

Leading a Small Group: Ten Suggestions for the First Group Meeting

The first group meeting is a crucial one. People will sometimes decide whether or not they will return based on this meeting. It is also a unique meeting, since sometimes group members are unfamiliar with each other, you, where to meet, etc. Don't be surprised if your first meeting takes a lot of energy and time to get going. It's worth it to take the time to make it a success.

Here are some ideas that will help you start off well.

1. **Visit every potential group member prior to the meeting.** If you can't visit everyone, a phone call is much more effective than a note. Take time to be personal on the phone, they need more than just a, "Show up tomorrow night at 8." When you drop by, establish a more personal relationship by asking them about the photos on their bookshelves, the posters on their walls, their major, their family, or how their week has been. Help them see their need to be in a group by asking what they want out of this Bible study. And lastly, give them the details of the group: Make sure they know when and where you'll be meeting. Write it out.
2. **Take care of all the details regarding the environment--i.e. the room, time, lighting, etc.**
3. **Be there early to welcome everyone and introduce people to each other.** Work like a dog on remembering names.
4. **Be enthusiastic, regardless of the turnout.** There's no sense slamming the people who didn't come for the sake of those who did. If only one or two people come, you may have to alter your plan and overview some of the material you wanted to cover. Be positive and ask them if they know of anyone else who might be interested. Tell them you are really looking forward to the Bible study.

Laura's Snapshot

My first group meeting met in my dorm. Five women were expected to attend, but only one woman showed up. She came every week after that. Eventually she asked me to be her roommate. During that time she accepted Christ. We became great friends and are still close today. She nearly died in a train accident during our college years and her faith grew through her recovery. Today she is married, a teacher, and a bold witness for Christ.

5. **Choose content that will meet needs in the group and can be done in a short time period.** Be sure it's non-controversial and easy to teach. You may not want



to have a "lesson" the first meeting, preferring to spend all the time getting to know one another. However, some people might be coming to your group to just check it out, and they expect some time in the Word. If you decide to include content in your first group meeting, discuss some of the biblical principles for growing in faith or for being in a small group.

6. **Be careful to plan the actual group time.** Give yourself extra time for flexibility so you end on time. You don't want to run long the first group. You might plan your first group something like this:

Sample Schedule for Your First Meeting

Introduce yourself. Be personable and real.	5 minutes
Pray. You do it. Keep it short.	1 minute
Have each member introduce themselves.	5 minutes
Icebreaker.	20 minutes
Communicate purpose of your group time.	5 minutes
Content.	15 minutes
Introduce the material, cover details.	5 minutes

7. **DON'T put people on the spot.** You can make people feel awkward by asking for their testimony or asking them to pray when they aren't prepared to do either. Depending on your group, you can also have some strange conversations which aren't appropriate for the group if you ask too much. Ask safer questions.

Dan's Snapshot

I was leading a Bible study and early on I asked each guy to share his testimony. The first said, "A friend and I were getting high on my front porch when I was in high school. The wind wasn't blowing at all, but I looked up in this tree and saw a small section of leaves moving back and forth, so I knew there must be a God." I moved on to the next guy, hoping for something better. He said, "I was at a Christian retreat (this looked a little more promising) and was at a dance. There was a girl I liked but she dogged me. I cried and ran down to the lake. I looked up in the sky and said, 'God, if you're up there, give me a sign.' At that moment a shooting star went across the sky." I looked at him and said nothing. I looked at the last guy with little hope, and he said, "Well, mine is nothing like that. I was at a youth conference and the speaker asked us to come up front to receive Christ, so I went up front and asked Christ into my life." I was sure glad that last guy came through.



8. **Don't blow people away with your big words, big dreams or spirituality.** If you start your freshman group with a lecture on how this group is going to reach the world, you might not have a group left.

Lori's Snapshot

I was holding the second meeting of a new Bible study with some women at Louisiana Tech. In the first meeting I had told the girls they could pay for their Bible study books at the next meeting. One of the girl's first visit to the group was at the second meeting. She arrived late just as the girls were passing their three dollars for the books to me. The meeting time ended and as this girl left she pressed a couple dollar bills into my hand and said, "Thank you." I guess she thought we had just collected an offering.

9. **Be real.** Share with the group some of your own journey with the Lord--your ups and downs along the way. Put yourself in their shoes. Remember, they probably don't know what to expect, so make them feel at ease.

Kelli's Snapshot

Jeanine led the Bible study I was in at Michigan State. The first meeting was fun, but she just wasn't clicking with us during our second meeting. Jeanine had been so intent on teaching the Bible that she hadn't taken time to listen to what we were saying, so we didn't share personal stuff. Plus she wasn't really telling us much about herself.

The next time we met she began the group by talking about some of the fears she experienced the first time she was in a small group Bible study. I could relate to how she hid her Bible on the way to her first Bible study and how she'd always explain to her friends that she was going to study at the library. Jeanine's honesty broke the ice. One girl told them about how her older sister had always warned her to stay away from anything religious. Another girl talked about her doubts about the Bible's truthfulness, something I thought about sometimes.

That Bible study helped me get a lot of my questions answered because Jeanine took the time to be vulnerable.

10. **Ask people to come each week.**

You might say something like, "You know, one of the things I'm looking forward to about this group is getting to know each other. If seven of us are here one week and four different people the next, we'll never develop a sense of unity, and we'll never get to know each other. I'll be here every week and hopefully everyone will be able to make this time a priority so we can get to know each other."

Follow up with each person later and ask if they think they can attend the group regularly. Give them room to say "no," but encourage them.



Judy's Snapshot

I led a group in my sorority in which we asked at our meeting who would be interested in a Bible study--about fifteen girls said "yes." The biggest frustration was that we average three or four each time and they were different people every time. Also, people used to hide on the day of Bible study to avoid me. (By the way, I did the same thing a few years before--hide when I was in my first group.

What to Do After Your First Group Meeting

- Take some time to **thank God for your group and the meeting time.**
- Try to **drop by and see each member sometime before the next meeting** to get to know them better and get feedback. You might do something social, but don't force yourself on them. Let them know you care about them as a person.
- For the first couple weeks **remind your group about the meeting a day or so before.** This can easily be done with a short phone call. After a couple of weeks it will be in their schedule.

A Word of Encouragement

Doesn't it seem like there are a million details to starting a small group? Well, you're right. There is a lot of stuff to think about, to plan, to implement. The things talked about in this lesson are the ideals of helping you get a group together. **You can't do everything and things do go wrong.** You may run overtime your first meeting or mess up someone's name five times. The conversation might go off on weird tangents. **Just relax.**

Everything doesn't have to be perfect. Trust the Lord, care about your people, and give it your best.

