

LEADING FOR THE FIRST TIME

As a new group leader, there are a few things to think about as you go into your first meeting. In fact, there may be too many things to think about. Focus on the basics and you will have a great first meeting.

SIMPLE TIPS FOR HOSTING A GROUP IN YOUR HOME

- The goal of an effective host is to make people feel welcome and distraction free. Have seats for people and make sure a bathroom is available.
- If you use technology, test it before the group starts to make sure it works.
- Not everyone loves your pets as much as you; put others before your pets and only bring them out if no one minds.
- People connect over food! Refreshments really help to break the ice in a group setting.

PREPARE AHEAD OF TIME

As the leader of this group, you don't have to be the expert. When you're doing a sermon-based or video curriculum, there's your expert. Otherwise, just follow along with the questions in your study guide. Before the meeting it's a good idea to preview the video/content and the discussion questions yourself. Then just read through the questions.

If you find your group doesn't have time to complete the entire discussion guide, that's okay. Prioritize the questions for the time you have available. As you get to know the group, choose questions that are appropriate for the group. If your group has been together for a while, or if your group members are well beyond the basics, then maybe skip the "ice-breaker" questions and start going deeper right away.

PRAY FOR YOUR GROUP

If you feel anxious, or even inadequate, about leading the group, that is perfectly normal, especially if you are leading for the first time. The Bible says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

So, how often should you pray? Pray every time you feel anxious. God will give you peace. Commit the meeting to God. Invite his presence into your meeting, and then watch Him work!

GUIDE THE DISCUSSION – BE LESS TEACHER, MORE REFEREE

While everyone should have a chance to share their thoughts and experiences, as the leader your job is to facilitate a discussion, not to teach a class. You want to make sure everyone gets their word in. A good rule of thumb is the 30/70 rule. As the leader, you should only do about 30% of the talking while the rest of the group does 70%. You also want to make sure no one dominates the discussion. If someone tends to jump in on

every question, politely say, "Now, on this next question, let's hear from a few of you who haven't had a chance to share." If the person dominating the meeting continues to do this, then you might need to talk to them outside of the group meeting.

You, as the group leader, prepared ahead of time for the lesson, but don't count on all of the group members preparing ahead for this meeting. When you ask the discussion questions, it may take the group members a couple of seconds to put their thoughts together. That's okay. Don't feel that as the leader you need to fill every silence. Let them think a minute.

PRAISING TOGETHER AS A GROUP

Habits are hard to break and sometimes hard to start. Changing attitudes and behaviors require more than just willpower. It requires God's power. At the end of every meeting, subgroup into groups of three to four people, so everyone can share any prayer needs, and then pray. In a large group, some people won't share, and it will take a much longer time, so subgrouping is necessary.

Also, limit the prayer requests to what is personally affecting the group member. Now, they may be concerned about Aunt Gertrude's big toe or something they read about on the internet, but this really isn't the place to discuss that. As much as you can, keep the focus of the prayer time on the changes group members need to make related to the subject of the lesson.

ASK FOR VOLUNTEERS IN YOUR GROUP

Don't lead the group alone! Just because you are the designated leader, you do not need to do everything for the group. In fact, delegate as much as you possibly can: the refreshments, the home you meet in, and even leading the discussion. If you do this right, you might only need to lead for a couple of sessions, and others will lead for the rest.

As group members become more involved in the leadership, they will feel a stronger sense of ownership in the group. Pretty soon the group will go from being "your group" to being "our group."