



Leading an Evangelistic Small Group



Quick Start Guide 10

Leading an evangelistic small group involves many skills in common with leading other sorts of groups (see the other resources in this series) but there are some specific things to consider. If you are using a resource like Alpha or Christianity Explored there will also be more extensive notes to guide you.

Who is it for?

Think about who is going to come to the group. Are they young professionals, retired people, internationals, students, mothers from a 'mums and tots' group, a whole mixture? What amount of reading they will be comfortable with (if any!)? Where are they at in their understanding of Christianity? Then decide:

- What material is best to use (for example, some courses come in different versions for young people or people who prefer simple English) — see below for more things to think about when choosing the material
- When is best to meet (not always in the evening or when suits you best —when suits them?)
- Where is best to meet (some people might be put off by meeting in the church—others will be happy to)

'Off the shelf' or 'home grown' Bible study?

There are many evangelistic courses to choose from. For example, Alpha looks at various passages from around the New Testament, Christianity Explored and Christianity Explained look at Mark's gospel. You will need to think about what will work best for the group. This might mean preparing your own material (or adapting an 'off the shelf' course). Getting to Jesus is the heart of evangelism which means using a gospel account is often best. But depending on the group's background, you may need to start further back. For example, Genesis 1 to 3 could be a good starting point for people who have very little knowledge of Christianity. Don't get bogged down discussing evolution—it's about establishing that God made the world, the world is broken because we are alienated from God by sin (explain sin!) and we need Christ to reconcile us to God. In other words, answering the big questions: 'where did we come from?', 'what's wrong with the world?' and 'how can it be fixed?'

Some pointers for preparing your own evangelistic Bible study:

- Read the other resources in this series on preparing a Bible study but note also...
- Try to read the Bible passage as if you had never read it before and knew nothing about Christianity.
- What words need explained because we don't use them in normal conversation?
- What ideas or background do we need to explain to help make sense of the passage to modern ears?

Who will lead?

It might work better if you don't lead but stay in the background while someone who relates better to that group takes the 'up front' role. Whoever leads, it's always helpful to have some support—look for at least one co-leader (you may need more if they split into smaller groups) and go through the course material with them. Consider together what sort of questions might come up. Make sure your co-leaders know it doesn't help if they disagree with the answers you give to questions from the group! This is less likely to happen if you prepare well together.

Pray!

Get together with your co-leaders and pray. Ask others to pray. Pray over the preparation. Pray for the people coming. Pray for the practicalities. Pray for God to work in ways you couldn't even imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

Tell people it is happening!

Have it announced in church services. Make sure you tell people the time, location and what's expected of them. Tell people to invite their friends. Individual invitations are a far more effective approach. "We're running an Alpha Course in the Hotel. It's an introduction to practical Christianity. It runs for 8 weeks every Tuesday evening at 8 o'clock - would you like to come?" "We're looking at who Jesus is in the Bible. You won't be asked to sing or pray or read aloud or made to feel stupid. You can ask as many questions as you like, or just listen to what others have to say. We provide the Bibles too. Would you like to come?" (Providing Bibles means you all use the same version)

Be welcoming

Your welcome speaks volumes! Involve people with a gift of hospitality. Food that works in your context (a meal, biscuits, canapés, tea/coffee, etc.) and relaxed conversation before the study helps put people at ease. Part of your welcome is delivering on expectations. That means starting on time and finishing on time (group leaders should be there at least 15 minutes early to welcome people). God is in control and doesn't need you to keep people there for 30 minutes longer than you said. Make space for people who want to talk further. Remember that people coming to faith is a process—it rarely happens all in one night. It's normally more comfortable for non-Christians if there are more of them than Christians in the group.

As it's happening (see also the resource on 'Leading a Bible study')

- If necessary make sure you explain chapters and verses and where to find the passage—use page numbers.
- Let the Bible speak—make sure you ask 'what is the Bible saying here?'
- Listen, listen, listen—try to get in their shoes so you can understand how to guide them to Jesus
- Answer their questions (sometimes if this will take too long or if the question relates to only one person in the group it's better to arrange to talk afterwards or meet up at another time)
- Answer gently—aim to win the person not the argument (1 Peter 3:15). Look for the 'question behind the question' - it could be something very personal requiring a sensitive response.
- Point to Christ and not yourself (John 3:30) — you are not the 'guru' with all the intellectual answers on Christianity or a perfect person whose example they should follow—they need Jesus!
- Share testimony (briefly!) if it is appropriate as part of the discussion and allow co-leaders to share too.

Follow up

Have a plan in place for what happens next. Most people come to faith over a period of time. One course is often not enough. When people do come to faith then need to come to terms with what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and grow in their faith. Here's some pointers for effective follow up:

- Encourage new Christians and 'not yet Christians' who show an interest to go further to meet one-to-one with one of the leaders or someone else who is a mature Christian who is able to relate well to them
- Run a follow on course (for example, Discipleship Explored following Christianity Explored)
- Involve new believers in a home group/Bible study group where they will be encouraged and supported