

Google

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Casey's Blog...

Title: Trap

Okay, here's the deal: Groups sometimes live in a trap. What in the world do I mean by that? Well, groups seem to think that if they engage in activities outside of the group time then they are a mature group. Every time we talk about how to grow our groups in community, my group is tempted to answer, "Well, we need to just hang out together more often outside of this time." We really think that if we just do things outside of our regular meetings more often, we'll grow deeper in community. We're wrong.

I used to think this way; now I do not. I don't think THE WAY to grow a group deeper in relationships is to engage in activities outside the group time. I think that it is A WAY to help grow the group but not THE WAY. I have even taught in the past that groups need to do things outside the group time to help the community grow. I still believe that, but I think I have stumbled upon a better answer to how to grow your groups deeper into community. This is so simple that I even feel stupid saying it. Instead of talking about everything you need to do outside the group time, talk about what you need to do during the group time to maximize each group meeting. WHOA...CRAZY THOUGHTS, HUH? Yes, I know - this isn't anything new or too insightful, but it is something that God is taking and driving into my heart. The other night in my group, we talked about simply taking the time we do have and using it more wisely. Why don't we just work hard on making our groups meaningful instead of trying to plan something else? Then we had another realization. We thought, "Hey, if we use this time wisely and grow to be good friends during it, we will just naturally hang out with each other outside the group time." Spending time together outside the group time can flow from what you do during group time. Actually, I think a byproduct of a healthy group is spending time together outside the regular group meetings. So, how do you take your group time to the next level?

1. Prepare smarter

What in the world does that mean? It means spending quality time preparing for your group meetings. Listen, I know that we don't write HOMERUN questions for your group every week. I think we do a good job of giving your group a template to work off of to have a great conversation. Here is the catch: I don't know your group like you do. Only you know what kind of things you can do to make the lesson connect. So when you prepare, take what we have provided and tweak it to fit the feel of your group. I am not telling you to write your own set of questions, but I am advising you to take our template and think through how you can set up each question so that it is meaningful to your group members.

An example: There was a question the other night that read, "I can be more honest with my group about..." Instead of me just asking that and moving on, I really set the question up by talking about how honesty is something that will grow our relationships deeper, but for people to be honest we have to know that what is

said in the group stays in the group. Then I asked the question and guess what I got – honesty...like never before in my new group. I knew that it was my responsibility to set my group up for the best success possible in answering the question. I prepared and it paid off. I took the time we did have and I maximized it. You can do the same.

2. Stop reading these notes and pray for your group time. Do it now. God can do more through prayer for your group than you can by trying to cook up community. Pray for the time your group does have together!

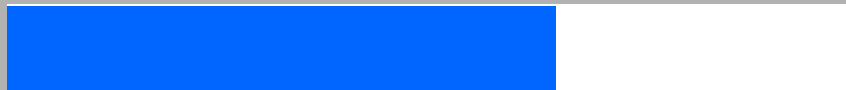


The Search for Real Relationships

Google Search

I'm Feeling Lucky

Transferring data...64% complete
16 out of 25 leaders committed



Objectives

- To evaluate where the group stands as a whole in terms of choice and chance relationships.
- To decide how we can intentionally make our relationships within the group more real as individuals and as a group.
- To discuss what success looks like for our Growth Group.

Facilitators' Guide

- After fifteen minutes, gather your group together to go through these questions. Open with prayer and move into the questions quickly.

1. **Let's get to know each other a little better by finishing the following statement with one of the answers below (share why you picked your answer): I really enjoy it when someone says...**

- | | |
|--|--|
| *Something that recognizes my abilities | *That they've noticed my personal growth |
| *That I've inspired them in some way | *Something positive about the way I look |
| *That there is something about me they want to emulate | *That they care how I feel |
| *Something that tells me I'm loved unconditionally | *That I am hot 😊 |

- This is a great way to get to know the people within your group whether your group has been together for a while or just a few weeks. It will help you and the members of the group know how to appreciate each other specifically. If I were facilitating, I would lead off with my answer to the question. I

obviously love it when Dan tells me I'm hot, but I'd be hesitant if anyone else said it. Well, not really...but more meaningfully, I love it when people notice something about me that they want to emulate. It encourages me. How about you?

2. In your opinion, describe what an intentional (choice) relationship looks like.

- Shawn talked about the difference between choice and chance relationships. This is the time to make sure everyone in your group truly understands the essence of these two types of relationships. Don't accept, "It is a relationship where you have to make a choice to grow it and be an active member of it." That is too general. Get specific. Remember, your goal is to make the most out of your group time; generalities won't get you there.
- For me, a choice relationship involves not just good intentions but actually following through with my thoughts. I often tell people in my group that I was thinking and praying for them the other day. Being intentional would involve me dialing their number at the moment that I'm thinking about them or praying for them. I could also be more intentional by sending a little card or remembering them on their birthday. I once heard someone say, "The smallest deed is better than the greatest intentions." That saying has always stuck with me. Real relationships involve time, money and effort. Those things are required to create intentional relationships.

***Describe what a chance relationship looks like.**

- These relationships are based on the idea and hope that we gain friends without any real effort or personal sacrifice. Without being intentional and willing to give time, money & effort, relationships will remain at a surface level without getting to the level that we all desire and are created to experience. "I hope I get a best friend; someone who really understands me and where I'm coming from because I signed up for this Connection Group."

***Outside of your spouse or immediate family, share about an intentional relationship you have been involved in. How did this relationship benefit your life?**

- This is a chance for people to share the benefits of real relationships that are built by choice, not just chance. It is a firsthand account that the time, money & effort that are put into relationships are well worth the benefit that you gain and receive from them. The relationships with spouses and immediate family are important, but we want to talk about outside relationships that people have with others as well.
- I met a hall mate when I was a freshman in college living in the dorms, and we began our friendship like most do, by saying "hi" when we passed in the hallway. It was a few months later that we began to hang out and build a real relationship where we trusted each other and depended on each other. It only happened by us being honest and taking the chance to share about our lives – the good, the bad, the ugly. We've been through a lot over the years in our friendship. We've been separated by thousands of miles, but she is still the person I call when I need someone to listen or pray or give me advice. The best benefit of all from our friendship is that she understands me. She may not agree with me or like what I'm saying or going through, but because we've been honest with each other and have stuck by each other for years, we understand each other. I know that she will speak the truth in love to me because she cares about me and wants what's best for my life.

3. Read Acts 2:42-47. If you assigned one word to describe the early church's commitment to community, what would it be and why?

- We really want to dig into the Bible and see real relationships in action in the early church. I love it when we get to talk about the Bible and hear each other's perspective on passages of scripture. To give you a little background on the early church, they were not well liked by the government or religious leaders, so they faced a lot of opposition from the world around them. As a result, these early church believers were giving up a lot. People were killed because they believed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and were living their lives for Him. They were looked down upon by their neighbors and family members. They had financial difficulties because they lost their jobs because they were Christians. When I look at how they lived in community in light of what they had to face, the word I would use to describe them is passionate. They were relentless about community despite the odds. Make sure you get the why behind your group members' answers.

***From the passage, how did the early church choose to cheat? Choose to fight?**

- We have to make two choices in order to have real relationships: 1. Choose to cheat and 2. Choose to fight. There are tons of examples from this passage of how the early church made these choices. This is where people can share their thoughts on this passage. Remember, silence is not your enemy and don't be afraid to wait for people to share. Eventually, someone will speak up.
- Choosing to cheat is the idea that every one of us cheats something in our lives based on what we think is important. We have to choose to cheat the unimportant things for what is important. The early church chose to cheat everything else but their relationships with each other.
- Choosing to fight means that we can't give up. Even in the hard times and busy times and when we get hurt, we can't give up on the relationships we have with others.

***Verse 44 shows us that the early church was committed to making the choice to have real relationships. Are the relationships in our group as a whole characterized by chance or by choice? Share concrete examples of why you chose your answer.**

- It is important that we talk about the group as a whole; not just the relationships of one or two people within the group. The question is meant for people to be very honest with the group about how they feel and their evaluation. Encourage the group that we all have room to improve, but being honest about where we really are shows us where we can grow in this way. It is okay to say *chance*; as the facilitator, make sure people know that. My group just began about six weeks ago, and we are definitely more chance than choice – and that's okay.

***We talked about choosing to cheat this weekend. What is one thing I can cheat in my life so that the relationships within this group are more about choice than chance?**

- Every one of us has to take personal responsibility to help grow our relationships within our group. Talk about this question for that reason. Here are some of my ideas: cheat TV time in order to spend time preparing for the discussion by completing the questions in advance, not just in the car on the way; cheat other activities to ensure consistent attendance; cheat pride to be honest about what's really going on in life and ask for prayer; cheat financially to buy a birthday card for group members, etc.

***As we can see, the early church maximized every minute they had with each other to build real, deep, lasting relationships. Decide together two things that the group can fight for to make your meeting time more meaningful.**

- It's not just about what's done outside the group time, but what you can do as a group during the hour and a half you have every week. Brainstorm together and decide on two practical things that will grow your relationships to be more real. It might be celebrating each other's birthdays during group time. It might mean being vigilant about having 10-15 minutes at the end of the discussion to pray for each other together. It might mean being committed to confidentiality within the group so people feel more comfortable sharing what's going on in their lives. Decide two things you can do and begin putting them into practice!

***Verse 47 gives us insight to the outcomes of a church choosing to fight for community. What happens?**

- It reads, "The Lord added to their group those who were being saved." The world full of disconnected people sees what it's like to live in healthy relationships with God and others and begin to want that for their lives. God uses people who are committed to each other to make a difference in others' lives to change lives.

***With that in mind, what is the ultimate goal of our Growth Group?**

- The goal of all Growth Groups is to complete the Great Revolution because there are people that are disconnected from Christ and the church who need someone to reach out to them and give them hope! We want people to have life-changing experiences in groups so that it can be replicated with new people.
- Remember the goal of the Great Revolution as you talk through this question with your group. It is easy to be selfish about growth group and think only about what you are getting out of it or how comfortable you are in your group. However, it is for the purpose of reaching other people so that God can change their lives that we invest in groups. End the evening by praying that your group will continue to grow in real relationships. Ask God to use your group to reach those who are disconnected.

