



Walk in Love 3: Basic Beliefs
With Scott Gunn and Melody Shobe
Facilitators Guide

Tips for Leading Small Groups

Welcome

A Blessed Ministry

So you've been asked to lead the group...

Thank you for taking on the role of facilitator for this course. We hope this class will help you and your small group in your journey of faith. Your role as a small group leader is very important – but it's also something you don't do alone. You have the blessing and privilege of working alongside the Holy Spirit to help people grow. This is not to be underestimated. You will find that the Spirit wants us to draw near to God more than we do – and in taking on the responsibility to lead, you open yourself up to growth as well, often in unexpected ways.

And you don't have to be an expert. It doesn't take an advanced degree or an ordination certificate to run a successful small group. Willingness to lead and learn is all that's required.

We at ChurchNext are delighted to share this Facilitator's Guide with you; we've designed it for clergy and laypeople. We've written it to help familiarize you with the topic and to give you some ideas as to how you would like your small group to gather.

In the pages that follow we will offer you some pointers regarding group facilitation and conversation-starting. Feel free to make them your own. These are suggestions and are meant to be molded, adapted, or tossed out, depending on your context.

Thanks for learning with us,

The ChurchNext Team

©2015, ChurchNext

Facilitating

Begin your meeting by welcoming participants. Try to create an environment of warmth and hospitality. Successful small groups offer safe spaces for authenticity and depth, where people are not uncomfortable exploring personal convictions and intimate ideas. After all, we all long for genuine connection and camaraderie in our spiritual journeys. The entire group benefits when honesty and candor are welcome.

You may want to approach your meeting by dividing your time together into three equal or unequal segments. The first should be spent connecting – greeting, catching up. You may want to offer refreshments. The second segment should be devoted to covering the material in the course, and the third should include a time of prayer.

Lead the class as a sojourner, not an expert. Facilitators lead by example. So when you are open, enthusiastic, and interested in learning, your group will join you.

A typical meeting outline may include: Welcoming, Music, Prayer, Course Material and Discussion, Closing Prayer. We've included some prayers at the end of this guide.

Depending on the topic, your learning goals, and the comfort level of your group, you may want to make the following materials available:

- Copies of the Participant Guides
- Bibles
- Prayer Books
- Paper or notebooks
- Pens or pencils
- Prayers
- Song sheets, Hymnals, music, and music player
- Refreshments

Asking Questions

Perhaps the most important role a facilitator plays is in posing questions and facilitating conversations. Here are some tips:

The key role in leading your small group is to help members engage in meaningful dialogue with one another. It will allow them to uncover deeper truths for themselves and others.

You can use a variety of questions to spark discussion (we've included some at the end of this guide), but we can't encourage you enough to come up with your own. Open-ended questions are best, but yes/no questions followed up with a simple "Why" can yield great reflection. Questions can be categorized like this:

Launching Questions – These are designed to get the discussion going by focusing on the topic. Launching Questions should allow everyone in the group to share personal experiences and connect them with the topic, i.e., *What one thing was the instructor trying to get across? Name an experience that came to mind as you heard the lecture.*

Observation Questions – These are questions which arise from consideration of the subject – how, why, and what do you think? They seek to make meaning of the lesson, i.e., *Why do you think this point is important? What did the lecturer mean by raising that point?*

Reflection Questions – These are transition questions that take us from the information presented to our own lives, i.e., *What does this have to do with me? How does the lecturer's main point resonate with me?*

Application Questions – These are questions that ask us to consider the course material in light of our day-to-day lives, i.e., *What is this new material asking of me? In what ways is my life changed because of what I'm learning?*

Basic Beliefs

This step is designed to give you some background on the course.

What makes Episcopalians unique among other Christians?

The basics may be similar, scripture, tradition, practice, etc., but there are certain nuances that make Anglican Christians different. Episcopal priests Scott Gunn and Melody Shobe unpack them in these four insightful video presentations:

- Gathered in Unity (The Creeds)
- Written for Our Learning (The Bible)
- Continually Given to Good Works (Salvation and Grace)
- Accept and Fulfill our Petitions (Prayer)

This course is ideal for those who are new to the Episcopal faith as well as veterans looking to brush up on their knowledge.

Discussion Questions

Lesson One: Gathered in Unity

1. Christian practice has varied with statements of the creed; sometimes the creeds have read "I believe" and sometimes "We believe." What are the advantages and disadvantages to each way of reciting the creed? Which do you prefer?
2. Every thoughtful Christian will struggle with parts of their faith at times. How does saying a creed help or hinder our struggle with faith?
3. Look at the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed below and on pages 96 and 358 in *The Book of Common Prayer*. What differences do you notice between the two creeds? Which creed do you prefer, and why?

Lesson Two: Written For Our Learning

1. Have you ever sat down and read all or big portions of the Bible on your own? If so, what was that like? If not, why not?
2. Who is your favorite character from the Bible, and why is that person your favorite?
3. In response to the biblical readings in worship, we proclaim "The Word of the Lord...Thanks be to God." Because we understand the truth of scripture to be contained in the entirety of the Bible, we say this even when the readings are difficult or upsetting. How can we see difficult texts or texts that challenge us as God's Word?

Discussion Questions

Lesson Three: Continually Given to Good Works

1. In the Episcopal Church, we don't often hear sermons about sin and salvation; it's not language that we use comfortably. Why do you think this might be?
2. Scott discussed being saved from some things and being saved for some things. What have you been saved from? What have you been saved for?
3. There are two aspects of grace that can be hard to accept. One is to actually believe that God loves us completely, no matter what. The other is that God loves everybody else too, completely, no matter what. How do you wrestle with these difficult aspects of grace?

Lesson Four: Accept and Fulfill Our Petitions

1. The Book of Common Prayer identifies seven different types of prayer: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, petition, and intercession. Name an example of each type of prayer. Which do you find most challenging? Most comfortable?
2. Melody talks about prayer as a "conversation that takes place in relationship." Does that definition change how you think about prayer? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. Identify one particular spiritual discipline -- an approach to prayer like the Daily Office; a way of studying the Bible; any regular practice that has helped you build your spiritual life. Tell what it involves, and explain why it works in your life.

Prayers

Finally, you will find that opening and closing your time together in prayer is an effective way of inviting the Holy Spirit into your midst as well as building connection and an atmosphere of openness. While spontaneous prayers are often the most touching and effective, written prayers offer a richness of their own. Here are some:

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (For Self-Dedication, BCP 832)

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (For the Human Family, p 815 BCP)

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (For Guidance, p 832 BCP)

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (For Quiet Confidence, p 832 BCP)

O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen. (In the Evening, BCP p 833)