

# FaithTalk Groups

## Lesson 9: Connecting Outside the Meeting

As a FaithTalk group facilitator, one of your most important tasks will be to help group members connect in ways that build authentic, loving community (“koinonia”).

In her presentation (see detailed notes below), Pat Shaw asks and answers four questions concerning what can be done *between* regularly scheduled FaithTalk meetings to develop loving relationships and create authentic community.

Here are questions to guide your group’s discussion after watching the video:

### 1. Why?

- How does Pat define “community”?
- Discuss the role of serving in community building.

### 2. When?

- What is the “2-1-1 format”? Does that format work for your group? If not, what format are you (or will you) use? Why?

### 3. Where?

- What sort of gatherings might you hold outside of regular meetings?
- What do you hope to accomplish?

### 4. What?

- What sort of “small acts of love” do you intend to engage in as a group?
- Explain what is meant by the “ministry of presence.”

Here are detailed notes for this lesson to help you prepare for the discussion:

### 1. Why?

Our Triune God is relational and He created us to live in relationship with Him, and each other. Authentic community involves sharing life together and connecting on many levels with the people in our group. This is made possible by nurturing relationships in-between meetings.

In John 15, Jesus told his disciples, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Community life is a direct result of our ability to love for one another.

In Matthew 18, Jesus tells us, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst.” Christ is central to each FaithTalk group. The group is not

together because they just share a common interest in religion or another subject, but are a fellowship of those who the Father calls into *koinonia* (fellowship) with himself and with one another, through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Koinonia* is a Greek word used in the Bible that expresses the state of sharing, of being partners, of having common or mutual interests. The deep commitment to love each other is what Christ had in mind.

As you share your lives together, it is important to recognize it is God who has brought each person to your FaithTalk group. He is the one who has gifted each individual to play a vital role in the group. He has uniquely designed each of you to contribute in your own way to building into the lives of the other people in your group.

The life of a 'Jesus disciple' is about much more than the mere act of being present. It is about putting feet to living life with Jesus—it is about showing passionate, whole-hearted love for God in our actions.

Something that might surprise you is that you will find the amount and depth of conversation that takes place during your FaithTalk meetings is directly related to the amount and depth of conversation that happens between meetings. When there is communication with one another between meetings, the opportunity to have life-transforming conversation take place during meetings is greatly enhanced.

Caring relationships are the key to developing a group that gets down to where people live. Most Christians, because of the battering received in life, tend at one time or another, to withdraw into ourselves and become a little defensive and guarded. As we develop stronger habits of serving, both in the group and one-on-one, we will find new ways to touch each other's lives. In the act of serving, we become more kind and gracious people one to another; in group, in the local congregation and in the community.

There is great power in serving. Serving starts and is most spontaneous in the context of the needs that will be disclosed in your group. If a pattern is established of serving one another in the group, then extending love and care to other people is an easy addition.

As we study the first church in Jerusalem, two facts rise to the surface. First, the people were totally committed to the Lord and His plan. Second, they were totally committed to one another. We tend to separate these two commitments, but in reality, one is expressed by the other. Our commitment to the Lord will be expressed by our commitment to love one another. We show love for Christ when we love His body. The first church clearly understood this necessity. We may not always agree on everything, but we become family, we stick together. As the Father has loved us, so we love one another.

## 2. When?

The first time your group meets, you'll probably look around and wonder how you become a true community? How does a FaithTalk group become a collection of people committed to each other no matter what? How is a safe haven developed where people can be vulnerable because it is a safe place of accountability and deep friendships?

A strong sense of community won't naturally develop unless it is set as a goal and the group begins working toward it from the start. This intentionality begins by deciding how often your group will meet. You will find that as the relationships within the group develop meetings between members will become more spontaneous.

Some groups follow the "2-1-1" format. This format allows for 2 FaithTalk meetings, one group get-together or outing of some kind and a week off every month. You may find that your schedule works differently, but the point is—you will from the beginning need to *schedule get-togethers outside* the FaithTalk meeting.

You will find that true authentic community is created between meetings. Most groups meet for an hour and a half per week. That means there are 166.5 hours in the week when group members are not involved with the rest of the group. Yet authentic community is created by doing life together between meetings because it will be during that time that relationships are developed and deepened.

Leaders can facilitate community by contacting each member at least once weekly. To pass on information, an email is appropriate. Also, to congratulate someone on a special occasion they can send a card. To celebrate a life achievement, a dinner or a party with the group would be appropriate. To comfort someone in a time of crisis, a visit to the home could be comforting.

In Faith-Talk groups we want to shift our paradigm from "the life style of **doing**" a group to the lifestyle of "**being**" a group. 'Being' a group is when members have accessibility to one another 24/7, if a need arises. It can be spending a planned evening together, talking late into the night, comforting one another through the trials of life, and praying for one another when only God can meet the need. This is when the most intense levels of unity are experienced. This is when you have become more than acquaintances.

Winston Churchill said, "We make a living by what we get: we make a life by what we give." Giving can consist of one giving time for the little things, too, such as remembering birthdays, recording important dates—both good and bad—in people's lives, providing practical support, and giving the gift of our time and presence.

Authenticity in FaithTalk groups will be lived out by our willingness to openly (and appropriately) share our pasts as well as sharing what is continually unfolding in our present. Members will know they are living lives of authenticity when they are ready for their personal stories to be revealed....the highs and the lows, the successes and embarrassments.

Here is how the Message Bible translates 1 Corinthians 12:25-26. “Every part is dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don’t, the parts we see and the parts we don’t. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.”

### **3. Where?**

The distinguishing mark of true Christian fellowship (*koinonia*) will most likely not be rediscovered in larger FaithTalk meeting, To learn to trust and to become trustworthy, to learn to love and to become loving—we must become deeply involved in the lives of others outside the scheduled meetings.

Community forms with shared experiences. We bond with each other if we spend time together regularly. Bringing the group together outside the formal meeting can be as simple as an ice-cream social or as extensive as dinners together. Planning for intentional gatherings provide a format for deeper sharing and just regular old getting to know each other.

You can nurture relationships by participating in outreach activities together such as day trips to serve at a homeless shelter. These events will help unite your group and strengthen your bonds.

Jesus was the greatest small group leader in history. In Ephesians 5, we are told to be imitators of him and to live a life of love. His actions were marked by love. Relationships were central to Him. He lived that focus by spending time with people, caring, listening, forgiving, encouraging, teaching and preaching. He continued with them eating, working, talking, going places together, camping, and attending weddings together.

There’s a big difference between eating together and sharing a meal together. The same can be said of living in the same space and truly sharing life together. To share a meal or do life together, we need to slow down to experience life. Eating together enables relational intimacy. The early Christian would have discussions about Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, about God’s work in the past and what He might accomplish in the future. In Acts 2 the believers made life in community a daily priority. Considering the needs of others built a close community.

Randy Frazee in his book, “*Making Room for Life*,” quotes therapist Will Miller, “If you talk to any therapist today, the problems we see mostly are mood disorders, depression, anxiety, loneliness and social detachment. As blessed as we are as Americans, as prosperous as we are, there’s all this depression. So where is it coming from? I’m convinced it’s rooted in the loss of ‘refrigerator rights’ relationships.” Frazee goes on to say, “A person with refrigerator rights is someone who can come into your home and feel comfortable going to your refrigerator to make a sandwich without your permission.”

#### 4. What?

In John 13, Jesus washed the disciple's dusty feet and told them, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." When we serve one another, the world sees clearly that what we have is real.

Community is about loving and usually in small acts that might not seem significant. But when we love over time, the small things add together to make a huge difference. As facilitator you show concern through personal visits, by phone calls or short notes.

FaithTalk groups need to express concern in practical ways: by watching a young mother's children to give her a break, or assisting with shopping and housework, providing meals, helping a family move or other ways to help that will show themselves.

Henri Nouwen wrote in Gracias: A Latin American Journal, "More and more, the desire grows in me simply to walk around, greet people, enter their homes, sit on their doorsteps, play ball, throw water and be known as someone who wants to live with them. It is a privilege to have the time to practice this simple ministry of presence." He goes on to say, "I wonder more and more if the first thing shouldn't be to know people by name, to eat and drink with them, to listen to their stories and tell your own, and to let them know with words, handshakes, and hugs that you do not simply like them but you truly love them."

When your group develops to the place of that kind of service and mind set, that is when your FaithTalk group will truly be an authentic community and not just **doing** group.