Living the Teachings

A "QUICK-START" GUIDE

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A "LIVING THE TEACHINGS" group is safe, loving, nurturing, and may be more spiritually progressive than any group process most of us have known. The key element is a singleness of purpose, that is a mutual desire for religious growth— and to support each other to actualize our spiritual potentials. To be successful and pleasant for all, there can be no competitiveness, nor secondary agendas.

EVERYTHING WE SUGGEST here was arrived at by trial and error. In the process of creating a *Living the Teachings* group we had attempted open study group-type meetings for a year, meetings patterned after AA step programs, and other formats. None of these worked well with Urantians. Then, at last, we arrived at the pattern that worked for us.

Start with a small, closed group

Several years ago we discovered that we had a nucleus of a few kindred spirits who were interested in the idea of a spiritual group dynamic for the teachings of the Urantia Papers. And this is the first suggestion: Begin with a small group that is compatible and willing to learn from one another.

Establish a time frame of commitment, say six months or a year. Unless everyone agrees on adding a new member—maintain a closed group. You will discover that a trusting, sharing group suffers from casual drop-ins or curiosity seekers. We discovered that eight or so people is about maximum. We meet on Sunday afternoons, and have juggled the time several times to meet the needs of members. The meeting usually lasts about two hours.

Your group will develop its own personality, and begin to have a life of its own. The group dynamic and wisdom will establish its own "rules," so to speak.

The basic format we use

We have learned it is best to begin with a moment of silence, and a prayer offered by a member. This sets the tone of the meeting. We do not read any "rules" or guidelines, since we are all committed to living the teachings of the Urantia Papers.

Each *Living the Teachings* group will have a de facto leader, or facilitator, who orchestrates things. This is *not* a guru, but rather an individual who wants to serve the group and keep things running smoothly. Eventually, members will take turns being the facilitator.

The central concept of the group is a process of sharing our inner lives with one another. After a moment of silence and a prayer, we begin sharing what we have experienced in our *spiritual* lives for the previous week. We do not rush it. We may talk about our failures or successes in living the teachings, our progress in prayer and meditation, a troublesome problem, or a spiritual challenge.

After each member shares, the facilitator may lead a discussion on a spiritual topic that was previously agreed upon by the group. The balance of the meeting could be open discussion around this topic. *(We spent four weeks on meditation techniques, with a group leader who was especially knowledgeable about it.)*

Guided worshipful meditations, when we use them towards the end of the meeting, are uplifting and fresh, and use wholesome images and symbols to stimulate the creative imagination. After the meeting, we enjoy conversation over coffee and dessert.

The structure, method or technique of the meeting does not matter so much as the loving atmosphere the group generates.

Don't comment or give advice

Discourage casual comments after someone shares. Advice should never be given unless it is specifically asked for. Just thank the person who shares and wait for a volunteer to share next.

At first you will discover that people are reticent, and won't have a great deal to say. Or they will tend to talk about theories and generalities, and avoid openly discussing their inner life. This is quite natural. We are not accustomed to discussing our spiritual struggles openly. Over time, as trust develops, this will become less and less of a problem. A good leader should set the example of candor and courage. But most of all, the facilitator must create a safe group.

Create a supportive and loving space

Be very careful who you invite to your group. You must get the right people on the bus from the very beginning. The key factor is to invite people with a sincere desire for religious growth by "sharing one's spiritual life with one's fellows."

This kind of spiritual sharing is not for everyone. It is not harmonious with the competitive intellectual arena that some Urantians seem to enjoy. For this reason, if there is not a good "fit" for a member, it is better to let this individual go and form his or her own group with like-minded individuals. The important thing is to make the ambiance of the meeting loving, safe, and fun.

Our meetings have spiritual goals and use spiritual methods. We found it best to avoid too much psychological theory, even though there were two professional therapists in our group.

We have a rule that we are not to interrupt anyone who is talking. This has required, at times, the use of a "talking stone" which is passed from member to member. Only the person with the stone can talk. As written previously, do not offer advice after someone speaks unless it is specifically asked for. We do not critique the views of someone. "Cross-talk" is not encouraged. (*Cross-talk is a give and take conversation that develops between two members while the rest look on*.)

The principle here is that we are all spiritual equals. We are experts in only one person's inner life, our own. There should be no "wannabe" gurus in the group. Each individual must feel safe to speak without fear of a subtle, judgmental response. Of all the "rules" we suggest, the "no advice unless requested" is perhaps the most important. The rest of the structure of the meeting depends upon who is leading it.

It is a good idea to alternate leaders, unless a topic is carried forward and the group agrees to keep the same leader for two or three, or even more meetings

Life-changing decisions

Religious growth is life-changing. We have discovered that over the many years, members have made important personal decisions which they attributed to being in a *Living the Teachings* group.