

An Introduction to Community Soul Groups

Definition

A Soul Group is a group of four to six, same-gender individuals committed to developing long-term relationships for the purpose of encouraging one another in their walks with Christ and for applying that relationship with Christ in practical ways in their relationships with others.

Soul Groups meet the need to know a few other Christians at a deeper level while seeking a more Christ-centered life. Through candid discussions and prayer, each person is built up. Soul Group meetings are a safe place where Scripture is explored and applied to the deep concerns of life.

A Community Soul Group (CSG) is a Soul Group of adult women or men from a community. These are people who have some common connection (i.e.- live in the same town, work together, attend the same church, have spouses who have a connection, etc.), but do not necessarily need to know one another well yet. For example, one CSG was created from women whose spouses all work at the same university, but who didn't know one another at all. Another CSG was created with six people who knew each other, but who wanted deeper relationships for accountability and prayer. The options are endless; the members of the CSG simply need to be committed to Christ and to one another.

We have created some guidelines and ideas of how to structure your group. These are just suggestions, but have been put together based on several years of experience with Soul Groups.

Guidelines

Commitment We consider becoming a member of a community Soul Group a long-term commitment. It is not to be taken lightly or entered into compulsively. This is a group of women that you are committing to meet regularly for an indefinite period of time. We will not shuffle people around after a year or two, so you are free to really get to know one another.

Where and How Often to Meet Homes are usually the most conducive to getting to know each other, though not necessary if you are committed and consistent. Many groups float around and take turns at different members' homes. Most groups meet every other week or twice a month. Since this is a long-term commitment, be sensitive to making sure you don't burn out. We want this to be something that you can live with on a regular basis; something that fits well into your life.

Contact Person Each group needs a "contact person" who will be responsible to tell the Administrative Leader (or whatever you may call your organizer) about any changes in addresses, email addresses, phone numbers, members who may move away, etc. The

Administrative Leader will use this contact person to communicate any announcements, events, etc. The contact person is not responsible for leading the group or for scheduling small group meetings (unless they choose to). They are responsible for communicating between the administration and their own soul group.

Keeping to a Schedule It is good to keep to a schedule so that members can depend on being home at a certain time. Your schedule will depend on which format you are currently using, but as a general rule, socializing at the beginning should be limited to 15 minutes and there should be at about 20 - 30 minutes set aside for prayer. Some of us less disciplined people actually use a timer to keep us on track. Plan to finish on time with the option of staying after to talk more.

Rotating Leader We suggest having a different person responsible for leading the group each time you meet (after the initial “story telling”). There needs to be someone who will keep you on schedule (who will set the timer if necessary!) and generally run the meeting.

Confidentiality Are you going to keep everything completely confidential or are some or all items allowed to be shared with spouses? Your group should discuss this together and come to an agreement as some do not feel right keeping secrets from spouses while others would not feel comfortable sharing personal things unless they can depend on complete confidentiality.

Conflict In small groups, there may be conflict at some point – we are not perfect yet. It is important to communicate with one another as a group about any issues you may have. As a group, do not discuss a particular person unless they are present. If you are having conflict with someone in your group, get together with them one on one and talk about it.

How to Start CSGs Where You Live

Step 1 Prayer. Two or more women come together in prayer.

Step 2 Set a meeting date. Plan to meet in someone’s home for a casual time to introduce women to the Soul Group concept.

Step 3 Publicize. Be creative.

- use campus channels
- flyers
- new staff/faculty packets via Human Resources Dept.
- emails to faculty and staff inviting all women employees, and/or spouses of employees
- personal telephone calls
- written invites

Step 4 Have Soul Group introduction meeting.

- see section titled “**Guidelines**”. This is helpful in making the presentation.
- stress the commitment level required
- accept sign-ups

Step 5 Pray for God’s guidance in selecting the new group memberships. Make group assignments of no more than 6 women per group.

Step 6 Second Meeting. This offers a time for the new group members to meet one another in a neutral setting. Divide the women into their new groups for them to make introductions and become more acquainted with one another. At this time, make sure you get a designated “contact person” for each new group for “step 8”.

Step 7 Follow up. This can take many forms. Some groups may need encouragement and/or prompting to schedule their first Soul Group meeting - provide that for them. You can use telephone calls, cards, or person-to-person visits.

Step 8 Maintain a database and/or contact list. This can be in the form of email and is ideal for maintaining contact with all the Soul Group women.

Suggested Formats for Soul Groups

Sharing Personal Stories (Year One):

Each member of the group takes 1-2 hours (or more if needed!) to share their spiritual journey with Christ. For some this means including part or all of your life story. The more you share, the more you get to know each other. This is a trust building exercise as it makes you quite vulnerable. It is good to remind each other of the confidentiality of the group. Pray for the person who is sharing both before and after they share.

John Wesley Self-Examination Questions

These questions can be used in personal devotion time or as a group. Here is a sample of some of the questions:

Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?

Am I honest in all my acts and words or do I exaggerate?

Do I confidentially pass on to others what was told to me in confidence?

Can I be trusted?

There are 22 questions. For a full list, see *Soul Strength* by Pam Lau, pp. 43-44

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina is an exercise in slow, contemplative praying of scripture. This can be done for your prayer time at the end of your meeting or as the focus of the meeting. Here is a sample of what lectio divina as a group would look like:

The leader reads a passage of scripture.

Be silent for 1-2 minutes while silently repeating a word or phrase that the Spirit calls to your attention.

The leader then asks each person to share aloud the word or phrase they are meditating on.

A different person reads the same passage of scripture again.

Be silent for 2-3 minutes, reflecting on the question:

“Where does the content of this reading touch my life today?”

The leader then invites each person to share their responses to the question.

A different person reads the same passage of scripture a third time.

Be silent for 2-3 minutes, reflecting on the statement:

”I believe that today or this week God wants me to...”

Resources on lectio divina:

Soul Strength by Pam Lau, pp. 93-94

Contemplative Bible Reading by Richard Peace