

community

GROUP LEADER TRAINING

COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER

TRAINING RESOURCE 102

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INTRODUCTION

This is the second module in the Community Group Leader Training program. It covers the practical and spiritual aspects of leading a community group.

PREPARATION

Intimacy with the Father

If you are to achieve any success in this or any other endeavour for the kingdom of God, it starts with recognising that you can do nothing significant without Jesus.

Joh 15:4-5

(4) Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. (5) I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for **apart from me you can do nothing**.

It is therefore imperative that you stay close to Jesus. This cannot be overemphasised. A life of intimacy with God is what he intended for every human being. We were created for this. Relationship with him is His and our greatest joy!

If it was necessary for Jesus to spend time with his Father while on earth, then it is necessary for us. He modelled a life of prayer and obedience, rooted in a loving relationship with his Father. The works he did followed from that communion with his Father; he did nothing on his own.

Joh 5:19-20

(19) So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, **the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.** (20) For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.

Joh 5:30 "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Joh 6:38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Joh 8:28-29

(28) So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that **I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.** (29) And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

We are likewise called to spend time with the Father and follow him. He will show us things in the secret place of communion with him and direct us in all things, just as he did with Jesus. **This is how we will bear fruit for his kingdom.** (John 15:5)

FOUNDATION OF LOVE

Everything we do should come from a foundation of love.

God is love.

1Co 13

(1) If I **speak in the tongues** of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (2) And if I have **prophetic powers**, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all **faith**, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. (3) If I **give away all I have**, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

(4) **Love is** patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant (5) or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; (6) it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. (7) Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

(8) Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. (9) For we know in part and we prophesy in part, (10) but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. (11) When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. (12) For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. (13) So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

We see from the above passage that even if we operate in powerful gifts of the Spirit and have great faith and give away everything we own, if the motivation is not love, it is meaningless.

God loves people. If God is really in us, it will reflect in the way we treat his people.

1Jn 2:9-10

(9) Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. (10) Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.

Rom 13:8-10

(8) Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. (9) For **the commandments**, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, **are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."** (10) Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Gal 5:15 [Amplified version]

For the whole Law [concerning human relationships] is fulfilled in one precept, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF [that is, you shall have an unselfish concern for others and do things for their benefit]."

If we truly love one another, in our motivations, actions and words, we will fulfil all the commandments. We will treat each other respectfully, not show partiality, be kind, not steal, always do things with the best interest of the other person in mind, etc. We will have a high

regard for the value and welfare of others, as Paul encouraged in Philippians 2:3-4. It means to put yourself a little lower and others a little higher.

Php 2:3-4

(3) Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. (4) Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

The Greek word *agapé*, which is used to describe God's love in us (Rom 5:5), means this:

Agapé denotes an **undefeatable benevolence and unconquerable goodwill that always seeks the highest good of the other person, no matter what he does.** It is the **self-giving love that gives freely without asking anything in return**, and does not consider the worth of its object. *Agapé* is more a love by choice than *philos*, which is love by chance, and it refers to the will rather than the emotion. *Agapé* describes the **unconditional love** God has for the world. (Word wealth: love, Spirit Filled Life Bible, page 1694)

This is the kind of love that Jesus demonstrated when he gave his life for us and that he has asked us to demonstrate to one another. When this love is visible, it shows the world that we are Jesus' disciples. This ought to be our mark!

Joh 13:34-35

(34) A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. (35) **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."**

May we give ourselves to God and learn to love one another like this, that others may come to see and know the love of God.

COMMUNITY GROUPS

What are Community Groups?

Community Groups are small groups of Jesus followers who gather weekly in homes (or otherwise) to:

1. Learn about following Jesus together from the Bible and help each other live out what we discover.
2. Spend time together in fellowship, sharing meals, breaking bread and praying together, building authentic friendship relationships, reminding each other of the gospel and helping one another walk in the light.
3. Build one another up in love, serving one another with our gifts.
4. Support one another in practical ways when needs arise, or seek help outside of the group.
5. Share Jesus' message with others and invite them to be part of the Jesus community.

What is the desired outcome?

We desire the Community Groups to be incubators of growing disciples of Jesus who in turn make other disciples of Jesus. Success is seeing people grow in their relationship with Jesus and for this to be evidenced by how they live their lives and treat other people. It is for all of us to be salt and light and impact the city for Jesus' kingdom.

What support systems are in place for Community Group Leaders?

Training and connect sessions:

We will do regular training and connect sessions to keep equipping and strengthening Community Group leaders. This will take the form of resources produced for self-learning and face to face connect sessions for teaching, impartation, Q & A and practical input.

Community Support Team:

There is a team of mature, experienced leaders who are available to support the Community Group leaders. They will assist with general queries, prayer, specialised counselling and practical matters like bereavements, funerals and weddings.

Fivefold Equipping Team:

There is a team of Fivefold (Ephesians 4) ministers who will serve the Community Groups in a variety of ways to build up the Body. Further details will follow on this team.

Who can lead a Community Group?

Profile of a Community Group Leader



Illustration: A COG

A community group leader must be someone who is born again by the Spirit of God (who has been spiritually regenerated and has the Holy Spirit living in them). This is reflected by a desire for communion with God, a desire to know him through his Word and to share him with others.

In other words, there should be evidence of the life of God in them.

The following should be present or developing in their life:

- a. **Love** – demonstrates a willingness to sacrifice for others (Example: Jesus)
Joh 15:13 *Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*
- b. **Endurance** – character that has been tested (by trials/patience) (Example: Paul)
Jas 1:2-4 *¹Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*
- c. **Trust in God** – someone who looks to God and trusts in Him fully and does not trust in his own strength and abilities, finances, career, others, etc. (Example: David)
Psa 20:7 *Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.*

Mat 6:24 *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

- d. **Rely on Holy Spirit** – must be able to hear from and follow Holy Spirit’s leading. (Example: the early church).
Reference: The Book of Acts
- e. Teachability – they should be willing to learn and receive correction and guidance
- f. Accountability – they should not be “lone-rangers”, but have accountable relationships with others at CCA.
- g. Hospitality – they should be hospitable or willing to learn how to be hospitable
- h. Faithfulness – they should be faithful, dependable and reliability; committed to this process through the good seasons and the difficult seasons.

What is expected of a Community Group Leader?

A community group leader is to be a disciple of Jesus who gently shepherds a group to be maturing in their walk with Jesus and discipleship of others. We would like them to personally disciple one, two or more people, according to their grace and capacity, but this is a shared responsibility of the group.

They are NOT expected to be a professional counsellor, theologian, preacher, financier or caterer. If help is needed in any situation, assistance is available from the Community Support Team.

Minimum time commitment:

- a. to meet weekly in a home or other suitable venue
- b. to participate in the ongoing training and connect meetings (monthly)

What does a typical Community Group meeting look like?

SUGGESTED FORMAT:

1. Start every week with an INFORMAL CONNECT TIME (+-10-20min)
This helps to break the ice and get conversations started. As the group gets to know each other, this will be a lovely catch up time.
 - a. Welcome people as they come into your home, in a friendly, relaxed way.
 - b. Have refreshments available (see practical notes). Let people help themselves or serve them. Help facilitate connections and conversations while people are milling around.

2. Move on to GROUP TIME
Draw everyone together in a lounge or around a table
 - a. Give God the focus:
 - Pray (you can start by praying or ask someone else to)
 - Praise and worship (see practical notes). You could give each other turns to prepare something for this part of the meeting.

 - c. Get to know one another (see practical notes on relationship building)

 - d. **Share the Word and discuss it.** Refer to the Outline and see notes on facilitation.

 - e. If appropriate, pray together.

 - f. Remind them of the purpose of this group and what we will be doing in the weeks to come. (*Tell people they are free to visit other community groups, if appropriate*)

3. Close the meeting

Note:

- i. The above is a guideline, not a structure.
- ii. The main aspects are to honour God and study the Word, learning to follow Jesus together.
- iii. Fellowship, prayer, sharing meals and breaking of bread should be practiced
- iv. Pray in preparation of each gathering and listen to any promptings the Holy Spirit will give. He may give a word, Scripture, picture, etc. Be careful to obey His leading. He may even lead someone else in the group, so be sensitive to his voice in us and others.

PRACTICAL NOTES

1. Using the Resources

Outlines will be provided to guide the groups, especially for the first period while they are being established. The leader would need to read through the outline before the group time and familiarise himself/herself with the topic and contents. We will all be tracking together in this process. Generally, we will be working through a book of the Bible together and learning together through process questions and group discussions.

These should be used to guide the discussion. The goal is to point people to Jesus through the Bible and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. The outline is a tool and guideline.

2. Hospitality

Creating a warm environment

Hospitality is how you make people *feel*; it is not just about service. It is love that is felt through warm friendliness and creating a welcoming environment where people feel comfortable and at ease. The good host tries to make people feel at home, as if they are part of their family.

We need to use our homes as tools for the gospel and discipleship. From the moment someone walks in they should feel like this is a place where they can relax and be themselves, even if they are meeting you for the first time. Practice saying the following, and mean it sincerely; people instinctively understand sincerity:

- "Hello, it's so nice to see you!"
- "Welcome!"
- "Please make yourself at home."
- "Please help yourself to some coffee or tea!"

Make a fuss, but don't be insincere.

Be friendly! Friendliness is a powerful tool in our Spiritual Warfare arsenal. Friendliness is the easiest way to show people that you love them even if you don't know them that well. It's extremely difficult to resist a friendly person no matter how moody you are.

Practise friendliness. We can develop our ability to love people and be friendly by loving people and being friendly. Whenever you go to a shop or if you're standing in a long, slow queue: (Waiting in queues might be God's way of reaching someone who doesn't know Jesus.)

- Make eye contact.
- Greet: "Hi, how are you?" – "I'm very well thank you."
- Make a point of noticing something that you can compliment: "You have a lovely smile."
- Practising friendliness is an amazing way to share Christ, if the opportunity presents itself.

- Maybe someone responds to your, “How are you?” with “Not so good...” There’s an opportunity right there.
- Be bold – offer to pray for the person.
- Tell them Jesus loves them.
- Listen to the Holy Spirit, he might ask you to lead them to Him... JUST DO IT!

Practising friendliness will help you, especially if you are naturally shy.

Refreshments

Provide tea, coffee, water and snacks according to your grace and capacity, e.g. biscuits, rusks or muffins. Cooldrink or juice is nice to have, but not essential. Keep it simple. Be careful not to create an expectation that may be burdensome for you or others to maintain.

Invite others to bring snacks in future but be sensitive to their financial situation. We don’t want to cause embarrassment. Try to have a packet of biscuits on standby.

It is great to have a treat sometimes to bless the group, but it is not an expectation.

If you are meeting in the evenings, you may decide as a group to eat a light meal together. Please tailor the refreshments to your group, capacity and needs. Sometimes people don’t have food at home and it’s a wonderful opportunity to provide them with a meal.

Consider that children may join so have some non-breakable cups on hand.

We usually set up a coffee/tea station where people can help themselves or make for each other. You can set the example and serve those in your group.

You can make the table look nice by putting some greenery or flowers from your garden in a vase if you have, but it is not necessary to do fancy table settings. We also recommend you don’t use your best china, unless it is a special occasion, or it would be fitting for your type of group. We want people to feel like they’re part of our normal family life.

3. Building relationships

It’s important to get to know one another and start to build trust. We want to become friends and start to see each other as family, but this takes time. When people feel safe, they will be more inclined to share honestly and openly and that is when real transformation can take place. We invite Jesus into people’s brokenness so they can receive forgiveness, healing and restoration. In building relationships, let’s always keep Jesus and the gospel as central.

To get started in the community group, ask everyone to introduce themselves and answer a getting-to-know-you question. Initially, you will spend more time on this until you know each other. You could ask a different question each week, e.g.

- i. What work do you do?
- ii. Tell us about your family/pets.
- iii. What is your passion/what do love to do in your free time?
- iv. What is your dream travel destination?
- v. What’s the highlight of your week?

- vi. Do you believe in having a "five-year plan"?
- vii. How do you separate your work life from your home life?
- viii. What's your biggest challenge or accomplishment as a parent/single person?
- ix. How do you pick yourself back up after making a mistake?
- x. What did you want to be when you were small?
- xi. What energises or drains you?
- xii. What does no-one in this group know about you?

You can also just ask them to share how their week has been.

Connecting as a group outside of the weekly meeting enhances the deepening of the relationships in the community. Someone in the group could host a braai or curry evening, or you could get together for a picnic or games evening or meet for breakfast at a local restaurant. Try to have family friendly activities and spaces for those groups who have children among them.

Serving together or reaching out to others together can also build relationship and unity in an incredible way, e.g. serving in a soup kitchen, doing a beach clean-up, being on hospitality duty at a Sunday service or hosting a neighbourhood braai.

4. Children and teenagers

Each group should decide how they want to facilitate children in the gatherings. They may choose to include everyone in one room together. Alternately they may choose to have a responsible person looking after or teaching the children in a separate room. If this is to be followed, it is advised that more than one person be present with the children. Teenagers should be encouraged to join in with the group activities and discussion.

5. Praise and worship

It is not mandatory to have a time of singing together in praise and worship of God, although it is recommended. The main idea is that we want to focus attention on God and spend some time adoring and exalting him. Each group can decide how they want to facilitate such times. It is not necessary to have a praise and worship set like we would have in a Sunday service; however it is recommended to have at least one item of worship each week. This does not have to take the form of singing together. It could be an inspired poem or some other creative expression, or simply adoration and exaltation of God in prayer.

First prize is to have someone in the group who is musical lead a song or two. Alternately, there are many well-known songs on YouTube or other digital platforms that could be used to facilitate a time of adoring God in song.

6. Effective Facilitation

Get started. Facilitation is a practiced art. You can't learn everything from a book, or even from these notes. Take a risk and start. Just do it, as often as you can. Your role as facilitator is very important. You have the privilege of working alongside the Holy Spirit to help people grow. Never underestimate this. As you spend time facilitating a group, you'll find that your facilitation skills will become more and more second-nature to you. In the meantime, be

intentional about facilitating your meetings and offer yourself grace when you make mistakes. The truth is that God will use this role to further develop you, so enjoy the journey.

Remember—the end goal of a group discussion is life change, not perfect discussions or getting through all the material. So stay open to the Holy Spirit during each group meeting and follow where He leads.

6.1 Partner with the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit and his anointing/empowering presence lives permanently within you.

It's important to spend time in prayer before each meeting, asking and listening for God's leading. It is equally important to keep listening to him during the meeting. He is your continual helper; you are not alone in this. If you ask Him and give him opportunity, he WILL lead you. This can be the difference between a “dead” meeting and an “alive” meeting. He brings life! We only create the environment where he is welcome and people are open.

We like to call this “CAMPFIRE”

When we gather in community around Christ and we allow the Holy Spirit to “take a chair” or “be the extra person in the room” — in the knowledge that He lives in us and that when we are gathered, we together are His temple. It is then that God by his Spirit becomes evident! In other words we acknowledge him in the reality that he has promised: God with us! By His mercy and grace, He uses us, speaks through one another, lifts one another's burdens and so on.

The campfire is where God disciplines us through one another! This is where people who are in darkness notice light and warmth nearby and want to come and take part. This is where those without Christ can surrender to him easily.

There must be an understanding that Jesus chooses to be on the receiving end of however we choose to treat one another. If we treat each other with contempt and partiality, we will be treating him with contempt and partiality. If we treat one another with love, respect and open hearts, this is how we'll be treating Him.

This is not a formula, but a stance of worship in the context of community gatherings. This is why hospitality is so important.

6.2 Train yourself to listen

One of the most difficult things to learn is to listen to people without answering them with our pre-conceived ideas. Sometimes someone might be telling us about a struggle they're dealing with and in our heads, we already have an answer before they're finished explaining. We need to learn to listen, to sincerely understand what the person is saying. Only when we understand what they're saying should we attempt to give counsel or advice.

6.3 The role of facilitator

Your role in the meeting is primarily facilitation. The goal is to study the Bible together and facilitate prayer, fellowship, etc., with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is not a teaching or

preaching session. You'll need to discuss the text in order to apply the principles faithfully, but remember the goal is life change, not simply gaining knowledge. Empower others to discover the truth of Scripture for themselves by asking great questions.

6.4 Meaningful dialogue

The goal of the facilitator is to help group members engage in meaningful dialogue with one another. This allows them to discover biblical truths for themselves. Very few of us feel like we'll have all the right answers or that we can handle whatever curve balls will be thrown our way (and there will be some!). It's even challenging to gauge whether we're doing a good job or not. But here's the good news: that's not what facilitating a group discussion is really about. We don't have to have all of the right answers. We don't have to lead the perfect discussion every time. We want to challenge people to think about the topic at hand, and to create a safe environment for people to share their thoughts—to help everyone feel valued about the input they've offered. Thankfully, there are some established practices and principles that can help us accomplish those goals.

6.5 Creating a safe environment

Trust is perhaps the most vital key to really making your meeting a place where genuine community can be formed. Group members need to be able to trust each other that the group is a safe place—a place where they can get real and know that they will not be judged, gossiped about, and so on. As a facilitator, be sure to model this safety and confidentiality yourself! When someone shares in the group—no matter how much you may disagree, or how theologically incorrect they may be—make sure they feel affirmed about their answer in the moment. Later, you can (and often should) talk to them about their comments outside of group, but it should be done one-on-one. Also, avoid giving unrequested advice within the group—"Well if I were you, I'd just do this..." That is one of the quickest ways to shut someone down from sharing. When you hear other group members start to do this, gently remind them that "this is a safe group, and we're here to listen, not to give advice."

6.6 Capturing information in people's own words

The key is using people's own words. Avoid listening to someone and then responding with "I think what you mean to say is..." or "I'll summarise what you said as..." and use your own interpretation. Honour people's own words.

6.7 Asking good questions

When you prepare for the session, think of meaningful questions that would cause them to think deeper about the topic or evaluate if they really understand it. The goal is always practical application and not mere knowledge.

Asking questions gets everyone involved and sets the tone for discussion instead of lecture. One of the most important skills in facilitation is not having all of the right answers, but asking the right questions. Here are a few secrets to good question-asking:

Ask open-ended questions. Avoid the yes/no, true/false, multiple-choice questions—"Is Jesus the sheep or the shepherd in this parable?" Similarly, avoid questions that let people

off the hook with a simple Sunday-school answer—"Why did Jesus die on the cross?" You want to ask questions that require people to share some actual thoughts and feelings. If you must ask a "yes or no" question, be sure to follow it with "Why?"

Ask follow-up questions. Many people default to staying pretty surface-level with their answers to your questions, so get in the habit of not letting them off the hook. Ask more questions that follow up on their response. Here are some examples of good follow-up questions for the short/simple answers that people often give:

- What makes you say that?
- How do you feel about that?
- How do you think that would've affected you if you had been living in the time of Jesus?
- How would you explain your answer to a non-Christian friend or neighbour?
- The idea is to get at the core of what people are really trying to say.

Ask application questions. So whatever it is you're discussing, make sure to end with some application questions.

Here are some examples:

- So what does that have to do with our lives today?
- How can you change your perspective from today regarding that issue?
- What one thing can you do differently in this next week to start living that out?

Don't forget to apply what you've learned! Ask group members how they will live life differently because of your discussion. You can also ask group members to identify next steps they need to take.

6.8 Be comfortable with silence - the 30 second rule

People might be thinking, so stop talking. Stop filling the silences with more talk. Too often, leaders ask a question, wait three to five seconds, and then jump in to answer it themselves. This is not helpful—your group members aren't participating, and they won't be discovering God's Word for themselves. Additionally, they'll learn that you'll always give the answers, which will discourage future participation. Instead, always wait 30 seconds after asking a question. In order to train yourself in this, ask a question and then glance at your watch. Wait the full 30 seconds. You might also practice at home by sitting in silence for 30 seconds. At first it will feel like an eternity! But someone will most likely speak up with an answer before 30 seconds are up. And if no one has an answer, someone will speak up and ask, "What was the question?" This can be a clue to you that the question may not have been clear. You can reword your question to make it clear and concise. Why 30 seconds? It takes at least 20 seconds for many people to process questions, especially questions that synthesise information like reflection and application questions. Allow group members the time they need so everyone can participate in the conversation.

6.9 Handling different kinds of people

Most people are comfortable to get together and connect, have conversation, ask questions and study the Bible. However there are those who need special attention. Here is some guidance on how to approach them with grace:

Talkative person. This person always has plenty to say, and loves to be the first person to say it. They can dominate the discussion if not attended to. Thank them for their contribution then say you'd like to hear from everyone in the group. If the problem continues, talk to the person outside of group. Affirm them in what they do contribute, and tell them you need their help in getting some of the other people in the group to open up and share. Sometimes you can go as far as to ask them to commit to not being the first person to answer a question, or to only answer when you call on them—or to even work out a subtle signal you can give them when they are talking too much.

Quiet person. Be sensitive to those who are quiet and try to include them in the discussion and fellowship. Often they have valuable insights to share. It might be that they're just quiet by nature, but if they're feeling uncomfortable or down, they need to be carefully and lovingly invited to take part and possibly prayed for. We can't force people so don't be too forceful, but be mindful of possible needs.

Distracting person. This person loves to get the group way off track by starting random tangents and rabbit trails. First of all, don't get upset at the tangents, and feel free to go off on them once in a while. When the time comes, firmly bring the group back on track. If the problem becomes excessive, talk to the person outside of group. Affirm them in what they do contribute, and let them know about the challenge you have in trying to bring across certain points each week, and how the tangents make your job harder. Ask them how they can help you. Perhaps you could give them a turn to facilitate the group with your help, ensuring they understand the objectives to be reached.

Insensitive person. This individual gives advice, makes fun of answers and people, cuts people off, or does a variety of other things to offend members within the group. This person is dangerous to the health of your group! They can keep it from being a safe group more quickly than anything else. Definitely have the one-on-one conversation outside of group to let the person know how important a safe group is, and what they can do to help make that happen.

Weird theology. If someone in the group brings in strange or weird theology, you will need to correct them gently and share the truth from Scripture with the group.

Try to discern where the person is coming from and address them accordingly.

- i) If they are innocent or acting out of ignorance, take them aside outside of the meeting and then guide them carefully, pointing out where they are erring. You could ask another mature believer in the group to do this, or seek outside help. Alternately you could tell them you'll do some research and get back to them.
- ii) If the person is divisive and has entered the group with the express purpose of disrupting harmony and bringing false doctrine, they need to be dealt with firmly,

but respectfully. We recommend that you contact one of your shepherds or elders to bring it to their attention and request assistance. If you have discerned correctly and the person leaves your group, they may join another group and cause further trouble, so it is necessary to report it. The shepherd or elder will be able to discern and address the matter appropriately.

6.10 Respect the time

Be aware of the time so you can aim to end the gathering at the appropriate time. You might want to sit where you can see a clock or your phone screen, so you don't have to obviously look at your watch. Have a clear understanding before the meeting of the "crux" of the meeting. That is the most important thing you want to do, achieve or cover. You can adjust the timing of other parts, but make sure to leave sufficient time to cover that well. Be honest with your group and say this is important, and go there.

7. Meeting needs

Biblical love is an action word. It not only provides spiritual, physical and emotional support, but also material support. Scripture is very clear on this.

1Jn 3:16-18

(16) By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (17) **But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?** (18) Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

2Co 9:6-8

(6) The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (7) **Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion**, for God loves a cheerful giver. (8) And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

There may be material needs that arise within the community group.

Here are some guidelines in giving:

- i) Everything we have belongs to God. We are merely stewards thereof.
- ii) What is God saying to you about his stuff?
- iii) Do you have grace in your heart to give?

If you do not have liberality of heart to give, rather go back to God and pray about it further. If you are married, share it with your spouse and come into agreement about the way forward. We want to always obey our Father, as he is the source of our very life and everything he has entrusted to us, but we also don't want to become bitter about giving. Rather be honest with yourself and God and say sorry, I'm not there yet. Ask God to help you cultivate generosity.

Not every need has to be met within the group. Trust that the Holy Spirit will lead you and give you wisdom. The least you can do is pray in faith for each other's needs. As you grow

closer, you may be compelled by love to go beyond the “minimum requirements”. Let’s open our hearts to God’s excessive kindness and generosity and learn to love in deed.

8. Confession of sin

We are called to walk in accountable, transparent relationship with one another, repenting of and overcoming our sin as a loving community.

1Jn 1:7-9

(7) But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (8) If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) **If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Jas 5:14-16

(14) Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. (15) And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (16) Therefore, **confess your sins to one another and pray for one another**, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

The context of this confession of sin is community. We ought to encourage people to be transparent about their shortcomings and sin so they can receive support and prayer. The power of sin is in its secrecy. If they are able to bring it into the light they can receive cleansing and healing. They can be released from the condemnation and guilt of the enemy and start to walk in forgiveness and freedom.

Here are some guidelines in confession of sin:

- i) Jesus is the High Priest of our confession.
- ii) When we acknowledge our sin before him, he forgives and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.
- iii) Some sin may require public confession, if it was committed publicly.
- iv) Some sin may require private confession – to one or two trusted people, particularly sin of a habitual nature.
- v) In a community group meeting wisdom must be applied where this is concerned, considering the maturity and age of those present. We should try to avoid inappropriate disclosures where possible. It is better to take the person into another room, with a witness, if this starts happening.
- vi) Sometimes people will just blurt out confession of sin in a group meeting. You may then need to do damage control. Prayer is always helpful in situations like this.
- vii) Confidentiality breeds trust and should be maintained.

9. Handling serious situations

Certain serious situation will require further action beyond the scope of the community group. Confidentiality should be maintained wherever possible, but certain behaviours could harm the person or someone else and would therefore require disclosure at the appropriate level.

If you are not sure how to handle a situation, you may seek guidance from a shepherd or elder about a situation, without divulging the identity of the person.

Should the need arise for specialised counselling or deliverance that you are not equipped to handle, advise the person that they should seek specialised help. We have a team of counsellors and shepherds who may be able to assist the person, or they may need professional help. You could offer to connect them with someone and even offer to go with them. Be careful to get their consent before sharing this information with others when seeking help and try to maintain confidentiality.

Reportable behaviours

If any of the following behaviours come to your attention, you will need to report it to an elder or shepherd. You will need to disclose this to the person concerned, explaining that you cannot keep this information to yourself because you care for their well-being:

- i) Suicidal tendencies
- ii) Self-harming
- iii) Homicidal tendencies
- iv) Physical and sexual abuse
- v) Physical, sexual or serious emotional abuse or neglect of a minor (under 18)
- vi) Illegal activities

We will be careful to observe all ethical and legal responsibilities with these cases.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. A single mom with four young children joins your group. She does not receive support from her ex-husband and has many financial needs, which are obvious to everyone. She also does not manage her finances very well. How do you suggest approaching this situation?

2. A new convert in your group phones you at 2:00 in the morning from the flat of a lady friend with which he's found himself in a compromising situation. He wants you to come fetch him. What do you do?

3. An openly gay person visits your group. He's been visiting the church for a few weeks and is interested in making friends. You don't know if he's serious about Jesus. How would you approach this situation?

4. A single guy in the group who is a proclaiming Christian has been secretly making moves on the ladies in the group. You were not aware of this, but a newly saved young lady in the group has just come to see you to tell you that he slept with her. How would you handle this situation?

5. A businessman in your group comes to see you privately to confess that he's been taking drugs. He brings you his left-over stash of drugs. He's repentant but this happens habitually. What do you do?




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