

## TIPS FOR THE FIRST MEETING

Every Community Group takes on a dynamic of its own. For every leader, there are just as many combinations of personalities and leadership styles. That's simply how God uniquely designed us! But the important thing is that He uses the uniqueness of each of our spiritual journeys, experiences, and passions to draw others one step closer to Christ! And that, in a word, is the purpose of Community Groups. Discipleship... Life change to Christ!

### Have Fun, Get Acquainted, & Set Expectations

Your first meeting should be designed as a fun, relaxed gathering for people to simply get acquainted. Anything involving food is always a winner!

### Use an Icebreaker

Being prepared with a couple of ice-breaker questions in case you need them to spur on the conversation is wise, but approaching this evening without a driven agenda is fine. Making everyone feel they are a part of your group is the key tonight. If conversation lags, try one of these questions. Participants will begin to connect with other's stories right away.

- How long have you been attending New Covenant and how did you come to be attending with us (invited by a friend, mailer, sign, etc.).
- What is it about NC that has kept you coming back?
- If money, education, and time were not object, what would you like to do?
- What are you really, really, [really!] passionate about?

### Discuss Expectations

People come into New Covenant and into a Community Group with all kinds of past experiences—some good, and some bad. Some people are church-ed, some are not. Some have been in Sunday school, some in Bible Studies, and some in Community Groups. Any of those experiences, or lack thereof, can create false expectations of what might happen in this new group. Take time to ask each person to share their expectations. Ask if they expect encouragement, authenticity, accountability, prayer and the big one — commitment! Be sure everyone understands that commitment is a decision and necessary in the journey. Ask them for commitment to the group and to your meetings.

*Remember: Mutual ministry is the culture of community group and the heart of the culture is the gospel.*

Community Groups are an environment where people can connect relationally; however, they fall short if that is all they accomplish. Groups are also meant to be a place where people are challenged to GROW in their walk with Christ and one another. In order to accomplish this, you will need to have a clear goal for your group. Our goal is for individuals to become more like Christ (disciple). Christ centered community is the context where discipleship happens. We are connecting people in Christ centered relationships that make and mature disciples of Jesus.

To promote trust and respect in your group, it's helpful to agree on a few ground rules. Mention these, and you'll likely get quick affirmation while setting the stage for a safe environment for sharing:

- A safe place where confidentiality is maintained\*
- Mutual Care in word, deed, and prayer.
- Biblical conflict resolution (Matthew 18:15-17, Ephesians 4:25-31)

*\*Exception: If you sense a life is in danger, inform the church office immediately*

### Promote Ownership of the Group

Discuss that this group is led and facilitated by you, but that everyone's input is needed in order to have a successful group experience. You are not here to teach every week, but rather to lead them in their journey. Active group members promote ownership of the group and keep you from managing all aspects of leadership.

## **Close with Prayer**

Offer the opportunity for others to speak out a prayer and close your first evening by giving thanks to God for all things, asking Him to guide your group as together you seek to create a Community Group environment that will foster the spiritual growth you each desire.

## **Between Meetings**

Invest in developing these new relationships. Take time to call them, check in on any serious prayer request issues, ask about family members, invite them to Sunday brunch, and express sincere interest in their lives. Let them know you enjoyed getting to know them and look forward to seeing them the following week!