

Principles of Group Closure

Good Endings Can Make for Good Beginnings in the future

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References:

- Mt 28:19-20
- Mk 14:13-16
- Lk 22:19
- Jn 16:29-33
- Jn 17:6-10

Healthy closure of any group experience is extremely important. It can help group members process and define their experience and positively set the stage for a new group. On the other hand, poor group closure can lead to barriers for a member's future involvement with groups.

Poor group closure can occur for a variety of reasons, including:

1. Lack of casting a vision for launching a new group, which can catch members off guard.
2. Burnout of the leader—a desire to “get things over with.” This prevents the leader from honoring the positive things God has done in the group.
3. Not giving the closure process enough time. Members will need to process the situation ahead of time, and will need at least one meeting set aside for discussion, reflection, and celebration.
4. The most destructive form of group closure occurs when a group ends with unresolved conflict or, worse yet, ends because of conflict.

Healthy group closure can be categorized into five steps, and are modeled perfectly through Jesus' actions during the Last Supper.

- *Consolation* (Jn 16:29–33):
Groups who have formed deep bonds with one another will need to recognize a wide variety of feelings associated with the closure of the group. Members may feel joy, sadness, or a sense of loss. Those feelings may be expressed with a variety of behaviors: laughter, excitement about the future, tears, or emotional distancing. Each member should be encouraged to identify their feelings and express them appropriately. Respect for each person's feelings should be given.
- *Celebration* (Mk 14:13–16):
When bringing closure to a group experience, it is critical to celebrate God's presence and activity within the group. This can be done in a variety of ways, including a worship service designed by the group members, sharing a meal, or a party. Spend time in prayer giving thanks and expressing the positive experiences of the group and special times spent together.

- *Commemoration* (Lk 22:19):
Commemoration is a great way to acknowledge milestones or special events experienced by the group. Commemoration differs from Celebration in that something tangible exists to mark the time together and to remember the group.

- *Congratulation* (Jn 17:6–10):
Congratulation for group members is expressed in statements of appreciation and affirmation. Small groups are relational. Suggestions for this affirmation include:
 1. Public acknowledgment of contributions to the group
 2. Private written notes of appreciation
 3. Sharing gifts with group members
 4. Group photos to remember each other

- *Commission* (Mt 28:19–20):
During the final meetings, it is important to chart a new course for the future. There needs to be an anticipation of the next experience of biblical community. Prayer is a great way to approach this commission (Phm 1:9–11). Others include planning a reunion and casting a larger vision for the future.

The ending of a group may be a relational hardship, but it can be sweetened by the prospects of the ultimate reunion in heaven with our leader—Jesus Christ.