

Leading a Small Group Discussion

1. Prepare

Work through the materials and think yourself into your group meeting.

2. Pray

Pray before your group meeting.

3. Don't talk too much

Your job is to get people thinking and talking and keep the discussion moving from member to member rather than talking to the members.

4. Be A Good Listener

So simple yet so hard to do. Don't just listen to what people are saying – actively listen. The best leaders listen with their eyes and ears.

4. Don't Answer Your Own Questions

The whole purpose of asking the question is to create an environment where group members feel safe to share. It's not about getting the right answer. When people are silent with some of these questions, embrace the silence: this might be where the introverts are thinking and the Holy Spirit is speaking!

5. Encourage Responses

If no one really speaks you could say something like, "Paul, you look like you were going to say something..."

6. Ask Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions help group members to say more than a simple yes or no. Use 'what?' or 'how?' questions to get people to open up.

7. Try To Involve Everyone

Your group might be too big if everyone isn't able to speak their thoughts. Groups of over eight members will have difficulty doing this. In those cases, it might be best to divide the group into smaller groups for some of the time.

8. Keep the Main Thing, the Main Thing!

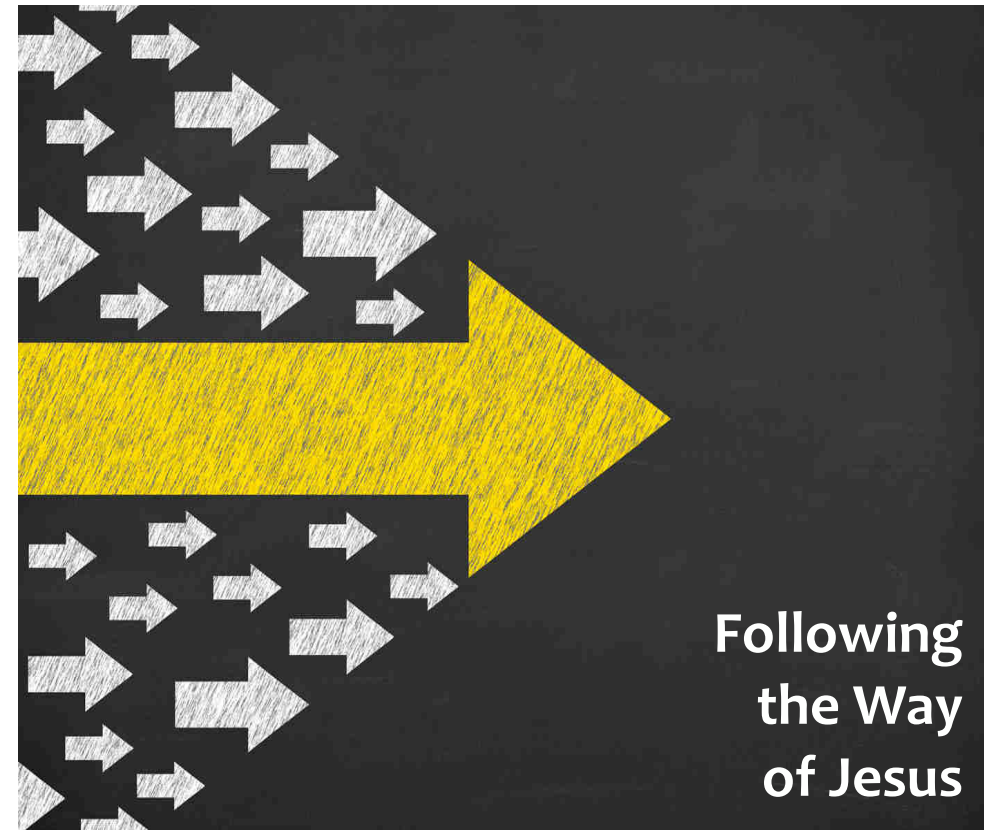
Remember, the focus is not on getting through the material and you may not cover all the questions. If the discussion is fruitful then allow group members the time they need to discuss, process, and grow with the information.

9. Manage the Time

Keep an eye on the clock. Don't let things get bogged down in interesting but irrelevant discussion. Bring things back on track and take the initiative to move things on when it feels right.

10. Leave time for application.

Make sure people have time to think about the difference that this discussion will have in their daily 'frontline' lives.



Discussion Guides for Small Groups

3. Following the Way of Jesus: Transformation

Read: John 3:1-21

Key Text:

Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.

Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You [plural] must be born again.'

(John 3:5-7 NLT).

WAY IN

- 1. If someone who knew you described you as a 'Born Again Christian', what do you think they would mean by it - and how would you react to being described in that way?

DISCUSS

- 1. Jesus is very insistent that the need to be born again applies to everyone (see 3, 5). Why do some people who think of themselves as Christians shy away from the idea of being born again?

- 2. Nicodemus clearly can't grasp what Jesus means (4,9). What different ideas are conveyed by the idea of being 'born again'?

- 3. Jesus says that being born again is a work of God's Holy Spirit (6-8): it is something that God does *for* and *to* us. How have people in the group experienced being 'born again'?

- 4. In verse 6 we read 'the Spirit gives birth to spirit (spiritual life)? Imagine that you were writing an entry in a Christian Dictionary. How would you define 'spiritual life'?

- 5. We are reborn by the Spirit, but we do have a part to play: what is it? (v 14, 15 and see 1:12,13).

It seems that to 'believe in' Jesus is the same thing as 'receiving' Jesus (1:12). If you were talking to a non-Christian friend, how would you explain how to 'receive Jesus'?

- 6. Read verses 13-18. What do these verses tell us about:

- I. Jesus?
- II. God?
- III. The human race (us!)?

WAY OUT

What would it look like to get up tomorrow morning, 'born again' by the Spirit of God?

After a time of sharing, pray for one another.

Commentary Notes

Jesus, however, says that there is a new prerequisite to see or enter this kingdom. "No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again [Gk. *anōthen*]." *Anōthen* can either mean "again" or "from above," and it is clear from the other uses in John's Gospel that the latter sense ("from above") is John's usual meaning (3:31; 19:11, 23).

The transformation offered to Nicodemus also opens the question of the nature of true religion. That is, religion is not necessarily a matter of personal knowledge or ethical behaviour. Nor is it fidelity to religious traditions, no matter how virtuously they evoke higher ethical, religious behaviour among us. Jesus is claiming that true spirituality is not discovering some latent capacity within the human soul and fanning it to flame. It is not uncovering a moral consciousness that is hidden by sedimentary layers of civilization's corruptions. Nor is it inspiring aesthetic qualities that promote society in its finest form. It is not a "horizontal" experience that takes up the materials available around us in the world. Rather, Jesus claims, true religion is "vertical." It has to do not with the human spirit, but with God's Spirit. It is a foreign invasion, sabotage of the first order. True religion unites humanity with God's powerful Spirit, who overwhelms, transforms, and converts (in the full meaning of the word) its subject. Our role in this transformation is belief (3:16, 18), and yet it is a belief that is aided by God's work within us since we live in the darkness and have our spiritual capacities handicapped by sin.

Burge, Gary M.. John (The NIV Application Commentary Book 4) . Zondervan. Kindle Edition.