

Cultivate Relationships

In order to grow spiritually you have to be connected relationally. That's just how God set things up. Spiritual growth is not just about learning more information or following a set of rules, spiritual growth is relational. It's about our relationship with God and our relationship with other people.

In Matthew 22, a pharisee asked Jesus, "What's the greatest commandment of the Law?" Jesus responded with 2 commandments, he said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself." Growing spiritually is about growing in love for God and love for others. You have to be connected relationally for those things to happen. There is no way around it.

That means a major part of your role as leader is creating an environment where your group members have the opportunity to connect with one another at deeper levels. Hopefully that happens fairly naturally during group meetings, but you should also spend time with group members outside of those meetings. That is what Cultivate Relationships, one of the 8 Leader Essentials, is all about. It's simply asking, "How am I and my group members connecting outside of group time?"

As relationships develop, empathy and vulnerability increase. As your group members open up more of their lives to each other, growth becomes more likely for everyone. As the group leader, it falls on you to take that first step. You have to lead the way connecting with other group members.

Cultivating relationships may never feel urgent, but it's important. If you're not intentional, it may never happen. We are all used to casual friendships, it's comfortable to keep things at a surface level. The important thing is that you are intentional about casting a vision for your group members so they understand that the bonds that form within the group are not just an add on to the real goal of spiritual growth, they are an essential part of that growth.

So here are a **couple things** that you can do to **cultivate relationships**:

1. BE INTENTIONAL

Schedule time to hang out with your group and connect relationally. Get your calendars out and plan some actual dates and times to get together.

2. SHOW VULNERABILITY

When you are answering questions during a curriculum discussion or telling your story at the beginning of a new group, be real. It shows your group members it's safe for them to be real as well.

But remember this, don't make things too complicated. After all, this leader essential is about spending time with your group members outside of group. It's about developing authentic relationships. Remember, in order to grow spiritually you have to be connected relationally. That is just how God set things up.