not be choosing content "cold turkey." Even if the group doesn't ultimately choose any of your suggestions, it's always a good thing to be ready.

Don't Delay

Third, set your group's start date and get going. Don't delay. Re-start with a bang, and consider gathering everyone first at a special event, such as a picnic or barbecue. This is a great way for everyone to share what God has been doing in their lives over the summer, and to ease back into the grooves of community.

Plan for the Future

Fourth, if you haven't done this already, start developing a leadership team for your group. This should include an apprentice leader, or someone you can mentor in the coming year. Start casting the vision for shared leadership—with both your apprentice and group—as a way to participate in the expansion of God's kingdom.

The start of a new ministry year, complete with new ideas and a new vision, is a great blessing and benefit to the entire small-group ministry. Enjoy it. Get creative. Have fun!

—ROBERT DAMON; copyright 2006 by Christianity Today International. Originally appeared on Smallgroups.com.

Discuss:

1. Has our small group re-started well in the past? What obstacles did we have to overcome?
2. What details are appropriate for me as the leader to decide? What items need to be decided by the group?
3. What steps could our church take to help groups re-start effectively?



Summer Calendar

A simple tool to help keep everyone on the same page

June 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					

STAYING CONNECTED THROUGH THE SUMMER

July 2008

STAYING CONNECTED THROUGH THE SUMMER/Staying Connected

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4	5
6		7	8	9	10	11	12
13		14	15	16	17	18	19
20		21	22	23	24	25	26
27		28	29	30	31		

STAYING CONNECTED THROUGH THE SUMMER

August 2008

STAYING CONNECTED THROUGH THE SUMMER/Staying Connected

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1	2
3		4	5	6	7	8	9
10		11	12	13	14	15	16
17		18	19	20	21	22	23
24		25	26	27	28	29	30
31							



Further Exploration

Websites and books to help your group stay connected over the summer

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. Practical resources from Christianity Today International.

- "Reaching Our Community" Training Theme
- "Doable Evangelism" Practical Ministry Skills

BuildingSmallGroups.com. Small-groups resources from Christianity Today International.

- "Connecting Newcomers" Training Theme
- "Creating Community" Training Theme
- "Family-Friendly Small Groups" Practical Ministry Skills

LeadershipJournal.net. This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

Smallgroups.com. An established website dedicated to equipping small-group leaders to make disciples and strengthen communities.

[Conspiracy of Kindness \(Updated\)](#): **A Unique Approach to Sharing the Love of Jesus** by Steve Sjogren. This is an updated version of the landmark introduction to servant evangelism (Gospel Light, 2008; ISBN 978-0830745722).

[Summer: A Spiritual Biography of the Season](#) edited by Gary Schmidt. This collection of powerful, stirring pieces from a wealth of sources invites us to fully experience the rich and bountiful spirituality of summer (Skylight Paths Publishing, 2007; ISBN 978-1594731839).

[The Big Book on Small Groups](#) by Jeffrey Arnold. In this revised bestseller, Arnold explores the basics of "Body Life" and explains how to start a group, develop relationships, train leaders, launch outreach programs, and more (InterVarsity Press, 2004; ISBN 978-0830823703).