



CREATING THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT



A key element to every group is the mood or tone. What happens apart from the content helps to enhance (or sometimes destroy) your group members' experiences. Some groups seem to soar and that's partly due to a comfortable environment.

Jesus knew the influence of environment in learning. He taught about the resurrection outside the tomb of Lazarus and about His identity amid the natural beauty of Caesarea Philippi. He taught about prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, about faith in a boat, righteous anger in the temple, and evangelism in a Samaritan village. Each change in environment brought an opportunity to teach another truth.

Think about the atmosphere you'll be creating in your small group. Ask yourself, "What can I do to communicate to my group that this is a safe place for them to come? How can I help people be comfortable? How do I minimize distractions? What conditions will enhance learning?"

Developing the right environment helps establish a sense of belonging. The environment will influence how people feel about your group, how well they learn, and if they will come back.

KEYS TO CREATING A GOOD ENVIRONMENT

- Meet in an informal and accessible location. Often a great place to meet is in the room of a group member as long as it's OK with their roommates. Places such as a church may intimidate new group members. Likewise, classrooms may be familiar and accessible, but they hinder communication and warmth.
- Set your meeting time so that all members are able to attend. Choose a time when everyone will be sharp and awake and make sure no one has an ongoing schedule conflict. Friday afternoons and late nights are better for blowing off steam or sleeping than for a small group meeting.
- Arrange the seating so everyone can easily see one another. Sitting in a circle at the same level will help. Also be aware of the distance separating each member. Try to sit close enough so each person has eye contact and can hear one another easily, but not so close people feel uncomfortable or their personal space is being invaded.
- Meet in a location where you can control distractions and interruptions as much as possible. Unplug the phone and turn down the volume on the answering machine. Put a sign on the door to prevent people from knocking, and turn off the TV.
- Provide refreshments (especially in the first few weeks) to help warm up the group and give people something to do at the beginning of the meeting.
- Make sure you have good lighting to create a warm feeling. No one should have to look into the sun or toward a bright window. Likewise, avoid dark, catacomb type rooms. You are developing fellowship, not film.
- Choose a location where you can freely interact and carry out the content of your small group plan. Make sure you have any equipment you need.
- Bring extra Bibles. Some members may forget to bring one or won't have a readable translation.