

## **Developing a Focus and a Plan for Your Meetings**

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### **Study preparation begins personal preparation.**

- Pray and ask God to teach you first.
- Study the lesson.
- What is the author's main point?
- What was the one key thing that hit you?
- How does it correlate with the rest of your study material and/or Scripture?
- Apply the study to your life.

### **Develop a plan for your lesson with an aim in mind.**

- What speaks most directly to what you and your group members are struggling with?
- What in this lesson will enable group members to relate to God more deeply?
- What do you want most for group members to take away from the lesson and apply to their life?
- What questions will best help you reach your objective?
- What Bible passages will you use?
- How long do you want to spend on each section of the study?
- What supplies will you need for the study?

*Knowing where you're going with a lesson will help you to stay focused through the midst of discussion.*

### **Prepare a proper place for small group meetings**

- Comfortable
- Conducive to authentic, transparent communication
- What does the seating arrangement at your small group say about your teaching style?
- Consistent with start and end time
- Orderly yet flexible

*Sample Small Group Schedule:*

6:30-7:00	Eating and Relationship Building
7:00-7:45	Bible Study and Sharing
7:45-8:15	Prayer
8:15-8:30	More Relationships

A word of caution: Just because you've planned a great lesson doesn't mean that's where God is going to take the lesson. Be prepared to follow God's lead in the meeting itself.

If something in the passage really speaks to several of the group members and the group wants to explore that aspect of the lesson, be flexible enough to guide discovery in that area.

## Knowing Where to Hold a Group Meeting

Many groups have hosts that open their homes for group meetings. Your host is an integral part of your group leadership team. Make sure you include them on discussions about how the location and set-up of the meeting can contribute to its success.

*Some key tips are:*

- **Keep distractions to a minimum.**
  - This could be everything from making sure another roommate isn't watching TV in the next room over to not answering the phone or door to making sure pets don't interrupt.
- **Choose a comfortable, warm meeting place**
  - Living rooms are the best environments in which small groups meet. Comfortable environments will encourage communication and authenticity.
- **Find a place large enough for your group**
  - It is important that there is room for everyone in your group to be together preferably in a circle. Sitting in a circle communicates the inclusive nature of the group and that it is not a lecture based experience.
- **Consider the “environmental” impact of your group’s location**
  - Discuss how to reduce the effects of pollen, smoke or pet allergies on susceptible group members.
  - Watch for group member’s body language in regards to room temperature. Keep a few blankets on hand for those who are consistently cold.
- **Meeting set-up**
  - Devise an easy way to collect any materials that might be needed during the study (extra pens/pencils, index cards, Bibles, song sheets, etc.).
  - Leave an empty chair ready to be filled by late arrivers (if there are any) to ease their stress from being late to group.

## **Leading Discussion Oriented Studies**

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### **Learning How to Ask the Right Questions at the Right Time**

Questions usually progress during a discussion from those that warm up the group to questions that generate deeper, more revealing discussion, and finally to questions that encourage the “So What?” or application of the teaching.

### **Engaging Each Other and the Topic: Icebreakers/Opening Questions**

- It is a good idea to start your group time each week with either a formal or informal icebreaker.
- An informal icebreaker could be something like:
  - “What was the best part of your week?”
  - “What challenges have you faced this week?”
  - “Where did you see God working this week?”
- Formal icebreakers can be found in a variety of books (i.e., Icebreakers and Heartwarmers, and Jumpstarts and Soft Landings from Serendipity Small Group Resources).

### **Encountering God in His Word and in Our Stories: Facilitative Questions**

Facilitative questions keep the conversation moving and help it go to deeper levels. Types of facilitative questions:

- Clarification Questions for when a statement needs further detail.  
*“Let me see if I understand what you are saying. Is this what you meant?”*
- Relevant Questions link back to something that someone said before.  
*“After what you said last time, I wonder how this passage adds to your perspective?”*
- Bounce Back Questions help others stay involved, gets their opinion and gives you time to think.  
*Statement: “Is it true that God doesn’t hear non-believer’s prayers?”*  
*Bounce back: “What do you all think?”*
- Summarizing Questions group a series of comments to highlight what they have in common.  
*“You seem to be asking, ‘How can we apply this to life?’”*

### **Experiencing Life as God Design and Desires: Application Questions**

Be committed to helping group members make application. Above all else, the most important thing that happens in a small group study is the application. There is no point in having a study if your group members are not applying it to their lives.

- Application questions may include questions such as:
  - “How can you apply tonight’s study to your day-to-day life?”
  - “What things do you need to change to apply what we have discussed?”
  - “What is God’s message to you from this study?”

*Some keys to effective application:*

- Communicate your commitment by devoting time to application in the meeting.
- Help group members develop SMART applications:
  - Specific
  - Measurable
  - Attainable
  - Relevant
  - Time-limited
- Set yourself as an example. Share your own application and ask them to hold you accountable.
- Write down their application. Pray for them. Check up on them.

**Tips for facilitating discussion**

- As a leader, don't talk too much.
- Ask open-ended questions.
  - As a general rule, don't ask group members questions that they can answer with yes or no or other one-word answers. If you do ask a yes/no question, follow up with a question that will require group members to dig a little deeper.
- Be comfortable with silence.
  - If you have been wise about how you have asked the question, you can have confidence that people are thinking about the answer, not trying to figure out what you asked. Give them the time to think.
- When calling on someone individually, call on someone "safe" especially in the early stages of your group.
  - Make sure they're comfortable with what you've asked them to do. Be careful not to put someone on the spot.