



Small Group Expectations

Help your group members see the value of living in community.

Transforming gatherings into truly relational communities is completely possible. First, check your expectations and commitment to relationships in the group. Then consider these tips:

- Refrain from trying to count everyone and everything. While we do need to be good stewards of all that God has entrusted to us, we need to be careful not to make this ministry all about facts and figures. Developing relationships and spiritual growth are not easy to measure, and doing too much measuring can draw you away from living relationally.
- Consider how small group members' minds and hearts can be transformed to understand the value of living in community. Study community in Scripture. Help them to commit to God's Word and his will for living in his relational kingdom.
- Rather than the church grouping people artificially, help people find their own groups. While the former method may seem easier, it's less relational and organic, and I've found that it has shorter-term results. Instead, help people figure out where they're already in community with others—for instance, where they serve, where they live or work, what interests they have, and what activities they're involved in. One example we've found that many people like is connecting through their kids' friends.
- Be careful not to make small groups just one more thing to do in an already hectic schedule. Instead, as indicated above, help people see the value of being in relationships and then help them enter into these relationships naturally.
- Help group members reform their expectations of what a small group is. This will come from your practical theology of community. Train leaders to use a small group covenant that spells out the small group's expectations and ground rules for living together in community.
- Encourage groups to study and apply the "one another" passages from the New Testament. One idea is simply to take one of these passages each week and discuss how they'll live it out.
- Encourage groups to connect in community between meetings: play together, hang out together, and serve together. Encourage them to get involved in one another's lives—in things they already do anyway, like attending their kids' games together, eating together, doing yard work together, and so on.

Remember that with all of these, the leader must go first, showing the value of living in community. And be patient. Building a relational culture won't happen overnight. As Scott Boren observes, though, God is not in a hurry. So while many of us want to see biblical community grow quickly in our groups, we must learn to work in God's timing. As we do, God will "do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us" (Ephesians 3:20).

Think about:

- When and how did you discover the value of living in community? What keeps you passionate about it today?
- How can you help communicate the value of living in community to your group members?
- How can you help your group members better understand the expectations of group life?

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