

Wednesday Brothers of Thunder

Men's Core Group Mission Statement, Guidelines, and Expectations

Last updated: Wednesday, October 4, 2006

What's a "Wednesday Brothers of Thunder"?

A "Wednesday Brother" (for short) is anyone who is or has been a regular attendee of our weekly men's group. Our two-hour meetings occur in a home in Santa Clara California on, well...Wednesday evenings. We split our time between Bible study and prayer. Sometimes there's food or snacks, but mostly not. This group has been around for over 15 years and consists of Christian men of all ages, married and single, with different jobs and careers, representing various churches in the Bay Area. Membership is voluntary. There are no membership fees, we don't take attendance, pass the collection plate, have a web site, a demo CD, stock options, benefits packages, corporate sponsors, U.S. patents, any sort of budget, a mileage points program, an elder board (or bored elders), a multimedia ministry, a skate park, coffee shop, theme song, snappy logo, or official t-shirts. This is a non-smoking meeting.

Ok, but why "...of Thunder"?

The origin of the group's name is unknown, though possibly Slavic, but not important. None of us remembers how it came about anyway. There have been no reported cases of spontaneous thunder as a result of our meetings...yet. Somehow the name stuck, so we kept it.

Why such formal documentation? Are you all control freaks?

No, we are not *all* control freaks. Through trial and error this group has found a need to clearly identify its structure and intent. Without structure the quality of our meetings rapidly declined and we experienced limited personal growth. Plus our meetings got routine and dull.

But, we are not just looking for a smooth running group! More and more we began to see ourselves as an active living part of the larger body of Christ. As such it is in our best interest to clearly identify the function of our body part and to work diligently to stay within those boundaries and keep healthy. We recognize that we do not exist in a Christian vacuum and have an affect on the Body of Christ, and the world, at all times.

The human heart has a very specific and limited function in the body. If it deviates from its necessary function for even a few heartbeats the entire body suffers. Likewise if the legs decided that they would like to try to be, say, the nostrils, for a few days chaos would ensue. Legs should be legs and leave the nostril business to the nostrils. Also, if we cut our elbow and don't mend the wound it could become all yucky and green, and maybe need amputation. Get the idea? Good.

For this reason we (our body part) have chosen to identify ourselves by documenting our guidelines, expectations and mission. That may sound too "corporate" and not enough "leading by the spirit", but so far a better approach simply hasn't been suggested. When one is suggested we'll do that instead. Until then this document reflects our best efforts to define the boundaries where we work best. We hope this will help keep us from becoming stagnant in our personal walk or make up a malfunctioning part of the Body of Christ. Of course this is all done with prayer and the Lord's leading. He is the head of the body after all. We also realize the Lord isn't finished with any of us or this group, so we review these guidelines and expectations occasionally to make sure we are on the right track. Changes are made when and where necessary.

What follows are the guidelines and expectations of members of this group. Anyone who considers himself a "Wednesday Brother" regularly attends our meetings and agrees to follow them as best they can. If that is you, keep this handy! We need your help sticking to these guidelines and expectations. If that isn't you feel free to fold these pages into paper airplanes and toss them around the office, or maybe just remind us about what total control freaks we are.

Our Mission Statement

“Anchor with Christ and one another. Affect the world as Christian men.”

Group Meeting Guidelines

Bible Study Time

- Our Bible study time is generally expository. We pick a book of the Bible and read through it verse by verse discussing and praying along the way. This takes about 1 hour each week.
- This is a “leaderless” group but there is rotational “chairman” for the week. This “chairman” has the responsibility (not the authority) of leading and guiding the discussion based upon their study and prayer beforehand, keeping us on topic (for the most part), and keeping us on time. The “chairman” may or may not change weekly. Any member of the group can be “chairman”.
- We know that flexibility and listening to the Lord is key. This means we may not always adhere to our regular format or finish where we want intended. This is OK.
- Everyone, not just the “chairman”, is encouraged to prepare and contribute to the discussions. This way we get the most out of the study time.
- When disagreements arise we will strive to focus on the main issues and keep the minor things minor. We realize we may not always agree on all issues.
- We try to keep moving and not let the content bog us down for too long.
- We all agree that the Lord is not finished with us and there’s much we have to learn about Him and His word.

Prayer and Sharing Time

- This is a men’s group. Issues discussed are understood to be personal and private. What is said in the room stays in the room.
- When we discuss personal issues we are making it “public” within the bound of the group and are giving the group permission to come along side us to support, encourage, or challenge as needed.
- We will strive to speak the truth in love and to create a safe place for us to share. We don’t expect to always be “comfortable” and do expect to be asked hard questions when they are needed.
- We agree to use active listening skills to the best of our abilities. Advice or comments will be given when they are requested.
- We try not to see each other as problems to be “fixed”.
- We try to avoid “sore toe” prayers and want to focus on the core issues.
- We would like this time be focused on all aspects of our lives, not just our “problems”. Simply sharing thoughts or experiences is OK too.
- We need to be mindful of our limited time and yield time to important issues when they come up.

Listening Guidelines for Prayer and Sharing Time

- When I’m thinking about an answer while others are talking, I’m not listening.
- When I give unsolicited advice, I’m not listening (doing so always seems like criticism).
- When I suggest they shouldn’t feel the way they do, I’m not listening.
- When I apply a quick fix to their problem, I’m not listening.
- When I fail to acknowledge their feelings, I’m not listening.
- When I fidget, glance at my watch and appear to be rushed, I’m not listening.
- When I fail to maintain eye contact, I’m not listening.
- When I don’t ask follow-up questions, I’m not listening.
- When I top their story with a bigger, better story of my own, I’m not listening.
- When they share a difficult experience and I counter with one of my own, I’m not listening.

Our Core Values

- Building trust and accountability between us, not forcing it.
- Evidence of spiritual growth in our lives and extending that beyond this group.
- Transparency about our inner thoughts, struggles, hopes, dreams, fears, questions, etc.
- Courage to do the right thing, even when it isn't easy.
- Speaking honestly with one another.
- Taking risks with God, in our relationships, and in our day-to-day lives.
- Asking for and receiving forgiveness from the Lord and one another.
- Maintaining sexual purity in our dating and marriage relationships.

Guidelines For Creating A "Safe" Place For Members

- Respect of each other's confidentiality.
- Listen first. Don't "fix".
- Stick to the core issue. Avoid personal attacks and respectfully disagree.
- Come with an attitude of serving one another.

Expectations of Members

1. We are "leaderless" by choice--to avoid the usual Bible study format of a teacher and a passive audience. Our Teacher and Leader is Jesus--we are all brothers and therefore all equals. Therefore everyone's sharing carries the same weight and the views of every member are important. At the start of each meeting it is important to remember that Jesus is in charge and He is in our very midst. Our two hours together is very different from anything else we do all week long. The Facilitator for the Bible study hour should not lecture but draw out the members when possible (Socratic method). The Facilitator for the Sharing Time should be direct and firmly in control, gently confrontational as necessary, to keep the group focused and in depth.
2. The group does not work well if members are irregular in showing up. This weekly meeting should be a very high priority for each member. We ought to start and end on time. We gather together to meet with Jesus not merely with one another. He is the Head of the Body. Guests are always welcome.
3. The sharing time is very important. If you have nothing important to share, then don't make up a bunch of low-content information to waste time and to draw attention to yourself. Be sensitive that one of the brothers may have major matters to bring up and pray about, and we should keep our own sharing brief and to the point--and watch the clock. If a member *never* contributes or shares the rest of the body loses something important. If one member talks too much and rambles the "acting chairman" should move the discussion to someone else. The Sharing time Facilitator may wish to poll the group ahead of time to see who has something important to share and how much time should be allotted, as well as making a triage list.
4. Prayer time at the end often gets crowded down to a few minutes and this is not good. This situation arises because individuals are not sensitive to the clock and to others in the group. Our prayer time ought to be the high point of the entire two hours together.
5. A certain level of Christian maturity is necessary for members to catch on to the dynamics of the group--which is merely a microcosm of the Body of Christ as God intended it to function in the world. We deal with real life adult issues in a safe environment where it is OK to share private matters with trusted brothers. Immature Christians will often be uncomfortable with our usual openness, and if so, it's OK to move on.
6. Many newcomers think we are just another Bible study. Wrong! We are a CORE group whose purpose is to learn more about the Bible in depth and to *practice Body Life* in a small and intimate setting. The group is for serious Christians. See <http://www.raystedman.org/bodylife/>
7. Friendships between the members outside of the group time are especially valuable. Since this group has been around for about 15 year we have a long chain of brothers we still feel connected to because of our past times together in the group. Time together outside the group meeting is encouraged but not expected.
8. No one is expected to be perfect.

Reference Material and Recommended Reading

Websites

- The Palo Alto Think and Pray Group, 1970: <http://www.ldolphin.org/patpg.html>
- Leaderless Core Groups: <http://www.ldolphin.org/leaderless.html>
- Small Group Guidelines, <http://www.ldolphin.org/Core.html>
- Description of the Spiritual Gifts in the Body of Christ, <http://www.ldolphin.org/Spgifts.html>
- About body life: <http://www.raystedman.org/bodylife/>

Printed Material

- The Bible (any version as long as you read it), by God.
- Almost everything written by Ray Stedman
- *The Four Loves*, *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, by C.S. Lewis