



Ways to Challenge Connect Group Members to Grow

Small groups can easily fall into “safe” routines: everyone shows up, has some light conversation, reiterates the main takeaways from the week’s sermon, and goes home unchanged and unchallenged. This isn’t necessarily bad, as community and relationship-building are good things, but we believe Connect Groups should go deeper. They should create important — sometimes intense — conversations that encourage members to be real with one another, learn more about God and themselves, and leave desiring a more personal connection with the Spirit.

It can be difficult to reach this level, especially with a newer group. Here are some ideas to help group leaders lovingly challenge their members and encourage growth within their group.

1. **Set expectations at the first meeting.** Let your group know that you want this group to help everyone grow both personally and spiritually. It may be challenging and uncomfortable at times, but that will result in spiritual maturation.
2. **Create a safe, confidential environment.** Group members are likely to stay at the surface level if they feel threatened or believe sharing openly could damage their reputation. Be extremely clear that anything said in the group is confidential. All opinions are welcome free of judgement. Everyone can trust that they’ll be respected and nothing they share will leave the group.
3. **Ask tough questions, even when there’s no “right” answer.** Softball questions don’t inspire learning. Ask thought-provoking questions that require real thought and concentration, including those that don’t have definitive answers. Encourage members to bat ideas back and forth without feeling the need to settle on one “solution.”
4. **Ask follow-up questions.** Engage with group members by asking them to continue with an answer or a thought. Say something along the lines of: “That’s really interesting. What makes you say that?” or “I think that’s a good point. Could you go a little deeper?” Add encouragement in your response so the member doesn’t feel attacked or interrogated.
5. **Work through conflict.** Tension can arise in group discussion, especially concerning challenging subjects. Guide the group to manage disagreements constructively and respectfully. Help everyone understand that there might not be a right or wrong answer. Real spiritual growth happens through honest conversation.
6. **Meet with members one on one.** Getting to know each member on an individual level helps you learn more about their personality and the unique ways you can

encourage, challenge, and engage them. It also shows investment and that you care about them on a personal level, which increases the chances they'll fully buy into the group and what God is doing through it.

7. **Create ways for members to develop deeper relationships.** The better your group members know you and each other, the more likely they'll be open, honest, and willing to discuss more challenging topics. Spend some time during each meeting allowing group members to talk about their lives. Dedicate one or two meetings each season to do something fun, like having a game night or going to a sporting event together.
8. **Remind members of the purpose of Connect Groups.** Great as it is to create relationships and have fun, the main purpose of Connect Groups is spiritual transformation, which requires earnest desire to learn and grow. Our purpose is to serve and add to God's kingdom. The best way to do so is by going deeper and using small group time to be real with one another.