

Transformation Takes Time

Follow these steps to lead people down the path of continued spiritual growth.

by [Brett Eastman](#)

Our small group, like most small groups, is comprised of people with varying degrees of Christian maturity. One lady arrived as a spiritual seeker. Within time, she committed her life to Christ and was baptized. The evening of her baptism was a special time for our small group, as we celebrated her decision and prayed with her. Both seasoned prayer warriors and new believers lifted up praises and petitions; new believers prayed out loud and learned that there is no right or wrong way to pray.

Because of this one event, others deeply grew in their prayer life. Those who never would have prayed out loud when they first joined ended the year praying. That kind of spiritual growth is exciting, but it doesn't happen immediately.

Transformation takes time. Despite the tendency to want instant spiritual growth, hosts are there to help members grow step-by-step, sometimes inch-by-inch. How do you do it? Following the acrostic CULTIVATE, here are nine simple steps to get you started.

Clarify the pathway of life. You need to begin with the end in mind. Ask, "What is the goal?" According to the Bible, the goal is to present every man and woman complete in Christ. There isn't one person in your circle who doesn't want to grow. Your role is to find out how to move each member ahead.

Jesus' call is clear. He wants to move us from a seeker of Christ to a student in Christ who is studying the Word and growing in our faith. However, most people get stuck at the midway point.

After we learn to be a student, Christ wants us to be a servant. Generally, 20 percent of people jump into a servant role. Your job is to let the other 80 percent know that God calls every one of his people, according to his or her unique giftedness, to be a servant in the body of Christ.

Then let them know that everyone is called to be a shepherd. We are not all called to be leaders, pastors, or teachers. Your challenge to them is: "Follow me as I follow Christ." You're the one who's done it, so lead them forward. Consider charting out where people are, and then help them see where God wants them to be. Start with yourself, and pray about where you need to grow.

Understand your members' spiritual goals and dreams. All of us have them and want to work on them. Challenge your members to find one thing God wants them to work on—they'll know it once they ask God. Then ask them to write it down. It might be reading God's word for the first time in their life, finding balance in their busy life, or finding an opportunity to serve or share Christ with a nonbeliever. You might use a health assessment to check their spiritual pulse.

Once they are aware of what God is calling them to do, continue to challenge them in that area. Have them write down one tangible step they can take to begin to fulfill that dream.

Listen for God's heart for each person. You need to look for the moments when their eyes water, when they get fired up, or when they lose interest. When you see such reactions, you know something is happening in their hearts. Listen beyond their eyes and their physical presence for what God might be doing deep in their soul. Here is your chance to help bring those heart-felt desires out.

Transformation happens best through group discussion. The greatest transformation happens when you take the information from the teaching session and apply it. This doesn't happen in groups of 8-20 people; you have to divide them into smaller discussion groups of 3-4 people. In smaller groups, individuals have more air time and more time for application of the truths from the lesson.

Encourage them to share their goals. Expect them to achieve them together in their divided groups, and try to maintain the groups throughout the entire study. As Ecclesiastes says, two are better than one. God is in the middle of that cord, helping people grow and move to the next level.

Inspect that which you expect. If you cast out a spiritual challenge, like reading the Bible or taking on a new leadership role, write it down and continue to bring it back to focus at your small group meetings. You might ask somebody to keep track of those things that are more than prayer requests.

Ask the group to praise God for the results of the first three weeks of working on their goal. Then ask them what one problem they are struggling with, and help them come up with a plan for overcoming it over the next few weeks. When you put them in pairs to discuss these goals, usually the discussion goes deeper and there is greater accountability.

Validate every step. You need to say, "Hip-hip-hooray!" and "That-a-boy! That-a-girl!" Don't forget to affirm even the smallest of steps. One man brought a Bible to his small group, and the leader said, "Fantastic. Now you might want to read it." Celebrate every step. Look for whatever progress there might be, and affirm them.

As a group, you may agree to celebrate when someone shows progress—memorizing their first verse, praying out loud, reading a book of the Bible, or leading their first session. Your job is to ask, "Who is working on what, and how can we help you get to the next step?" Don't forget to include yourself. Leaders are also on a spiritual journey.

Ask whom they would like their spiritual partner/mentor to be. Nine out of ten Christians—and even spiritual seekers—want to grow spiritually. But nine out of ten don't know how to make it happen alone. You are the catalyst to help members find spiritual partners. Start with yourself, and ask someone in the group to be your partner for the next six weeks. Then ask the group whom they would like to partner with for the next six weeks. Ideally, men pair with men, and women with women.

At the end of the meeting in which you pair them up, have them exchange e-mail addresses and spend some time setting goals and praying together. Encourage them to celebrate when they take steps in their spiritual journey. Remember, sheep need a shepherd, but shepherds need shepherds as well.

Together you accomplish more than you could ever do alone. Shared goals make a difference. If you all stack hands and vow to do one ministry project together—just one over the course of six weeks—it will happen. Just ask your group what interests them and what the group could accomplish together. Then ask people to take on positions to start getting it done.

Our group was moved to feed the homeless. We made a plan and then made barbecue chicken meals. To make a long story short, two of the homeless men ended up coming to Christ—their lives were changed forever. More than that, our small group changed forever, as they learned what can happen when they express themselves in love with Christ's help. We all grew through that experience.

Expect them to pass it on. If you do not expect them to pass on that which they have been given, they won't fulfill the Great Commission. Not everyone is called to be a teacher, but cast a vision that everyone is called to be a shepherd of some. It doesn't have to be 22; it doesn't have to be 12. It doesn't even have to be more than one, but where two or more are gathered, there God is in their midst. Someday, they must come up with the name of one person whom they can shepherd.