

# GETTING STARTED WITH PROXIMITY

## INTRODUCTION

Proximity is a series of small booklets providing relevant and challenging content for the context of relational discipleship. This resource is designed for one-to-one or small group conversations and provides biblical content and practical questions on a wide range of key discipleship themes. The 4 themes Proximity will explore are “Seasons of Life”, “Life in God’s Story”, “Rhythms of Devotion” and “Places of Mission.” Each series includes 6-8 sessions that dig into bible study, personal reflection and practical conversation.

## USING PROXIMITY

Proximity is designed to be distinct from regular small group material that leads people through a one-off conversation together. Instead, content is provided for people to read on their own, helping them to reflect themselves before they come to a conversation. There are 4 parts to each Proximity session, the first two of which are designed to be done alone.

### 1. Into the Theme

This is a brief synopsis of the topic and an opening blurb on the theme to get people thinking. It introduces the idea being explored in the session by placing it firstly within a life situation.

### 2. Into the Bible

The Bible is introduced through a passage to read, with participants encouraged to read the passage thoroughly, asking the Holy Spirit what He wants to reveal to them from His truth. Alongside this there is a short reflection on these words of Scripture, beginning to share application and challenge through that. Space is provided to write notes. It’s important to note that both these sections are meant to be completed on their own by the participant. Proximity will work best if participants come to the conversation having already engaged with the first 2 sections of the material. This aims to go further than spoon feeding people the answers, but aims to help teach people to reflect on God’s word for themselves. Having read the material before they meet together, participants then come with their thoughts, reflections or questions, and that’s where the conversation starts.

### 3. Into the Conversation

This section provides some questions to help guide or develop the conversation. Start by sharing together what stood out to you as you read. What truth was being revealed? What challenged you? Go around the group, giving each person a chance to speak. This should help remove awkward silences and allow the conversation to flow more freely. This is also the difference between a discipling relationship and a small group bible study. A small group focuses on finding the answer while a Proximity group starts with what biblical truth has been revealed and then focuses on how can that can be put into action. To help the conversation continue to flow, there are a series of trigger questions provided. These will help walk deeper into the content and should give the Proximity group leader some ammunition.

### 4. Into our Lives

This is a deliberate section at the end to attempt to apply the truth and to ground the conversation into people’s everyday lives and circumstances. This section is such an important part of the Proximity resource, helping people express specific actions that they can be held accountable to and prayed for. There are 3 R’s in this sections:

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RESPOND: One specific and practical action you would like to take as a result.

REACH OUT: What is a missional or outward implication to the theme?

READ FURTHER: A Bible passage to read to continue reflecting and learning.

After this, the participants are encouraged to take time to pray together and for one another.

### GETTING STARTED

So how can you start using it and how could you even take the first steps in developing your own Proximity group? There can be flexibility in how often you meet, but it should be regular. There can be diversity with group size, but it should be small enough to be relational. And there can be freedom in how you use the resource itself, but it should act as a good basis for a discipling conversation. However, here are some tips on how to develop a Proximity group:

#### 1/ Identify & Invite

Identify some people who you could invest in this way. Think about who has both appetite and availability for this. Invite these people to meet with you, beginning with a short term commitment such as “let’s meet for this term and see how it goes.” Pick a starting date, time and venue and invite people to come along. Give them the resource in advance so they can prepare for the first session.

#### 2/ Regular Routines

Decide on a routine for your group or mentoring. Your routine could be weekly over a short period of time, or fortnightly or monthly throughout the year to meet together. Making it the same time and venue helps it to become a regular routine in people’s lives and easy to schedule. Whatever routine works for you that will give consistency.

#### 3/ Start Well

Set the bar high from the very start and create a healthy culture such as encouraging reading beforehand, arriving on time, setting the tone as you begin the conversation, listening well to one another, being open in what you share about yourself and taking time to pray for one another. If you meet in a public place, that might affect the nature of your prayers, but still aim to pray. Making space to pray together is really important, as is following up on those things that have been prayed for. Try to connect with people outside the group. This is about whole-life discipleship rather than a programme so look for social opportunities, call people during the week, send an encouraging text message and most of all pray for them.

### PERSONAL TESTIMONIES

*“Proximity was the perfect tool that enabled honest, real & vulnerable conversations about God, His word & our lives. It pushed me to think, relate and apply the scripture to every part of my life and I always left our time together feeling excited about how this was going to change me.”*

*“I really liked it, mainly because it wasn’t over-complicated or theologically heavy. I love the emphasis not being on the resource as a booklet but as a relationship tool. I also liked the Into our Lives section. I’m a big fan of response, action and knowing what to do next.”*