

Leading a Small Group: Planning Your Group Session

Several questions may come to mind as you plan the group session:

- What elements should I include in the group this week?
- How long will I spend on each element, such as the lesson, prayer, fellowship, etc.?
- How can I best structure the group session to meet the needs of those in the group?

Think about a small group you liked. **What made it enjoyable?** Your leader probably did some fun things to help members get to know each other. You might have spent time praying. You studied the Bible.

Think through these issues as you determine what to include in each group session:

- What is the purpose of this group?
- What are the needs of the group?
- What are you trusting God to do in this group?
- How does this specific group session fit your overall purpose?

In light of your conclusions, select elements for this group time that will help facilitate your purpose and objectives. After you've selected the elements, determine the time allotment for each element.

Let's consider a small group that has been together for only 5 weeks. Many of the women know each other from the soccer team. The group leader decided the group session would include a time for interaction with each other (15 minutes), time in the Word (35 minutes), a prayer time (5 minutes) and announcements (5 minutes).

What might happen in each of these four sections?

1. **Interaction with each other** (15 minutes)--This is **relationship-building time**. It may include icebreakers or some other form of sharing time or fellowship.

A relationship building time is critical for any group, even if group members know each other. The leader can use a question, or icebreaker, that will help everyone get to know each better. It's important the leader choose an activity that fits into the time allotted for fellowship.



Icebreakers can run long. If you don't watch it, your group will be one big icebreaker. This isn't all bad at times, but it might communicate to some in your group that you don't value the lesson portion of the your group meeting very much. Maybe they'll think it isn't worth the time to come. You're better off guiding the discussion and planning ahead so you can control the length of the icebreaker.

Caution

Never underestimate the importance of creating an atmosphere where people feel at home. Icebreakers or other relational interaction are great for this, and you'll find that food always helps.

Food is power, they say. It communicates to your group that you went out of your way for them. It also makes people feel more comfortable. Jesus taught 90 percent of the time in the context of a meal.

Jessica's Snapshot

I wasn't a Christian when I was invited to my first Bible study. My leader brought cookies to that first group. The next week I came back primarily for the cookies and they kept me coming. I guess you could say God used cookies to lead me to Christ (indirectly, of course).

Tom's Snapshot

My discipleship group at Auburn University included four young men--Paul, Hank, John and Matt. Each week we took turns bringing "the goods"--the pop and junk food of choice. Food always brings a sense of community ... especially IBC Root Beer in bottles.

2. **Interaction with the Word** (35 minutes)--This is when the group studies and applies God's Word together.

Most leaders see this as the real meat of the group. Interaction with the Word is central, but sometimes the other sections of the group time make the time in the Word come alive.

3. **Interaction with God** (5 minutes)--spending time praying. As a group grows together, prayer increases in importance.

A relatively new group usually won't feel comfortable praying together. So, you can share briefly about prayer, discussing why we pray or how to pray. Give them time to warm up to group prayer. You could pray for the group meeting and maybe ask a more mature member to pray at the end of the meeting. In the appendix you'll find some ideas on how to teach your group to pray.

Some groups, even though they are made up of young believers, enjoy sharing prayer requests with each other. This helps the group bond together and helps their faith grow as they see God's answers. The prayer time might become the



group's favorite time.

4. **Information about upcoming activities** (5 minutes)--This helps them know what's happening in the movement in order to meet new people and build bonds.

In this portion you communicate any details about events going on during the next week or two--the campus weekly meeting, any upcoming activities in the movement, clarify the meeting time for the next week. You might suggest someone bring the goodies or get a volunteer to help with an icebreaker. You should always include a teaser for next week's topic, to motivate them to come back. For example, "Next week we're going to look at what to do when we blow it in our Christian life" or, "Next week I'd though we'd look at biblical guidelines for dating."

Each ingredient helps produce an effective small group, but they won't always be exhibited to the same degree each time your group meets.

An older group might spend more time in the Word and in prayer than a younger group. These examples aren't perfect models because there is no "right" combination of elements. Rather, the leader must make each group session fit the purpose and needs of the group. Sometimes the sessions won't always work out like you planned.

Gladys' Snapshot

There are times when the women in my Bible study are really struggling or discouraged. On days like this sometimes we spend more time sharing prayer requests and encouraging each other to trust God. When I take time to meet their needs, it shows I care about them. The women really appreciate these times.

The crucial point in planning your group time is to wisely structure each element to help meet the needs of your group members. A staff member or veteran group leader can help you make good choices in this regard.

Note: The InterActa small group leader's guides have a built in tool to help group leaders allocate their time for each lesson.

