

LEADER'S GUIDE

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This Leader's Guide contains helpful tips for using these *Why in the World* materials with your group.

Leading the Discussion

You probably have a mental picture of what it will look like to lead—what you'll say and how group members will respond. Before you get too far into planning, there are some things you should know about leading a small group discussion.

Cultivate Discussion

It's easy to assume that a group meeting lives or dies on the quality of your ideas. That's not true. It's the ideas of everyone in the group make a small group meeting successful. Your role is to create an environment where people feel safe to share their thoughts. That's how relationships will grow and thrive among your group members.

Here's a basic truth about spiritual growth within the context of community: the study materials aren't as important as the relationships through which those materials take practical shape in the lives of the group members. The more meaningful the relationships, the more

meaningful the study. The best materials in the world won't change lives in a sterile environment.

Point to the Material

A good host or hostess creates an environment where people can connect relationally. He or she knows when to help guests connect and when to stay out of the way when those connections are happening organically. As a small group leader, sometimes you'll simply read a discussion question and invite everyone to respond. The conversation will take care of itself. At other times, you may need to encourage group members to share their ideas. Remember, some of the best insights will come from the people in your group. Go with the flow, but be ready to nudge the conversation in the right direction when necessary.

Depart from the Material

We've carefully designed this study for your small group. We've written the materials and designed the questions to elicit the kinds of conversations we think will be most helpful to your group members. That doesn't mean you should stick rigidly to the materials. Knowing when to depart from them is more art than science, but no one knows more about your group than you do.

The stories, questions, and exercises are here to provide a framework

for exploration. But different groups have different chemistries and different motivations. Sometimes the best way to start a small group discussion is to ask, “Does anyone have a personal insight you’d like to share from this week’s material?” Then sit back and listen.

Stay on Track

This is the flip side to the previous point. There’s an art to facilitating an engaging conversation. While you want to leave space for group members to think through the discussion, you also need to keep your objectives in mind. Make sure the discussion is contributing to the bottom line for the week. Don’t let the discussion veer off into tangents. Interject politely in order to refocus the group.

Pray

This is the most important thing you can do as a leader. The best leaders get out of God’s way and let him communicate through them. Remember: books don’t teach God’s Word; neither do sermons or discussion groups. God speaks into the hearts of men and women. Prayer is a vital part of communicating with him.

Pray for your group members. Pray for your own leadership. Pray that God is not only present at your group meetings, but is directing them.

Session 1: Notes for Leading

Big Idea

Jesus lived and taught in order to reveal the truth about the Father.

To find and understand God, look to Jesus.

To Prepare to Lead the First Session

- Read John 14.
- Pray that you and your group members begin the study with hearts and minds open to what God wants to show you.

Discussion Starter

The Discussion Starter is designed as an icebreaker. Some of the questions may feel a little random, but they're intended to help your group members warm up by talking about a common experience or tension. They're usually related in some way to the session's topic but are intended to get your group members talking about their personal experiences without delving into theology or doctrine.

The Session 1 Discussion Starter is meant to get group members talking about the private disciplines they use—reading the Bible, praying, fasting—to connect with God. Thinking about how we connect with God can get us to think about the assumptions we make about God.

Discussion Questions

1. **In what ways have you seen people look in the wrong places to discover what God is like? How did it shape the ways they view God?**

The first question is intended to get your group thinking in more concrete ways about the wrong places we look to discover God. It is focused outwardly at the behavior of other people in order to allow group members to ease into the conversation.

2. **Do you tend to feel closer to God when your circumstances are good or bad? Why do you think that is the case?**

Interpreting God's character or actions through our circumstances is something almost all of us do. This question encourages your group to explore that idea—including its shortcomings—on their own. As your group members talk about their experiences, it will become clearer that some people feel more connected to God when their circumstances are good, while others feel more connected when challenging circumstances force them into a posture of dependency.

3. **Read John 1:14. What do you think it means that Jesus is “the Word”? What does it tell us about Jesus' connection to God?**

4. **During the message, Andy said, “Jesus didn’t claim to *have* the best explanation of God. He claimed to *be* the best explanation of God.” Respond to that statement. In what ways do you find it challenging, disturbing, or offensive?**

These two questions are designed to allow group members to wrestle with one of the most offensive aspects of Christianity. It’s important that the group environment is safe enough that group members who don’t agree with Jesus’ claim feel free to say so.

5. **Talk about some of the wrong places you’ve looked to find out what God is like—religious traditions, your circumstances, nature, within yourself. What limitations did you discover in these attempts to find God?**

6. **At the end of the message, Andy challenged you to read the four Gospels with this question in mind: What do we learn about the Father from the Son? Which gospel will you begin with? What can this group do to help you follow through on this homework?**

The last two questions are intended to help group members personalize and apply the content. Identifying their own tendencies to look for God in the wrong places sets them up for a richer experience when they read a gospel and ask themselves the question, “What do we learn about the Father from the Son?”

Session 2: Notes for Leading

Big Idea

Jesus came to teach us things we could not learn from nature, space, looking within, or looking around.

To Prepare to Lead the Second Session

- Read John 9:1–34.
- Pray that you and your group members are able to speak transparently about personal pain and suffering. Pray that your group members have the courage to open up about their doubts and fears, and that God meets their openness with mercy and grace.

Discussion Starter

This discussion starter is designed to help you and your group members think about the way you view rules and how that has shaped your interactions with the world and with God.

Discussion Questions

1. **Last week, Andy asked you to read one of the Gospels with this question in mind: “*What do I learn about the Father from the Son?*” What is one insight you gained about God as you read?**

As you and your group discuss this question, you'll have the opportunity to discuss any personal insights you had while reading during the week. If a group member didn't read, be sure not to make him or her feel guilty.

2. **Have you ever seen someone demonstrate great faith despite great suffering? How did that affect your faith in God?**

3. **Do you ever wonder if your suffering is your fault? If so, how has that shaped your view of God?**

4. **During the message, Andy said, “*God sometimes chooses to display his power through our pain.*” Respond to that statement. How does it bother you? In what ways is it comforting?**

The next three questions are designed to help you and your group explore and discuss the topics of our pain and God's grace and mercy. This is a complex and emotional topic, so the questions are organized to move from a discussion of other people's pain, to personal experience, and then to how our experiences influence how we view God's role in our pain.

5. **During the message, Andy used an example of the Pharisees allowing their theology to become an obstacle to mercy for a man cured of blindness. In what ways have you seen theology—your own or someone else’s—act as an obstacle to mercy?**

This question offers you and your group the chance to dig into conflicts between theology and mercy in a modern (and even personal) context. The more transparent you are, the richer your discussion will be.

6. **Do you find it difficult to believe that God takes an interest in you individually? Why or why not? What is one thing you can do this week to remind yourself that God is interested in you individually?**

Sometimes there is a divide between what we know in our minds to be true and what we feel in our hearts. This question provides an opportunity for you and your group members to wrestle with an emotional topic that many Christians brush aside with the “right” theological answer. If you or one of your group members is struggling in this area, the group can offer encouragement and accountability.

Session 3: Notes for Leading

Big Idea

Jesus came to elevate the dignity of the individual.

To Prepare to Lead the Third Session

- Read Luke 7:39–40 and Romans 5:7–8.
- Pray that you and your group members have open hearts regarding this challenging topic. Ask God to help you share freely and to change the way you view and treat the people around you.

Discussion Starter

This week's discussion question is designed to help you and your group members reconnect with a time when you may have been treated poorly or treated others poorly depending on the group you were in. The question's purpose is to create an emotional bridge to the material you'll discuss later.

Discussion Questions

1. **In what ways do adults label people? How does this impulse to attach labels to other human beings shape our culture?**

2. **What labels, good or bad, do you carry? How do they shape how you see yourself?**

The first two questions are intended to help you think about how people are labeled in our culture, as well as how people are treated based on the label they're given.

3. **During the message, Andy said, *"The Christian community should be the most nondiscriminatory, it-doesn't-matter-to-us-who-you-are group of people on the planet."* What are some of the obstacles to the church living up to that calling? What is the cost of not living up to that calling?**

This question is meant to spur you and your group members into exploring and discussing how successfully the church carries out the mission Jesus gave it. The purpose isn't to create a feeling of guilt or anger. It's to encourage group members to see the church from an outsider's perspective.

4. **Read Romans 5:7–8. How does this passage change the way you view your value as a human being? How does it challenge the way you view others?**

5. **What person or group of people do you power up around, look down on, treat as less than, or maintain a bad attitude toward? What causes you to respond to that person or group the way you do?**

6. **What is one thing you can do this week to begin to treat that person or group with dignity? How can this group support you?**

The last three questions are intended to help you think about God's view of people and your view of people. The final question then challenges you to think of ways that you can begin to treat with more dignity people with whom it is challenging to interact.

Session 4: Notes for Leading

Big Idea

Jesus came to put religion in its place.

To Prepare to Lead the Fourth Session

- Read Mark 2:24, 27; Isaiah 1:11, 13, 15, 17; and Matthew 22:37–40.
- Pray that your group ends this study well. Ask God to help your group members use the discussions you've had to grow closer to him.

Discussion Starter

This week's discussion starter is designed to help you and your group members think about your own perceptions of and responses to rules. It ties into the main topic but allows you to kick off the discussion in a fun and nonthreatening manner.

Discussion Questions

1. **What are some reasons people find rules comfortable and comforting?**

2. **Are there things about religion that you find constraining or stifling? If so, what are those things?**

The first two questions are designed to continue and deepen the conversation begun in the Discussion Starter. They give you and your group members the opportunity to think and talk more about the benefits and drawbacks of rules and religion.

3. **Read Isaiah 1:13, 17. How do these verses challenge most people's views of God? What do they tell us about what he values?**

This question is a springboard from two verses that express God's passion and love for individual people. It's intended to get you thinking through your assumptions about God's values and priorities.

4. **During the message, Andy said, *"Jesus consistently prioritized people over his own religion, customs, and traditions."* Respond to that statement. In what ways does it challenge your assumptions about Jesus?**

5. **Is it difficult for you to believe that God values you above his own rules? Why or why not?**

Questions 4 and 5 continue the theme that began in question 3. Now, you'll think about how Jesus navigated tensions between religion and compassion as well as connecting those thoughts to your relationship with God.

6. **What is one thing you can do this week to prioritize loving God and loving other people over your religion, customs, and traditions? What can this group do to support you?**

The final question turns outward, challenging you and your group members to treat others with a love and compassion that reflects the love and compassion God has shown you.

End the session in prayer. Ask your group members if anything came up during the course of the study about which they would like the group to provide continued encouragement and accountability.