

THE CAMPFIRE: WHAT IS IT?

The most effective men's ministries utilize small group interactions: what we call "the Campfire." Picture a group of men in the woods gathered around a crackling fire. At first, they may discuss their favorite sports team or talk about recent outdoor pursuits, but soon they'll begin opening up about their triumphs, worries, and struggles.

The Campfire is the bonding element that enhances all of the resources we offer. Each Campfire gathering covers various topics, some of which men may wish to avoid:

- managing aggression
- dealing with failure
- eliminating self-destructive responses
- processing emotions
- guiding sexual interest
- granting forgiveness

Campfire groups give men opportunities to experience smaller, safer conversations, and also give them the freedom to ask questions, share their struggles, and discuss solutions.

WE GROW THROUGH RELATIONSHIP & COMMUNITY

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.
Proverbs 27:17 NIV

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

God has a special purpose for everyone, but we are unlikely to achieve ours without the love and support of others who serve as His representatives in our lives (Proverbs 27:17). Unfortunately, our culture convinces men that they're supposed to go it alone, and that needing others renders them "unmanly." Buying into this mindset leaves men without allies, without support, and without accountability. An isolated man is dangerous to himself and others.

The Campfire counteracts being alone by creating an opportunity for each participant to form bonds with others in a safe and intimate environment as they support each other through life's many challenges. When they don't feel judgment or pressure, men become more comfortable expressing vulnerability by sharing their stories and past negative experiences.

Campfire gatherings are also essential for fostering personal growth, as each member will learn valuable lessons from their peers. As each Campfire group grows closer, the men will have a collective reason to meet each week —to interact and encourage their brothers. They will do life together.

THE LEADER'S ROLE

Men are like pack animals. While they want to be close to others, they also feel the need to compete with, challenge, test, and express provocative and potentially controversial opinions to determine if developing trust is likely. The differences between them that exist need time to be discovered and worked through. Your campfire group may bond naturally and without issue, but they will more likely need some gentle guidance to grow strong. Your role as a campfire leader is to cultivate a safe environment and steer the conversation in the right direction.

You should make sure that no one person dominates the discussion, that no one is left out, and that the group doesn't get derailed by irrelevant topics or arguments.

Following the flow of the provided questions that build on each other controls the pace of the conversation and provides safety as each person decides how vulnerable they are ready to be. With your leadership, your campfire will grow into a tight-knit group who push each other to become the best they can possibly be.

The typical image of a leader is someone powerful and in charge. God, however, calls us to servant-leadership, which means letting go of our needs and focusing on others instead. As you lead your campfire, make sure to show respect and empathy to each person. Your group members will be much more comfortable sharing when they feel encouraged and supported.

GOD CALLS US TO SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all.
Mark 9:35 NIV

Guide the Group Warm-Up

The people you lead each have their own families, jobs, and everyday worries. At the beginning of the campfire, they'll need to transition from their day-to-day lives back into a group mindset. Before you dive into the deeper issues, encourage each participant to take a minute to share any thoughts they have about the lesson or to give an update on their week. This warm-up will allow you and the group to get a feel for each person's mood and readiness to share, and to become aware of any major changes that have taken place since the last meeting. However, while warming up is a good way to encourage one another to reconnect, it should never derail the group's focus. Step in when necessary to ensure the group moves on to more relevant topics.

Encourage Attendance

Campfire meetings can be immensely useful for those you serve, but they can only receive its full benefits if they show up. Find ways to make them want to come back time after time. One way to motivate attendance is to give them small tasks to do during the week. Give them various roles to contribute to/in the group. Allowing those that can to facilitate a group interaction not only provides you with backup, but teaches them leadership skills they can use at home. Other tasks could include taking attendance, contacting a missing individual to see if they're okay, or handing out and collating any group surveys. This will keep their focus on their growth when they're not at the campfire.

By making it a part of the “caring for each other” culture, members should text or let others know when they're not coming and why. The concern for each other's welfare is respected and emphasized. This gives each person a reason to contact one another outside of your weekly meetings, which will increase their bond even if there's a week they can't attend.

Another way to keep your campfire committed to each other is by organizing social events when the ministry is less active, such as over the summer. These events will remind your members that they are important to the group and will keep their bonds strong until you reconvene.

Encourage Openness & Participation

Most people reap more benefits from sharing their beliefs, thoughts, and feelings than from receiving a lecture. They actually are more likely to remember what they heard when it is shared through a relationship. However, they may be reluctant to offer more than simple, one word statements at first. Your job as a leader is to find ways to get each person to feel comfortable enough to open up over time. The purpose of each program offered is to get men to talk about what really matters and to include God and others in the spiritual recovery process.

One helpful method is to share your own stories and feelings first. When others see your vulnerability, they feel safe being vulnerable themselves. Make sure to limit how often you share, though. Otherwise, you may dominate the discussion and discourage others from giving their input. You must let others do their own developmental work and trust in their ability to do it. You can only encourage this through your support, prayer, and listening. Providing advice often limits the individual from needing to seek out their own God-inspired answers.

Another approach is to ask the group about their lives—their jobs, hobbies, and relationships—and then ask follow-up questions to encourage them to think more deeply about what they shared. When a person does open up, make sure to respond positively by thanking them for sharing and acknowledging their struggles or successes. Over time, more and more group members will become willing to share, which will help every member of the group feel supported as they face their challenges.



Focus on the Goal

The goal of every campfire is to ensure that each person feels cared for, understood, and part of the group. The most important goal, however, is growth. As time goes on, your campfire may get stuck in a routine that no longer stimulates the group. For example, each LiveUp Resources video lesson is paired with a set of questions to prompt discussion, but sometimes people focus too much on directly answering these questions. While guiding questions are good for keeping a discussion focused, an overly structured campfire can actually limit engagement, creativity, and growth. If the group enters into sharing more deeply about a relational issue, put aside your need to control task orientation to finish each question, and let God's spirit lead you into that inspired moment.

You should regularly assess the progress of your group to make sure they're continually encouraged to grow. You may even want to directly ask the group how they're feeling. If you sense that they're bored or checked out during discussions, examine any specific group member differences that are threatening positive bonds from being created or try changing the structure.

You might instead of going through every question that goes with the lesson, ask each member to answer the question they think is most important, or select a single question to look at in-depth as a group. Most importantly, keep an eye out for times when the lesson brings up a particularly tough issue for a member. In those cases, the group may need to discard its typical structure to fully focus on helping that person work through the challenge. If things seem to be going well, keep with it!

GOD IS WITH YOUR GROUP

Where two or three people gather in my name, I am there with them.
Matthew 18:20 NIRV

There isn't one right way to lead a campfire. Every person is unique, and each campfire needs to be flexible to fit the needs of its members. Work with your group to find the method that works best for them, and don't be afraid to change it up every now and then. When your campfire continues to grow, the discussions will deepen, the loyalty will increase, and every person will develop in their relationship with Christ.

Be Aware of Differences

As your group begins their journey together, keep an eye out for how each person is doing. What works for one won't always work for another, and you should tailor your leadership approach to meet each individual's needs. Sometimes, someone's pain is so great that they cannot properly process it in a group setting. Its intensity may dominate the discussion or intimidate other members. In these cases, you may need to ask the person to limit discussing it in the group and to concentrate instead on listening or sharing other areas of their life. If necessary, you can assist them in seeking professional counseling.

In some extreme cases, someone may simply not be ready for the group experience. Make sure that every member has the option to quietly excuse themselves from the group during your meetings. At times, a member may feel they need to leave the campfire for good. It can be hard to have a group member leave, but sometimes it's the best option for both the group and the individual.

Allow Others to Step up as Leaders

God created all of us to be a sign of His love through serving others. To help your group develop as servant-leaders, you should let other individuals manage the group if they seem ready to do so. Allow them to lead the group discussion for a week or decide the schedule for your meeting. Keep in mind that this individual is a leader in training and will need your guidance. You can't sit back and zone out while they're in charge. Be a supportive presence as they practice their leadership skills, and step in to guide them if they seem lost.

ISSUES THAT MAY ARISE

Speed Bumps

It's possible that your campfire will hit a roadblock, and it may feel like there's nothing you can do to fix it. This often happens when there's a major issue with the number of times each member shares and it seems out of balance. In these instances, you should seek guidance from the other leaders on your ministry team or reach out to a trusted mentor for advice. You can also reach out to our team at info@liveupresources.com. Rely on your support system to help you push through any challenge that arises in your campfire.

Disconnect

Ideally, everyone in your campfire will bond over time. However, you can't make people get along, and occasionally you may have a member who doesn't seem to be settling into the group. This doesn't mean you've failed as a leader. It simply indicates that the person needs the chemistry of a different group, and transferring them may be the best option for their growth. Sometimes individuals aren't ready for a group process, and if they can't simply sit and listen, they need to leave.

Silence

There will be times when someone asks a question or shares a story, and no one seems to know how to respond. When this happens, don't panic and try to fill the silence immediately. First, assess whether the silence is productive or unproductive to the group dynamic. Sometimes, people are simply using the time to think about what God is teaching them and how to integrate His truth in their lives. Other times they aren't sure what to say or may feel uncomfortable. If the silence seems unproductive, your role is to jump-start the discussion by asking another question or sharing your own thoughts.











Time Constraints

In a perfect world, everyone should be able to talk as much as they need to during a campfire. Unfortunately, this isn't always possible. If you find your group never has enough time to fully flesh out their issues, consider dividing them into two smaller groups. Doing so means you won't all be able to hear everyone's stories each week, but it will ensure that each member gets to speak and receive support. If some people are open to extending the time or meeting individually throughout the week, explore these options.

Keeping the Relationship Lit

Everyone has different styles of interaction, and your group members may have some bad habits that can negatively impact the campfire dynamic. To make sure each participant feels comfortable, you should outline some basic campfire ground rules.

Each member should commit to these 10 sparks of a campfire by being:

-  **Honest** - Share, in a vulnerable fashion, not just what you want to be, but what you are. Communicate the “true you.”
-  **Trusting** - Build up this important bond between men by demonstrating a commitment to each other’s growth processes.
-  **Listening** - Suspend your need for a response and focus on the various levels of stories being shared.
-  **Reflective** - Let the individual know that you hear them by repeating (back to them) the concepts, feelings, and beliefs they communicate. Limit the advice you give, but instead share similar experiences, if they occurred.
-  **Respectful** - Accept that people will have differing opinions and viewpoints from you and have a need, as well as a right, to express themselves. A judgmental attitude has the same effect as water on a campfire. Remember, you can’t change anyone.
-  **Fair** - Make sure that each person gets their fair share of time to “warm their hands by the fire.” Personal growth comes from both sharing and listening. Each person should be encouraged to share and no one should be allowed to dominate.
-  **Strong** - It is important that “no man is left behind” either by attendance or level of involved sharing. At times in life, the whole greater than the sum of its parts. A campfire’s strength can be measured by the quality of each piece of kindling.
-  **Confidential** - It’s an assumed part of the campfire experience that what is said in the campfire stays there. This will allow men to share safe issues as well as issues that have significant levels of emotion attached to them. If someone should share something of specific concern, encourage him to go with you to the leadership team for extra prayer or listening assistance.
-  **Loyal** - As part of a campfire experience, tell people how to contact you. If you are not going to be at the next campfire, let someone know. Share the information that was missed with those who missed the previous week’s discussion. Call individuals who missed the campfire and check in with other members about what’s happened since the previous campfire.
-  **Accepting** - At times it’s necessary to have someone change groups in order for him to benefit from the program. If interpersonal chemistry is not present, a group change is warranted. Move the individual as he or the group desires, as soon and with as much sensitivity as possible. If someone is not ready to change what they should or go further in improving themselves, let them feel the group’s caring presence as God is trusted to develop them.

Campfire Promise

We gather this day, as men committed to strengthening each other's manhood. We agree to set aside life's many distractions, and our own avoidance of the hard work that personal growth demands. We will discuss the material presented and openly share our journey. We will answer honestly, listen intently and challenge, when necessary. Each of us will work to apply the ideas found in the lesson. We, individually, will decide where we should or should not change. No one's needs will continually dominate, as each person is provided specific encouragement. We will respect our individual differences, especially in the area of one's faith, and never pressure someone to share beyond their level of comfort. We will assist each other's faithfulness to their journey by sharing our selves truthfully, graduating together, and leaving no man behind. Let the joy and laughter found in this next moment of our brotherhood journey, refresh our busy lives, deepen our self-understanding, and positively influence our relationships. Let this campfire begin!

MEN'S MINISTRIES

One Of The Largest Providers Of Men's Ministry Video Curriculum

LiveUp Resources offers one of the most comprehensive collections of men's ministry video studies available today. Designed for churches, small groups, and men pursuing spiritual growth, these series combine biblical teaching, practical wisdom, and real-life authenticity. Whether you're leading a weekly men's group or looking to build a stronger foundation in your own faith journey, these studies help men grow in character, identity, relationships, and godly leadership.

