

# Healthy D-Groups



# Common Denominators

Determining what makes a D-Group healthy can seem subjective but over my entire Christian life of small group leading and learning from others who have done it longer you just need the common denominators. Some small groups are vibrant, healthy, and multiplying while others are not. Some become this on accident while others grow into this on purpose. There are a few simple practices that make the difference between health and disease, effectiveness and ineffectiveness. In a case study, this built these practices into their weekly gatherings become healthier and those did not... well, they did not. The best part is that these practices are doable.

## 5 W's of a Healthy Group

The 5 W's of a healthy group are Welcome, Worship, Word, Witness, and Works. Welcome is the basics for building great community and maintaining it. Worship is us never neglecting the power of recognizing God. Word is us ensuring that some part of our group life engages with God's word and what God is teaching you as a leader through it. Works ensures our entire group is being poured into by the group but also pouring out for the group in some way. Lastly, witness keeps our focus on being a people-reaching group. Let's glance at them in short.

### 1. Welcome

Practically, how you as a leader and your group as a whole welcomes each other and new people will impact your health. The Bible gives us the clearest guidelines on developing community in our groups through the one another commands. We have to pursue these intentionally. Sticking people together and calling them a group doesn't make them a group. **The commands for establishing community include:**

*Love One Another (John 13:34)*

Loving someone simply means to unselfishly choose for the highest good of another. Sometimes that means taking a break from seeing people after the semester so you are rested and healthy when you see everyone again. Other times it may be taking someone to lunch with you when you would rather go on your own.

*Move Beyond Your Comfort Zone to Affectionately Greet One Another (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Pet. 5:14)*

We live in a fast-paced, distant, shallow world. Group is a space where things can slow down, people can be up close, and everyone can be deeply known. The first step in that is greeting well especially when the group is new. If many of you have been in group together for a long time direct them all to really greet people that are new to the group.

*Hold each other in high esteem and actively honor one another (Rom. 12:16)*

It's a sign of modern western friendship to cut-down others as a form of humor. Nothing, however, builds community more than a genuine atmosphere of esteem and honor. When a group breathes an atmosphere of respect and regard, meaningful, authentic, relational community will grow. This simply means giving undivided attention, celebrating joys, and seriously considering their questions and concerns rather than quick-to-speak solutions.

*Accept one another (Rom. 14:13; 15:7)*

When people sense a spirit of criticism or self-righteousness in others, they either close down or look for faults in others as a defense mechanism. It draws the life out of community.

Unconditional acceptance, on the other hand creates fertile soil for deep friendships. Give others the freedom to be themselves.

*Encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:25)*

Make an intentional effort to point out the hand of God in someone's life. They may remind you of Jesus when they do this or they really show what endurance looks like when they go through that hardship they're down about. Encouragement is oxygen for the soul.

Once a group begins to love one another the building phase is over and **you move into the maintaining community phase**. The one another commands implemented here are as follows:

*Make the Effort to Resolve Conflict (Rom. 12:16)*

Many communities fail because of their fear of conflict. We are all different people so variance will happen. Denying or avoiding conflict will kill community. Resolving it builds community. Because conflict WILL come, **pray for discernment** about the intent of the other person. Is there a conflict or am I just being sensitive? **Determine your own part** of the problem. **Plan to talk privately** but don't wait too long. Let them know it may not be a fun conversation but it's important. If you are the primary source of offense starting with these secret phrases may help: "I was wrong"; "Please forgive me"; "I love you." If the other person is the source of offense do not accuse. Share observations and ask for their perspective and seek understanding.

*Bear with Each Other and Forgive One Another (Eph. 4:32)*

Community is expressed by loving all the people all of the time no matter what they are going through. They may be having a bad day or challenging set of circumstances. Community deepens as you bear it with them and, when necessary, forgive them.

*Submit to One Another (Eph. 5:21)*

Arguments are not worth winning. If an issue is preferential it probably won't make a difference if you win anyways. Community can grow when we learn unity in diversity.

*Refuse to Slander Someone in or Outside the Group (James 4:11)*

Slander or gossip will kill a group. Make and remind everyone of the rule that what is said in the group stays there. Once people see it's true it will be a safe place for them to know and truly be known.

*Take Turns Showing Hospitality to One Another (1 Pet. 4:9)*

Share the responsibility of food or hosting. The enemy can quickly get in through someone feeling used and hurt when they're the only hospitable ones.

*Sin Dulls Light and Destroys Fellowship (1 John 1:7)*

Sin prompts people to hide and make masks. Community can't be built with masks. Honest confession and prayer heals and deepens community. It likely won't happen in the meeting but rather in same sex gatherings or one on ones with someone else from the group. Make space for this.

*Motivate One Another (Heb. 10:24)*

Fire and hunger is caught for than it's taught. If someone needs a slower pace of life commit to a regular practice of sabbath with them. Challenge someone to 10 minutes of silence and solitude that you will do also so you can both share.

## 2. Worship

God is worth infinitely more than we could ever imagine and Jesus is more than sufficient to satisfy us and our deep longings. His intrinsic value (the value of a thing in and of itself) is wildly unmatched. Worship is a natural response to this. Worship is assigning worth to something. When we worship and give attention to something we reveal the worth we believe it has.

Life is happening before group and will be happening after group. Worship helps shift our attention, as divided or weighed down as it may be, from our circumstances to God. Psalm 73:16-17, 26, 28 is an example of Asaph struggling with something, going into the sanctuary of God, and coming out encouraged and with a new perspective. Worship is us re-recognizing God's worth and centrality in the middle of whatever disruptions we experience.

So what do we do to worship? It isn't just singing which is good because I can't sing and my group wouldn't want that. Here are some activities of worship you can do:

- Being silent in awe (Isa. 6)
- Kneeling or lying facedown in absolute surrender (Rev. 4)
- Confessing sin (2 Sam. 12; Psalm 51)
- Shouting in Thanksgiving (Ps 42:4; 66:1-2; 71:23; 98:4)
- Resolving to obey (Gen. 22)
- Praising in midst of difficulties (Job 1)
- Giving God offerings out of gratitude (2 Sam 24; 1 Kings 8)

- Lifting your hands (Ps: 63:4; 134:2)
- Yielding your will (Jonah 2)

### 3. Word

The Bible is one of the powerful tools at our disposal in disciple-making. It is the best-selling, most read, studied and memorized book in the world. It is the world's most quoted, despised, and discussed book. History shows it to be the most unstoppable and indestructible book ever written. Archaeology shows it to be the most reliable ancient text. Fulfilled prophecy shows it to be the most unique book. Through the Bible we can know God and His intentions for our lives. It is written so we can be more formed into the image of Jesus.

At some point in a group you will need to open the Bible and teach or share what God has been teaching you. The goal is to draw out what God is doing in your life and the lives of the members. If you can help your group verbalize what God is doing in their lives, then you will have helped them make a crucial step in their spiritual formation and growth.

### 4. Works

The Jordan River flows into the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea further south. The Sea of Galilee is full of organic life and fish. Civilizations and other life cluster around it because of the life it contains. The Dead Sea, on the other hand, has almost no organic life. People do not gather around it to glean life but to marvel that something that should have life doesn't. The difference between the two is the Sea of Galilee has an inlet of water and an outlet. The Dead Sea only has an inlet and no where else for the water to go.

Many Christians become like the Dead sea because they consume the kingdom of God but never help create it. Members of a group are very prone to this happening. The solution is simply that everyone in the group must be viewed and view themselves as ministers. Every Christian is a "mini Christ" and Jesus described himself one who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Serving and giving are characteristics of Jesus and, therefore, should be of his followers.

Even further, Paul describes the church as a body where every member is unique, needed, and dignified (1 Cor. 12:20-22). There are no insignificant parts or ministries (acts of service). Every group has multiple ministry opportunities, can minister together in the community, and can serve together on weekends. These could include watching a neighbor's kids after school, tutoring, helping elderly with their yard work, cleaning the house for group, preparing food, caring for the children, preparing games, helping members of the group move furniture, and more.

One of the best things you can do to bond your group together is serve together. Feeding the homeless once a month, clean a widow's yard, watch children so single mom's can have a night out, or clear debris after storms. What you do doesn't matter as much as that everyone is serving.

To transition your group into this kind of lifestyle see the ROLES IN D-GROUP and MONTHLY RHYTHMS practicals in the Shepherd Portal.

## **5. Witness**

Data will show over time that groups that replicate (disciples who make disciples) all follow roughly the same basic practices. A very fulfilling and joy-giving experience is watching your group no longer need you as the leader because many go on to lead their own and fight for the Kingdom along side you. These nine principles, when intentionally practiced, allowed groups to grow and multiply over years and across many demographics.

### **1. Faith**

We believed God wanted to reach people more than us. We strongly expected that if we invited people, they would come. If we shared the gospel, they would respond. It didn't happen every time but enough to know God was blessing it.

### **2. Pray**

The enemy will not give up his prizes without a fight. As long as people prayed consistently that God would save souls, He did.

### **3. Love**

Evangelism is a process of 3 successive victories: First, people are won to an individual. Second, they are won to the group. Third, they are won to Jesus. Most evangelism is ineffective because people want to win people to Jesus without the loving sacrifice of winning them as friends first.

### **4. Invite**

If you invite them, they might come. If you don't invite them, they won't come. Unsaved people will not wonder into a group on their own. Many people are invited 4-5 times before they decide to give it a try.

### **5. Gospel**

The Gospel is powerful and should not be underestimated. Every 4-6 weeks someone would share the gospel story of Jesus, how to be saved, and people responded.

### **6. Process**

Few people are ready to give their lives to God at their first group. Groups have to be patient since helping people understand takes weeks, months, and even years of inviting, praying, loving, and hearing truth before the soil of their heart is ready.

### **7. Party**

Never underestimate the power of love and laughter. Love and laughter plows hard hearts. These are easy group nights to invite unsaved people to where you do something simple like a sports watch party, game night, movie night, or kids play date. People will feel more at home if they contribute so just ask them to bring something tasty.

### **8. Testimony**

An easy way to preach the gospel without being “preachy” is to have someone share why they chose to follow Jesus. If possible, have someone share that mirrors the audience (unsaved husband sharing at a group with many unsaved husbands, etc).

### **9. Celebration**

Luke 15 shows that when something lost is found it was marked by a celebration. Celebrate when someone chooses to surrender to Jesus. Whether its hugs or a full-blown party next group. We should be truly excited to see someone choose to apprentice under Jesus.

## **Thoughts to Consider**

- Welcome: Start every group with catch up time or ice breakers. It keeps the group focused on each other. If it is a largely new group spend a good amount of time building community and getting to know one another.
- Welcome: Make a list of the one another's the group can work on, how to apply them, actually do what you say, and everyone report back to the group with the results.
- Worship: Pick a worship activity and implement into the group.
- Word: Ensure you are grounding pivotal truths in scripture so people can know where they are anchored.
- Works: Make a list of serving opportunities the group can pursue together for a season to strengthen your connections and give everyone an outlet.
- Witness: Start incorporating witness practices into your group until you start seeing people consistently come to group or to Jesus.