

## ***Beyond Thursday: Practical Tips for Provoking Weeklong Conversations***

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For The Small Group Exchange

Let's face it. Most of us aren't that good at connecting. In many cases, groups that hold "community" as a central tenet have devolved into simply being a group of people who meet together on Thursday night. But, hey, life is busy. For some folks, they have a hard enough time keeping up with their own families, much less the people in their small groups.

It's not my goal to teach you how to re-order your group members lives so as to increase connection – that would take a whole book. Rather, I plan to offer you a few very practical tips for provoking weeklong conversations in hopes that they might deepen your individual connections. Every group has its own dynamic, so I'll tailor my approach to several different types.

### *The Outgoing Group*

Is your group the one that spends the whole time talking and can barely squeeze in the planned lesson? You might think that these folks are nothing if not connected and living in community. Unfortunately, conversation doesn't always mean connection. You know as well as I do that you can have a great conversation on Thursday night and totally forget about the other person's life until you cross paths again on Sunday morning.

If this is your group, here's an idea for maintaining weeklong connections: Carry a notepad/journal with you to group. Whenever you hear something that another person has going on that is significant that week, jot yourself a reminder. Then, take 5-10 minutes each day throughout the week and send each person a note, specific to what they have going on. A great way to do this might be to write on their Facebook "wall" so that their friends and everyone else in the group can be reminded that each of you have a life beyond Thursday.

### *The Studious Group*

This group stands in stark contrast to the Outgoing Group. These group members dispense with conversation as quickly as possible so they can dig deep into whatever they have been studying throughout the week. While great personal connections can happen in this forum, these guys may find it even more difficult to engage throughout the week.

If this is your group: Think about putting together some study/reflection questions that you can email out to your group. Encourage them to send their answers back to you or to someone else in the group. If you want to take this a step further, set up an online discussion board or forum so that these great conversations don't have to end when 9:00pm rolls around.

### *The Disconnected Group*

Unfortunately, there are a lot of groups made of people who just don't have any connection to each other, to the larger church, and sometimes to anyone at all. These folks typically offer little to group conversation whether on or off topic. Sometimes, as a leader, you don't even know why anyone comes when they seem so distracted or disinterested. However, this is often their form of reaching out for community. You just have to be careful about how you reach back, so that you don't scare them away.

If this is your group: Do your best to get at least a cell phone number from everyone in the group. Then, when you get a free moment between meetings, at lunch, while waiting for your spouse to get ready, etc., drop someone a text message just to let them know you are praying for them (and actually DO IT), or simply wish them a good week. If someone had a specific prayer request, try to remember it in your message. Texting is a great way to send a message without expecting a response. Your message might make someone's day, and you never know, they may just write back.

### *Bonus Tips*

This has not been intended as an exhaustive list of ideas. Hopefully, it will just get your creativity flowing to discover something that is perfectly suited for your group. Use the tools that you have on hand and see what can come of it. I have a friend (a web-designer) who set up a website for his group where they could access study materials and discussion questions. I used a service called Ning (<http://ning.com>) to set up a mini-social network for a book discussion group that I started.

Having trouble remembering to follow up with people? Set up alarms on your cell phone: "8:00 am, Have you called Steve yet?" Google Calendar (<http://google.com/calendar>) will even send you text messages or email reminders of events.

Developing individual relationships can be a slow-going, difficult process. Creating a deeply connected group dynamic is an art form. But if we believe in community (the way we say that we do) then we must do the hard work of making it happen.