

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!

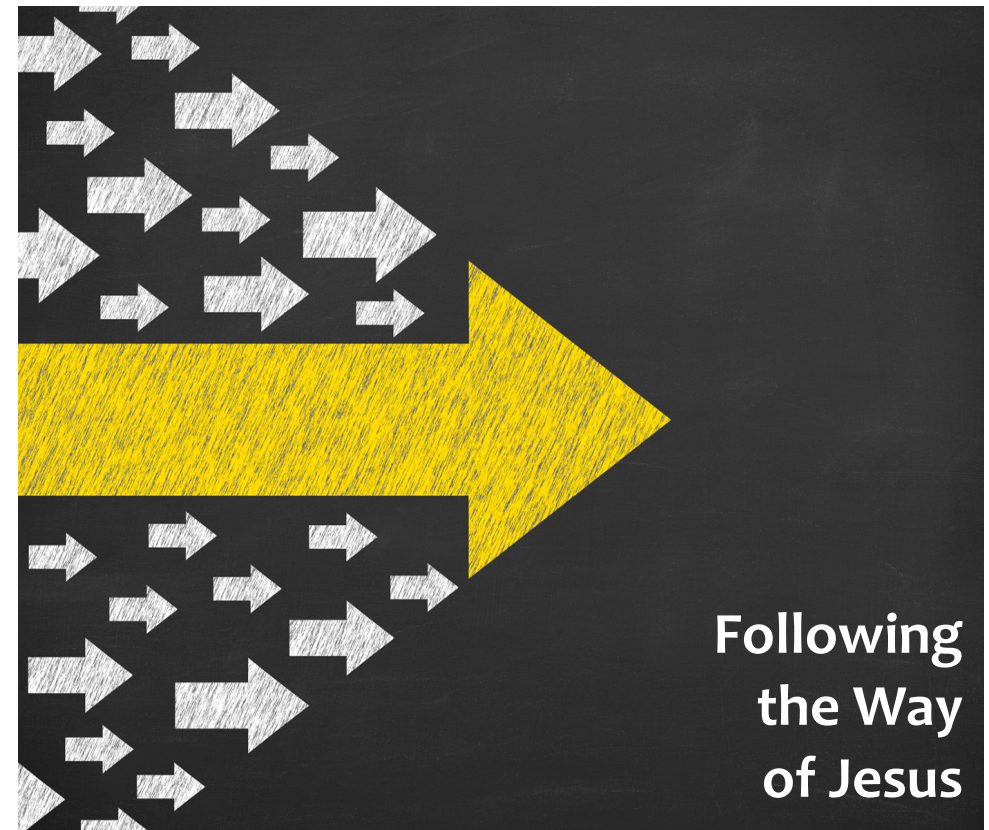
Remember, the focus is not on getting through the material and you may not cover all the questions. If the discussion is fruitful then allow group members the time they need to discuss, process, and grow with the information.

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

11. Following the Way of Jesus: The Way of Community

WAY IN

Ask each person to say what the best thing is about belonging to a family. And also, what is the most challenging.

Read John 13 (see point 1 below)

Key Text: John 13:34

34 I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'

DISCUSS

1. Jesus gives the disciples a new commandment (v34). In one sense it was an old one (see Leviticus 19:18): what made it new was the quality of love (as I have loved you). Take time to read John 13 right through. You might like to have different people read the roles of Jesus, Peter and John (v25).

- Having read the whole passage, how had

Jesus just shown his love for his disciples?

- In the light of your discussion so far, what, practically, does it mean to 'love one another *as Jesus has loved us*'?

2. Jesus said that this kind of love would be the test of authentic disciples to those looking on (v35).

- How does this work?! How does the authentic love of Christian community (church) 'speak' to those who are on-lookers? Can you think of any examples?

3. How does 1 John 3:16-17 help us understand what it means to love one another?

4. What other things - apart from love - can people point to in order to 'prove' that they are a Christian?

- What does 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 have to say?

5. If verses 34, 35 tell us about the real nature of 'church', how would you respond to someone who says, 'you don't have to go to church to be a Christian'?

WAY OUT

What is each person taking away from this group discussion? Anything that people intend to act on?

Pray for one another.

Commentary Notes: John 13:1-34

Jesus' decision to wash his disciples' feet is anchored in his assurance of his relationship with God (13:3). He knows both his origins and his destiny and as such understands the authority he has been given. This gives him the courage to do something his followers never expected. Footwashing was commonplace in Greco-Roman and first-century Jewish culture and appears as a ritual of daily cleansing, as a religious act (such as washing the hands and feet in hot water before Sabbath), or as a token of hospitality when someone first entered a home. When done by a wife (for her husband), a child (for his/her parents), or a pupil (for his teacher), it was always an act of extreme devotion. But since it was an act with social implications, in no way do we find those with a "higher" status washing the feet of those beneath them. When Jesus "takes off his outer clothing" and wraps a towel around himself (13:4), he is adopting the posture of a slave.

The "new commandment" mentioned in 13:34-35 is also explained in 15:12-17. That the disciples are to love one another is nothing new (Lev. 19:18). That they are to love each other with the sort of love modeled by Jesus is something dramatic. Love characterizes Jesus' relationship with God (14:31), and love characterizes God's relationship with Jesus (3:35; 15:9-10). Jesus' love is manifested in his obedience to the Father's will ("the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me," 14:31). Therefore disciples are to reflect the sort of love known to Jesus—a love expressed through committed obedience. "As I have loved you" points to Jesus' most immediate act of love (the footwashing) and means that to truly love another, we must pursue a life of servanthood and sacrifice.

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