



Being An Effective Home Group Member

(Or ... how you can gain the most from belonging to a Home Group!)

Introduction

Home Groups are an integral part of the ongoing life of most churches. Belonging to a Home Group becomes ever more important when church members are scattered across a wide geographical area. It's also so easy to feel 'lost' in church on a Sunday and engaging with church members before or after a service doesn't allow much time for meaningful interaction. Home Groups provide the opportunity to develop friendships with other members of our church family and to strengthen your Christian faith. They usually meet every other week, following a set study series and include regular opportunities for social events.

Why Attend in the First Place?

People attend Home Groups for all sorts of reasons: to make friends; deepen relationships; receive encouragement and support; to learn more about being a Christian - amongst many others. Whilst all of these are perfectly good reasons to join a Home Group the first, and most important, reason must be clear in our minds: *Our primary reason for belonging to a Home Group is to give us an opportunity to love and encourage other people in their walk with Jesus.*

This, after all, is what the Christian life is all about. We are called to love other people as Jesus has loved us, to lay down our lives as Jesus did. This applies as much to Home Groups as it does to our marriages and families and our church life. We attend Home Groups not primarily to have our needs met, but to meet the needs of *others*. In essence, it's not about *me*; it's about *them*. And it's about them *because* of Jesus. Of course, we have needs too and I've every confidence they will be met along the way. The truth is, the more we focus on loving others, and doing whatever we can for them, the more encouragement and strength we find ourselves.

There's no doubt that being a Home Group member can be a very demanding experience. It can cost us our lives, but isn't that what it means to be a follower of Jesus - to lay down our lives for the sake of others?

Some people might ask whether belonging to a Home Group really makes a difference to the lives of its members? Does the Home Group have a clear purpose, or does it just exist because it has always existed? Do folk attend because that's what they're expected to do? More to the point, what part do members play in their Home Group and what can they do to make their Home Group a success? I want to suggest five ways in which answers to these questions can be found:

1: Presence

This is the simplest and most obvious, but is no less powerful for being so. Being present each time you meet is a powerful encouragement to other members of your Home Group. In making a commitment to group time, to be missed only in times of emergency, you send a very clear message to other members: "Being with you matters very much to me. Unless something important comes up, I'll be there. Encouraging you is very important to me."

Conversely, inconsistent attendance sends a somewhat less encouraging message: "I don't mind coming, but it's not that important. If I feel a bit tired or something else crops up, don't expect me. Being with you and encouraging you isn't really a priority for me." Turning up regularly requires no extraordinary gifts or talent, but it is a powerful way of loving other people.

2: Preparation

Can I encourage you to read the Bible passage and complete the study sheets in advance of the meeting. You may have never thought about it in this way, but preparation is a powerful way to love members of your Home Group. The sermon notes and/or study sheets are planned on the basis that every member will do some preparation in advance.

It stands to reason that preparing in advance by reading the passage, working through the study material and completing the *Looking Upwards, Looking Inwards, Looking Outwards* sections, greatly increases the benefit you yourself receive from the meeting.

More importantly, it enables you to encourage others by what you say because, rather than throwing in ‘whatever comes to mind’ at the time, you have actually thought about the Bible passage and the issues it raises. This way, you are much better prepared to encourage and stimulate others if you have given it some thought beforehand.

3: Prayer

Epaphras, the apostle Paul's friend and fellow worker, would have made an ideal Home Group member. According to Paul, he was always “wrestling in prayer” for the Colossians, that they might “stand firm in all the will of God”. Paul was able to say that, in doing so, Epaphras was “working hard for you” (Colossians 4:12-13).

Praying for others can be difficult, even emotional but, equally, it can also be very satisfying. Prayer is, I believe, one of the most loving things we can do for our fellow Home Group members, not only because it is through our prayers that God does His work in people’s lives, but because it is such a quiet, inconspicuous form of ministry. We do it because we care for that person and want what is best for them in Jesus.

4: Personality

The analogy may be starting to stretch out a little thin here, but another powerful way of encouraging members of your Home Group is to be willing to share your own life and personality with them. This is by no means an easy thing to do. Many of us would much rather keep quiet and not give too much away.

However, by being willing to make ourselves vulnerable and by opening up and sharing our lives and thoughts and hopes and fears and joys, we can be a great blessing to others. Not only do we show them that we have the very same struggles they have (but thought they were alone in suffering); we also encourage them to open up as well.

Of course, we need to heed the advice of Proverbs and think carefully before we speak. Ephesians 4:29: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*

5: Pastoral Care

As a church, we will never be able to meet the pastoral needs of everyone but, through Home Groups, we can ensure that most people's pastoral needs are catered for (especially if an 'associate members' network is in place). Whatever you do in the Home Group - every word you say, every action - do it for the sake of others. Look for ways you can support and help the leader.

Look for ways to care for the members of the Home Group (and associate members); those who could really do with a phone call or a visit; those who would benefit from someone praying, or reading the Bible, with them; those who need practical, financial or material help; those who just need a friend to share a meal and watch a DVD.

And Finally ...

I believe that if we fully grasp the possibilities, and potential, that Home Groups have to offer, we will recognise that they present us with an enormously fruitful opportunity for the building up our church family through: developing meaningful relationships; establishing effective pastoral care; enabling us to grow in our faith.

It must be obvious by now how much I value, and want you to benefit from, belonging to a Home Group. If you are interested in finding out more, please have a chat with me. It is my prayer that you will find enjoyment, encouragement and, most of all, spiritual growth, when you commit yourself to being an effective Home Group member.

Revd Paul A. Carr - March 2025

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