



# ROD AND STAFF: TOOLS FOR A SHEPHERD

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## Enhanced Invitation: Closing the “Stranger Gap”

Vol.1 No 5

“You are invited to a party” the invitation says. It is a party at the home of a family you have seen once or twice in passing before. Do you go? Does it seem a bit awkward to think of accepting this invitation? For some the adventure of meeting new people is an appealing chance to expand one’s group of friends and is no stretch to attend. For many however, it could be an intimidating thought. Who will be there? What will the expectations be? Should I bring something? Will I fit in okay? Will our kids get along with their kids? Suddenly, accepting a simple, fun, party invitation can become an intimidating decision to make. At times, our invitation to a Life Group meeting can raise the same kinds of fears, hesitations and questions in individuals new to the church. Calling someone new on the phone and inviting them to the group is fairly low stress for most of us, but, for them, it can be an offer that’s a bit intimidating to consider.

So what can we do to lessen some of this intimidation factor? Let’s rethink the party scenario for a minute. What would make this party easier to attend? As you probably already reasoned, the more established relationship with either the family or others who were also invited and attending, the more the comfort factor is likely to increase. So it is for many when considering your invitation to come to your Life Group. Here are a few practical tips for closing the “stranger gap”:

1. Build familiarity beyond the meetings. Intentionally take time to chat on a Sunday morning, practice active listening skills\*, and introduce them to others from your Life Group. Encourage other members of your group to make it a mission to intentionally seek out and talk with the persons. Having met more than just you means they will have more familiar faces waiting for them at their first time at a meeting. If they are a part of a social network such as FaceBook, befriend them there too.
2. Along with your basic invitation information, include some background information on what they might expect at the group time. Highlight things about the group that address matters you have heard (via active listening) them express need of, desire for, or interest in, during your conversations. It does not mean you should give them a detailed, line- by- line description of people or activity; in fact, that could also work against the desired outcome. However, a brief overview of the group, what kind of things you do and have done together, things you are planning to do, size of the group, a carry-in or refreshments, how long you generally meet, how kids are involved or not involved. This kind of information can help shape realistic expectations and create a familiarity to put them at ease. If you are having some kind of food event, let them know that while they do not have to bring something, they could bring \_\_\_\_\_. This allows them an immediate way to contribute to the group, which makes many feel more comfortable in coming.
3. Go deeper and invite them out for coffee or over to your house apart from the Life Group meeting. The meetings themselves are not the essence of Life Group. Investing this way reinforces that the invitation is not simply to a meeting but to a relational community.

Don’t give up. We have rarely ever heard anyone say “please stop inviting me!” Most appreciate the ongoing invitations even if they can’t come. If they do not express it themselves, feel free to ask if they would like to continue to be invited. However, if the brief phone or email invitation is all they ever receive, it can remain ineffective and become an annoyance. Along with those invitations, draw from the three tips above and see what difference an enhanced invitation makes.

**Matthew 25** <sup>35</sup>For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

**Hebrews 13** <sup>2</sup>Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

\*Resource recommendation: Spirit Built Leadership # 12 Listening by Malcolm Webber