

• FOUR MEMORABLE WAYS TO •
• BUILD COMMUNITY AT YOUR NEXT RETREAT •



As a leader of a Christian group or ministry, how many times have you heard these words?

“I’m sure getting away with a group is a good thing, but I am just so not a ‘retreat’ person.”

Maybe retreats conjure up images of singing “Kumbaya,” sitting in a therapy-like group circle with strangers, or enduring breakout sessions where just staying awake is an accomplishment.

You know better. Getting time away with your group can be a life-transforming experience—and even fun! You know people who went on a retreat because they were pressured into it by friends. You know that often these are the people who encounter God in impactful ways. They experience personal and spiritual change. They deepen old friendships, form new ones, and find a refreshing sense of community. When they return home, these same reluctant retreat-goers say to their friends, “That was one of the best weekends ever. God spoke to me in a new way and I actually had the time to listen. I had so much fun just hanging out and laughing with friends. You have to go next time!” Now that’s the response you prayed for!

Building community at retreats is an important part of building up the body of Christ. We are created to be in fellowship with one another. As you plan your next group getaway, here are four ways to help you run a successful retreat by creating a new sense of community in your group.

1. UNCOVER YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS AS A GROUP

A retreat is one of the best times for people to press pause and take time to assess their unique spiritual gifts. Many times, people serve others simply based on need. But when they can step back and really look at how God has gifted them, they find ways to better align their gifts with needs in your group. An assessment can be an eye-opening experience—one that helps your group members tap the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives in new ways.

When you give people the time to use one of the recommended tools here in discovering spiritual gifts, you empower them to serve others in new ways. Group members gain a better understanding of their own gifts and the gifts of others. The fresh perspectives, new insights, and new appreciation of how the body of Christ works together is a beautiful process to witness. You see roots of faith grow deeper and fruits of the Holy Spirit flourish.

TAKE A DEEPER LOOK AT THE GIFTS OF YOUR GROUP

SPIRITUAL GIFTS TEST

This spiritual gifts test is one of the best around and it's completely free to use. It provides up-front support with research and an explanation of the process. The assessment is user-friendly and follows up with tools to understand and use your gift. It also comes in a youth version.

spiritualgiftstest.com

BELIEFNET GIFTS TEST

This spiritual gifts test by Beliefnet is designed to be finished in 5 minutes. It's quick, user-friendly and can be the start of great conversations in your group.

giftstest.com/test

2. DO SOMETHING HARD TOGETHER

“Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” - Isaiah 43:19

There are few better ways to build new bonds and team connections than stretching group members with a team-building activity. Often, even if your group regularly spends time together, they fail to see others’ unique strengths and abilities outside of usual meetings. But with unique—and edgy—group challenges, you can help people discover something new about themselves and others.

Whether your group completes a dizzying high ropes course, goes ziplining, or climbs to a mountain peak together, these intense moments build lasting bonds between members. You watch as they cheer each other on during moments of paralyzing fear and instill confidence in one another as they sacrifice their own comfort for the benefit of their teammates. Challenges show everyone in a tangible way how to put the needs of others before their own and what a group can accomplish working together.

At the end of a long day, you smile to yourself as you hear your group debriefing: “I cannot believe I ziplined off the edge of a cliff and over a lake! I’m terrified of heights, but honestly, I couldn’t have done it without you guys!”

3. PRAY TOGETHER IN FRESH WAYS

While Christian groups usually have “prayer and praise” times together, retreats offer opportunities to connect people to each other and to God in out-of-the-ordinary ways. It starts with having the opportunity to get out into nature to pray—the beauty of God’s creation high up in the mountains or along the shores of a lake creates a connection that is hard to beat. But you can also introduce new ways for your group to pray that they may not have experienced before.

Here are three fresh ways you can pray together:

Offer Individual Blessings

Go around the group blessing each other. Spend time building each member up by recognizing strengths and unique gifts that each person demonstrates. Perhaps this prayer and blessing time can take place after a day full of small group activities. The group members have spent most of the day getting to know each other better and participating in hair-raising activities together. You can assign each person the name of another group member; he or she can first talk about an individual’s gift and then pray specifically for that person. Go around the group until each person has been blessed and covered in prayer.

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“Pray Jesus”

Have you ever prayed using the body of Jesus as a guide? Pray from the top of Jesus’s head down to his feet:

“Lord, I pray You give me the eyes to see those who need my help and the ears to listen to Your voice.” “Lord, give me the hands and arms of Jesus to reach out to those in need, those less fortunate than me and to those who are lonely.” “Heavenly Father, please use my legs and feet to walk as Jesus walked—into places He wasn’t always welcome and towards the people who needed Him the most.” “Lord, please allow me to follow hard after You, just as Jesus did.”

Partner Prayer Walks

When you are at a retreat in a beautiful, serene setting with panoramic views all around you, there is no better place to pray. Allow your group members to select a prayer partner for this exercise and set aside an hour (or however long you like) to walk and pray together. You can provide each pair with a notecard listing topics to pray about.

For example:

- Prayers of adoration
- Prayers of thanksgiving
- Specific prayers for personal needs
- Prayers for the church, our country, or our world

Lastly, prayers can center on ways they can better serve the Lord as they head back home after the retreat. What have they learned and how have they been transformed during this time away? How can they apply new truths they learned as they step back into their day-to-day lives? In what ways might their attitudes towards others, work, or ministry look a little bit different as a result of this transformative time away?

This builds community and faith while unleashing the power of Matthew 18:20:

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Walking and praying is especially appealing to the active members of your group.

4. OFFER DAILY DEVOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 15:5-6

When your group is away at a retreat you give others the blessing of uninterrupted time and freedom to create new ways to connect with God. There is nothing better than knowing that time has already been carved out in the schedule to start your day alone in the Word and in prayer. What a perfect way for members to super-charge their souls before the day begins! It is also important to build community into devotional times, and retreats give you the perfect setting to do this.

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Here are a few simple ideas to build community into devotional times:

- **Use a retreat prayer journal. Give your group members journals when they arrive. Build time into the schedule for them to journal in the morning and in the evening. You can provide journal prompts for each devotional time. If time allows, there may be portions of journal entries that can be shared with other group members or prayer partners. Here are a few examples of prompts you can use:**
 - **List out as many of God's attributes that come to your mind. How does knowing these things about God make you feel? What changes do you need to make in your life to make sure you regularly reflect on His attributes?**
 - **What is one (or more) area(s) in your life you can ask God to change or transform you more into Christ's likeness? Write a prayer to the Lord asking for wisdom in this area. What are specific steps you can take to make sure you intentionally allow this transformation to take place? Be honest with the Lord and yourself!**
 - **List out the blessings in your life that give you a heart full of gratitude towards the Lord. How can you carry this gratitude with you in the weeks and months ahead?**
 - **As you head home from this retreat, write a letter to the Lord asking Him where/how He wants you to serve in the months ahead. What does this service look**

like when it is applied to your family, your church, your neighbors, your team members, and to other Christian organizations?

- **Create Bible verse collages.** You can print out retreat theme verses in a variety of different script styles. You can then have participants search for pieces in nature that could be used to create a collage. Anything from acorns to shells or small rocks, to tree bark or flowers—anything at all and give members the opportunity to create a collage to take home. Have group members talk over what the collage means to them.
- **Schedule prayer on the water.** In Scripture there are so many teachings of Jesus on the water or near the water. Give each small group a list of specific passages and have them paddle out onto the quiet water at sunrise or sunset. They can read these passages and pray together after each reading. There is nothing more beautiful to the Lord than hearing His people pray using Scripture. The peacefulness of the water is ideal for time in the Word and in prayer.
- **Create a mini “Rolodex.”** You may recall the old fashioned Rolodex that used to be fixtures on office desks, right? Well, a retreat is the perfect time to provide members with small 3x5 cards on a ring with the key retreat verses. During times of private reflection they can read and pray over these verses. You can also divide members into groups of two, three or four and encourage Scripture memory sessions. These verses will go home with them and may likely become ones they recall for years to come.

Retreats provide time, space, wisdom and fellowship that is hard to find in our busy everyday lives.

Looking for the right place to host a retreat for your group? Hume Lake Christian Camps offers a peaceful setting far removed from the stressful demands of everyday life. You have the flexibility to structure the retreat how you wish and the Hume staff will follow your lead. The staff will take care of the details—and they will spoil your group! Hume specializes in offering warm hospitality, mouth-watering meals, great meeting locations so you can focus, and cozy evening campfires that help your group unwind and refresh their souls.

Interested in connecting with us about how your group can attend a retreat at Hume?

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