



SMALL GROUPS TOOL KIT

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SOME BASIC SMALL GROUP DOS AND DON'TS

HUGE wisdom for effectively leading a small group.

DON'T BE AFRAID OF SILENCE

Let the students sit for a moment and think.

DO VALUE STUDENT INPUT

Do whatever it takes to affirm the comments of student input, but do not be artificial with your praise. Be delicate with answers that are clearly wrong (you probably don't want to put a big red "idiot" stamp on their forehead). Do not feel like you have to finish, complete, or correct a student's answer.

DON'T FEEL LIKE YOU HAVE TO KNOW ALL THE ANSWERS

We are human, and it's good for your students to see that you are limited. You are, but most of them don't think so.

DON'T READ QUESTIONS OFF THE LEADER'S GUIDE

Understand the questions and be prepared to ask them in your own terms. Feel free to generate your own questions during your preparation AND even "on the spot."

DON'T TALK MORE THAN THE STUDENTS

Ask questions to generate discussion, ask students to explain their answers and go into more depth. Allow multiple students to respond, even if the first person gets the "right" answer.

DO ASK STUDENTS IF THEY HAVE QUESTIONS

Encourage them to deal with the material on their own terms. Create a climate where people feel the freedom to ask any question.

DO ECHO SOME RESPONSES TO YOUR QUESTIONS

If a student's answer or comment is long-winded or unclear, repeat it back (summarize it) for clarity. This proves you are listening and it keeps the attention of the rest of the group.

DON'T MOVE TO A NEW QUESTION TOO QUICKLY

After a student answers a question, ask, "Would anyone like to add to that?" or "Does everyone agree/disagree with that?"

DO KEEP THE GROUP FOCUSED AND ON PURPOSE

Don't go down a rabbit trail and leave the topics and/or Scripture passages unless something "big time" comes up (e.g., a family crisis). Be sensitive to the Spirit (but that's not an excuse to be lazy and let the group wander). Wandering is easy, being a leader isn't!

DO REQUIRE AND MAINTAIN CONFIDENTIALITY

This allows students to open up because they feel their environment is safe. However, don't keep potentially dangerous information to yourself (e.g. abuse, suicide, destructive intentions, etc.)

DON'T BE DISCOURAGED

Even if you don't have enough students for your own small group . . . we will give you phone numbers of students to call and invite to your small group.

DON'T BE DISCOURAGED

When (not IF) you have a "bad night." There is not a small group leader alive in the world that hasn't had bad nights.

DON'T GO TO ANOTHER SMALL GROUP IF YOUR SMALL GROUP DOESN'T SHOW UP

This probably won't happen very often once the year gets started. Don't overwhelm a small group of 3 students with two leaders. Spend the small group time in prayer, writing letters, calling (phone) students, etc.

LEADING PRAYER REQUESTS

This tool has some helpful advice compiled by many of our veteran leaders.

Although most of us struggle with prayer, no one would argue about the power of prayer. As believers, we are called to support one another in prayer, and this should be one of the cornerstones of your small group. Because prayer is so important, it's easy for ALL OF US to complicate things (e.g. elaborate prayer plans) and make prayer harder than it ought to be. Sometimes prayer isn't so difficult, it's listening to everyone share EVERY POSSIBLE REQUEST that exists under the sun that becomes a minor trial of fire. Here are a few things to help you lead your students in a constructive time of sharing and prayer. This is a list of SUGGESTIONS...it won't be possible for you to try every idea, so don't try unless you want to go crazy! Every group is different, so use your best discernment.

GET STARTED ON THE RIGHT FOOT: TELL THEM THE BASICS....AND REMIND THEM!

As the leader, you'll need to set the tone for your students...and remind them once a month (or more often). Two ABSOLUTE essentials to making a small group work are **honesty** and **confidentiality**. Let your students know you will "cut them short" if they share for too long (it's not personal, you just don't want to monopolize everyone's time). If there are other values you'd like to have for your small group, be sure to explain those as well.

WRITE `EM DOWN

Make everyone write down every other prayer request in the group...it'll be tough to pray without remembering...if someone is going to commit to a small group, they also ought to pray regularly for the group. (Alternate: have one person write it down and email it to the rest of the group...if you go the email route, remember to **respect confidentiality** and make sure it's OK to send the request over email...some people share emails with their parents, siblings, etc.)

PRAY ON YOUR DAY

Assign everyone in your group to a particular day of the week to pray for the group, (assign two to a day if you have more than 7 people). Remember to sign up for a day yourself. When you meet each week, be sure to ask who prayed...you don't need to heap on the guilt, but WE ARE TALKING ABOUT MAKING ACCOUNTABILITY HAPPEN! (ALTERNATE: you can also have each person pray for just one other person in the group for the week, e.g. everyone is going to pray for the person on his left)

YOU SHOULD PROBABLY STOP TALKING NOW

Don't let everyone talk as much as they want. For your group to support one another, each person doesn't have to share ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING...you can limit people by saying:

- i. Everyone can share one thing, or
- ii. Just tell us what to pray for, we don't need the long drama
- iii. We're only going to pray for the people in the group...for the sake of having some focus, we're not going to pray for your best friend's grandma's dog
- iv. "We've ran out of time to talk about our prayer requests, everyone take a moment to write your prayer request and give it to me, I'll be sure to email all of them tomorrow"

TAKE TIME OUT

Be sensitive to huge issues and problems...if one student is facing something MAJOR, then obviously you should take more of the group's time to care for that person.

PARDON THE INTERRUPTION

If one person is talking FOREVER, then interrupt them and tell them you'll meet with them one on one after small group.

NO GOSSIP HERE

Don't allow "sharing prayer requests" become an excuse for gossiping...this happens more often than you'd think. Much of this can be cut out if you don't let your students share stories, but just the actual request. You can also have your students speak in general terms, without giving details, names, etc.

DON'T STOP JUST TO SHARE

If you're having GREAT discussion about a topic or a Bible passage, don't feel like you ABSOLUTELY have to cut it short to do prayer requests...the people in your small group won't wilt away and die if you skip one week of prayer requests....THIS IS ALSO A GREAT WAY TO BREAK THINGS UP, I've found that a group who does the exact same thing every week can get stuck in a rut.

LET THEM KNOW YOU'RE PRAYING

As the leader in the group, you obviously should make a commitment to praying for them. If someone has an especially difficult situation, be sure to drop them a line to let them know you're praying for them.

ALSO: if you choose to have each person pray for one other person, require everyone to follow up with the person they are praying for sometime during the week. It'll be great to get your group communicating with one another outside of the small group time.

GIVE ME YOUR DIGITS

Exchange phone numbers and emails so if someone really needs prayer or encouragement during the week, he or she can get ahold of someone else in the small group. It is especially important for your small group to feel like they can get in contact with you, their leader.

KEEP YOUR ADVICE TO YOURSELF

When students share their struggles and problems, a common response (especially in guy's groups) is to "fix" the problem and offer all kinds of advice. Obviously there is a right time for the group to provide input on a particular problem, but this shouldn't be the norm. Use your best discernment.

SOMETIMES, ALL YOU NEED IS A LITTLE SPIRAL THINGY

Get everyone in your small group a "little spiral thingy" of note cards from an office supply store. This will make the prayer requests small and compact—easy to carry in a back pack, purse, etc.

NOT EVERYONE HAS TO SHARE

Sometimes it's good to "force" everyone to share, but you don't have to do this every week. You can introduce your prayer time with something like:

"As a small group, we're here to support one another in prayer. This doesn't mean that everyone has to share something—in fact, I don't want you to get into the habit of thinking, "I've gotta share something." This will lead to people making up things to pray for...so if you have something you'd like the group to pray for, let us know. If not, that's fine. About not sharing something, it's great if you don't have something every week, but if you NEVER have something to pray for, then you're not struggling with anything...."

PRAY NOW!

If time permits, pray as a group over the issues. It may be that each week you have one student pray out loud over all the requests, or go around in a circle with each one praying for one of the requests. Sometimes it's best to have each student pray for his or her own request. The students are immediately blessed by knowing that they are being prayed for by their group. This will help to break down walls. Also, they see examples of how others pray to God (i.e. the words they use and how they approach God) and get to practice audible prayer.

THAT'S AN ANSWER TO PRAYER

Encourage your students to keep track of prayer requests AND the God's answers to these requests. At the end of the year, this can be a great thing to look at and be amazed at God's power.

STARTING OFF RIGHT...

If you have one student who nearly ALWAYS takes a lot of time to share, be strategic with who you choose to start sharing so that the BIG TALKER is the last one to share.

PRAISE REPORT

Sometimes sharing prayer requests can become negative and focused only on problems. Encourage your students to share something for which they are thankful before they share their request. Some weeks, I only do praises...and explain to my group that prayer isn't just about talking to God about our problems, but it's mostly praising him.

MILESTONES OF UNDERSTANDING

This tool will help you know when your students "get it"

Making an impact in students lives can be discouraging, especially after weeks of Bible studies where it seems as if you're never getting through. When God's Word is taught, we know we have the Holy Spirit "teaching" alongside our efforts. If we know where to look, we can find glimmers of hope in our students--evidence of spiritual growth and maturity. The following list highlights some "milestones" that stand as evidence of understanding with students. Such a list could never be "complete," but hopefully you'll be pointed in the right direction to see spiritual maturity in your students.

1. DELAYED RESPONSE

Sometimes a student will pause for a moment before responding to discussion questions. Students who speak quickly and "continuously" seem to be repeating something they've heard in the past. When words come slowly, this could be evidence that he or she is really struggling, and succeeding, to understand.

2. CONTAGIOUS EXCITEMENT

Excitement and passion explode from the learner in such a way it's so powerful it defies written description. It begins in the eyes. You'll know it when you see it—it's contagious and it will encourage you as a teacher and/or facilitator.

3. NEW AND DIFFERENT QUESTIONS

You can tell that a student is beginning to "get it" when he or she asks new questions...the questions will surprise you and may be framed in a way that is personal for the one who asks.

4. ASSIMILATION AND COMPARISON

Sometimes a student will take a new concept and assimilate or compare it with something he or she has learned in the past.

5. PERSONALIZED RESPONSES

Truth and concepts are explained in personal terms, rather than parroting back something in "churchspeak."

6. PERSONALIZED APPLICATION

A student who "gets it" can quickly apply an eternal principle to a particular situation in his or her life.

The rarest of them all: lasting life change.

TEACHING GROUPS HANDOUT

When you divide your students into their teaching groups, one option is to appoint one student as the "LEADER" for their group (choose a new person each week). If you do this, you might want to cut the following out to help them facilitate their group.

TAKE 5 MINUTES TO:

a) MEET ONE ANOTHER

Leader introduce everyone--Make sure everyone knows everyone's name in the group.

b) PRAY TOGETHER

Leader prays for the group (or appoints someone to) that God will guide them and help them with the scripture passage.

c) READ SILENTLY

Each person should read the passage to themselves.

d) READ TOGETHER

The Leader reads the passage out loud (or appoints someone to).

TAKE THE NEXT 15 MINUTES TO:

(a) DISCUSS THE PASSAGE.

The group leader's job is to keep everyone INVOLVED and FOCUSED on talking about the passage. If something is unclear to one person, as a group, try to come to an answer.

(b) WRAP UP THE DISCUSSION.

After the discussion, the leader will try to highlight the KEY POINTS of the discussion.

(c) CAPTURE A SUMMARY STATEMENT.

As a group, CRAFT a one sentence summary of the passage. As a group, CRAFT a one sentence summary of the passage.

(d) CREATE A PLAN FOR TEACHING THE PASSAGE

As a group, decide how you will teach the other 3-4 groups what they you have learned (via a skit, or a summary, etc...) The Group Leader should make sure everyone is given an opportunity to be involved.

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RESPECTING YOUR HOST HOMES

Some practical tips for respecting your host homes and the families of your students.

Each host home is a tremendous gift from God to our student ministry. We could not facilitate all of our small groups without their hospitality. For the observers of our ministry, perception becomes their reality. How they perceive our ministry will determine their attitudes about our ministry. The following guidelines are helpful for maintaining a family-friendly respect for the host home.

- 1.** Be finished by 9:00 p.m. Serving in a ministry is a privilege, but we don't want to burn out our leaders or our host homes. Parents also like to have their kids at home by a reasonable hour.
- 2.** Hang out in the door or entryway to tell your students goodbye, and to greet parents when they pick up their kids. Being visible is what makes you available to parents if they have any questions.
- 3.** Try to leave the host home cleaner and in better condition than it was when you arrived. This means returning furniture to its original location. Send a crew of students through the house to pick up any Taco Bell wrappers or loose Starburst wrappers that may have been forgotten.
- 4.** Be aware of and sensitive to any special concerns your hosts may have.
- 5.** Be wise when it comes to physical play, wrestling, roughhousing, tag, etc. Most homes aren't constructed like a gym, so help students be wise. When the students leave, they should be reasonably quiet outside so they don't disturb the neighbors

THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS

Telling someone what they need to know is seldom effective...asking the right question puts the ball in their court

Telling someone what they need to know can be ineffective for at least two reasons: a) The learner is passive and uninvolved b) The learner may not be convinced they need the truth, and therefore the lesson doesn't "stick."

The eternal truths of God and wisdom for everyday living are too important (and complex) to reduce to a lecture of platitudes and clichés.

As a Small Group Leader, you are a teacher of God's truth. One thing you ought to continually work to master is The Art of Asking Questions.

THE BENEFITS

A good question puts the ball in the court of the learner. Aside from generating verbal interaction, everyone can answer the question quietly and softly in the privacy of their own thoughts...when you hear a question, it's almost impossible not to think about your answer. Questions create an opportunity for your students to become active participants. Good questions allow for self discovery, as after the need is recognized by the leader, he or she seeks to fill that gap in his or her knowledge, maturity, etc. Personal understanding and ownership can be facilitated by good questions. Teach people to think for themselves!

SOME KEYS TO GOOD QUESTIONS

1. Think through a series of questions. Phrase the same thing in a couple different ways. Because people think differently, at times a single truth ought to be expressed in several different ways.
2. Discern the particular truth you hope to communicate, and then create good questions to lead your group there. Good questions build on one another and lead to a particular destination.
3. Ask questions that are understandable. In our curriculums, we have tried to be clear as possible. But don't settle for that! If you can say something better, then do it!
4. Use every ounce of imagination you have, and consider where your students are really "at." Use this wisdom to craft your question beforehand and to make adjustments during your small group.
5. Maintain eye contact. It's more personal and encouraging.
6. Don't settle for the "Right Answers." When someone gives you a quick answer, press them to determine confidence level—are they saying something they believe, or repeating something they've heard before. Ask them, "Ok, I hear what you're saying, but what does that really mean?"
7. Create confusion, don't shy away from things that are difficult and controversial. Don't let your students "off the hook" with difficult issues. Healthy confusion leads to growth. This is based upon the "Poor in Spirit" Principle: if a learner doesn't feel the need to learn, he or she won't.

8. Admit confusion. You don't know everything, so don't worry about hiding this when you're confused.
9. Be positive. According to the example set by Jesus, only hypocritical religious leaders deserve negative input...chances are you don't have too many of those in your small group.
10. Be focused. Being sensitive to the Spirit doesn't mean wandering around every spiritual truth, guided only the tangents of your group. Rather than covering a ton of subjects on a surface level, go deep with just one or two.
11. Repeat long answers with a quick summary, when one student talks for a long time, and is confusing, you'll lose the rest of your group. To bring them back in, give a quick summary, or gently ask for one.
12. Don't answer your own questions... or let other leaders answer...if you need to hurt the feelings of another leader, do so. Do it gently, but do it.
13. When you ask a question, don't settle for just one answer from a single person—even if it's the "right" answer. Prompt further responses with phrases like "Good, who else...what's your take?" "Does anyone have something to add?" "Who agrees with what was said? Ok why?" "Who disagrees...why?"
14. Learn multiple sides of an issue. Consider common misapplications/misunderstandings/myths. This will help you create "healthy confusion" and present different angles on the same subject.
15. Be transparent. Share your inadequacies in understanding different truths.
16. Jesus commanded us to teach others to OBEY his commandments. Keep your discussions real. Head knowledge is for the classroom. You're at a small group; keep the significance of the conversation in front of your learners.
17. Learn to push things to the extremes. We often accept truths because they are nice in the few situations in which we apply them. Challenge the answers your students give you by applying them in all kinds of situations, test them for consistency and accurately consider the implications.
18. Have students write down especially good questions and tell them to journal on them. This is also great for questions you don't have a chance to get to... but be realistic, don't dish out a dozen questions!
19. Ignite your passion. If you're never passionate when you teach God's Word, spend a day or two fasting and studying and praying. If that doesn't work, you need to talk with someone about your spiritual health, and you probably shouldn't be leading a small group.

Next to salvation, God's Word is the greatest gift we have from God. YOU GET to COMMUNICATE IT! You don't deserve it neither do I. You aren't good enough, and neither am I. But the mystery remains: God will speak through you! Get excited about that...or get excited about letting someone else lead your group.

Excitement and passion don't mean doing back flips every week. Nor does it mean you'll always feel "up." I'm talking about the deep rooted joy that comes from walking in the Spirit. Sometimes, I come to my Small Group tired and worn out. Don't try to fake it, if you find yourself lacking, then run to God's presence.

WHO IS JESUS?

This material was taken from a handout designed to communicate the basics about the nature of Jesus. This may be something you can walk a student through.

He is God

The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. Matthew 26:63-64

He became a person

The Word [Jesus] became flesh and made his dwelling among us. John 1:14

He taught with authority

They were amazed at his teaching, for he taught as one who had real authority-- quite unlike the teachers of religious law. Mark 1:22

He healed the sick

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. Matthew 4:23

He hung out with the outcasts

That night Matthew invited Jesus and his disciples to be his dinner guests, along with his fellow tax collectors and many other notorious sinners. The Pharisees were indignant. "Why does your teacher eat with such scum?" they asked his disciples. Matthew 9:10-11

He got angry at the religious fakes

How terrible it will be for you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs-- beautiful on the outside but filled on the inside with dead people's bones and all sorts of impurity. Matthew 23:27

He was persecuted unfairly

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward. Matthew 26:59-60

He was tempted in every way

. . . for he [Jesus] faced all of the same temptations we do . . . Hebrews 4:15

He never made a mistake

*. . . he [Jesus] did not sin. Hebrews 4:15
But you know that he [Jesus] appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. 1 John 3:5*

He died, rose from the dead, and continues to live to this day

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, 1 Corinthians 15:20

He made it possible to have a relationship with God

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. John 3:16-17

He can sympathize with our struggles

This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses . . . Hebrews 4:15

He Loves Us

May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Ephesians 3:19

TEACHING DIFFERENT KINDS OF TRUTH

Some ideas for communicating the truth effectively.

A good teacher can communicate truth well. The reality is that, just because something is true, that doesn't make it important. It is helpful to discern different "kinds" of truth. Understanding different "kinds" of truth can help you develop your skills as a teacher. Below is a passage from Mark 4:35-41. From this passage, we will draw out three "kinds" of truth we will teach.

35 That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." 36 Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. 37 A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. 38 Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" 39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be Still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. 40 He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" 41 They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is he? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" Mark 4:35-41

HISTORICAL TRUTHS ...

... are events or sequences of events which happened in the past. Although historical truths may be interesting, they do not always apply to life today, nor are they meaningful for the point you want to make.

For example: Irrelevant historical truth: Jesus slept on a cushion.

For example: Relevant historical truth: Jesus calmed the storm.

PRINCIPLES ...

... are "transferable" truths which reach across time and culture.

For example: Jesus, Son of God, has absolute control over the weather.

APPLICATIONS ...

... are meaningful truths which can and should be applied to every day life.

For example: If Jesus could calm the winds and the waves of the storm, imagine what he can do with the storms in your life. Trust Jesus to care for you in the midst of life's storms.

FOUR KEYS FOR LEADING YOUR SMALL GROUP

This material came from a training taught a few years ago at a staff meeting.

CONNECTIONS

We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us. 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Superficial community exists at nearly every level of our lives, and we often settle for clubs and groups and miss out on powerful relationships. Your small group should be a safe place where people feel freedom to be real and take risks in sharing their struggles. The first step to creating this environment should be taken by the leaders.

COMMITMENT

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. James 3:1

Your task is not to be taken lightly. As a mature believer, you have within you the ability to communicate God's truth. Be committed with your diligence to prepare for your small group time. Follow up on important issues.

AUTHENTICITY

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16

Don't seek to offer something to your students that you don't have. Maintain a vibrant relationship with Christ. Make filling yourself up with God's Word your first priority, and then passing that along to others will require less effort, as you'll be offering directly from your heart.

MATURITY

But solid foods for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Hebrews 6:11

The ultimate goal of your investment in students' lives is to encourage them to grow closer to God. Help them mature in intimacy with God and the knowledge of the truth.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM GOD'S WORD

This tool takes a look at four broad categories of truth in Scripture, understanding these can lead to stronger Bible study skills. This can be something you can teach to your students.

When I read the Bible, I can look for:

I. TRUTH ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER

God gave us the Bible so we could learn more about who he is. We don't need someone else to tell us EVERYTHING about God, we can learn on our own! Discover God on his own terms, he gave us the Bible so we could learn more about his character through alone time with him and his Word.

II. TRUTH ABOUT THE WAY THINGS ARE

God hasn't left us here on earth alone to figure things out on our own. Life can be difficult, but when we know "how the world works" we can make better, wiser decisions.

III. TRUTH ABOUT THE WAY THINGS WERE

God gave us the history in the Bible to teach us. The Bible isn't a history full of perfect people; instead, it details the lives of imperfect people like you and me. Their lives—good choices and bad—serve as an example to move us on to greater maturity. (See Hebrews 11:1-12:1)

IV. TRUTH ABOUT HOW WE OUGHT TO ACT

The Bible doesn't only tell us about how things are or how they were; it also reveals a picture of how things ought to be. God's love for us is so great that he accepts us where we are; and his love is greater still because he doesn't want to leave us there. God gives us commands to follow for our benefit and well being.

When you read, here are four questions you can ask to help learn from the Bible:

1. What does this passage teach me about who God is, how he acts, what he likes?
2. What does this passage teach about the nature of the world (about the way things are)?
3. Does this passage have an example from the past that I can learn from?
4. What commands does this passage contain for me to follow with my life?

Some practical steps for becoming better at studying the Bible:
 Learn to view Bible study as a non-negotiable time throughout your week.
 Set aside a consistent time when you are at your best.
 Avoid the extremes of being ritualistic (mechanical) or slothful (lazy).
 Begin with some realistic goals and boundaries for your study time.
 Be open to God's Spirit.
 Fall in love with God like he's your best friend.

THREATS TO AUTHENTIC AND POWERFUL COMMUNITY

Some ideas to enhance the strength of the relationships in your small group and ABS

What follows is a list of dangers to community . . . and it's not exhaustive. Spiritual Community is tough work. Everything becomes personal. Rejections cut deeper in relationships, and superficial conversation threatens to overwhelm at any moment. Fighting the urge to be polite and nice and take no risks is like holding a tidal wave back with your bare hands.

Fortunately God's spirit is available, he is a necessary "resource" to create spiritual community. As you read through the list, think deeply about your relationships. The awareness of these dangers will help you connect deeply with others.

GREAT DANGERS TO COMMUNITY:

- #1 Talking to make conversation because it's easier than risking being transparent and truthful.
- #2 Refusing to share our confusion and brokenness because of a critical, non-accepting environment.
- #3 Ignoring our personal brokenness because of pride, in spite of the fact it is everyone's condition.
- #4 Failing to admit our confusion, in spite of the fact that confusion leads to openness and learning.
- #5 In the midst of problems, asking, "What will make things better?" rather than, "What is God teaching me?" because we act as if spiritual people aren't supposed to have problems.
- #6 Failing to truly delight in one another because we don't look for the good placed by God in all believers.
- #7 Relating through unhealthy patterns, like:
 - Inauthentic acceptance of one another
 - Screwing around
 - Accepting some, but excluding others in your group
 - Offering truth without grace
- #8 Maintaining the status quo of safety from people rather than safety with people.
- #9 Operating out of selfishness, rather than servanthood.

FOUR KEYS TO CREATING SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY:

- Celebrate others; this leads to safety through acceptance.
- See the good in others; this leads to hope through believing in others.
- Discern how God is working in others, this leads to wisdom.
- Give life to others in your group, so they can feel the power of Christ's touch.

SOME THOUGHTS ON RELATING WELL WITH OTHERS

This material came from a training taught a few years ago at a staff meeting.

1. UNDERSTAND/IDENTIFY YOUR PERSONAL DESIRES.

This works for general, broad sweeping areas of your life, as well as smaller, more focused situations.

Here are some examples:

General: What do I want most out of life?

Specific: How do I expect to be treated when I get home from work."

"What offends me?"

2. EXAMINE/EVALUATE YOUR PERSONAL DESIRES.

Here's the question: is what you want something good or something wise? How does it stand up to God's standard? Are your desires in accordance with wisdom? Are your desires consistent with one another, or are some mutually exclusive?

"Should this bother me?"

3. MAKE AS MANY OF THE NEEDED CHANGES AS POSSIBLE.

This is where sanctification enters into the picture. God loves us for how we are, but he still wants to correct our errors . . . our selfish desires.

"I will grow in this area."

4. UNDERSTAND/IDENTIFY THE OTHER PERSON'S DESIRES.

This requires careful observation, a great imagination, and a pure heart. Diligence in relationships considers the other person's perspective.

"What do they want? What offends them?"

5. RESPECT THE OTHER PERSON'S DESIRES.

Respecting another's wishes can be done actively or passively, both are important. Active living says, how can I meet the other's needs? Passive living says, how can I keep from offending?

"I will live as a servant like Christ."

6. EXAMINE/EVALUATE YOUR DECISIONS, ACTIONS, THOUGHTS, WORDS, ETC.

Refuse to live life on autopilot, consider the outcome of your actions.

"Have I offended the other person?"

7. COMMUNICATE YOUR PERSONAL DESIRES

When appropriate, let others know what you want. Appropriate can be defined with lots of different variables.

If you continually talk about your needs, you're obnoxious.

If your need is obvious, and you continually remind others, that's lame.

If your needs are ungodly, keep them to yourself, and work on becoming more like Christ.

If you talk about your needs without respecting others, people will avoid you.

If you communicate your needs without examining them, you may send mixed messages.

If you NEVER communicate your needs, you'll remain distant from others.

"This is how I feel. . .; This bothers me . . ."

8. EXAMINE/EVALUATE THE OTHER PERSON'S DESIRES.

As you test your desires, test the desires of others. God often teaches us through other people, and considering their wants can lead to wisdom. The horrible thing about this step (and the next one), is that typically we tend to over inflate the importance of judging others. IT'S SO MUCH EASIER. But there is a gift to be mined from the murky mud of judgment: more often than not, when you see something you "don't like" in others, you probably have that same trait in your own life. Here is the jewel: now you have a new avenue for growth!

"Should they be offended by xyz?"

9. INSTRUCT/CORRECT WITH GENTLENESS WHEN IT'S A GOOD TIME.

Christians are supposed to impact one another. Our community should be powerful enough to create life change. A good time for "confronting" others would take pages to fully describe, but here is a principle: Don't waste your words, say something only if it has a chance of accomplishing something good.

"This is an unfair expectation. . ."

10. FORGIVE AND REPENT OFTEN.

People aren't perfect. You aren't perfect. You will hurt and be hurt. The only once of hope in the hurt/be hurt cycle is to forgive others, and ask for their forgiveness. This doesn't really belong on this list, since it is titled, "Some Thoughts On Relating To Others," because this isn't just a nice idea, it's a biblical mandate for all believers.

"I will not hold a grudge"

"I am sorry."