



How to Lead a Small Group

If this is your first time leading a small group, here are six general steps to follow. (If your church leadership provides the curriculum for your group, you may want to skip Step Three.)

Step One Pray.

It may go without saying that prayer will need to play a vital role every step of the way as you lead your group, but it can also be the easiest step to overlook. Seek God in everything and in every decision. Let Him be the one to direct you. Pray for a supernatural love for the people in your small group and for wisdom as you lead them.

Step Two Discern and be sensitive to your group members' backgrounds and needs.

Every group member has individual needs and any given curriculum may or may not meet those needs for each person. If the curriculum choice is yours, you as the leader may need to make the decision based on what you know about each of your group members and their current life needs. Perhaps several of your group members have never been in a Bible study before. Or maybe your group is made up of seasoned believers. Perhaps the majority of your group members are parents of preschoolers. Any and all of these factors should be considered as you decide what, where, and how to teach.

Step Three Choose a curriculum.

Decide on whether you will need each individual group member to purchase his or her own Participant's Guide, or if you or the church will be purchasing the guides. Either way, be sure your group members have Participant's Guides in time for your first meeting. Here are some suggestions for curriculum choices:

DVD STUDIES

Max on Life DVD study (Max Lucado)

The Hole in Our Gospel Study (based on the book by Richard Stearns)

Putting Plan B Into Action (Pete Wilson)

The Trouble with Paris DVD Study

STUDY GUIDE ONLY

Encounters with God: A Blackaby Bible Study Guide Series
Life Lessons with Max Lucado Series
Life Principles Study Series with Charles Stanley
John MacArthur Old or New Testament Study Guide Series
Calvin Miller: Fruits of the Spirit Study Guides

WOMEN'S STUDIES

Stuck DVD study (Jennie Allen)
The Shelter of God's Promises DVD study (Sheila Walsh)
Captivating Small Group DVD series (John & Stasi Eldredge)
Falling in Love with Jesus (Dee Brestin & Kathy Troccoli)
Women of Faith Study Guides

MARRIAGE STUDIES

FamilyLife Bible Study for Couples (Dennis & Barbara Rainey)
Getting Ready for Marriage Workbook (Jerry Hardin & Diane Sloan)

The curriculum choices we offer are perfect for both individual and group use. DVD curriculum is great for groups that meet in homes, church buildings, or other venues with DVD capabilities. Some studies may require a little more teaching from you as a leader; others will call for you to function as more of a facilitator. These are things to keep in mind as you choose a curriculum.

Step Four Prepare yourself to lead.

Spend ample time preparing yourself as a leader. Read through the Leader's Guide for your chosen curriculum if one is available, as well as the Participant's Guide. Watch the DVD sessions as well. Make notes of material that may be difficult or challenging for your group members and prepare as much as you can in advance for those situations. Most importantly, read the Bible passages involved with each section of study, and ask God to speak to you through His Word. It is important that you as a leader are teachable and listening to the Holy Spirit, so you can model this for your group. You don't have to have all the answers, but it is essential that your heart is in the right place. Here are some suggestions for helpful study resources:

Encounters with God: Transforming Your Bible Study by Henry Blackaby
Chronological Guide to the Bible

Consider studying further each section of Scripture by using various reference tools. You can find help for building a reference library here.

Step Five *Lead your group.*

Continue to prepare yourself before each session by studying God's Word and using supplemental study materials. Gather together any items that might be needed for that particular session in advance (pens, paper, DVD player, etc.) and make the room/venue feel as welcoming as possible. Greet each group member personally as they enter, and be sure to start and end on time.

At your first meeting, clearly communicate that anything that is shared within the group setting is to remain confidential among group members. It takes some time to build trust, but only a few moments to break it. Group members should affirm to one another that they will take care to build trust.

In general, people are more likely to experience life change gradually as they are given the consistent opportunity to study and share what they think and learn. Our studies are developed with this in mind. Master teaching (you as the leader conveying most of the information) can be an effective way of communicating, but be sure to make your group time is a conversation rather than just a lecture.

During your discussion times, take note if there are certain people who dominate conversation or who don't open up with the group at all. You may want to talk with these persons privately outside of the group time to encourage them in the right direction. If an individual has a deep personal need that you are not qualified to address, refer the person to your pastor or a professional as soon as possible.

You may need to take into consideration things such as childcare, meals, parking, and signage. If your church cannot provide direct help with these things, enlist members of your group to help in these areas. Group members will appreciate the feeling of ownership.

Step Six *Evaluate.*

When the study comes to an end, ask your group members for feedback. How did God change their lives through the study? What will they do as a result of that change? Will your group continue to meet together? Were the number of sessions and time spent in each session appropriate, or should it have been longer/shorter? These and other questions can help you as a leader prepare for next time, and can also lead group members to further allow God to transform their lives. Be sure to follow up with anyone who needed additional help or made a big decision as a result of the study.