

<b>Organizing successful Urantia Book study groups</b>	circa 2000
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Urantia Book study groups have figured as a large part of our lives for twenty-eight years and recently, discussions regarding the various aspects of study group formation and function have caused us to consider our own experiences with them.

We need groups, the support of other like-minded individuals who have a similar purpose in their study of the Urantia Book. Yet we have noticed that groups are as different as the people who compose them, and as varied in their expression. For many years now, we have watched and participated in the dissolving and reforming of groups. The dissolution of a group has always disturbed us and yet we have finally begun to come up with some answers, as to why a number of people with similar goals, genuine affection for each other and a wealth of shared experience can decide to forego the regular contact with each other that has fostered all of the above.

We truly believe now that every group has a "shelf-life", if you will, that is determined by many factors. Those groups that stay together the longest seem to incorporate one or more of the following practices over the course of their existence:

1. **Genuine affection and respect for each other**  
Many times people meet together regularly for long periods, and yet there are feelings of separation, ego battles, and other forms of negative emotions among them. Unless these can be overcome by a real respect for each individual, no matter how different, the "bad vibes" eventually cause people to leave.
2. **Welcome new members and consequent new interpretations of truth**  
After a long time together, people come to know each other very well, and new ideas are fewer. New members provide a breath of fresh air that can awaken a flagging interest, intellectually and socially, and initiate new avenues of growth for all. It has been our observation that new members are sometimes regarded with discomfort by old members, because new ideas are not in accord with the old; but the most vital and long-lasting, growing, groups are usually those that make a visitor and their ideas and questions feel welcomed and valued, if not always agreed with by the majority.
3. **Clear recognition of a "purpose" for the group and the individuals in it**  
For example, is the purpose of the group understood to be one of fostering the spiritual growth of all the individuals in it? What about emotional support? Is it to engage in community outreach or remain as an oasis of purely intellectual pursuit for its members – or both? Each individual may regard these questions differently. If a person joins the group with the express purpose of finding people to whom they can reveal their innermost self and find support therefore, the constant arrival of new members and visitors may make it very difficult for this person to do that with a sense of security. On the other hand, the therapy aspects in which he/she might be expected to engage will discourage an individual who finds the revelation of intimate thoughts and emotions of others uncomfortable and really just wants to study the book.  
Please note: when a group has remained relatively small and the members have forged very close friendships, have had "soul-sharing" experiences with each other, and have adopted a group response to certain stimuli, they may also present a closed front to newcomers. We have had this experience with a group, and while we remained friends with the individuals, we never penetrated the "inner circle" or felt entirely comfortable with them and eventually lost interest in attending their meetings. Another aspect to this is the idea that some may feel that they are more advanced than others. There are two ways (and probably many more) to regard this: 1) those who feel that they are advanced can take the viewpoint that they may progress faster among those who are also more advanced and with whom they perhaps feel more able to express their thoughts clearly; or 2), it is more enjoyable to act in the role of teacher of the truths they believe themselves to have, even though it will mean simplifying their expression of them to a newcomer. Some groups can accommodate both approaches, but usually one will prevail
4. **Either a striking similarity of personality and spiritual types, or a group that is so varied that it can adapt swiftly to new people and changes**  
Both types of groupings have certain strengths and weaknesses; and each will have a different idea of leadership due to the differing mind-sets of the members.
5. **Leadership of some type, and a stable meeting schedule and place**  
It is also helpful to provide refreshments at some point, as this provides an element of social warmth and exchange.
6. **Participation of all members in one way or another, i.e., organization, program, presentations, etc**  
We all feel a much greater identification with and loyalty to, something we help to create.
7. **An affiliation with an outside network, such as a state or regional organization of groups**  
Urantia societies tend to last longer than unattached study groups, partly because of the identification and feeling of belonging with a larger group, larger purpose, etc., and access to a large number of readers.

The most important element of any study group meeting is the love expressed by those in attendance. This is shown in the acceptance of differences not only within the group, but as that acceptance is extended to visitors. We have always announced to newcomers that there is no one "right" interpretation of the truth in the Urantia Book and no such thing as a stupid question.

Truth is always an individual experience, and we do all we can to help them find the truth of their own experiences in and with the teachings of the Urantia Book.