|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *A person holding a black and white striped flag  Description automatically generated with medium confidence* | **Principles of Group Closure**  Good endings can make for good beginnings in the future.  By Randall S. Brenton |

**H**ealthy closure of any group experience is extremely important. It can help group members process and define their experience and positively set the stage for a new group. On the other hand, poor group closure can lead to barriers for a member's future involvement with groups.

Poor group closure can occur for a variety of reasons including:

1. Failure to cast a vision for launching a new group, which can catch members off guard.
2. Burnout of the leader and a desire to "get things over with." This prevents the leader from honoring the positive things God has done in the group.
3. Not giving the closure process enough time. Members will need to process the situation ahead of time, and will need at least one meeting set aside for discussion, reflection, and celebration.
4. The most destructive form of group closure occurs when a group ends with or because of unresolved conflict.

Healthy group closure can be categorized into five steps, and are modeled perfectly through Jesus' actions during the last few days on earth with his followers.

**Consolation (John 16:29–33):** Just as Jesus modeled, listen to group members' feelings and let them know of the hope and joy that can accompany the next chapter. Groups who have formed deep bonds with one another will need to recognize a wide variety of feelings associated with the closure of the group. Members may feel joy, sadness, or a sense of loss. Those feelings may be expressed with a variety of behaviors: laughter, excitement about the future, tears, or emotional distancing. Each member should be encouraged to identify their feelings and express them appropriately. Respect each person's feelings.

**Celebration (Mark 14:13–16):** Jesus spent the last night with his disciples by sharing an important meal together: Passover. When bringing closure to a group experience, it's critical to spend time together celebrating God's presence and activity within the group. This can be done in a variety of ways, including a worship service designed by the group members, sharing a meal, or a party. Spend time in prayer giving thanks and expressing the positive experiences of the group and special times spent together.

**Commemoration (Luke 22:19):** Through the bread and wine, Jesus gave the disciples something by which to remember their time together. Similarly, take time to commemorate the milestones and special events you've experienced together. Commemoration differs from celebration in that something tangible exists to mark the time together and to remember the group. Consider taking a picture together or giving away a small token that will help the group members remember their time together.

**Congratulation (John 17:6–10):** As Jesus prays in John 17, he acknowledges his disciples and their faith. Congratulate your group members through statements of appreciation and affirmation. Consider acknowledging group members for their contributions to the group publicly in your meeting or through a personal note written to each member. You might also give a gift that recognizes your relationship.

**Commission (Matthew 28:19–20):** During the final meetings, it is important to chart a new course for the future. Build anticipation for the next chapter. Cast a vision for the future as the end approaches. Pray a commissioning prayer for your group members in their next steps at your final meeting.

—Randall S. Brenton; copyright 2007 by Christianity Today.

**Discuss:**

1. When have you experienced healthy group closure? Unhealthy group closure?
2. What kind of token of commemoration can you give group members?
3. Make a plan: How will you work through these five steps of healthy endings? How much time will each step take?