



# Leading a Small Group

---

## Exploring the Bible Starter Pack



# Welcome

---

This Starter Pack has been put together in the hope of encouraging Focal Ministers to begin or refresh small Bible study groups. It does not provide all of the answers, but it does suggest some questions to ask and some things to consider when starting a group. It also offers some practical tips and ideas for content.

Please do try and share out the leadership of, and preparation for, the sessions. Please don't expect to have all of the answers, but do be willing to be a role model for lifelong learning and try and find them out together. Also, each person who comes along will have something to teach and so try out different approaches and styles of learning to make the sessions as accessible as possible for all.

Most importantly, pray, grow closer to God and have fun!





# Who and why?

---

- Who is the group for?
- Has a particular group requested some particular learning?
- Or is this a more general invitation?
- If there is a general invitation, who isn't coming and why?
- Are people sure they are welcome?
- Have people been asked what they would like to study?
- Does the group have a particular aim? (Simple curiosity is fine!)
- Is it part of a wider programme of learning; sermon series etc.?
- Is it in response to an event or issue?





# What?

---

Be guided here by what the people coming to the group want to study. There are many published study-guides available, or any number of different possibilities to try out for yourselves:

- Looking at a book (or sections of it) of the Bible (e.g. Genesis, Luke, 1 Corinthians)
- Looking at people in the Bible (e.g. Moses, Mary, Peter)
- Encounters with Jesus (e.g. Woman by the Well, Zacchaeus, Saul)
- Parables of Jesus (e.g. Wedding Banquet, Sower, Prodigal Son)
- Major themes (e.g. Poverty, Creation, Law and Grace)
- Studies of words (e.g. Salvation, Faith, Hope)
- Famous passages (e.g. Sermon on the Mount, Psalm 23, Jesus the True Vine)
- Prayers in the Bible (e.g. Psalm 51, the Lord's Prayer, the Magnificat)
- Places in the Bible (e.g. gardens, hills, lakes)







# Where and when?

---

- Does the place we will be meeting in have water, a kettle and toilet?
- Is the lighting, heating and seating comfortable?
- Is it accessible by public transport?
- Is it convenient for most people or just me?
- Is the place accessible to those with different physical needs?
- Can everyone see, hear and participate when they are inside?
- Has a risk assessment been done?
- Does everyone know what time it will start and finish and have we discussed how will we make sure we stick to these?
- Are we excluding anyone by the timing of the session e.g. those who work, have family commitments or don't like to come out at night, and can we make a repeat session available if so?





# Prayer to begin

---

It is always a good idea to pray!

If you are leading the group then please do pray about how you are going to facilitate the session, methods and materials you will be using, and how this will serve those present.

If you have time to do so before the session begins, pray into the space that people will be welcomed in to.

It is also good to begin and end sessions with prayer. Where possible, if they want to, ask the different members of the group to do this in turn.

Remember people have different preferences in prayer, just as they do in learning: some will like spontaneous prayer, others will want time to prepare; some will like open prayer, others will prefer to provide a written liturgy; some will like to include some music, others some silence; some will like videos, others will want to light a candle. Hopefully, you will get a good mixture.





# Translations of the Bible

---

It is good if people can bring along different translations of the same text so that you can compare them. Get people to read from the different versions and notice how some words are translated differently and different emphasis is used. What questions do the different versions raise as we listen with modern ears?

- NRSV – a good academic translation
- NIV – a good evangelical translation
- Jerusalem – a good catholic translation
- Message – uses modern language and tone
- Dramatized – allows different members of the group to play different parts
- King James Version – traditional language can evoke a different response

It is also a good idea to have a study Bible and commentary to hand (either physical or online) to look for the answers to the questions that will be raised!



Word





# Things to be aware of

---

## **Yourself**

Be aware of your own preferences and agenda and try not to let that dominate. You may have something pressing on your mind, but try and put the needs of the group first and meet people where they are. Try to be aware of what pleases and annoys you and respond after reflecting, rather than reacting in the moment.

## **Individuals**

Some may be extrovert and others introvert; some may be confident, others shy; some may have a lot of knowledge from books, some may have a lot of experience of life; some may be certain, others unsure; each will bring a different history, talents and hurts. God loves them all.



## **Groups**

Some groups get on really well right away, whilst others take time to settle in. Try to include everyone in discussions, leaving space for the quieter ones and protect that space from the more dominant members. Try to notice and avoid getting into unhelpful assumptions and patterns of behaviour.

## **God**

It is easy to become anxious if you are leading, or have prepared more material than the group seems to have time for. Remember who is in charge! The opening worship should set the compass in the right direction, but try and create other times of silence or open reflection to listen to God. If things seem to be taking things in a different direction to what you had planned, don't be afraid to try and discern whether it is the Holy Spirit at work, and if so, to pray, and see where it leads.



# Preparation

---

- Take it in turns to lead if possible. Perhaps in pairs. This lightens the load and keeps things fresh.
- Read the passage or the session at the beginning of your prayer time for a week or so
- Pray for God's guidance.
- Think of the people in the group and ask what they might want and need.
- Agree together the shape or approach the next session will take.
- Do some research using a study Bible, commentaries and concordances. If you do not have access to these the diocesan website has some great information and links:



[www.sheffield.anglican.org/](http://www.sheffield.anglican.org/)

Think about what useful resources you could bring to the group; maps, artwork, poems etc. and encourage other members to do the same.

Pray again!





# Creating a safe space for learning

---

As with all groups it is important to set some ground rules at the beginning. It is helpful therefore to make sure that you have a conversation about this at the first meeting. Things that you will want to consider will vary but may include:

- Phones on silent (unless on call or parents),
- Mutual respect,
- Respect for different traditions,
- Confidentiality,
- Equal contributions,
- Arrive on time,
- Listen to each other,
- There is no such thing as a silly question!
- Ask for help or time out if you need it,
- And it is also good to reiterate good safeguarding practice around disclosures.





# The 4 Ws

---

## Welcome



Welcome is about building the group into a community and focusing us on our lives outside church.

It's important that people feel welcomed and comfortable as they arrive, particularly for new people or with new groups. Please see separate card for Icebreaker ideas.

## Worship



A really good way to help us connect with worship is to keep it simple, comfortable and creative. Again, take it in turns. Please see separate card for worship ideas.





## **Word**

Please see separate cards for ideas for engaging with scripture.



## **Wonder**

This is a an opportunity to offer to God in prayer all of the things that have been discussed, and to wonder how the scripture that has been studied could make a difference to our lives, community and world.

# Icebreaker ideas

---

- Favourite season of the year
- Book you enjoyed
- Film you enjoyed
- A memorable holiday
- TV you like to watch
- Type of music you enjoy
- Food you like to eat
- Favourite school teacher
- Sport you like to play or watch
- A hobby you have or would like



Welcome







# Worship Ideas

---

- Read a psalm together or alternate verses.
- Light a candle and keep silence.
- Listen to some worship music or hymn on YouTube, CD etc.
- Write down all the things you are thankful for.
- Write down all the characteristics you can think of for God e.g. kind, loving, generous.
- Say the Lord's prayer together and leave a bit of silence after each line.
- Take it in turns to say a positive word from the Bible, pause after each e.g. Love, peace, Faith, Kindness.
- Everybody reads their own favourite Bible verse, pause after each.
- Sing a song together (if you are confident enough).
- Write a thank you letter to God, you don't have to share the contents.





# Prayer to end

---

- Ask each member if there is anything they would like prayer for
- Be sensitive to the fact that not everyone will want be vulnerable in this way
- After hearing prayer request of the group, each pray in silence
- After hearing prayer requests one person leads for the whole group
- After hearing prayer requests pray in 2s or 3s
- Write down prayers and place on a table people pick them up and pray them
- People say their requests and after each a tealight candle is lit and silence kept
- Pray openly or in silence using call and response e.g. Lord in your Mercy... Hear our prayer
- Spend some time listening to the Holy Spirit without asking for anything





# Approaches to Bible study

---

The next group of cards suggest different shapes and ways of doing Bible study.

## Finding out more

The diocese has produced a great set of resources about setting up small groups, some of which have been included in this pack. There is more though. The podcasts are well worth a listen, but please beware of the jokes...



[www.sheffield.anglican.org](http://www.sheffield.anglican.org)



Word





# Reflecting on the weekly readings

---

- Leader asks someone to read the previous Sunday's passage out loud (another person can read out a different version if available).
- Leader poses questions one at a time and each time the question is discussed in pairs (allowing quieter people to have a say!).
- Leader invites feedback from each pair if they wish to do so.
- Leader continues until all questions have been asked.
- NB questions can be made available by preacher via church news sheet, website or email or these questions can be used instead...
  - 'From this passage what do we learn about God?'
  - 'From this passage what do we learn about humanity?'
  - 'How will what we have found in this passage make a difference to our lives and the lives of those around us?'



Word







# Involving the senses

---

This method follows the Ignatian method of meditating on the scriptures, which recommends making full use of the senses. For example, if you are asking people to think about the feeding of the five thousand...

## Sight



What do all of those people gathered together look like? How are they gathered; in small groups or a big crowd? What can you see?

## Sound



What does it sound like? Is everyone talking at once or is it quiet? What other noises can be heard; animals, water, laughter? What can you hear?



Word



## **Taste**



What do the bread and fish taste like? Is the bread warm or cold, fresh or stale? What type of fish is it and how has it been cooked? Do you enjoy what you taste?

## **Feel**



Is the sun hot? Is there a breeze? What emotions are on display around you? Are people anxious or excited? Are they hungry for food or for knowledge? How do you feel?

## **Smell**



What sort of smells are around? Is there a breeze carrying odours from the markets, or farms or sea? What do all of those people gathered together smell like? What can you smell?

# Study – Response – Encounter – Action

---

This method is based upon the theory of Honey and Munford\* who proposed four distinct learning styles. Try moving from one perspective to another in a learning circle.

## Study

Theorists will want pay careful attention to the text and to be able to explore key questions. They will want to know about the big picture and context. They will like ideas and concepts that stretch them. They will want to test the validity of input and enjoy new learning things.

## Response

Pragmatists will prefer a devotional approach to the text. They will want explore their personal situation in light of scripture; moving beyond objective concepts to think about what it means for their everyday lives. They will enjoy thinking about the different sorts of responses they might make.



Word



## **Encounter**

Reflectors will enjoy a personal encounter with the text. They will want to explore what the scripture means for their own walk with God at a deep level. They may have an emotional reaction to the text, but will usually want some time alone to think about things before processing it with the rest of the group.

## **Action**

Activists will want to get to the point of what God, through scripture, is calling us to do. They learn by doing and can't wait to put learning into practice. They will be interested in exploring what we as individuals and church can be involved in as a result of their learning. This might be getting involved in issues or events.

**\*Honey, P. and Mumford, A., 1986.** The manual of *learning styles*. Maidenhead: P. **Honey**.

# Journey through the reading

---

## What do I bring with me?

- What luggage am I bringing on this journey?
- What bias and preconceptions, past experience and learning do I have 'in the bag'?
- What am I expecting to find?
- What hopes do I have?

## Mapping the passage

- Where does this passage sit within scripture as a whole?
- Where is it set in terms of a timeline of history?
- Where is it set geographically?
- Which parts of society are portrayed, and which are absent?



Word



## **Entering into the passage**

- What am I learning about the passage as I journey through it?
- What am I responding to with joy?
- What is making me feel uncomfortable?
- Do I want this part of the journey to go on forever or end?

## **Reflecting on the passage**

- What difference has journeying through the passage made to me?
- How do I now feel?
- Will I make any changes following the journey?
- Do I want to explore more?

# Other ideas

---

## Using images

Ask people to bring along images or objects that speak to them of the passage being considered and discuss.

## Using Art

Provide pens and paints, or clay or fabrics and ask people to express their response to the passage creatively.

## My Story Our Story

Read the passage and then invite participants to tell the story of a time something similar happened to them.



Word



## **Write a prayer**

Ask participants to write a prayer in response to the passage being studied and then, if people are willing, share them with the rest of the group.

## **Old Fashioned Lecture**

If a member of the group has a particular expertise, invite them to give a talk and then take questions and answers.

## **Word and Wonder**

Reflect on a passage and wonder what the world would look like if we truly took it to heart. Let your imagination run riot with radical visions of the Kingdom.