

Week 2:

Leading the Small Group Meeting

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Introduction

Small Group meetings provide us with the opportunity to read, understand, and apply the bible to our lives, give and receive prayer, and develop close relationships with others in the group. In this session we will walk through how to prepare and lead a bible discussion, and how the group meetings should flow. Our next training session will focus on prayer ministry at Small Group meetings.

1. The Purpose of Bible Discussion

We believe the bible is God's infallible, inerrant word to us and is therefore profitable for everything we must do and be as Christians (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Titus 2:1). We need to know our bible in order to apply it in ways that grow us into healthy, fruitful Christians (Matthew 4:4, 13:23, John 15:1-11). We need the word of God in order to endure the challenges that come with being disciples (Matthew 7:24-25), and in order to hold on to our hope (Romans 15:4). We need a good foundation of true beliefs from the bible in order to build a solid Christian life (1 Timothy 4:13-16, 2 Timothy 2:15). These convictions drive our practice of Small Group bible discussions aimed at life application.

2. Preparing the Bible Discussion

Preparing for group night discussion begins at the monthly Small Group leaders coaching meeting. At that time the Small Group topic, the goal of the month for Small Groups, and potential texts that can be covered under the given topic are handed out. The group leader then has the necessary materials to begin preparation for individual Small Group discussions. Last minute or little preparation will keep the group from having relevant bible discussions. The following steps describe how to go about preparing good discussions.

a. Choose an Appropriate Text

Plan the month out by reading the suggested texts and picking out the texts you will use and the order in which you will use them. This gives you clear direction for the month. For each text, answer these questions: 1) Why is this important for my Small Group members? 2) What should be different in my group members as a result of this discussion? It is very important to answer these questions for yourself first! You will be far more effective in leading a bible discussion if you believe and live out the message of the text yourself. Let the text do its work in you before you seek to help others apply it.

b. Read and Soak on the Text

Spend time reading the text and thinking about it. Read it through several times and read the paragraphs surrounding it to help to understand the context. Reading the explanatory notes from the ESV Study Bible should help with context as well. As you're reading and rereading, give the bible text a chance to affect your mind and heart. This will help you lead a helpful discussion. Write down thoughts, stories, and things that stick out before you begin writing your discussion questions.

c. Break Down the Text

Mark out the text into chunks, according to the flow of the passage. Sometimes the chunks will correspond with paragraphs but this may not always be the case. The suggested texts in your handout will already be broken down, but it is important that you understand the main point of each chunk of verses. This is helpful when you are ready to write questions.

d. Write Questions

Prepare 4-6 questions that are drawn from the text and follow the flow of the text. You will probably write 1-2 questions from each chunk. Good questions will be answerable by all kinds of people since they are not dependant on previous bible knowledge and they will draw people into applying the bible to their lives. **Here are some examples of good questions, taken from Matthew 28:1-10.**

1. Good questions will be answerable by all regardless of the level of knowledge of the bible they presently possess. *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are going to see Jesus' tomb. What kinds of feelings might they be having that morning?*
2. Good questions will draw people into the story or situation described in the text. *How might you have responded to the appearance of the angels?*
3. Good questions will move towards personal application, usually at the end of the discussion. *What would you do in response to the angel's message? How would you like Jesus' resurrection to change your thinking or feelings about death?*
4. Good questions will lead very naturally into prayer ministry. *What is an area in your life presently where you need to hear Jesus say "Do not be afraid?"*

It is also helpful to understand what to avoid in writing discussion questions. Questions that are mostly intellectual or merely interesting but fail to lead towards application should be avoided. **Here are some things to avoid when writing questions.**

1. Avoid questions that require bible knowledge, are obvious to everyone, or are looking for a factual answer. *Can you think of another bible passage that talks about this? How many times did Jesus pray for the leper? What word is mentioned the most in v. 12?*

2. Avoid “Why” questions that are either speculative, vague, or require bible knowledge. *Why did God choose to reveal himself in a burning bush? Why did Paul love Timothy so much? Why was Paul so upset about the circumcision party?* “Why” questions that are personal and reflective can work but they will usually need to be preceded by a statement of truth. *Most of us find it hard to extend forgiveness when we’ve been wronged. Why do you think that is true?*
3. Avoid questions requiring a yes/no or right/wrong answer. *Do you have a hard time forgiving people when you’ve been wronged? If someone is genuinely sorrowful and repentant when they’ve wronged you, should you forgive them?*

What about icebreaker or introduction questions? An icebreaker question is designed to get people comfortable talking and give everyone a chance to say their name. They work best when the group is small and/or includes new people. An icebreaker question might be vaguely connected to the text but not really about the topic and simply provides an easy segue. Icebreaker questions can be lighthearted and get people feeling comfortable. An introduction question tends to be more serious and reflective. It doesn’t need to be answered by all the people. It is designed to prepare the people for the discussion before reading the text. **Here are examples of each, taken again from Matthew 28.**

1. Icebreaker (from the text but not on the topic) – *Say your name and tell us about the last time you woke up before dawn. When was it and what got you up that early?* The transition to Matthew 28:1 is then very natural.
2. Introduction (on the topic but not from the text) – *Who have you known/been close to that has died? Share briefly.* The transition to a discussion on the resurrection is then very natural.

e. Finalize the Discussion

Complete your written discussion by reviewing your final list of questions, and include pertinent information needed to lead the meeting.

1. Examine all your final questions. Are they simple and well worded? Can you answer them yourself? Are they answerable by all types of people? Do they move toward the main point?
2. Write out any background/explanations that are needed to set up the questions.
3. Add all meeting extras. Remember to describe the vision for why we do Small Group and what we hope to gain from the night. Be prepared for announcements, remembering to share vision and not just details. Prepare thoughts about possible prayer ministry issues.
4. Complete your preparation early enough so you can pray before people arrive and be relational when they do.

3. Leading the Bible Discussion

The goal as we lead bible discussion is that everyone would apply the text personally. Good conversation and high participation are good things to seek, but these are not the end goal.

a. Before you Ask Questions

1. Set up the text: Connect the text to the goal for the month and share what could be different for members as a result of the discussion.
2. Read the text and pray: Provide background and explanation if necessary. Invite a core member to read the text. Ask a possible next leader to pray.

b. When you Ask Questions

1. Wait for a response: Give the group time to think through and answer. Silence is okay. Don't get nervous and answer. Try to discern if the silence is because the question is thought provoking or just poorly worded.
2. If there is no response: Restate or rephrase the question. It is also helpful to restate the question between responses to refocus the discussion. If the silence persists, direct the question to a core member whom you trust to answer well.
3. Avoid: "What I'm looking for is..." (this is a bible discussion, not a quiz).
4. Draw out: Occasionally call on someone who rarely participates, but be wise about when to do so and with whom.

c. When People Respond

1. Affirm responses: Thank people for sharing with specific encouragement. Give non-verbal feedback to the person talking as you would in one-on-one conversation.
2. Clarify: When people say things that are simply untrue, clarify gently but clearly. In the case of answers that may be true but not on topic or helpful, affirm the person ("*Thanks for sharing*") but restate the question to refocus the group.
3. Transition: Build on each response and use transitions/segue. Ask spontaneous or follow-up questions when appropriate and helpful.
4. Move on: Not everyone has to answer. Be aware when the question has run its course and it's time to move on.

d. At the End of Discussion

1. Summarize: Reiterate main points and affirm specific responses.
2. Apply: Aim to have the final question apply the main point, provide some kind of challenge, or encourage people to receive prayer.
3. Pray: Pray over the group and encourage people to get prayer.
4. Close: Be sure there is a definite end communicated to people. Let them know it is okay to leave or they can hang out for as long as the host is comfortable.

4. Organizational Considerations for Small Group Meetings

There are many aspects of a Small Group night beyond the bible discussion that need to come together for a successful group meeting.

a. Be Welcoming

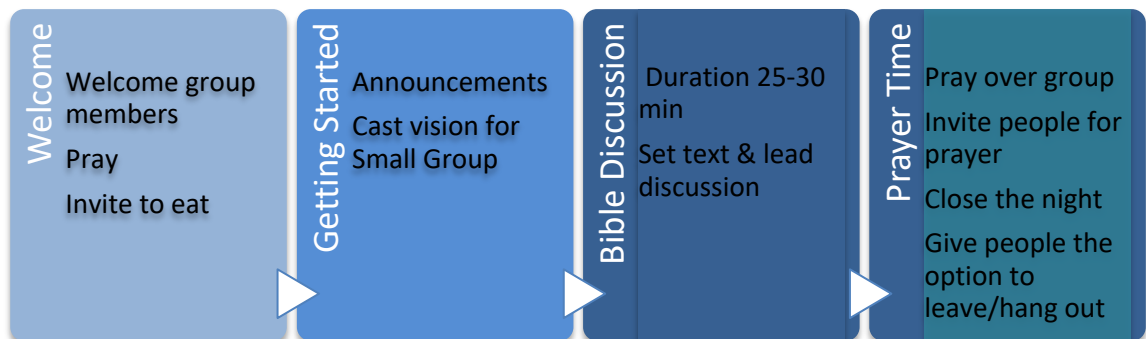
It is your responsibility as group leader to be welcoming and conscious of new people and to train others to do the same. The overall feel of the group will determine whether people feel welcome and comfortable and whether newer people will continue to come to the group. Thinking about what a new person's experience might be like is a good place to begin. Ask yourself "What if the friend or family member I've been inviting came to group tonight?"

b. Be Time-conscious

Let your group members know you are respectful of their schedule. Begin on time and end on time. If you wait to begin until everyone shows up, you are training them to be late.

c. Plan Out the Evening

Follow a schedule that may be sequenced like this:



d. Put Careful Thought into Everything

This sends a subtle but important message to people, that you care and this is important to you. The next page contains a helpful checklist of important details to be taken care of for the night to go smoothly. It is helpful to talk through these issues with core group members, hosts, and childcare workers.

Small Group Night Logistics Checklist

Location	
Is the location easy to find?	
Are the address and map correct on the group card and online?	
Are there helpful location landmarks presented on the card or online?	
Is parking adequate?	
Does the street/neighborhood feel safe?	
Is there adequate lighting outside when people are leaving?	
Home Environment	
Is the home clean, presentable and inviting?	
Are bathrooms equipped and ready for visitors?	
Is the room temperature comfortable?	
Is the lighting adequate?	
Does the seating arrangement promote discussion and community?	
Does the seating arrangement allow room for people to move freely to pray?	
Are distractions eliminated (roommates, ringing phones, pets)?	
Childcare Arrangements	
Does the childcare space feel clean and safe?	
Is the childcare separated from the group space to minimize noise from kids?	
Do the childcare workers feel safe and well-trained?	
Are the childcare workers on time?	
Hospitality	
Is the group aware of new people (welcoming, no inside jokes, no cliques)?	
Is there adequate space to invite/include more people?	
Is there clear communication about bathroom location, other "housekeeping" stuff?	
Are core and committed members on time?	
Are there extra bibles for people who may need them?	
Do the refreshments feel quality and appetizing?	
Is the refreshment set up convenient and conducive to conversation?	

Conclusion

A Small Group meeting that includes a relevant discussion led by a prepared, faith-filled leader in a hospitable atmosphere will be a joy to attend. The next essential ingredient to a healthy, growing Small Group is the empowering presence of God experienced in prayer ministry. We turn to that subject in our next training session.

Sample Bible Discussion for Practical Training

THIS IS ONLY A SAMPLE. This discussion should not be used verbatim. It is meant as an example to illustrate how to write a bible discussion. You must soak on the text and write your own questions in order to lead a helpful and relevant discussion.

Vision for Small Group – We gather in Small Group weekly to grow closer to God and to one another. Both of these goals are helped by honesty and transparency as we discuss the bible together.

Announcements

Topic – Applying the Bible to Real Life

Main Point – The bible is not meant to merely be read but to be lived.

Icebreaker – Say your name and briefly describe the worst storm you’ve ever been close to (severe thunderstorm, flood, snowstorm, tornado, etc).

-OR-

Introduction Question – What is one of your “words to live by,” maybe a wise saying that you can remember your parents or a teacher sharing with you?

Read Matthew 7:24-27 and Pray

Question 1 – (v. 24) Jesus is teaching about the different responses of those who hear his words. When do you feel like you first began to really *hear* the words of Jesus? Describe what that was like.

Question 2 – (v. 25) The rain and floods describe the storms of life, hardship or trials that come our way. What are some examples of storms that have come your way?

Question 3 – (v. 26) The “hearing” is a good start but the “doing” is clearly more important. When was a time in your life, maybe long ago or maybe very recently, when you *did* something *just* because you knew Jesus taught that you should?

Question 4 – (v. 27) In the parable, both types of people hear the words of Jesus and both experience the unavoidable storms of life. The difference between the house standing (v. 25) or having a great fall (v. 27) is *not about hearing* what Jesus says *but doing* what he says. What is something Jesus (or the bible) has been saying to you recently or is even saying to you tonight where he is calling for obedience?

Prayer Ministry – Let’s ask God for help to live out the things he speaks to us in his bible.

_____ Church
Small Group Report

Month/Year: _____

Leader: _____

Assistant: _____

Please include dates & check all boxes that apply!

NAMES		Week	Week	Week	Party	1 st
First	Last	1	2	3		Time
		__/__/__	__/__/__	__/__/__	__/__/__	
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						
6.						
7.						
8.						
9.						
10.						
11.						
12.						
13.						
14.						
15.						
16.						
17.						
18.						
19.						
20.						
Total attendance						
# of Children						

OVER

1. What are your goals for the next month?

2. On a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (great), how do you feel the group is doing? Explain.

3. On a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (great), how do you feel spiritually? Explain.

4. List people saved and/or baptized (indicate which and include dates).

5. How did your social activities go this month? How could they improve?

6. When are you planning to multiply the group? Possible leaders?

7. Are there any other issues you'd like to discuss with your overseeing pastor?
