

Leading Small Groups

Introduction

Anyone who has lead a small group before, or who is preparing to lead one, will know that they have much to learn. If they don't then perhaps they ought not be responsible for leading a small group at all. Leaders who are not also learners are a menace.

Small groups need leaders whose role is to help people discuss the issues in an atmosphere which enables and encourages everyone to take part. This isn't a lecture, but a time for shared discussion, reflection and discovery.

Those who lead small groups need:

- Skill
- Prayer
- Common Sense
- A Sense of Humour
- Some Knowledge

How to Lead

"So you want first place? Then take the last place. Be the servant of all." (Mark 9.35 MSG)

The people in the group are more important than you. Your job is to serve them. What matters is our attitude. If we care for people, genuinely seek their good, put their interests first, then we shall be good leaders. Leadership should be an expression of love.

For instance, sometimes the material the groups is using may ask participants to share something of their personal journey of faith. It is the Group Leader's responsibility to ensure that everyone understands a general rule of confidentiality and that no-one is asked to share more than they feel comfortable with.

Everyone in the group will have come for different reasons and these need to be respected. Everyone in the group will come with different experiences of the Christian faith and Church life. The group leader can really help the group to grow and develop by encouraging the participants to build up one another - the experienced ones explaining the in-language of the church and the inexperienced asking questions which all will find valuable.

“Blessed is the group which has a member who is so simple-hearted that they ask the questions everyone is dying to ask but dare not.”

Getting Going

How Often?

“A long journey is best covered in short stages”

It is up to the group to decide how often they want to meet. Some will want to meet weekly, some less often. It may be that for certain material the group wants to meet frequently and at other times less so.

It is good to start the group off with an initial session. This is where people can get to know one another and the 'ground rules' sorted out. Here you can introduce the

frequency of meetings and how the group want to organise them.

Be flexible, but make sure that it is a decision of the whole group and not just those who enjoy speaking or who have strong opinions.

The material you will be given will be flexible enough to cope with each group meeting for a different number of times. Don't worry if your group meets less frequently than another - it's important that you do what's right for your group.

Where do we meet?

This may be dictated by numbers. If your group is large then you will have less choice than a group of three or four.

It is probably best if you can meet in someone's house as this is often more comfortable than the church or hall! If you have someone to host who is not the leader this can make the task of leading a more relaxed experience.

The most important thing about where you meet is that it is accessible and comfortable for all. Try to remember these four things when preparing the room: Visibility, Audibility, Temperature & Seating. If these are good, then you have the right room. Meeting in a 'posh' house of someone who collects fragile Victorian china is not going to help people to relax. Meeting in a cramped front room with people perched precariously all over the place is going to become uncomfortable fairly quickly.

If you are going to move around different places it is important that the hosting doesn't become competitive!

Agree what refreshments are going to be offered. A drink and a simple biscuit is normally quite sufficient.

Leading a Session

Preparation is essential for leadership. You don't need to have all the answers - in fact it's good if you don't! However your preparation should be: prayerful & practical; thorough & flexible; done in collaboration with anyone else who is leading with you.

When you prepare you might find this approach helpful:

- Pray
- Think about the last session: what did you learn? What worked? What could have been improved?
- Read through the material twice carefully. What is the aim of the session?
- Once you know your group you will know which bits need to be stress or can be missed out.
- Write notes for any teaching you are being asked to give.
- Think about the practical arrangements - make sure you have everything you need.
- Pray some more.

And Finally...

Agree a start and end time with the group. Like a football Match, each session should last 90 minutes with 30 minutes for extra time!

Go home at the end of each session wanting more not less!