

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!

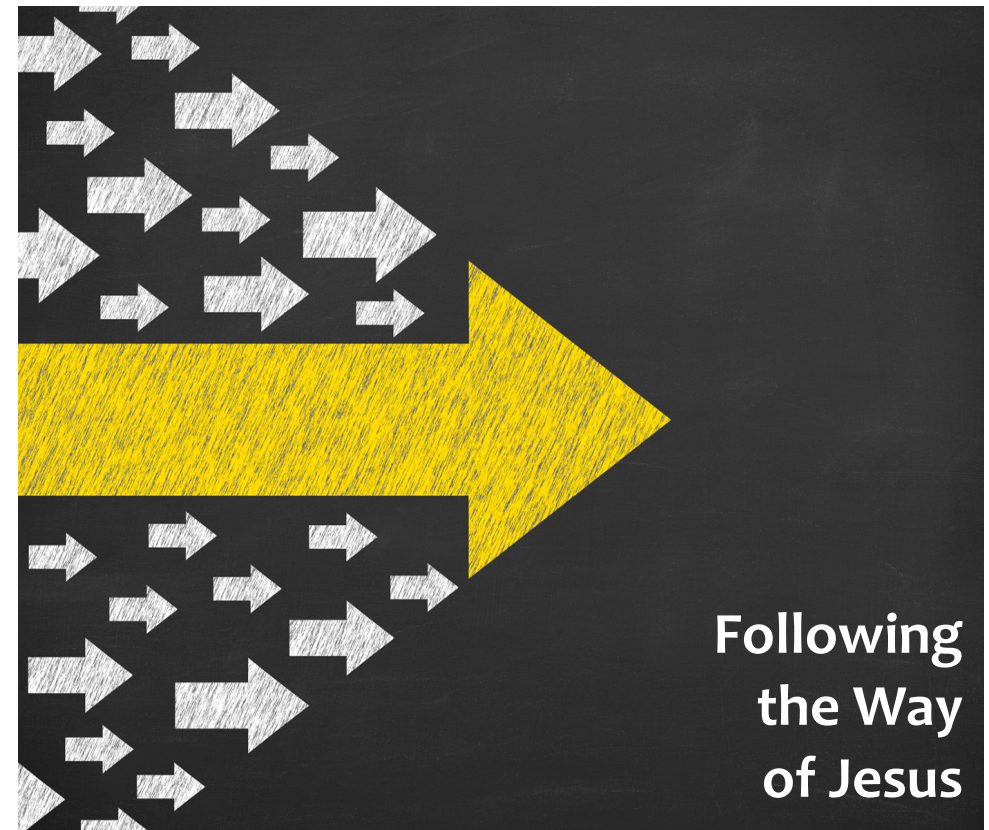
Remember, the focus is not on getting through the material and you may not cover all the questions. If the discussion is fruitful then allow group members the time they need to discuss, process, and grow with the information.

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

5. Following the Way of Jesus: The Way of Trouble

WAY IN

What are the things that have made people happy this week? or.. Can anyone think of something that happened to them that made them rejoice?

Read Matthew 5:11-16

Key Text: Matthew 5:11,12

11 'Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

DISCUSS

1. See Luke 21:16,17 for similar warnings about the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. Why do you think Jesus spells this out, as part of his 'induction course' for new disciples?

Would you have found it helpful or unhelpful to have had this said to you when you were coming to faith?

2. What commands does Jesus give in Matt 5:12?

How do the two reasons he gives for rejoicing (v 12b and v12c) help us obey the commandment to 'rejoice and be glad'?

3. Why does some level of opposition or persecution come with the territory of Christian discipleship? (see John 15:18-20).
4. "Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets". (Luke 6:26). Why can it be a bad sign if people think well of Jesus' disciples?
5. If you were responsible for nurturing a new Christian, how would you go about explaining this theme of opposition and trouble, to them?

6. In Matthew 5:13-16 Jesus tells his persecuted disciples that they should be salt for the earth, and light for the world. Why is their witness even more powerful when it comes out of persecution?

WAY OUT

What kinds of 'trouble' might people expect this week, for living as a disciple of Jesus?

How can you support one another?

Pray for one another.

Commentary Notes: Matthew 5:11-12

Here persecution takes the form of verbal abuse in addition to physical pursuit. The use of "vilify" and "say every kind of evil thing against you" magnifies the verbal abuse. So too does "every kind of." "Lying" qualifies the verbal abuse to ensure that it's undeserved. "On account of me" has the same purpose but qualifies physical pursuit as well as verbal abuse, corresponds to "on account of [disciples'] righteousness" in 5:10, and thus points to Jesus as the one whose teaching produces righteousness in those who obey it. The command to "Rejoice and be glad" underlines the coming good fortune of those who suffer such abuses undeservedly. "Your reward" defines the good fortune as deserved, in contrast with the abuses. Since the meek "will inherit the earth" (5:5), "in heaven" doesn't mean you'll get your reward when you go to heaven. It means, rather, that your reward is already packaged in heaven, so to speak, and only awaits delivery when the reign of heaven fully takes hold on earth. "Much" describes the reward as quite sufficient to compensate even for the saying of "every kind of evil thing against you." The similarity between the way people persecuted the Old Testament prophets and the way Jesus' disciples are persecuted supplies the reason "your reward in heaven [is] much." You're being persecuted no less than and no differently from those ancient prophets, and you don't doubt that their reward is much.

On Matthew 5:16: The light of the sun is visible to all throughout the world. A city situated on a mountaintop is visible to all in the vicinity. And the light of a lamp placed on a lampstand is visible to all in the house. Despite the threat and actuality of persecution, Jesus says, you must behave as a disciple out in the open, where your discipleship is visible. No hiding it to save your neck.

Gundry, Robert H.. Commentary on Matthew, Kindle Edition.