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THE COMMUNITY

Leading A Small Group | PLANNING YOUR GROUP SESSION

What Do I Need to Know?

Several questions may come to mind as you plan the group session: What elements should I include in the group this week? How long should 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. You might have gone somewhere together as a group. 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 this 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 five weeks. Many of the women know each other from the soccer team. The group leader decides the group session would include a time for interaction with each other (15 minutes), time in the Word (35 minutes), prayer (5 minutes) and announcements (5 minutes). What might happen in each of these four sections?

Components of a Small Group Meeting

1. Interaction with each other.
This is relationship-building time. It may include icebreakers or some other form of sharing time or fellow- ship. A relationship building time is crucial 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 other better. It's impor- tant for the leader to choose an activity that fits into the time allotted for fellowship. Chapter 6 discusses

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the importance of building relationships within the group and gives many specific icebreakers and ideas for group interaction.

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.

2. Interaction with God's Word.
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 session make the time in the Word come alive. Write down your answers to 2 and 3 at the start of the lesson. This will help you focus your questions and allocate your time around the key objectives of the study.

3. Interaction with God in prayer.
Spend time praying. As a group grows together, prayer increases in importance. A 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.
This lets your group know what's happening in the ministry so they'll have opportunities to meet new people. 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 ministry, 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 we'll 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: 60 percent interac- tion with God's Word, 20 percent interaction with each other, 15 percent interaction with God, 5 percent information about upcoming activities.

These examples aren't perfect models because there is no "right" combination of elements. The leader must make each group session fit the purpose and needs of

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the group. Sometimes the sessions won't always work out like you planned. 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 wise choices.

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