



REVITALIZE YOUR HOME GROUP

10 tips from an **International Church planter**



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INTRODUCTION

The intimacy and comradery that accompany a home group or organic church are difficult to explain to someone who has never experienced them. But sometimes after a few months or years of meeting together, we fall into a rut. We do the same thing we have always done and follow an unwritten liturgy that can often hinder the Spirit from moving freely and keeps us from sharing the deep things that we are learning and living through. The very things that made our first experiences in home worship so life changing can easily be lost if we are not intentional about what we do and how we do it. This short guide was written from more than 15 years of planting organic churches all over the world and helping small groups draw closer to their Lord and one another. You will find within these pages both spiritual as well as practical help. I hope this guide supports you and your group to thrive in Christ together.

DEFINITIONS

Home group: Members of a traditional Christian congregation which meets in a church building, but also meet together regularly in homes during the week for a more intimate worship time.

Organic church: a group of believers who meet together as a church (usually in homes) to worship, encourage one another and meet with the Lord. They consider this small gathering their church.



SPIRITUAL HELPERS

Lord's Supper :

The history of the Lord's Supper is fascinating. Throughout history, differing beliefs on the Lord's Supper have led to large-scale disunity, church splits, and even violence. Why? Because when it is done correctly, it will strengthen the church and help her to grow in unity and purpose. This is dangerous, and obviously, the enemy does not want the church to be mobilized to her true life-transforming purpose in this world. So over time, the Lord's Supper has become mysterious and removed from both daily life as well as its original purpose. So, let's go back to the Upper Room and see what we can learn from the Last Supper that the disciples shared with Jesus? In Mark 14, the disciples were given some imagery that they did not fully understand but they soon would.

Jesus was telling them that though they were all different, they were all united in Him and in their need of Him. They all had need of the blood that was shed and the body that was broken. It was through that ultimate sacrifice that Jesus built His kingdom. A kingdom that breaks every rule of race, gender & creed and unites all people.

The Lord's Supper has the ability to refocus your group on the most important thing: Jesus. Sometimes we lose our focus on Jesus. It is a sad truth that is hard to admit. But I have been to small group meetings where they talk about everything under the sun for an hour or two, but after all is said and done, the name of Jesus was never once mentioned. It is not because we, His people, lack faith. It is simply that we need to refocus from time to time. The Lord's Supper helps us to do just that.

The Lord's Supper has a unifying effect: My recommendation to a church who is struggling with some disunity issues is to take some time to have a really meaningful expression of the Lord's Supper. Scripture commands us not to take the Lord's Supper in a manner that is unworthy. First, we must examine ourselves and our relationships. Taking time to evaluate if there needs to be confession, repentance or reconciliation. All this finally culminating in the whole group partaking in the bread and wine, the very thing that levels the ground and unites us together in Him.



There are many ways to eat the Lord's Supper, but try to avoid overly ritualistic expressions. Instead, focus on Christ and your relationship with the other members of His body. I usually recommend doing the Lord's Supper in the context of a full meal in the same way that the First Century church did, but it doesn't have to be like that. Just make sure there is time for discussion, testimonies, confession, praises, and overall making a big deal about who He is to us and how grateful we are for what He did for us and continues to do among us.

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Study 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

What are some ways you can implement the Lords Supper into your meeting?

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GROUP READING

Every once in a while, it can be very fun and encouraging to go through God's Word together. It is like you are all sitting under His teachings at the same time and learning different things from that study. Then, you have the opportunity to share what you learned and help your brothers and sisters to broaden their understanding of a passage or book. Every church or small group should be a place where we not only learn but also where we teach. So, get on the same page (literally) and study God's word together. In this group practice, the Holy Spirit will teach you many different things based on your giftings, your experiences, and your level of understanding. This can also give you an opportunity to clear up misunderstandings or false teachings within the group because we base all of our doctrine and theology on Scripture and Scripture alone.

Here are a few options:

- ☐ Take a book of the Bible and commit to reading it in its entirety every day for 1 week. Then discuss what you learned when you gather for your normal meeting. Choose a book that is a reasonable size, so that people can actually do it every day. Many of the Epistles are a good length for this exercise.
- ☐ Walk through a longer book in portions over a period of months: Have everyone read 1-3 chapters and study the text in depth and be prepared to discuss at your gathering. Try one of the Gospels or maybe Acts.
- ☐ Meditate and study on a particular passage or chapter over one week and let everyone use their giftings to express what they have learned from that passage throughout the week. For example, maybe you decide to focus on 2 Corinthians 4. When you gather together some of your members who are more inclined to teach will bring their words of knowledge, a new believer may share a testimony about how the reading of the passage affected him/her this week. Someone may sing a song that personally expresses the content of the passage, etc.



One extra benefit of this exercise is that it will help ensure that your whole group is in God's Word every day. It is a sad truth that most Christians go weeks without opening God's Word. Imagine the impact this has on our day to day lives, on how we hear from God or even on the depth of our meetings. There is a level of accountability with this exercise that helps us to encourage Bible Study without a confrontational approach.

Workbook examples:

- Try reading Ephesians as a group.
- Focus on one chapter of Romans a week and discuss it in the meeting.
- Meditate on a different psalm every week, have someone put it to music if have musicians.



LET THE SPIRIT LEAD

It's okay to have a plan but be ready to dump the plan if the spirit leads in a different direction. It is true that our Lord is a God of order, but He is also creative, spontaneous, and the Scripture says His ways are not our ways. Frankly, if your meetings look 100% the same every time you gather, then that usually means you have fallen into a rut. That is when people start getting bored and gathering starts becoming a chore. So, be free. Be willing to follow the leadership of the Lord. *Be willing to chase a Holy Rabbit from time to time.*

Humans crave repetition, and we grow accustomed to doing the same thing over and over, it helps us know what to do without having to put much thought into it. But that is the opposite of what you want to do in a home group or organic church. You want to do everything with purpose and meaning. So, switch it up regularly. Here are some simple tips:

- Don't always start with prayer and songs
- If there are prayer requests mentioned, stop right then and pray for them, don't wait until you have a long list, you will forget something.
- Ask yourself regularly if you felt like the meeting was free and the Spirit had full opportunity to guide you. If not, look to change things up.
- If the Lord prompts you to do or say something, be bold and obey His direction. He might be asking you to lead the group into a new area of growth.
- Focus your efforts on mutual edification and encouragement. As the Scripture says, outdo one another in showing honor.
- If you want to sing, sing! You can spend the whole time singing if the Lord leads you in that direction.
- If there is some serious need to understand a passage, pull out your study tools and dig into the Word as a team, see what you find.



You know you are doing it right if you find yourself pondering and even discussing the meeting days after they actually happened. Ideally, your time together should resonate for days after it actually happens giving you food for thought and encouraging you to meditate on these things and seek out new knowledge and wisdom.

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What are the repetitious habits that your group falls into that sometimes hinder the free moving of the Spirit?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

DON'T GET CAUGHT OFF GUARD

One of the biggest red flags for me when I am visiting a small group or organic church is when I arrive and find everyone with their Bibles open, browsing through chapters and verses. This may look spiritual at first, but it is usually quite the opposite; I know because I have done it. Here is the basic scenario, I'm sitting on the couch browsing through my Bible thinking to myself, "Okay, so I have been really busy this week. I've had a lot on my mind. I don't have anything particularly spiritual to say because frankly, I have not been living in the Spirit. Heck, I can't remember the last time I read my Bible. BUT If I don't come up with something that sounds spiritual, everyone will think I am Spiritually Lazy! Can't have that, I have to hurry and find something good to say."

When this attitude is shared by many, it really has a despiritualizing effect on the meeting, and it leads us toward empty ritual rather than genuine spiritual growth and expression. So, how do we avoid falling into this trap?

Well, you have to learn to do things a little bit differently. You see most of us have been programmed to see our Spiritual walk from a very individualistic perspective. What is God saying to ME through this passage, this story or song? But we have to begin thinking about the body of believers that we worship with throughout the week not just on our meeting day.

Asking Questions like: "This song really touched my heart, maybe it would be encouraging to my home group on Sunday." Or "This passage really impacted my perspective on hope. Lord, was this meant for me alone or might you possibly have given this to me so that I can share it with my brothers and sisters?"

You have to start seeing life through the lens of the church and realize that you are called to participate with them in the Gospel together. That means being intentional throughout the week so that when your meeting comes, you are ready, your heart is full, and you are fully prepared to encourage and bless others.



What have you read, heard or studied this week that you think should be shared with the group?

[illegible]

MEET WITH OTHER HOME GROUPS

Take the opportunity to Share what God is doing, what He is teaching you. Consider reaching out to other home groups from time to time to join in shared fellowship. Plan this get-together at a place that can manage a larger group. Public parks can be a good place, or maybe someone has a large property that they can make available. Cook some food on a grill, let the kids stretch their legs and play. When you have time to get down to business do some singing together as a group. There is something about singing in a larger group that encourages the soul. Add to that the fact that being in a public place may draw some interested parties into your group to hear the singing. Who knows, maybe they will be interested in joining one of the groups meeting in their area.

Rejoice with one another over victories, pray with each other through your struggles. Perhaps the other group has gained new believers since the last time you met. Introduce new members to the larger group, then let everyone hear how they came to follow Jesus. Don't let this group fellowship turn into a business meeting but rather see it as a family reunion.

This can also be a good time to network together to solve problems that maybe you cannot solve as a simple small group. If there is a family with a big financial need or a ministry opportunity like disaster relief or community service, then you can spread the Word and join together as a bigger group to have a larger impact.

I recommend doing this at least every quarter, but every month would be great if you can make it happen. It will become something all of you look forward to. And it will allow you to get to know some of the others you don't know so well.

Workbook examples:

- Do public baptisms during this time so you can bear testimony to what God has done in someone's life.
- Do an old time singing in a local park then share what God is doing in your group. Be sure you take advantage of this opportunity to share your faith with anyone who might be listening.
- Doing the Lords supper together as a large group can be an uplifting experience.
- Do a service project for the community.



INCLUDE BELIEVING CHILDREN

If you have children that are Christians and are starting the early steps in their Christian walk, don't just cast them aside as though church is just for adults or those who can sit still for extended periods of time. Children really do have something to offer in home groups, and if you let them, they will bless you and teach you something about the Lord and His will that the worries of the world have stripped from you. Remember Jesus said we have to be like little children to come to him.

It is also very important to teach them from a young age that Christianity is not a spectator sport. Many of us have been conditioned to just sit and soak. Our idea of involvement is limited to singing in the choir or serving on a committee. But if you involve your children, this is your chance to:

- Teach your child how to ask questions
- Share Scriptures they have learned and what they mean to them
- Sing a song that really speaks to them and have others share that experience
- Help your child feel valued and appreciated for their spiritual understanding
- Teach your believing child how to pray and request prayer
- Allow your children to hear about how their parents are walking with the Lord
- Be influenced by other godly people and be mentored and encouraged by others
- Intensify their spiritual growth by encouraging participative learning



Every group may do things differently since their composition will be different. One group may have 3 children another could easily have 20. Some of the children are believers, and some are earlier in their spiritual journey. Kids will want to play with their friends so you may not want to force them to be there the whole time. But do identify ways to support them in their spiritual growth and offer access to the deeper teachings of the Lord when they are old enough to participate.

Ask the believing children about their situation at school. Do they have friends that are not Christians? Or do they know someone who seems to be sad? Is there someone they can reach out to? Or pray for?

Some groups have a special “children’s church time.” Others may be less structured and let kids come and go as they please. There is no RIGHT way. Just be intentional about the meeting and your kids, don’t let it be an afterthought or you will miss out on a huge opportunity for growth in your kids.

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How could my children participate in the meeting?



PRACTICAL HELP

Have gospel-centered activities for the younger kids:

Make sure your kids know what you are gathering together for. This is not just a playdate, but a time to gather and grow in our relationship with Christ, no matter where we are in that process. Kids learn well together so take advantage of this opportunity to expose them to the Truth of the Gospel and make it fun. Let them learn about the stories of the Bible, or hear interesting missionary stories. Here are some tools that can help as you look for activities:

- Bible Coloring books & Activity pads
- The *Torchlighters Series* are missionary biography animations found on Amazon
- If you have someone working with the kids, tell them a Bible story and have them perform it for the adults
- Let the kids dance and play with the adults during some of the more upbeat songs
- Of course, there is always the trusty old *Veggie Tales*

Eat Together:

Breaking bread together has been a central practice of the church since the church began. Eating together is a thing that we do with family, people that we love or those we want to get to know better. Eating together deformatizes almost any worship gathering. Everyone brings something that they want to share, it is usually a bit of a mash-up. But who doesn't love mashed potatoes and pizza or fried chicken and tacos?! It can be spontaneous or planned but eating together regularly helps to bond a group together like a family. Bring your appetite.

Worship songs from YouTube:

Some groups struggle in the musical category, but just because you don't have anyone in your group who can sing or play an instrument doesn't mean that you cannot worship through song. If you look up "worship tracks" and the song you want to sing on YouTube.com, you will usually find several versions of the song with the words displayed on the video.



This can then be displayed on the television, and there you go, worship music without musicians. Plus, if you are light on singers as well, just turn the volume up, and you won't even notice.

Start a WhatsApp/Facebook group: This simple addition can take your home group to the next level. Gather everyone into a group on Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp. Then you can share prayer requests as they happen, you can plan your meals, change meeting times and locations, you can encourage each other daily with a verse or devotional. Basically, it takes the meeting beyond the four walls of the home and helps you to be the church with each other every day. A simple addition that brings a huge benefit.

I hope you have found this little e-book helpful. My goal is to help you express the Love of Jesus both in the meeting and outside of the meeting in a way that brings Glory to God. If this e-book was helpful, drop me an email about how it helped you at echelon2011@gmail.com

Also, I am working on a much more extensive book to help people who are interested in organic church or home worship experiences. If you are interested in the book, I will be sending my subscribers a sample chapter when it is nearing completion. So, stay tuned. www.jitaliaferro.com

Thanks again.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



J has served as a church planter, missionary, mentor, trainer and team leader for 16 years. He has served with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, Uganda, South Sudan and Chad. He is married to Susan who has been his partner in the Gospel for 16 years. He has 3 amazing children. Victory, Memphis and Ember.

