



SOIL & ROOTS

CULTIVATING DEEP DISCIPLESHIP

GREENHOUSE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

Q: Why do you call these gatherings “Greenhouses?”

A: The name ties into the Soil and Roots creation and agricultural theme and refers to the place where our roots (our hearts) are cultivated and grown in community. And because a Greenhouse isn't a local church service, a Bible study, or a small group, it has its own name.

Q: What are the Five Key Elements of a Greenhouse?

A: As with any other type of formative experience, our spiritual formation (discipleship) is best developed as part of a group specifically designed for that purpose. The five key elements of any formative experience are time, specific habits, immersive community, appropriate intimacy, and repetitious and increasingly complex instruction.

Q: Can Greenhouses be formed through a church institution?

A: Absolutely. Soil and Roots encourages the formation of Greenhouses as a component of local church efforts.

In some cases, a Greenhouse may include people from multiple churches who continue to attend their local church for corporate worship, sacraments, etc. This is similar to any community para-church effort such as the Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) model.

People who are not part of local congregations for whatever reason are also invited to become participants in a Greenhouse.

Q: How long should a Greenhouse expect to be together?

A: There is no recommendation for how long a group should stay together, and people may come and go for various reasons. However, longer-term, trusted relationships are a hallmark of Greenhouses, so groups should not rush the process of splitting.

Q: Do all participants need to be Christian?

A: While the facilitator of each Greenhouse is an apprentice of Jesus who is intentionally on the journey of becoming more like Him, other participants may be at any stage of their walk, or people who are curious about Jesus and discipleship.

Q: How should a Greenhouse accommodate children?

A: This is up to each group. Greenhouses should consider that the intent of both weekly gatherings is to focus on the Kingdom, heart formation, and the community itself in a peaceful environment. Regular interruption may impact the group's ability to listen carefully to the Holy Spirit and other people. So that may mean the group opts for on-site or off-site babysitting or some other arrangement that ensures everyone is able to fully participate in the gathering, and that children are well cared for.

Q: Is there some sort of official plan for the meal served at Gathering 2?

A: No, each Greenhouse can make its own arrangements for the meal at the second meeting each week. They may opt to rotate the provision of the meal among participants, the host may choose to provide the meal as an act of hospitality, they may choose to do a potluck meal, or perhaps just order pizza or wings for delivery! Since food played such a key role in New Testament discipleship, we honor that each week. How that meal is provided is entirely up to each group.

Q: What if our Greenhouse is remote and uses video calling?

A: If having a meal together in person isn't possible, you still might consider gathering over video during mealtime or sharing a beverage or snack together remotely during Gathering 2. While eating on a video call is generally considered a breach of etiquette in some scenarios, the Greenhouse isn't one of them! However, if that isn't practical, Gathering 2 can still be conducted online as outlined without food or beverage.

There is also a "hybrid" Greenhouse model, where some participants are in person while others engage online. Each specific Greenhouse may determine how it handles the "gastro gathering."

Q: How should a Greenhouse handle electronic devices?

A: Where possible, electronic devices should be turned off or put in silent mode for the duration of the gathering. Being interrupted by phone calls, emails, texts, and chats will not be conducive to engaging and listening to the Holy Spirit and other people. Some groups may opt to have a basket or table where devices are placed before the meeting to avoid unnecessary interruptions.

Q: What's involved if I want to form and facilitate a Greenhouse?

A: Though participants may be in any stage of their journey, a facilitator is a follower of

Jesus, intent on becoming more like Him, and practices the habits of listening, guiding, and extending compassion and empathy. People interested in becoming a facilitator apply to Soil and Roots using the online application on the website and walk through a series of steps in order to be approved. They are required to align with our Statement of Faith, and they should at least resonate with the basic themes of the podcast, including the Three Primary Problems, Heartview, and the Five Key Elements of Formation.

Soil and Roots provides ongoing support and connection for facilitators through various means, forming “Greenhouses” for facilitators as they guide their groups.

Q: Why is the Soil and Roots podcast the base material for the Exploration rhythm of Gathering 1 each week?

A: The podcast is designed to provide a progressively deepening introduction and journey into spiritual formation. It also introduces several themes relevant to our current age and invites Greenhouses to explore these themes in the community.

Over time, Soil and Roots will develop other materials and provide references to existing, related materials. At present, the podcast provides a simple way for people to engage with the idea of discipleship in community and a ready foundation for each week’s exploration. It also makes life easier for the facilitator, in that all they need to do to prepare is listen (or read) the podcast and review the provided exploration questions.

Q: What sort of “habits” should be explored and tested in our Greenhouse?

A: There is no master list of habits or “spiritual disciplines” that could contain the creativity and personality of the Holy Spirit. Soil and Roots provides some recommended readings that may help groups determine which habits to choose and apply. However, the group should prayerfully lean on the Holy Spirit for guidance. Well-known habits such as prayer, fasting, confession, solitude, and service may be tested, though lesser-known habits such as celebration, heart-listening, practicing radical generosity, looking for restorative opportunities, and entering others’ sufferings may also be considered. The point is to (as a group) decide on a habit or two and begin to adopt a lifestyle of spiritual habits as a means of drawing deeper into Christ and others.

Q: Two weekly gatherings seem like a pretty big commitment. Why not gather just once a week?

A: Weekly corporate worship, weekly or every two-week Bible studies, and community groups are wonderful events.

However, they do not necessarily form a “primary” community. Part of what Greenhouses look to overcome is the fragmented, disintegrated lifestyle people in the West now assume. Whereas for most of human history, the opportunity for close community was a reality of life (many people lived and died in the same area and spent most of their time with the same people), this is no longer our reality.

Yet time with trusted people is a necessary element of formation. So, Greenhouses seek to recreate a deeper sense of community and vulnerability through more regular gatherings.

Additionally, Soil and Roots recommends the groups communicate outside of gatherings on a regular basis with calls, texts, emails, and other engagements. The idea is to form “sit-com” types of communities (see Episode 38), which embrace a deeper commitment of time and presence than most Western Christian experiences.

Q: Some folks may not want to make that sort of time investment. How should we respond?

A: Soil and Roots recognizes a Greenhouse is not for everyone. In general, you will be looking for people who jump at the chance to be with people in community twice a week versus those who see twice a week as cumbersome or unrealistic.

Soil and Roots believes it is best to form a Greenhouse by “working with the willing.” There are people longing for a deeper experience with Jesus, and making the time for a primary community is a joy, not a challenge.

The point isn’t to attempt to persuade or “sell” anyone on community-based spiritual formation. If someone does not wish to participate, we remain grateful for them and honor their decisions.

So prayerfully identify people who long for Jesus, desire His Kingdom, wish to explore their own stories, and celebrate the commitment to a community of this type.

Consider AA. An alcoholic who genuinely desires to be free of his addiction rearranges his life around community-based AA meetings. He may attend one, two, or ten meetings per week. That’s because he is desperate to be formed into a new person – a person in recovery from addiction.

A young girl who wants to become an Olympic gymnast spends untold hours with her community at the gym. A student who wishes to become a heart surgeon sacrifices time doing other things in order to learn to be formed into a doctor. Any healthy marriage makes the sacrifice of other time-consuming activities for the purpose of becoming one.

The current hectic, performance-driven, fragmented Western lifestyle competes with genuine discipleship. Greenhouses seek people who already recognize this fragmentation and desire a much deeper, more connected life and may not currently have those relationships.

Q: What if someone legitimately has the desire but truly doesn’t have the time?

A: Though rare, this circumstance does occur, and it presents an opportunity for the Greenhouse to show extraordinary commitment to the person, as evidenced in Acts 2:42-27.

For example, let’s say a single mother of three children has a deep desire to join a Greenhouse, but truly lacks the time and resources because she works multiple jobs to provide for her children. The Greenhouse may opt to express radical generosity (a Kingdom characteristic) and take up a regular collection for the family, so that she may reduce her job responsibilities, secure babysitting, and join the group.

Q: Is Soil and Roots affiliated with a particular denomination or sect?

A: No, Soil and Roots is a faith-based organization focused on restoring New Testament discipleship through specific communities and rhythms. It is considered a non-denominational, para-church effort. Though facilitators embrace our statement of faith and, in general, align with the themes of the podcast and related materials, people engaged with Soil and Roots represent a wide variety of denominations, sects, and perspectives. We all, however, have a desire to experience “deep discipleship” as we journey together to become more like Jesus.

Q: What do you mean by “less monologue, more dialogue?”

A: Soil and Roots maintains the art of “civil discourse” has been all but lost in modern society, both outside and inside the church. Though most Christians at times struggle with doubts, dissents, and confusion about cultural issues, Bible passages, doctrines, and the discipleship journey, many of us lack an environment in which those things may be safely explored.

Many times, we are presented with teaching and sermons but have little intentional opportunity to disagree, ask questions, or further vet the material. However, instruction is most formative when it is experienced in a community where such exploration is fostered.

In Greenhouses, participants are invited to engage in civil discourse with each other regarding the podcast episodes, relevant Bible passages, cultural issues, and the perspectives of other participants. The point isn't to be intentionally disagreeable, but rather to create a culture in which polite disagreement is welcomed, and the issue further vetted.

Facilitators maintain a healthy environment, in that the group understands we are discussing and debating an issue and not devaluing a person. It is Soil and Roots' hope to restore small communities where civil discourse is practiced and honored, and that it spills back into the culture at large.