

Suggestions for Spiritual Small Groups

Small groups can be exercises in listening deeply, without judgment or criticism. The goal is to listen to each other, to ourselves, and to the Inward Teacher who is within each of us. We want to listen each other into a deeper understanding of the divine Presence within and among us. Such listening is a manifestation of love. This loving listening creates a space in which it is safe enough to let go of old props and ideas, and to open our hearts to receive new insights which the Spirit offers.

A good size for a small group is about 4 to 8 people who agree to meet regularly over a period of time.

The guidelines are simple:

1. We begin with silent prayer, that each of us be open to hear God in ourselves and in each other, that God be present and teach us what God wants us to learn.
2. This is one suggestion for the first meeting. Out of the silence we take turns addressing the question: *What was your childhood or early experience of God/religion/spirituality?* We speak when we feel ready, leaving a space of silence after the previous speaker so that we can savor what has been offered.
3. In the silence between speakers each of us may ask God to show me where I might pay particular attention. If I find someone's words jarring or disquieting, or even if they seem outright wrong, I do not speak, but silently pray that God give that person what he or she needs, and gives me whatever understanding God feels I need at this point.
4. It is alright to ask a brief question for clarification, or to briefly comment to affirm or encourage the speaker. But usually the response will be loving and prayerful silence. It is important to refrain from criticizing, correcting, or adding your own advice or experience at this point.
5. When everyone in the group has had an opportunity to speak, there is time for more general summary, perhaps briefly articulating common themes or experiences.
6. Of course whatever is said within the group will not be repeated to others outside the group. Gossip, even well-meaning, kills trust. And trust is necessary for creating a safe place in which people are willing to speak of that which is very close to their hearts.
7. As a suggestion for the second meeting, you might ask the question: *How do you experience God at work in your life now?* The process outlined above is repeated.

8. At subsequent meetings the group may want to settle on using the old Quaker query (or some variation of it): *How hast the Lord dealt with thee since last we were together?* The idea is to enable us over time to pay attention to what the Spirit is doing within us, to recognize and respond to the subtle (or not so subtle) guidance we receive, and to tell each other how this is working. Doing this together helps provide a discipline to keep paying attention. Speaking of our experiences of God and of things of the Spirit helps to encourage them, validate them, and make them more real. Hearing each other's experience helps us see and identify God's work in us. It enlarges our imagination of ways that God interacts with us.

Connect

Connect with FGC:

- FGC has resources to support new and existing groups
- FGC can help a group connect with other local Quaker groups
- FGC can help you get listed on QuakerFinder.org to help others find you

FGC staff and volunteers are happy to talk with you about this, or any other issue, your meeting or worship group is facing. Please contact us by emailing us or phoning 215-561-1700.

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