

CCL Men's Group Report September 2020

How are things going?

Following a first informal meeting in a bar in January 2018 we decided to set up a men's breakfast meeting. Since about June/July 2018 we've met semi-regularly, about every month to six weeks. The last time we met physically was February/March of this year. A typical meeting is normally attended by around 6 or 7 (sometimes as many as 9, sometimes as few as 4) guys from the church, both morning and evening service. We eat breakfast, a wide variety of food offered, and catch up together and usually there's a small topic for discussion on faith and our spiritual lives before we close in prayer. We tend to have around 6 or 7 regulars and we have a whatsapp group to keep in touch.

Our last physical meeting was a success, we had 8-9 people attending and we had a discussion, taking stock of how we've done as a group over the previous year or so and how we'd like to see the group evolve- maybe more social hangouts. We also had a very moving discussion on stress and the pressures of life and how perhaps men particularly find it difficult to express these sentiments.

A positive to report is that over the lockdown period we tried to meet up over Zoom on a Saturday morning, to catch up and try to support one another. Clearly this is quite different from what we are used to- the format has to be a lot more structured and formal (allowing for only one person talking at a time for example) but there were requests for this to be done more regularly than normal so we had a meeting every week during lockdown for about an hour and typically we got similar numbers attending as we normally would do. It was a great way to continue to support one another from afar and pray for each other, plus it meant an easy way to meet each other even though at that time we were scattered all over the world.

How are you moving forward? What are your plans?

Going forward it's quite difficult to know where we're going. There are no plans to meet physically for the time being and probably not for the foreseeable future. That means continuing by Zoom which on the one hand is a good way to keep in touch even while in different locations, but on the other hand is not ideal considering a lot of what we were about was providing that social space, bringing people together from the two services and sharing food together. I am also very aware that there is more than one member who is not able to join in with us online so inevitably if we have to continue this way it end up being more exclusive than we'd like. Furthermore, before we paused meetings over the summer numbers had begun to dwindle (maybe because the summer was getting closer, maybe because lockdown had ended and people were busy doing other things...) and I'm concerned that just continuing over Zoom

doesn't provide the same opportunities for people to connect with each other and really get that quality time together. However, we may not have a choice...

- Going forward we're likely to continue to meet via Zoom, perhaps once a month, or fortnightly. But I don't consider this ideal- I think it takes away from the social aspect of what we were about (it's not really a men's breakfast anymore) and there are limitations to what we can do. Moreover, I'm aware that not everyone can benefit from us moving online like this

What do you need in order to grow and develop?

Before lockdown I felt like discussions for meetings were very much ad hoc and varied meeting to meeting. Sometimes we had a testimony-style sharing of a persons' journey to faith, sometimes it was a discussion regarding something topical or sometimes just something I'd come across recently in a Bible reading.

It's difficult for me to know what people want out of the meetings (in my experience men are terrible at providing feedback- myself included!), whether it's purely the social aspect, space to talk/open up, or something more spiritually. People do keep coming back (except just before the summer..) so I guess there must be something going right. Personally, I try to make it as socially fulfilling as I can- the food helps with that as it's socialising around a meal- whilst providing some spiritual food for thought or something as least that could be taken away and thought about. Obviously the food aspect has gone now and I've personally found video meetings (in general) less fulfilling and more difficult to recreate that really social vibe, but it's the best we've got for now. If there was a way to adapt to include those who can't join us online even better but with trying to limit physical meetings that's tricky.

- We're trying to recreate that social space as much as we can and to provide a time during which we can encourage one another- but I find that this is limited over Zoom and doesn't include everyone in the group

As for the discussion part, I've felt a bit like I haven't always been sure of myself in trying to lead discussion or provide subjects to talk about. I don't have any experience leading a group and at times I can feel a bit of pressure. I didn't want it to be formal Bible study, more like informal discussions. Sometimes we get minimal participation, and it's difficult to know whether that's just guys being guys, me not providing an interesting or appropriate topic, or maybe because most people don't come for the spiritual part (must be for the excellent cooking!). One thing I think would really help going forward, especially if it's going to be via Zoom for the foreseeable future, is more structure, to really know what we can discuss more in advance, maybe go through chunks of books of the Bible, but without it being more formal Bible study. It's tricky, and I really don't have any experience leading or preparing anything like

this and I feel a little at times like I'm finding my way, but it needs to be more structured than me just finding my way.

- We need more structure in the discussions- meaning meeting to meeting and within the meetings- but these are things I'm struggling to know how to handle at times, and it's tricky when I don't always get a lot of participation (though we have had some great discussions!), and I don't have experience handling this kind of thing

Of course it doesn't have to be discussion based, but one of our aims early on was to have some spiritual input and not just be a social group, though clearly that is a big part of it.

We've had some great moments together over the past year and a half. We've had a lot of different people come to at least one meeting and quite a few regulars. Food has been well received, and I think people really enjoy the social aspect of it, as well as the ability to support one another over Zoom during lockdown. Praise God that we are still here, that we always get people attending, that we have had good discussion and for all those who help make it work. I think we've reached a crossroads now in terms of where we go with it. I said this at the meeting in February, but clearly this is a different crossroads because of the pandemic. I hope we can move forward and develop as a group, that we can open up more to each other, have more structured (but not necessarily more formal) discussions and meetings and help each other mature in our faith (and of course open up to new members..).