

Starting a New Group: The First Meeting

Quality groups don't just happen. They are developed by leaders who carefully and thoughtfully seek the Lord for guidance. Here are a few tips for that first group gathering.

Tip 1: Pray for God's blessing

Leading people is an awesome responsibility and a huge challenge. Pray for God to give you insight into his how he is already at work in people's lives. Have a servant's heart as you lead your group. If the Lord has called you to lead the group, don't worry, he'll give you the ability to lead it.

Tip 2: Understand the context of your first meeting

People may be a little hesitant to being there. Don't be discouraged if they come and then don't continue. You are feeling each other out. Also, don't be discouraged if some people don't show up at all. Sometimes it takes a few weeks to get some group momentum.

Tip 3: Prepare the meeting with others who are helping you lead the group

Prayerfully recruit someone who is willing to help lead the group. Partnering with others spreads the load of leadership responsibility. Identifying others who will help you lead also reinforces the multiplication value as God adds to the numbers. If you can't identify someone prior to your start-up, God will provide one soon.

Tip 4: Prepare the environment

Make sure the meeting area is prepared before the arrival of group members. Leaders need to be at the door welcoming guests and assisting with name tags.

Review this checklist before the meeting:

- Name tags and large markers
- Remove all outside noise distractions such as cell phones, pagers, TV's and so on.
- Absolutely no pets in the meeting area
- Light refreshments (Group members should volunteer to bring refreshments to subsequent meetings.)
- Seating, lighting, comfortable temperature

Tip 5: Warm up the group with an icebreaker/opening question

Icebreakers and opening questions help develop the group's relational component. Early on, they should be light and humorous. As the group deepens, you can move toward deeper sharing icebreakers. Don't rush through this, especially early in your group life. Relationships are what will keep people coming back.

Tip 6: Share the nuts and bolts of a DCC group

- Groups often meet two to four times each month
- Leaders host meeting in their homes—don't rotate too much unless you have to—people may drop out because they don't know where the group is from week to week
- Meetings should last from 1.5 hours to 2 hours—begin and end the meetings on time
- Basic group agenda:
 - 30 minutes of conversation, icebreakers, refreshments
 - 30 to 40 minutes for group study discussion
 - 20 minutes for sharing of prayer requests and group prayer. (People may be quite hesitant to pray out loud. Help reduce the fear and intimidation by spending a week sometime in the first couple of months focusing on the concept and practice of prayer. Don't randomly call on someone to pray—check with him or her beforehand to make sure they're comfortable praying in a group.)

- Homework in the study discussion is optional. It is usually perceived as a positive thing, but becomes a burden if it is too time-consuming or intense.

Tip 7: Allow time for questions

Clearly state the details of the group. If members sense that you are unclear about the direction of the group, they may back off. Don't be fuzzy about the details. Be as specific as you can when answering questions.

Tip 8: Follow up the first meeting and invite everyone to the next one

Pursue your group members after the first meeting. Often people need personal communication from the leader to realize that they are wanted and valued. Your follow-up email is a high touch relational message. It is incredibly vital to the growth and life of your group.

Tip 9: Build a scriptural foundation

At some point in your first meeting, you may want to place the role and importance of groups in a biblical framework:

- Acts 2:42–47—This passage represents a description of the early church and its values. Explore what that first church did and the impact of their life together. How could this group follow this model?
- Acts 5:42—The early church had two places to meet and gather: temple courts, and houses. That church understood the value and role of both as they sought to grow in their faith—supporting each other, learning from each other, simply living life together. Group community is the relational heart of Christianity.

Tip 10: Aim high

Cast a vision and set goals for the group. Here are several examples:

- To help each other follow Jesus
- To discover and deepen friendships that apply biblical values to our lives
- To learn to pray for and with each other
- To go the extra mile in caring for each other
- To be the church of Jesus Christ in its scattered form

—Adapted from the *small groups training manual of Crossroads Church, Loveland, Colorado.*