SAFE ENVIRONMENTS IN YOUR LIFE GROUP

Most of the settings in our daily life aren't "safe." At the office you're under constant pressure to perform. Even at home there are the demands of being a parent, spouse, neighbor. Everyone seems to want something from you. The people in your group have their guard up all day long.

So how can you make your Life Group a safe place, where they can drop their guard? And why?

Though it is not an overnight or easy process, it is a critical one if your members are going to experience authentic community and spiritual growth.
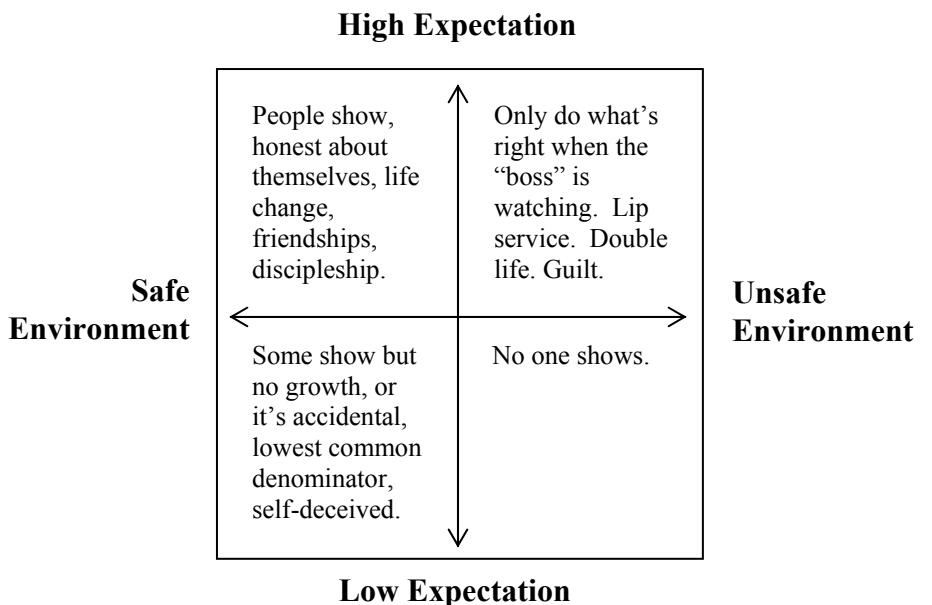
WHY CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT?

1. Creating a safe environment paves the way to <u>community</u>. It is an essential for building connections, and friendships. *And relationship comes before discipleship. There is no discipleship without relationship.*

2. It removes the obstacles that can get in the way of the <u>Holy Spirit's</u> work. If people don't feel safe in your group, they will shut down, shutting themselves off from what the Spirit could do in their lives through the group.

3. A safe environment is <u>irresistible</u>. People want acceptance, and they will go where they feel they are accepted and appreciated. Especially in an unsafe world. Your group will be a draw!

WHAT CHARACTERIZES A SAFE ENVIRONMENT?

Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines it, a place where we are "free from harm or risk." So how does this translate to community groups? Imagine if you were able to create an environment such as this:

- A place where you can let your <u>guard down</u>.
- A place where you can feel free to talk about issues without the fear of <u>judgment</u> or <u>criticism</u>.
- A place where you feel <u>valued</u> and can be <u>vulnerable</u>.
- A place where you feel <u>accepted</u>.

Is this compromise? Going soft on sin? No. Jesus created a "safe" environment with the woman caught in adultery (John 8).   It's interesting that after He dismissed her accusers, He told her that He didn't condemn her and yet also said, "go and sin no more" (v. 11). Life change has to happen in this type of safe environment.
Look at this chart:

High Expectation

Safe Environment		Unsafe Environment
People show, honest about themselves, life change, friendships, discipleship.		Only do what's right when the "boss" is watching. Lip service. Double life. Guilt.
Some show but no growth, or it's accidental, lowest common denominator, self-deceived.		No one shows.

Low Expectation

HOW DO YOU CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT?

1. Begin to lay the foundation for a safe environment right from the start by using the Group Covenant.   It helps set expectations and lay the groundwork for your group. The values of confidentiality, authenticity, and respect set the right tone for creating a safe environment. As well, walking the members through the group guidelines will go a long way in keeping the group a predictable place where members know what to expect.

2. Another way that you can create a safe environment is by modeling it yourself. Lead by example. Be a safe person yourself. Model transparency, acceptance, commitment, consistency, and integrity.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP HAS BECOME UNSAFE?

If we aren't careful, our Life groups can become unsafe. Symptoms of an unsafe community group include:
- People shut down.
- Conversations tend toward superficial.
- Members feel insecure. or you see there is a lack of trust.
- People make excuses and don't show up.
- Prayer requests become third-party ("…for my friend's aunt Polly I've never met")
- Discussion is flat.
- People check out. (body language)

HOW DO YOU CORRECT AN UNSAFE ENVIRONMENT?

- Revisit the vision for the group. Perhaps you could go back through the Covenant, inviting discussion from the group as to whether the group has lived up to the Covenant or not.

- Take personal ownership . Look at yourself first. Is there anything that *you* are doing that is making your group unsafe?

- Talk about it openly in the group. You can't simply ignore an unsafe environment and hope that it will somehow become safe again. You need to initiate discussion of where the group is and where the group needs to be.

- Determine if this is a general group issue or just one or two members. If it is just one or two members, then you'll need to consider having private conversations with those involved. Do what you can to repair broken relationships. And when possible, encourage direct communication among the group members.