

With all these exercises, please remember:

- Know your goal.
- Think through the group size and break it down into smaller groups if necessary.
- Make sure you allow enough time for everyone and don't shorten the time required.
- The leader must participate like everyone else.
- Let the Spirit move and don't get in the way. Be discerning about when to step in or redirect and when to just be quiet. Face the awkwardness of the expression of emotions.

"He is able" celebration

Ask your group members to bring to your next meeting a tangible item that represents how God has proven Himself able in their own lives recently. Ask them to be prepared to explain how God has been able, and how that item represents God's ability to act and bless.

- It should be a physical item that they can hold up and talk about
- They should talk about their own experience (not someone else's)
- Ask them to relate a recent experience that they have had

At the meeting, let each person relate their story. You may wish to close this time by all singing the song, "He Is Able."

Variation: "God Answers Prayer" celebration

"Remember when"

In the Scriptures, we often see God's people recounting the past experiences they have had or remembering God's deeds. This can be done in a variety of ways.

- Remember how you first heard about Christ
- Give your testimonies
- Remember times when God answered prayer
- Remember when God brought you through a difficult situation
- If your group has been together for a while, remember things you have been through together, and what they meant to you
- Retell the story of first coming to your church and explain what the church has meant to you

This experience builds a sense of "history" with your group if you've been together for a while. Recounting God's character or your experiences can be a prelude to a time of worship.

Two truths/One lie

Give everyone in the group a sheet of paper and a pen or marker. Have everyone write down two true things about themselves and one lie. These can be in any order. (Have them write big enough so the paper can be shown and seen around the room.) Then have someone read their three items. Everyone must guess which item is a lie. The person then reads each item and explains why it is a truth or a lie. Have everyone take a turn.

Questions in a hat

Before your meeting, fill a hat (or bowl) with opener questions on individual pieces of paper (one question on each piece of paper). Have at least as many questions as there are people in the group. Vary the depth of the questions to be appropriate for your group. Add the following "special" things on separate pieces of paper and put them in the hat:

"Pass to the Right"

"Pass to the Left"

"Boomerang (back to you)"

At the beginning, state that everyone always has the right to "pass" on any question (to put people at ease and not feel put on the spot). Someone (let's say Mary) picks a question out of the hat. Mary can ask anyone in the room (but just one person) to answer that question. She asks John. After John answers the question, he then picks a question and asks anyone in the room *except* Mary, and so on.

If you pulled the "Pass to the right" or "Pass to the left" pieces out of the hat, save them and use them when you are asked a question. If you use a "Pass to the right," then the person on your right must answer the question. If you have the "Boomerang," then the person who asked you the question must answer it. (Of course, anyone can pass if they wish.)

"Who am I?"

During the week before your meeting, collect one unknown fact about everyone in the group. This should be something the group members will not mind being told. The leader types a list of these facts (including one for himself/herself). Enough copies are made so everyone has a list.

At the meeting, the lists are handed out. The objective is to find out which fact matches which person. You may approach someone and ask about only two items on the list. ("Are you the one who . . ." If not, then "Are you the one who . . ."). After two inquiries, you must move on to someone else.

After a time limit (or as soon as someone gets them all), the game stops and you read through the list, identifying everyone.

Draw a time line of your life

Give everyone a long sheet of paper and pens or markers. Have each group member draw a time line of his or her life, showing three to five major life events. The number of events can vary, depending upon how much time you have. Then let each explain what he or she drew.

Draw a self-portrait

Give everyone a large sheet of paper and markers or crayons. Have each person draw a self-portrait. Collect all the self-portraits, hold them up one by one, and guess who each represents. When you figure out who it is, have that person tell a little about themselves.

Introductions

When introductions are needed, instead of everyone introducing themselves, let someone else in the group introduce them. If it is a couple's group, have the spouses introduce each other. This can be very affirming.

Videos

Videos can be used for times of worship, praise, or singing. Or use a home video camera to film "A Day in the Life" of a group member.

Subgrouping

If your group is large enough, break them up into smaller groups, even pairs, for various activities. This is especially useful for times of prayer, sharing on a personal level, allowing relationships to deepen, and dealing with sensitive subjects.

Attributes of God

Ask, "What attribute of God has been especially meaningful to you lately?" (For example, "I really appreciate God's faithfulness to me because . . .")

Have the leader and each person in the group talk about this.

Variation: Don't talk about it—go right to prayer and pray through it.

Their names in a verse

The leader, ahead of time, picks a topic, and chooses verses on that topic—one verse for each member of the group and for him- or herself. During prayer time, have each person read his or her assigned verse with their own name in it and pray through that verse.

For example, the topic is "God's love for us." Verses chosen could be Psalm 13:5–6, John 15:9, Romans 5:5, etc. One of the group members reads aloud Psalm 13:5–6: "But I, Sandy, trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to you Lord, for you have been good to me."

Serve each other

Look for opportunities to serve each other outside of group time. This will really go a long way in developing your relationships with each other. How about

- painting a room in someone's house
- doing a large cleaning project
- bringing meals when help is needed

Serving others together

Look for opportunities to serve as a group, providing help, support, or encouragement to someone else. Here are a few things you can do:

- help a needy family or person(s)
- serve at church for a special event (i.e., childcare for Easter service)
- look into an international ministries opportunity

Celebrate

Search for things to celebrate: groups starting, birthing, growing; personal accomplishments; the end of a season of your group; a successful experience. Be creative in the way you celebrate. Enjoy being together!

“It’s a wonderful life”

In advance, the leader secretly asks three close friends (may include the spouse) of each group member to write out what the world would be like if that person had never been born. Before reading these aloud, the leader cues up the scene from the classic movie when George Bailey tells the angel it would be better if he had never lived, and the angel Clarence has an idea to show him how the world would have suffered.

After viewing the video, read the three letters aloud for each person. Allow time for the group to comment.

Gauges

Each person is given a white sheet of cardboard. These have been prepared in advance with the following categories on the left margin:

Emotional	<i>(Am I in touch with my feelings?)</i>
Relational	<i>(What is the quality of my family relationships and friendships?)</i>
Physical/Recreational	<i>(Am I healthy? Am I having any fun?)</i>
Ministry Fulfillment	<i>(What is my joy level in ministry?)</i>
Spiritual	<i>(How honest and growing is my relationship with God these days?)</i>

Colored pieces of tape or colored markers are then made available. Each person takes time to analyze each dimension of his or her life and put a piece of tape or wide band of color next to each gauge. Colors have the following meanings:

- Green I am flourishing in this area.
- Gray I am doing okay; nothing too great, nothing too bad.
- Yellow I have growing concerns for this area. Caution!
- Red I am in trouble in this area. It requires serious attention and correction.

Then each person holds up their card and explains the gauges.

Hot seat

The leader calls each group member, one at a time, to sit on a seat in the room, facing everyone. Then the person on the hot seat chooses a question from a pile and answers it. Members of the group pose follow-up questions or discuss the person's responses for the next three to four minutes.

Sample questions for the above exercise might include:

What is your favorite book of the Bible and why?

Fill in the blank:

Lately I am becoming more _____.

The feeling that best describes where I am at right now is _____.

If there was one person in the world that I could spend a day with, that would be _____.

Group member appreciation night

Each member of the group has a piece of paper with their name at the top of it. Lines are drawn on the paper to create enough boxes for all of the people in the room. At the top of the sheet is the sentence, "I appreciate this person because he/she . . ." Pass these sheets around the room, asking each member to complete the sentence by filling in one box. After all the sheets have been passed to everyone in the room, return the sheets to their owners. Then have members share what impresses them most about the affirmation they received from others in the group. (This should take approximately 30–45 minutes.)

Life story

Over the period of several weeks, each member of the small group can be assigned to spend fifteen minutes telling his or her life story. Then, fifteen minutes of discussion and interacting can occur. The point of the exercise is to find out exactly where people have come from. Often, it is hard to appreciate people until we understand their past and some of the significant events in their lives.

Group communion service

The purpose of this is to share in the Bread and the Cup as a small group. This can be an incredibly meaningful experience.

Each person, one at a time, personally serves another group member. (You can assign whom they will serve in advance or simply move around the circle.) As you serve one another, make appropriate comments about the love of Christ, specifically for that individual. When you are completed, the group closes in a time of prayer and/or worship.

Three key material possessions

Set up the scene as follows: Explain to the group that they have just discovered a major fire in their home. Assuming they have been able to safely get their family out, what three *material* possessions would they take with them from their

burning home? Have members explain why they would take the items they chose. Then generate a discussion to discover the value behind each of these possessions and why we hold certain possessions so dear.

Group photo

The purpose of this exercise is to have each member take a “picture” of the group. In other words, have each person draw or describe what the group looks like using a word-picture. For example, the group could be described as any of the following:

- A hospital (a place where wounds are healed)
- A gas station (a place to be refueled spiritually)
- A fortress (a safe place where struggles can be shared)
- A battleground (a place where we can work on who we are becoming in Christ)
- A mountaintop (a place to gain perspective and be encouraged)
- A valley (a place of discouragement and trial)
- A carnival (a place for fun, enthusiasm, and excitement)

These are just some examples, but have members either draw or describe the kind of group environment they need or see.

“We are living in an era when the art of conversation is almost a thing of the past . . . Yet at the same time, there is a growing hunger for closeness, for being known and understood.”

Jerry Jones

201 Great Questions

Fill in the blank

Ask various members of the group the following “fill in the blank” questions:

1. Tomorrow, something I will most likely take for granted is

2. Last year at this time I never would have thought God would

3. The person I am most thankful for this year is _____ because he/she

4. One specific attribute of God which I most appreciate is that He is

5. God used the following people to enrich my life this past year:

6. I want to specifically thank the Lord for giving me the gift of _____, so I can use it to serve Him and the church.
7. Considering the standard of living of most of the world's population, I am rich because I have these material blessings:

8. If I could stand up and shout anything to the rest of the body tonight, I would tell them that:

9. My God is _____.

► Ideas for Worship

1. Listen to or sing along with a worship tape.
2. Walk through a nearby park or forest preserve and praise God for His creative power.
3. Ask your group to think of the names of God that are found in Scripture. Ask each member to tell why that name is important, and pause to give God glory for who He is.
4. Ask members to select a favorite psalm or Scripture passage that focuses on who God is or who Jesus is. Read it aloud and then pause to pray.
5. Have each member write prayers of worship and praise to God. Ask them to share them with the group. Think of this as writing a letter to God.
6. Go to a worshipful Christian concert or church service together.
7. Have members in your group use their video cameras (if they have one) to record images of things that cause them to think about God or to want to worship Him. View them together as a group. Pause to reflect upon who God is and what He is doing in your lives.

► Social Activities

1. Eat meals together.
2. Play sports together.
3. Take a retreat as a group.
4. Go to a park.
5. Go to a concert.
6. Go to a lake/beach for the day.

Leading Life-Changing Small Groups

7. Go to someplace special at Christmas time.
8. Go to a pumpkin patch at Thanksgiving.
9. Have a fall harvest party.
10. Watch a video together and critique it.
11. Make popcorn, ice cream, or pizza together.
12. Brainstorm with your group some fun things to do.

► Outreach

1. Pray for someone to fill the open chair.
2. Pray for different parts of the world that need Christ.
3. Pray for a missionary from the church.
4. Plan a trip to the inner city.
5. Gather materials or gifts together to present to an orphanage in America or Mexico.
6. Have a potluck dinner and invite visitors.
7. Have a Superbowl party or Oscar night and invite neighbors.
8. Adopt a child through World Vision and support that child financially.
9. Plan to bring friends to a seeker service.
10. Take the *Becoming a Contagious Christian* training course together.