

Women's Bible Study Small Group Guidelines

(Compiled from several small group resources found online – Teri Anderson)

Trust that God will use us to serve our women....and such service, blessed by the Spirit, will have eternal consequences. This is Kingdom work...don't minimize it!

Be praying now for the women The Lord will bring to the Bible study and together in each group.

Expect there will be some days that are "better" than others...days in which there is exceptional participation and sharing.

1 Corinthians 15:58 – *“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”*

What is our motive as small group leaders?

To be used by God in the lives of the women in our group....by serving them, loving them, and pointing them to Christ.

Philippians 2:1-7 — *“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.”*

What is our role?

To facilitate the discussion and to shepherd the women in our groups—to know where they are, not only in their lives, but in their walk with the Lord. We'll be best able to do this by spending time with them during and outside the Bible study time.

What we do outside the small group time will impact the small group time and vice versa. As we love and care for the women in our small groups during the week, they will be more committed to be there and to be open during the discussion; as we listen to what they say during the discussion, God will show you ways to pray for them, ways to connect with them and love them well. Pray God will show us where each woman is. Sometimes her response to a question will give you great insight. Listen.

I hope it will be freeing to realize what our role is and what God's role is: our role is to love these women, to pray for them, to point them to Christ, to listen, to encourage them toward community; it is NOT our responsibility to change them or to solve all their problems. That is God's responsibility alone; we can't.

Philippians 2:13 — *“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”*

One of the most exciting things about serving in this way is that we are bound to witness God changing hearts; we should anticipate the work of the Spirit. It is such an incredible privilege to watch God change hearts. The better we get to know our women, the more we will be aware of what He is doing.

Keys to leading a vibrant small group:

1. Prayer
2. Preparation
3. Perspective

Prayer: Commit every aspect of your leadership to God.

Philippians 4:6-7 — *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

As you entrust the leadership of the group to God, He will give you a peace which will enable you to focus on Him and on your women, not on yourself and your insecurities.

Pray for your women. The more you are praying for them, the more you'll be able to love each of them with the love of Christ.

Preparation: Read the scheduled Psalm and review the questions for the lesson ahead of time. Always prepare by first preparing your heart- answering the questions for yourself and asking The Lord to the apply the truths to your own heart. Ask The Lord for insight and wisdom on how best to facilitate the group with the particular Scripture text and questions in mind.

Another aspect of preparation is knowing your women —this will help you know what to draw out, how to respond with sensitivity.

As you've done these things, you will be able to focus on them, to really listen without thinking about yourself—“What should I say?” “What will they think of me?”

Perspective: Knowing your role and God's role. Be intentional about what you are doing; what your role is and what God's role is. If I know why I'm doing something, I will stay focused, passionate, committed.

What is the purpose of small groups:

1. To learn to apply God's Word to our lives. We want to develop a hunger, habit of turning to God and His Word for answers. Romans 12:1-2 so that we will be “transformed by the renewal of your mind.”
2. Foster authenticity and open sharing in order to “stir up one another to love and good works” (Hebrews 10:23-24).
3. All women desire to be connected. Small groups allow women to get connected to other people in a safe, small environment. Safe environment implies a confidential place. "What happens in small group, stays in small group."

You want your group to promote these purposes—how you do create that?

1. Encourage openness
2. Be the leader

1. Ways to encourage openness

- The goal is to help the ladies process what they heard, not necessarily to get through all the questions. The questions themselves are not sacred; the women's hearts and minds are.
- Actively depend on the Lord's wisdom to know how to best engage the different women He places in your group.
- Affirm their openness. Remind them that we are here for each other; let them know that it may be the very thing they share that The Lord uses to help another member of the group.
- LISTEN. If they know you're listening, that they are being heard, it will encourage them to be open. Be active in listening—body language, eye contact, nod, whatever is natural for you. Call them by name. It is encouraging to be called by name. "I have called you by name; you are mine!" – Isaiah 43:1
- When someone shares, respond briefly to affirm that person. Especially if someone has shared a personal experience, don't leave it hanging. But be brief; keep it about her, about God, not about you. "Thank you, that was powerful / I can really see how God has been working in the situation / great insight / good point / gives us something to think about" . . . something natural to you that will encourage her to be open again.
- Be aware of body language that is saying "PLEASE DON'T ASK ME ANYTHING!" and "If you ask me, I will talk." But first, throw the question out and wait for a response. Don't be afraid of a little silence; someone may be working up the courage to share. Often the silence is the space people need to think through the answer to the question that was just asked. We're usually tempted to jump in and say something—start rambling, etc. A few moments of silence does not mean that it's not going well. It may mean that lots of (mental) wheels are turning! Don't be afraid of silence as women think about the answer to the questions. Nobody wants to end up looking foolish, and silence allows their thoughts to gel somewhat.
- If someone has been really vulnerable or emotional, always respond with compassion and affirmation. You might want to stop and pray right at that moment. Be sure to contact that person later in the week to follow up and thank her for her vulnerability.
- If someone says something you know is contrary to Scripture, gently correct without any edge in your voice, saying something like, "I understand God's Word to say _____."
- If someone goes too long (and you can tell by the other ladies' body language that they know it too), bring relief to the group by finding a place to jump in and redirect the conversation with something like, "That's great, _____. Thank you for sharing. Maybe you and I can talk about this more later. Anyone else has something they would like to share?"
- Be open and transparent yourself; let them know we're all in this together; you struggle too; set the example of being teachable yourself. For some of us, that's hard; for some, it's too easy. Be open and transparent, but don't make it "all about me." A small group is not a therapy group for you to dump all your "stuff"! Neither should you put yourself on some sort of pedestal that elevates you above the other women. The ground is level at the foot of the cross!

2. Be the leader

As a small group leader, you are a facilitator—not a teacher. But, remember, you're the leader.

What does a facilitator do?

1. Encourages discussion and openness, draws out sharing.
2. Let group members answer; doesn't give all the answers.

3. Affirms and responds to someone who shares.
4. Is gracious.
5. Is an active listener.
6. Is the leader; guards against poor use of time; guides the discussion to stay on track.

You have flexibility to lead the group the way God is showing you to—this means you are not limited to reading straight through the questions, but be careful not to get totally off track. If the group time just becomes "What did you do this week?", they could do that anywhere. Scripture centered discussion is what makes Bible study small groups unique.

Things you can do so the time will be well spent:

Start on time; end on time. Let them know you'll do that; it gives security and helps the group be more relaxed. Be sure they feel free to leave by the published ending time. Some have responsibilities they're going home to. Be sure any "official" part of the group is over by the official ending time. It's great if people want to stay and talk later; that's not a bad thing. But if someone needs to leave and feels awkward about doing that, it will discourage her attendance in the group. If you know you can get so wrapped up in the discussion that you easily lose track of time, ask for a volunteer time-keeper who will help keep everyone aware that there are ten minutes left (or however you choose to handle that).

Encourage participants:

- To be committed to the study of God's Word: to prepare by reading and meditating on the assigned text.
- To pray for themselves and the other group members.
- To let you know if they won't be there; demonstrate you care whether they are there.
- To come expecting The Lord to use the study/small group time to grow them and others in grace.

Remember the chief purpose of small groups: to learn to apply God's Word to our lives

- Guide the discussion to fulfill that purpose: to help them identify situations in their lives where they can apply God's Word. We want authenticity. . .but not venting. Be careful to guide discussions away from husband-bashing, boss-bashing, boyfriend-bashing, roommate-bashing, etc.
- You may have heard this truth—God loves you just as you are, but He loves you too much to leave you just as you are. This is a good principle in our small groups. Openness in the groups is a goal, **but not an end in itself**. God's Word transforms...we want to encourage this transformation.

Some specific situations you may encounter in your group

1. The person that dominates the conversation – Privately, have a conversation in which you thank you her for her enthusiastic participation in the discussion, and then ask her to be aware of giving others opportunities to share. This is a difficult conversation, so be sure to sandwich the uncomfortable truth between affirming her participation on the front end and the back end of your conversation.
2. You might experience times in which someone is very emotional and vulnerable. Sometimes when we're in this frame of mind, we don't know how to stop. We want to be compassionate but, unless it is an extraordinary circumstance, it is best to not let it go on and on, to monopolize the whole group time. You can step in by saying something like "I'd love to talk with you about this later or tomorrow. Right now we can pray for you." Then pick up the discussion again. I

think the ladies in your group will be grateful for you maintaining control and not getting derailed. And, be sure to follow up with the woman if you've made that commitment.

3. Someone who offers unbiblical advice to another person in the group – Affirm the person's heart to help so they feel heard and appreciated, and then gently redirect the conversation to what God's Word says. This is tricky but remember "God centered, people oriented."
4. The quiet person – make eye contact with her during the time together, smile at her and make sure your voice is warm and inviting if you plan to direct a question at her. This woman would greatly benefit from hearing from you during the week. Continue to direct questions her way from time to time...but never put her on the spot or pressure her.
5. The conversation that gets WAY off track – It's your responsibility to apply the brakes and lead the way back on track. The women are expecting you to! With a smile on your face, say something like, "OK, that was an interesting (and it might even have been important) rabbit trail, but now let's get back to our questions."
6. The exceedingly needy person with "the problem" she talks about all the time – Exceedingly needy people have "boundary" problems, and they need you (and the group expects you) to provide limits. This woman typically needs a lot of affirmation, but be aware of the time slipping by and don't let her develop a pattern of dominating the group. Letting her go on and on about her problem (which is very effective at getting the attention she craves) will not change her neediness—or her problem. Seek to make her feel heard and understood, but also communicate in private that you want to make sure everyone gets their opportunity to share as well, and that means being sensitive to one person not taking up too much time.
7. When you are asked questions about a particularly difficult passage of Scripture, don't be afraid to say "I don't know, but I will find out."

Best questions for small groups:

There are two types of questions that are important. **Encounter questions** that focus on observation and interpretation of the text studied. These questions focus on the "what" of the passage. However, two of the biggest things to avoid when crafting encounter questions are **closed-end questions** and **"check your brain at the door" questions**. Closed-end questions are questions that can be answered simply with a "yes" or a "no." Remember, the questions are to be used to lead a **discussion** not just assess factual knowledge. "Check your brain at the door questions" are questions that ask for obvious answers and require zero thought. These questions don't spur growth. The questions should require some thought and inspire growth to maturity. This will not happen if we ask easy to answer, "yes or no" questions.

Along with the encounter questions, we need to ask **application questions** that answer the "so what?" of the passage. Application questions can center on actions we need to take, examples we should follow, or attitudes we should adapt. The key is that these questions lead to action.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 — *"To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,¹² so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ".*