

Small Group Leader Guidelines

A small group is a gospel-centered community that moves women to have joy in glorifying God.

What will glorifying God look like specifically in YOUR setting? Alert the group to the Biblical call of being transformed by God in THIS setting. In other words, how are we learning to apply God's Word to our lives? We want to learn to turn to God's word for answers. We want to create an environment that is a safe place to examine our hearts and our lives in light of the Gospel & a setting where we can grow.

Am I qualified? Not without Jesus!

Psalm 127:1 — *"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain."*

I Corinthians 3:7 — *"So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth."*

Pray for your leadership: Commit EVERY aspect of **your leadership** to the Lord. Prepare your own heart to prepare for the study. Know God's role & know your role! Trust God & lean on Him in prayer, so you are able to focus on others instead of yourself. This is GOD's small group, not yours! (What will they think of me?) We are each unique, so we may each need to pray for different aspects of leading a small group. Some will need to pray for courage, some to hold our tongues, others for a non-judgmental spirit. Pray for a flexible heart when it becomes obvious that God's agenda any given session is different from the one you had created.

Pray for your personal sanctification: Are we open to experiencing change in our own lives as we lead others? We need to realize that transforming process first applies to us as leaders! Pray that we can be as transparent as appropriate in sharing how God is sanctifying us. Philippians 3:10-14

Pray for your women in advance & through the life of your group. Pray for the Lord's wisdom to know how to engage the variety of women that He places in your group—personalities, level of faith maturity, life season, background. Pray for them without ceasing: Before/During/After the time together.

BEFORE: Don't just have good intentions; be intentional. Our passion is to be like Him, all the while expecting **God** to do the transforming! Anticipate the work of the Holy Spirit. We get to watch God change both our own heart and the hearts of the women with which he has entrusted us.

- Do the lesson; meditate on the Scripture; answer the questions in advance!
- Ask the Lord to apply the Truths of the study to your own heart.
- Ask the Lord to guide you in facilitating questions about specific Scriptural truths and questions.
- Identify key questions and teachings to prioritize during the discussion time. The goal is to process & to apply the teaching, not to get through all the questions. Women's hearts trump the questions. Scripture-centered discussion makes ministry and Bible study small groups unique. Are we listening to God speak to our hearts? Or merely accumulating knowledge?
- For an effective time of prayer, plan for it as much as for the discussion.

- **PRAYER CONTENT:** If you want an effective prayer time, guide it toward prayer requests that relate to applying the teaching discussed, about growing to reflect Christ, about challenges to being transformed. Identify discussion questions that you can pray about.
- **PRAYER LOGISTICS:** Will you open it up or ask individuals to pray? (not newcomers). Prayer requests, yes or no? Written or aloud? How can you share requests and still have time to pray? Do you need updates on previous prayers?

DURING: For optimum effectiveness in your role, think of the small group leader as a FACILITATOR rather than as a teacher. But BE THE LEADER! What's that mean?

- Arrive ahead of time. Start on time. Sticking to your time schedule gives the group security, relaxing them. STOP at the announced time. It's ok for people to stay and talk after, but not ending on time will discourage attendance, causing members feel awkward for having to leave for other commitments. Assign a time-keeper if it's helpful.
- Create a welcoming, safe, non-judgmental environment for your group.
- Allow for flexibility to lead the discussion as God shows you
- Create a confidential climate, a safe environment. From this Vegas gal, "What happens in small group STAYS in small group."
- Lead with authenticity and vulnerability. Take notice of ways He is transforming you & share them. Note: Authenticity is different from venting!
- Let group members answer; don't answer all the questions. (but it's ok to answer some!)
- Listen actively, i.e. eye contact, body language, nodding
- Respond graciously and with sensitivity.
- Encourage discussion and openness; draw out sharing. Affirm and briefly respond to anyone who shares, especially if it is a personal experience shared, using her name. Keep it about her & about God. For example: Thank you; that was powerful/ I can really see how God has been working in that situation/ Great insight. / Good point./ I hadn't thought of it like that/ Now that's something to think about, etc.
- If someone has been very transparent, vulnerable, or emotional, respond with a compassionate affirmation. It may make sense to stop discussion to have someone pray specifically just for her.
- Guide the discussion to stay on track; guard against poor use of time.
- Include as many of the group members as possible in the discussion. We don't want to embarrass quiet members, but draw them out. If you have talkative, dominant group members, call on the quiet ones by name periodically.
- "I don't know" is an acceptable answer. Solutions? Ask everyone to research before the next small group time; have a volunteer research or even ask a pastor/elder for clarification; postpone that discussion until you are able to look into the answer.
- In blogs.thegospelcoalition.org, one author notes: "A good leader will be sensitive to the mood of the group, discerning whether there is hurt, confusion, sadness, or frustration that needs to be addressed. Don't just play traffic cop. Be a shepherd."
- Confirm any next small group details before closing. **End on time.** Period!

AFTER:

- Follow up on any extra info needed for unanswered, "I don't know" questions.
- Reflect on how you were personally transformed through this small group time; evaluate if you need to change up any of these elements in future groups: environment, helper teams, logistics, prayer time, discussion approach, agenda, absences, group growth, resources, etc.
- Pray & rejoice over the results God will provide through the teaching & the interaction.

A small group that is intentional about biblical truths presented is a place where God can do His work in us & through us. His Word penetrates our hearts (Heb 4:12), transforming us so we glorify Him. In a small group, we get to see God not only working in our own life, but working in the lives of others. We get to grow up together, rejoicing that God will continue to transform us long after the group has ended.

—Teri Anderson