

# Ten Practices of Effective Life-Group Hosts

*Follow these practical steps to get your group started in the right direction.*

1 Timothy 4:12

Without a doubt, life-group hosts have the greatest influence over the atmosphere and dynamics within their groups. They set the tone, whether positively or negatively, for all aspects of group life.

Fortunately, new group hosts don't have to figure out what to do (and not do) completely on their own. By upholding the following ten principles, you will be well on your way toward setting a positive example in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity (1 Timothy 4:12). What is more, your skills as a host will improve each week through the positive experiences provided by following these principles.

## **Pray for Your Members**

As with most things in life, life-group hosts should begin with prayer. Consider making it a personal goal to pray for each group member by name on a regular basis—and don't be afraid to let them know you're doing it. If you ask them how you can be praying for them, be sure to follow-up.

It's helpful to jot down notes during the group's prayer time in order to keep their needs fresh in your mind through the week. This also allows you to recall specific requests in future meetings, which reinforces your group's bond.

## **Be Authentic**

It's important that a host model authenticity and vulnerability during the group's spiritual discussions. In fact, this can be the greatest contributing factor to your group's discussion dynamic. Realness is contagious; it has a magnetic force that raises the level of honesty and cohesion in your group. In other words, you help others to be themselves when you are able to be yourself.

In the beginning of a group's life together, the host is usually the one who initiates conversations, presents questions, and takes the risk of sharing personal responses. But rest assured—full participation will soon follow from the rest of the group.

## **Encourage your Members**

Don't be content with saying nice things every once and a while—lavish encouragement on your group participants. You can do this by building them up with kind and compassionate words; serving them through your gifts; reminding them of who they are in Christ; affirming their gifts and positive contributions to the group; and sharing how they are needed, gifted, and called to ministry.

Here's a principle you can take to the bank: people don't grow tired of being encouraged. Your consistent effort to lift up group members shows care, validates them, and encourages more involvement in the group.

## **Empower Your Members**

This aspect of life-group leadership is often overlooked. Make sure to help people find a way to contribute to the group and fulfill God's purposes for it. Your members want to make a difference and add value to the group, and there are multiple benefits to helping them do so:

- Believers' gifts are developed as they deploy them.
- Your load is eased.
- Your group becomes well-rounded, builds ministry synergy, and makes more of an impact.
- Participants experience more of Christ as people express the gifts he has imparted.

In short, life-group hosts should think of themselves as administrators of gift deployment.

## **Look Outward**

As a host, cultivate an outward orientation to your group's thinking and practice. Most groups naturally slide toward introversion and isolation unless the host intentionally develops an external focus. But God's grace will flow more freely in and through your group when people are not focused on themselves. What is more, your members will experience greater fulfillment when they pour themselves out for others and use their gifts and resources to serve.

To accomplish an outward focus, start with the group's prayer time. This is a strategic moment where you can influence members to think of their friends and neighbors who have yet to experience Christ. Also, encourage

participants to invite their friends, and brainstorm ways your group can reach out together through acts of servant evangelism.

### **Be Flexible with Your Curriculum**

When using a pre-packed study, read ahead one session or chapter and see if you can reduce the amount of material covered by half. This will help the group feel more focused and less rushed, which actually boosts the overall participation.

Remember that some questions and exercises will work for one group of people, but not for another. You will learn what your group connects with best over time. By tailoring the study plan, discussions will feel more lively, natural, and relevant for everyone.

### **Be Flexible with Your Agenda**

Don't get locked in to a regimented schedule for your group's gatherings. There will be times when the group tracks with what you anticipated and planned to cover. There will be other times when it does not. Community-building is not an orderly, mechanistic process—so be flexible. Prioritize the principle of staying “on-track” behind the personal needs that arise in the group.

For example, when someone shares a difficult situation or problem that they are dealing with, make time to pray for that person as a group. Stop what you are doing and care for him or her instead of pressing forward to complete all the questions for that session.

### **Listen Well**

Oftentimes, people concentrate so much on what they think about a statement, or what they want to say in response to that statement, that they really don't hear what the other person is actually saying. This lack of listening can be devastating to a group's mutual trust. So be sure to establish the principle of “hearing one another” as an expression of “loving one another.”

Do this by encouraging group participants not to interrupt when another person is speaking, or to be too quick in offering advice that will “solve” the person's problems. In addition, pat answers—“all things work together for good”—or attempts to “fix” the person speaking both end only in frustration.

Finally, don't just sympathize—empathize. It's easy to listen when a person is speaking. But it's an entirely different thing to put yourself in that person's shoes and compassionately enter his or her story. As a host, taking the time to empathize with your group members shows that you understand and care for them.

### **Care for Your Members**

Display a genuine care for your group participants, and do so both inside and outside of meetings. Be available to your group as needs arise, and make sure that each person knows you are available. Remember that some of the best moments of relationship building occur outside of scheduled meeting times—connection “outside” fuels connection “inside.”

### **Be Accountable to Your Members**

Last but not least, lead participants to a place where they can find the courage to confess their sins to each other and experience the healing God wants to bring (James 5:16). Doing so prevents sin from festering inside of your members and promotes wholeness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words reveal the importance of practicing confession in your life group:

In confession the breakthrough to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him. And the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation.

Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed, it poisons the whole being of a person.... In confession, the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light.

As the host, you can take the first steps in this process by sharing doubts you have faced, principles God has taught you through weakness, and personal struggles in applying God's Word and living a life of faith. Don't worry about being on an island for long—everyone will quickly relate to your experiences and find more freedom in their own confession as a result.

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