

TIPS FOR HOME GROUP LEADERS

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us...if it is to lead, do it diligently. Romans 12:4-8

EVERY GOOD LEADER...

1. Prepares.

You wouldn't make a presentation at work without preparing. So why would you come unprepared to something that might change the life of 1 of those who attends the study? Leading a discussion well requires time in Scripture, thoughtful reflection of the questions, time to write your own answers, questions and notes, and a creative imagination and knowledge of your group members to think ahead about how they will hear the questions, how they might answer, and what else you might need to know to help them understand the Scriptures.

2. Models.

Your example of faith, your courage to be transparent, your living relationship with God may speak louder than the Bible study!

3. Facilitates.

Your role is not to preach or teach, simply to facilitate a discussion centered on the text at hand. If people are silent, ask if they understood the question. Rephrase it. Point them to a verse if necessary. Ask an individual who looks like they might have an answer but are too shy to say. Silence is good if people are thinking. But too much silence distracts. So learn to time your questions and prompts. It's a skill to be learned through practice.

Often various problems crop up during Bible studies. As the facilitator, do not feel compelled to solve people's problems. Point people to Scripture. And to people who can help them outside the study time. Be willing to be 1 of those people.

A good leader is humble. So don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." Then find out and let them know via email or phone or in the next study.

4. Encourages.

Help everyone to participate. Affirm their contributions.

Some talk more than others. They are helpful to get things going. But don't let 1-2 people dominate. Ask specific questions of people who are quieter. It's ok to say, "I'd like to hear from someone who hasn't said anything yet."

5. Listens

Actively listen, encouraging people to interact through your attention, body language, and verbal affirmations.

Don't jump to the next questions when you've heard 1 answer. Ask for more insight from others.

5. Leads.

Distractions, rabbit trails and sidetracks are inevitable. You are the leader. Lead. Bring the group back to the passage. (e.g. "What does it say here in chapter 1?") Point them back to the main point. (e.g. "How does that relate to the main point of _____?...Let's get back to our main focus.")

An important aspect of leading is to keep the study within the agreed upon time limits. If important issues come up, ask people who'd like to continue to discuss it to stay afterwards. Sometimes you may not finish a study. This should not be the norm. But once in a while when the discussion is important or someone needs more time for prayer, don't rush the close of the study. It's ok to finish it the next week. But good preparation and good leadership will help this from happening too often.

6. Prays.

Pray as you prepare. Pray for your group members by name during the week. Spiritual growth does not happen through human effort alone. 1 person plants. Another waters. But God gives the increase. Once in a while it's appropriate to stop the study to pray for someone. Follow your intuition and the leading of the Spirit.

7. Has Coping Strategies

for silence

- "Was I clear?"
- "Do you need time to think?"
- "Don't be shy."
- "_____, what do you think?"

for a confusing or wrong answer from a group member

- Never say an answer is wrong. It will only shame the person. But don't say, "Yes, that's right", either! Use 1 of these questions to re-direct:
- Thanks for sharing. Does anyone else have other thoughts or insights?
- Did anyone understand my question differently?
- Did someone get a different answer?
- Where did you see that in the text?
- Let's look at the text and see what it says. (You might point them to a specific verse.)
- If something is overtly contrary to Scripture, gently correct with a statement of understanding and correction, such as, "I see why you'd think that or that's an interesting perspective. But the text here says, _____ or in (biblical reference) God very clearly tells us that _____."

for sidetracking, rambling, long-winded explanations

- Thanks for sharing. Can we hear the rest of your story later? Let's get back to the question (repeat the question). (Be sure to ask him/her about it later during coffee or on the phone!)
- Let's share briefly so that everyone can have a chance to speak.
- Don't be afraid to jump into it mid-sentence and make a gracious statement that points the group back to the question at hand.

for irrelevant questions from group members

- Can you save that question for later?
- How does that relate to this text/question?
- Don't ask the group what they think!

for heated arguments or tense discussions that don't look like they'll be resolved

- Remember our guidelines, to refrain from judgment. Let's continue with the study and see if there's more insight from the Scriptures.
- This seems important. Could we discuss it later (after the study, over coffee, etc) and get back to our study together.

EVERY GOOD GROUP...

1. Keeps confidences.

This is crucial for a successful and healthy small group. Do not talk about anything shared outside the group. Even with one another. We need to be confident that we are not the subject of gossip.

2. Refrains from judgment.

We don't have to agree with each other. We have to love each other. Allow people to voice their ideas, feelings, etc. without fear of being immediately corrected, shamed, etc. This doesn't mean everything we think or feel or do is ok. It means we love one another even when we are wrong, sinful, or in trouble. This also means that it's ok to choose not to share personally if you don't feel comfortable.

3. Appreciates others.

Listen to one another. Learn from each other. Vocalize your appreciation for one another.

4. Works together.

The leader is not the only one who can ask questions or encourage others to speak up! Work together to study the Scriptures. (But don't forget that the leader is there for a reason!) It's also good to do things together outside of the Bible study. Don't be afraid to apply the Scriptures together in practical ways in the church and in the community.

5. Prays.

Encourage people to pray short, sentence prayers. A small group is a great place to learn to pray in different ways. If your group doesn't like to pray out loud, figure out ways to pray that are helpful. Of course, it's good to help stretch people, too.

6. Plays.

Enjoy each other! Have a good time. Share life. Share food. Build relationships outside the small group as time permits. Take some time each week to laugh together!