

Lesson 14: Mission through CARE Groups

Introduction When the early Christians met together in their homes for fellowship, Bible study, and prayer, they experienced people meeting Jesus and making a decision to follow Him. “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47)

What happened back then in the homes of the early Christians, can be experienced in our CARE groups as well. Care groups that follow the example of the first Christians create an environment that makes it easy for people to get to know Jesus. The guests can observe our faith, ask questions, study God’s Word, and grow spiritually in an informal and familial atmosphere. In this lesson we want to learn what we can do to increase the probability that people will become followers of Christ in our CARE groups.

What are we here for? First of all, we need to answer a vital question: “Why do we exist?” For the early Christians it was clear that their commission and their right to exist consisted of preaching the gospel and making disciples. It was their vision to fulfill Jesus’ commission. If we want to experience people finding Jesus in our CARE groups and making a decision to follow Him, we have to answer this question just as clearly as the early Christians. It’s good to put the answer in writing: “Our CARE group exists so that people can get to know Jesus in our midst and become disciples.” Everything else we do to reach people and to create a hospitable CARE group only makes sense when the core team feels committed to this vision.

Some CARE groups exist without such a vision. They are only there so that church members can fellowship and be strengthened in their faith. These are not CARE groups according to the example in Acts 2. It’s okay if a group meets amongst themselves for a certain amount of time in order to study certain topics, which aren’t suitable for guests. But if a CARE group doesn’t commit to fulfilling Jesus’ commission, it will eventually die out. When church members are active in a CARE group, they learn to approach guests, explain the Bible’s message, and talk about their faith in a natural manner. They pray for others and experience a closer walk with Jesus. As a result, their personal faith grows more than it ever could have in a group without any guests.

If a CARE group doesn’t have any guests for many months, then under prayer they should consider discontinuing the group. It doesn’t make any sense to have a CARE group only for church members. In the end, they will only be frustrated. At this point, it would make more sense to change the location or the leader or to divide up the members into other existing CARE groups.

Finding People for a CARE group How can we find people that we can invite to the CARE group? Essentially, we can use everything we learned in the lessons on “Winning Friends for Jesus”. The most effective tactic is a personal invitation. Let’s look at some steps to prepare people to accept an invitation.

- Make a list of people’s names that you want to invite to the CARE group. The overview “my network” in lesson 4 of this module can help you not to overlook anyone. Also think about Adventist youth and church members, who are at the edge of the church. They count as guests just as much as people outside of the church.
- Pray intensively for these people before you invite them – both in your

prayers together and in your personal prayers. Pray that the Holy Spirit will work on their hearts and prepare them for the invitation.

- The most important factor that moves a person to accept your invitation to the CARE group is their trust in you. Pray that God will move their heart and that they will be drawn to you. Think about how you can do something good for them and reach their heart.
- Another factor that makes it easier for a person to accept your invitation to the CARE group is when they already know other people in the group. Create opportunities for them to meet other group members before you invite them to join the group. Plan joint leisure activities, like a film or game evening, hiking, a birthday celebration, etc., which you can invite your friends to.
- Realize that a CARE group is a constant opportunity to invite people. It is important that we consistently invite new people and not get comfortable when we have a few guests in our CARE group.
- Don't be discouraged when someone doesn't accept your invitation immediately. Keep inviting that person! Many people have to be invited multiple times before they finally come.
- When you personally invite people, do it naturally, just as if you were inviting a friend over to eat. Be enthusiastic! Rave about the good food, the great fellowship, and the deep conversations.
- Encourage your guests to invite their friends. They have their own network of relationships and know people you don't know yet. Some CARE groups purposely put an extra empty chair in the room and pray that God will send someone to fill that chair. We can speak with our guests about how important it is to invite friends. The message, which we are studying together, is so valuable that our friends have to hear it too. When our guests feel comfortable and are touched by the message they will gladly bring their friends along.
- Search for topics, suitable for your target group. Compile a series of lessons that you can specifically invite people to. Create a flyer for your CARE group that introduces your group and the lessons. You can use this flyer to personally invite friends to the CARE group and advertise in the area.
- It is possible to advertise in the newspaper to invite people to your CARE group.
- When your church offers needs-oriented seminars it is wise to connect the lessons in your CARE group, which are studied after the seminar is completed, in some way to the seminar. In this way, it is easier to invite guests from the seminar to the CARE group.
- When the members of the core team don't know many non-Adventists, it is hard to invite people to the CARE group. Therefore, it is important to meet new people. One possibility is to be involved in your local community.
- If you have friends, who have visited the CARE group, but aren't attending anymore, don't lose touch with them. Keep inviting them. Ask why they aren't coming anymore. If there was something in the CARE group that bothered them, this is an opportunity to apologize for it and to resolve it.

Creating a hospitable CARE group

We have to harmonize the CARE group meetings with our friend's needs so that they feel at ease in the group. The following things are important for this:

- Everyone is welcome – no matter how they live. We don't apply our life style

principles to our guests. We are an example and stand up completely for our principles. But we don't condemn anyone simply because they live differently than we do.

- We have to be careful during discussions not to exclude our friends with insider topics. We talk about things which our friends also feel comfortable talking about.
- The Bible study topics are chosen in such a way that they help our friends grow in faith and at the same time new guests can join anytime.
- We explain what we are doing. For example, when we pray before reading the Bible, we can say: "We believe that we can only understand correctly what God wants to say to us with His help. That is why we want to ask Him to help us understand this Bible verse correctly."
- Create an atmosphere which encourages our friends to ask questions. Show appreciation for their questions and take them seriously, even if the questions are very simple.

Leading Friends to Jesus

When someone makes a decision for Jesus it is a miracle, which God has wrought. We may know that God is working on our friends and is drawing them to Himself. But He decided to let us work together with Him on this miracle. There are a significant number of things we can do to help our friends make a decision for Jesus:

- Pray continually for our guests!
- Speak openly in the CARE group about your personal faith and experiences that you have had with God. This is a perfect way to show what real faith looks like in daily life and encourage our guests to speak openly about their faith.
- As a rule, the purpose of a CARE group isn't to systematically go through the Adventist fundamental beliefs. But still we want our friends to get to know the complete Adventist message. This works best when we study the Bible with our friends outside of the CARE group as well. For this reason it is important that the members of the core team have learned how to give personal Bible studies.
- People who have been a member of a CARE group for a while and read the Bible for themselves often have questions that can't always be answered in the CARE group. It is a good idea to give them three Bible texts and ask them to discover the answer for themselves. Then call them during the week and offer to study the topic with them. Personal Bible studies often result from this.
- Plan joint leisure activities for the CARE group. Go hiking together, celebrate birthdays, organize a camping weekend, etc.
- When there is a public evangelistic series in the church attend the meetings together as a CARE group. The evangelistic series is a good opportunity for your friends to hear the Adventist message in a fairly short time and they can make a decision to be baptized.

Challenge

1. Continue to pray for the 5 people that God has placed on your heart.
2. Pray specifically that the Holy Spirit will work on their hearts so that they are open for the gospel.



Bible Study

Please study **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10** carefully and take notes on the content, meaning, and life applications of these verses. Be sure to write down good questions for each.

What does the Bible say? (content, meaning, application)	How can I ask questions about this? (Questions on content, meaning, and application)

