

Finding Your Home Group's Message

By Matt Rogers

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I think the first step in planning for a year of home group is to develop some kind of vision for what your group will be about. Before you go after an audience, go after your vision. (I'm using the terms *message*, *vision*, and *theme* interchangeably.) Go after your vision before you ever go after your audience. Your desire to reach people will be greater if you know you have something worth telling them once you have them.

Why theme?

I know some people don't like themes. All I can do is tell you why I like them. They provide context for your group. They frame what it is your talking about each week. Otherwise you just jump from one topic to the next each week, and there is no larger story being told. It's all just random issues. A theme pulls it all back together and give your group an identity.

Developing a theme

Ask yourself three questions:

- What are the major themes in my life right now?
- What are the needs of my home group right now?
- Is there a point where the themes of my life and the needs of my home group intersect?

If there is a point of intersection (and there almost certainly is because we're all human beings with the same general needs in life), you'll most likely want to set up camp there. You'll be addressing the needs of your group, and you'll be doing it with inherent passion because it's also touching on personal themes in your life. Your passion and excitement will rub off on others.

Elements of a good theme

A good theme is both broad and narrow, general and specific. It must be broad enough to appeal to people regardless of where they are in their journey with God, but specific enough to attract deeply committed believers. It must be general enough to allow for a real breadth of topics, but specific enough that you can always bring the topic back to one main point.

Testing the theme

Share the theme you're considering with a few select people before announcing it to the group. Try to find people with different personalities to see how they respond.

Start now!

Probably the biggest mistake people make is waiting till they get back from summer break to start planning for the fall. It's hard to go after your audience when you haven't found your message. And you'll want to be ready to go after your audience when you get

back to school in the fall. Free yourself to reach people by finding your message before August.

An example

What I've written below is an example of how my co-leaders and I went through developing a home group theme a few years ago. This is ONLY AN EXAMPLE! Your theme doesn't have to end up looking anything like ours. You do not have to follow the same process we went through. This is only an example to help get you started.

First, we looked at the major themes in our lives right now:

David: I'm really thinking about what I'm going to be doing next year, and for the rest of my life. It's a time of uncertainty; I need an ultimate purpose and direction. The coward in me wants something definite, but the dangerous side loves this gracious uncertainty I'm in now. I'm really searching for purpose and position. I imagine I'm not too different than most other peeps, especially freshmen.

Christa: God's plans are bigger than I can imagine; how much and how well do I love people; God calls us out of our strengths and into our weaknesses to help us; God answers prayer.

Matt: I want a home group that is, as Graham Tomlin calls it, an "outpost of the Kingdom." I want a group that anyone can walk into and get a true glimpse of what heaven will be like by the way we love God and people. The brevity of this life and the length of eternity are on my mind everyday. I want to live for something that really matters. I fear wasting my life. I want to give others a BIG reason to live.

Next we looked at what we each thought were the needs of the new group we're starting:

David: It needs a strong evangelism side to bring people in. This is paramount. Second, it needs a friendly environment to keep the people it does bring in, and a strong teaching/leading group to keep the people getting closer to God, and encouraging them to seek Him out.

Christa: The people need to feel that they fit in, have friends, and have a place that they feel is real. They need a place to go outside of school. Students have a need to grow where they can feel safe in being honest.

Matt: Well, we need people for starters. So fall kick-off and follow up will be crucial. We need a strong identity as a group. In other words, why should someone come to our group when they have four million other options of what they could be doing during that time? We need to have such a strong, clear reason for existing so that new students will WANT to check us out. And we need plenty of activities outside of home group time to QUICKLY build a sense of community. If people don't find their friends in our group, they will find them elsewhere.

Out of this came a theme and a brief description. Notice how it is broad, yet specific. Also notice how it meets at the intersection of our personal life themes and the needs of our group:

Life as a Revolution

Or: How I learned to stop just existing and turn the world upside down

“We all want the same things out of our college experience: good grades, good times with our friends, and good jobs when we graduate. But deep down most of us want something more. We want to know that our lives matter. We want to know that how we spend our time here won’t leave us with regret. We want to change our world. Check out this brand new group as we look into God’s Word for how to live life as a revolution.”

Again, your theme does not have to look like or come about in the same way as ours. This is an example to help get you started on the path to finding your group’s message and identity.

If you need help or have questions, contact me anytime.