

General Topics :: Request for advice on small house group meeting

Request for advice on small house group meeting - posted by davym (), on: 2011/1/4 6:38

Happy New year all

I was wondering if anybody could give me some advice on hosting a small house prayer meeting/Bible Study.

Are there any useful structures that could be used for the meeting e.g. Bible study plan etc? Are there any do's and don'ts people have experienced from house meetings?

Many thanks

David

Re: Request for advice on small house group meeting - posted by JoanM, on: 2011/1/4 10:56

Thoughts I am sure you know already. Prayer, prayer, prayer and PRAYER to be certain of God's leading and direction. Ask God for everything. Wait until He provides.

1. Are you hosting or leading? It is often good to not be both. Unless you have a spouse also called, this provides a two-person unit (sounding-boards).
2. It is often good to have the leadership, the person who leads out in prayer, change with each meeting. If God points someone out mid-week, speak to/ask them ahead of time.
3. Acapella singing can give everyone the sense of the Body of Christ. A hymn related to what God has put on the group's/leaders heart can be very good.
4. Groups over 12 can become very different.
5. A certain beginning and ending time can keep the focus clear to all, separate general fellowship of believers, discourage "degeneration" into Kingdom of this World gatherings.
6. Daily prayer for members, with sharing answered prayers after a bible study, or during a thanksgiving time is good.
7. Eating and drinking really can stimulate the flesh (dull the mind) and not be a good activity to BEGIN with. Over time, as people desire, a planned fellowship meal can be good from time to time.

Let us know how this progresses David. This can be a wonderful time of growth in Christ for you and others that are hungry to know Him more. A real happy new year :)

Re: - posted by davym (), on: 2011/1/4 11:32

Hi Joan

Thanks for your reply and I really appreciate your thoughts. They are very wise and will be used.

There is about 8 of us who feel led to start the house meetings. It was a concern of a few of us that a lot of the time we meet and chat our conversation ends up being unprofitable. It would be nice to have our conversation focused on the Lord and, as you say, grow in Christ. The initial plan is to rotate it probably monthly or bi-monthly around each of our houses. I will probably host and lead in the first instance, but this may or may not be the case.

It is something I'm quite excited about, but at the same time I know the enemy will be seeking to destroy it. Your point about the meeting degenerating is interesting. Also, it would be great if everybody felt comfortable contributing in the meeting.

I will definitely keep you posted on progress. Trusting the Lord will lead.

God bless

David

Re: Request for advice on small house group meeting - posted by Areadymind (), on: 2011/1/4 12:53

In a small group, you have the opportunity for true fellowship, prayer is a paramount objective. Stir people up to good works. If you are the moderator, learn to direct the conversation, as long as you are spiritually minded and discerning, yet do not attempt to dictate the conversation like an authoritarian. Scripture is always to be the light and the guide in all fellowship, you are merely to encourage others to see what the Bible says for itself. Let it speak, and just attempt, in faith, to speak what it says. Be prepared to correct gently and with love and grace, but also be incredibly patient. If all you do is correct, well...you may not have a home fellowship after long (contrary to popular belief, heresy is something that is to be tolerated with patience, mercy, compassion and grace, wolves with agendas and men who make followers after themselves are not to be tolerated.) Learn to pick your battles, you will earn peoples respect through patience and long-suffering just like the Lord does. Jesus was extremely patient with the disciples...

Going through a book conversationally and expositionally can be a huge benefit, but not just to understand it in a head-case fashion. Rather the point of studying it together is to encourage one another to actually perform it. If you happen to have a laptop with a concordance, and study software on it for quick and easy language help, that can be a benefit as well to help analyze nuances of the word when there is confusion or disagreement. Disagreement is not immoral, it is a-moral.

If you confess your faults and sins to others, then others will do the same. In all things lead by example and not by fiat. Be prepared to be the one who gets the most convicted by the word and the most willing to be humble and bear others burdens.

As far as structure goes...well structure is and ought always to be an overflow of a people with cleansed hearts and pure minds. No amount of external structure corrects those issues. But on a practical level, if one person is always dominating the conversation, then a private encouragement to that individual to consider others above themselves may be in order. If someone does not speak often, do not pressure them to do so beyond what God is doing through them. Although I have rarely found this to be a problem.

If these people start praying more, and obeying more, then you know Jesus is working through you and in your study group. If you are the host, or know a host family, make sure that hospitality is their gifting, or they seek to be as hospitable as possible. Food is good. The early church always shared meals like a family because they were family. I think this is a great thing to continue in. Feed Jesus sheep both the word, and food. It is a great combination.

In all things, be humble, and teachable in your own spirit. Recognize that Jesus is the head of your meetings, not you. Love trusts in all things, trust that God is working in those who attend and believe that God is good, and wants them to flourish. Encourage that flourishing.

Something I keep praying for and would like to see in the home fellowship that I am a part of would be a vision around which that little group of people could become united in the purpose of the advancement of the kingdom. It would be awesome to see home fellowships be like relay stations where brothers and sisters come to get informed on the callings of what it means to be the body of Christ, and then they get "sent" to perform, together as a cell, something for which Jesus has prepared for them from the foundations of the earth to do. My pastor always says, and I think it is very wise, "You cannot push a rope, you can only pull it." Your home fellowship is going to be a reflection, not of how you push others into service, but how you pull them by your own Godly example. This is where the skids are greased in ministry. I still have a lot to learn and have high hopes for what God purposes through his kids in regular home fellowship. The things I have shared are just some things I have learned...

Also, in James it says that we are to "Confess our faults to one another." And in 1 John it says that we need to confess our sins. James also says that, if we are sick, or in sin that we are to come to the elders and ask for prayer and the anointing of oil. Home fellowship is a balance between teaching, and actually DOING what the word says. If you come across something in scripture in your study that is an admonishment to perform and the setting allows you to obey that scripture then do it. Don't just teach about doing it. 1 John also says that if, "We walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another, and truly our fellowship is with him." You need to make sure you are walking in the light ab

ove all things, and encouraging others to do the same with the end goal in mind of fellowship with God. What an amazing truth.

Home fellowships should be a place where sheep are comfortable, knowing their privacy and best interests are protected at all costs. Knowing that they can trust one another to ask for prayer and find a small body of people who are not just "brothers" in a technical sense, but brothers in deed.

I hope some of this helps. May God richly bless your meetings.

Re: - posted by Areadymind (), on: 2011/1/4 12:54

As per Joan's advice, we always eat...after the fellowship, not before :)

Re: Request for advice on small house group meeting - posted by Ceri (), on: 2011/1/4 12:56

Hi David

JoanM gives very good advice.

We've hosted a house group in our home on the first Thursday of every month for many years and it is great.

We have a man who has retired from the diaconate of our church to lead the meeting and give the word, as that is his gift.

He does a brilliant word and sometimes loves to follow a theme, the latest being all the 'I Am's' that Jesus said about himself e.g I am the bread of life; I am the good shepherd; I am the door; I am the light of the world etc - you could do a year of meetings on that theme alone!!

He always prays and meditates on God as to what to bring us and has spoken into situations by doing this.

He occasionally feels God leading him to ask one of us to speak on a following month. One occasion God told him to ask my young daughter to speak, and unknown to him she had been praying asking the Lord for an opportunity as she had a word to give. She has now spoken on further occasions and is thriving and growing in her gift, which he realised she had the first time she spoke, as everyone was moved to tears and so blest of God.

A house group is a place where giftings can be spotted and encouraged to grow without the pressure of being in front of a full church.

I assist by leading and speaking whenever our regular leader is absent, and also every month arrange the worship time. I plan no more than 3 songs to start the meeting, but folk can start a song up during the prayer time as they feel led.

We usually sing unaccompanied so it helps to have songs that are well known and comfortable to a small group vocal range - otherwise it can descend into embarrassed giggles!

We sometimes have a lady attends who really needs to feel needed and appreciated, so I encourage her to play the keyboard that is already set up in our house and she plays well and loves to do so, so I like to encourage her this way.

We start at 7:30 and end around 9:00 and then have tea/coffee and biscuits, we find that people are more open in sharing in this environment.

We find it helps stability to have a regular home to meet in, and no less than once each month - if we miss a month as we've had to do with the weather conditions recently, it always seems too long without the fellowship and folk are really yearning to get together again. We are all so looking forward to this coming Thursday!

We did for a year have another group from a few miles away link in with us and we grew to 25!

We had to open up the double doors into the dining room too and the leader and I sat in the doorway to link up! although it was fun I find it a lot better fellowship wise now that the other group have gone their own way and we are back to approx 12 again.

As JoanM stated the number one secret to success is prayer and lots of it!

Can I also say confidentiality is essential too and must be stressed publically before asking folk for their requests!

Folk know that what is said in our house stays in our house and they feel part of a family and able to share personal issues for us to pray for them. To be honest we did lose that family feel when we grew to 25 but now it has returned.

I pray for your group as much blessing as we have had together, it is the best way to fellowship!

Re: - posted by davym (), on: 2011/1/4 19:34

Thanks so much for the replies.

They're a great help.

David

Re: - posted by learjet, on: 2011/1/4 20:23

Quote:
-----Eating and drinking really can stimulate the flesh (dull the mind) and not be a good activity to BEGIN with. Over time, as people desire, a planned fellowship meal can be good from time to time.

My wife and I led a small group for about 3 years and it was one of the happiest times of our life. When we started we had 1 kid and God multiplied our group by his grace. However, I agree with everyone else here, when the group gets too big it loses its intimacy. Hopefully, you will be able to ask another brother or sister to start another group when this happens. Overall, whether good things or bad happen, the Lord will use this time to produce endurance in you, and that's a good thing. The devil is already defeated, keep this in mind at all times but be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove.

Joan offers some good advice here, don't eat until afterwards it's a big distraction. We can glean from the Apostle Paul that eating together is an important part of our relationships as believers. Paul tells us to not eat with a brother that has fallen into sin and not confessed and repented from his sin. Reading into the practical application of his command you can gather how important sharing a meal was among the church.

Brother I pray for nothing but the best for you!

In Christ,
Earl J.

Re: Request for advice on small house group meeting - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2011/1/4 21:00

Just some practical considerations:

- 1) ALWAYS have food. Food was and should be a main feature at any such gathering, as the idea of Biblical and ancient fellowship centered around "whom you were willing to share the table with." This doesn't have to be anything amazing or over the top. But there should be some sort of food and drink available. As it is, such is simply good hospitality.
- 2) Decide what kind of meeting will it be. There must be a purpose behind it all. Is it an open forum where people are going to be encouraged to flow in the gifts of the Spirit? Or is it going to be spear-headed by somebody for the purpose of teaching from a book or from the Scriptures?
- 3) If it's going to be a sort of open forum, then there is little need for structure. Simply allow the Holy Spirit to do His thing. But if the meeting is for the purpose of studying the Scriptures or a book, then you should have at least one person who is capable of teaching AND moderating a sort of round-table discussion.

Ideally, this one person should also have an assistant who is capable of helping the primary teacher/moderator, and can fill in for them as necessary. And ideally, the moderator/teacher will also use this as an opportunity to groom this person to launch a new group WHEN your group grows too large for your one location. Think of it as a Paul and Timothy type of relationship.

- 4) Always have a definite start time, and a definite finish time. For personal scheduling purposes when holding such a meeting in your house, always anticipate that your guests will linger for about 30 some minutes after your meeting is "over." From my experience, 90 minutes is generally a good amount of time to meet. You may want to meet longer, but from my personal experience anything much longer than two hours and you and your guests will be unable to retain anything of great value. There might be exceptions to this. But, let's be practical.

5) Open and close in prayer. Encourage people to only share pressing prayer needs whenever possible. Not, "I know somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody who is dying of cancer." Remember, all things must be done for edification, and praying for somebody four times removed from the life of your small group is probably not the most edifying thing you can do as a group. People can be strange critters sometimes, and pull prayer needs out of a hat in order to fill silence, or get some sort of attention they personally long for. While God cares for such persons, such prayer request will KILL your community quick.

6) Encourage everybody to participate. Avoid sermonizing lectures. Be much more "Socratic" in your style, where there exists a running dialogue. Ask open ended questions (one's that don't simply require a simple yes or no answer). If you notice somebody being quiet, don't be afraid to put them on the spot from time to time and ask them directly about an issue at hand.

7) As Areadymind pointed out, play nice :-) Be very tolerant. Be very patient. Be very gentle! Above all things, abound in love and mercy.

And above all things, remember, this isn't rocket science! Don't be stressed out. Simply entrust all things to the Lord, and commend the people you are gathering to Him. Allow Him to be above all and in all! Sometimes things might get ugly, but remember the historical injunction: "The Church is a whore, but she is my mother." As bad as your mom might get, remember at the end of the day she's still your mom!

Re: Request for advice on small house group meeting - posted by savannah, on: 2011/1/4 23:59

Re: your request

May the topical articles at the following link, and the website in general, be of help toward that end for which you began this thread.

<http://www.ntrf.org/articles/index.php>

Bless God