

# Hosting a group in your home

## *Some obstacles and practical ideas*

Matthew 25:37-40

The Holy Spirit has given some people the spiritual gift of hospitality—a natural bent to creating an exhilarating environment. They intuitively long to make every person in attendance feel at ease. From the moment group members walk through the front door right up to the time each individual turns the ignition in their vehicle and exits the subdivision, the host experiences a healthy tension that drives him or her to make their home everyone's home.

Whether or not you have this gift, you can still be an effective host. And even the person with the gift of hospitality has some mountains to climb. These obstacles can easily be overcome with the right understanding, delegation of duties, and some careful planning.

Here are some examples:

### **Time**

For many group hosts, time is the highest hurdle of all—finding time to clean the house, prepare food, set up seating, and so on. This is especially true if the host home is made up of a husband and wife who both work, or who have children (or both!). It is even more difficult for the single person who hosts a small group.

Still, there are ways that any host can be effective without killing themselves.

- **Plan ahead.** Too many hosts begin to think about the group's arrival—and all that must be done in preparation—a day or two before the group meeting. They find themselves sprinting through life, often aggravated that the group is coming. There's a house to be cleaned; a meal to be planned; food to be purchased, prepared, and served; reminders to be sent; and if time allows, prayers to be prayed. By the time the group shows up, the host doesn't have the energy to exhibit love.

But if hosts plan ahead, they can involve other group members in the process, and this is always positive. For example, get someone in the group to watch your kids while you clean. This will give the host time to prepare the house without multi-tasking. Or, have someone join you for cleaning and setting up the house. You'll build deeper relationships while you work, and the two of you will be more efficient. Plus, you can finish early and watch a movie! You can also coordinate efforts with our spouse. Ask your husband or wife to take the kids somewhere fun while you prepare the house for the meeting.

- **Don't be obsessive.** Too many small-group hosts forget that the people in the group are family. They over-decorate, over-clean, overdo the meal, and underestimate the power of letting the group do real life with them. They prepare the house and food and table settings as though the editor of *Good Housekeeping* is going to be at the meeting.

God never expected perfection in your actions or your housekeeping—especially when your imperfect peers are coming by. Agree with your group members at your first meeting that the house may not be perfect, but it is open to them so that you can do life together. They will be honored, not disgusted.

### **The Meal**

For many hosts, the meal is a massive undertaking. No doubt this is especially true if the host senses a responsibility to cook for everyone every week. One word—don't! Don't cook for everyone every week. One of the most important things a host can do is delegate responsibility and involve every household in the meal. This unifies the group and establishes a community built on the essential principle of equality.

Here are a few strategies:

- **Households take turns preparing and bringing the meal.** This way, each household will only have to be concerned with the meal once every four or five weeks.
- **Divvy out responsibilities for next week's meal.** Ask someone to bring the main dish, someone else to bring something green, someone else the bread, and so on.
- **Go out to dinner sometimes.** If you do this, be sure you go someplace that everyone can afford.
- **For a change of pace, coordinate efforts with another small group.** Take a meal to them the night of their meeting and let them do the same for you. You'll be shocked at how relaxing this will be to your group, as no one has to rush home, prepare food, and show up at the meeting frazzled.
- **Some of the group members come early and prepare the meal together.** This can be a great bonding experience.

Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Everyone doesn't have time to go home and cook before the meeting.** Tell group members that picking up a pizza, going to the local deli, and so on are just as good as cooking something themselves.
- **Every household is not equal when it comes to finances.** Be sensitive to group members who cannot afford to bring the most expensive items or prepare a meal for the entire group.

These ideas will save you money, involve other members in the group (sparking better attendance), deepen relationships, and allow you to come to the group meeting more relaxed. You'll be ready to experience the same level of conversation, understanding of Scripture, and life-change that others are experiencing.

### **Childcare**

Need I say more? Childcare may be the most perplexing question of all. There is no perfect situation, but you will find some systems that can work well.

- **All the small groups from one church meet on the same night, and childcare is handled at the church building.** This sounds perfect, but it often overworks the church staff. It also keeps those doing childcare from being in a small group, and it demands that groups end on time.
- **Adults and children meet at the same house—adults in one room, children with childcare in another.** This can be done in various ways. 1) Group members take turns babysitting the kids. 2) The group pools money to pay babysitters that come to the house. 3) Make a deal with another small group. They send childcare to your group meeting weekly and you do the same for them.
- **Adults meet in a home no more than a three minute drive from the home where the children are being watched.** The group pools resources to pay for childcare at a home close by. In this instance, be sure that one cell phone is left on, the childcare team has the phone number, and when that phone rings everything going on at the time stops to see if there is an emergency.
- **Every group member takes care of their own childcare at their own home.**

## All the Rest

Sometimes a host can have a perfectly clean and organized home, serve the perfect meal, have childcare down pat—and end the evening still realizing that “something just wasn’t right.” They can’t put their finger on it, but they know in their spirit that things were just slightly off balance.

Little things are what keep the big things from being accomplished. If you’ll deal with the little things below, you’ll reap big rewards.

- **Engage all the senses from the moment people arrive.**
  - *Hearing.* As group members arrive, have appropriate music playing. It should be at a volume that still allows conversation between group members.
  - *Smell.* A scented candle will relax the room and engage the sense of smell (be sure to check for fragrance allergies first).
  - *Taste.* Have coffee or soft drinks available for people when they arrive.
  - *Touch.* As people show up, welcome them with a handshake, hug, or pat on the back.
- **Pets.** Do not allow pets to run around the house during the small-group meeting. They may be family to you, but they may be an allergy or a source of fear to someone else.
- **Phones.** Phones are “the great interrupters” in small groups today. If you can silence your land-line phone, do so, and turn off your answering machine. Have group members turn off their cell phones during the meeting.
- **Lighting.** Make sure lights are bright enough that attendees can see to read.
- **Set the room temperature at 69 degrees.** When people fill the room, the temperature will rise to 71.
- **Make sure the seating is set up so that every person in the group can see every other group member’s eyes.**

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