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God's Sixteen Guidelines For Building Great Community

By [Dave Earley](#)

As a pastor of a small groups church, I have visited various groups through the years. I have found that one can often quickly predict much about the future of the group within the first few minutes.

There are groups where people obviously enjoy each other's company. They rapidly flow from laughing to crying together. They respect one another. Group members share more than surface situations and short shallow answers to probing questions. The facades have been cracked, the inner person has been exposed, and transparency is expressed. They are experiencing something wonderful called, "community".

There are also groups where the opposite is true. People come in guarded and stiff. Walls are still in place. Defenses are set. Disclosures are guarded. Polite smiles never give way to outbursts of laughter. Tears are held in check. People leave carrying the same burdens they walked in carrying. Something is missing. This group has yet to experience community.

Community is coming to the point where, as a group, we share our stories, thoughts, opinions, struggles, and victories with each other. We begin to share life together. We are experiencing real, Biblical fellowship or koinonia. We are participating in life with others to the point of knowing them, feeling their hurts, sharing their ups and downs, and encouraging their hearts.

God has already told us how to develop community. He actually commands us to do so by fulfilling sixteen "one another" commands in the New Testament. They are God's guaranteed guidelines for growing great community.

1. Move beyond your comfort zone to affectionately greet one another. (Romans 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14)

Never underestimate the power of touch. As social beings we need touch to be healthy. We live in a high tech, low touch world. One major reason people get involved in a group is that they want a safe, high touch environment. Learn to use the time as members arrive, and/or after they have all arrived, to greet one another with an appropriate touch. In some cultures this would be shaking hands. In other cultures it is a hug. In still others, it is a kiss.

We often give out a few handshakes and hugs before we get started. As touch goes up, defenses come down. As touch increases, receptivity increases.

2. Hold each other in high esteem and actively honor one another. (Romans 12:16)

Nothing builds community more than the atmosphere of esteem and honor. When

a group breathes such an atmosphere, meaningful authentic relational community will grow and blossom.

3. **Make the effort to resolve conflict in order to live in genuine harmony with each other. (Romans 12:16)**

No two people are alike. Therefore, it is just a matter of time until one of my differences rubs one of you the wrong way. Conflict is the result. To try to deny or avoid conflict is to kill true community. To resolve it builds community.

4. **Don't look at each other through the lens of criticism or self-righteousness. (Romans 14:13)**

When people sense a spirit of criticism or judgment, they either close down or begin to find fault. A spirit of criticism will suck the life out of community.

5. **Treat each other with a sense of acceptance. Give others the freedom to be themselves. Realize that no one is perfect. (Romans 15:7)**

The opposite of the spirit of criticism is the spirit of acceptance. When a group lives in a climate of acceptance, biblical community grows like plants in a hothouse.

6. **Create a climate of teaching and teach-ability where members can share what they learn with each other. (Romans 15:14)**

The attitude of being mutual learners on a journey together builds camaraderie. Camaraderie creates community, and people feel closer to one another when they sense they are on their spiritual journeys together.

7. **When a need is shared, make the effort to meet it. (Gal 5:13)**

I was in a group one evening where the leader asked about the whereabouts of an absent member. Someone noted that they were home sick. The group immediately planned to visit them the next evening. One person even volunteered to bring a meal. That was a group living community.

In another group, a single mom shared a financial need. After she left, the group members remaining collected over a hundred dollars to meet her need. The leader and apprentice met after work the next night to drop the gift by her home. She never missed group again. Instead of referring to "the" group, she now refers to it as "my" group.

8. **Sing together. (Eph. 5:19)**

Currently, my family leads a group of high school students, mostly boys. The week before Christmas, we gathered around the piano to sing Christmas carols. I thought the girls would like it and the boys would groan. I was wrong! My wife could hardly play as seven or eight broad shouldered, varsity-jacket wearing, side-burned, high school boys crowded around singing at the top of their lungs. It wasn't pretty music (although it really wasn't that bad), but the community was warm and beautiful.

There are eight more guidelines for growing community. Let me list them.

9. **Realize that everyone goes through seasons that are so challenging that they make the person more difficult to enjoy. Bear with them and forgive them. (Eph 4:32)**
10. **Don't try to win every argument or always be right. Submit to one another. (Eph. 5:21)**
11. **Encouragement is oxygen to the soul. Encourage one another. (1 Th. 5:11; Heb 3:13; 10:25)**
12. **Motivate one another. (Heb 10:24)**
13. **Refuse to ever slander someone in or outside the group. Nothing will shut down community more quickly than slander. (James 4:11)**
14. **Don't let hospitality be the job of just one person or couple. Take turns showing hospitality to one another. (1 Pet. 4:9)**
15. **It's not all about you. Clothe yourself in a servant's apron of humility. (1 Peter 5:5)**
16. **Sin dulls light and destroys fellowship. Deal with it. (1 John 1:7)**

God created us for community and knows what helps us get there. Follow His guidelines and watch Him grow true connectedness in your group.

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