

LEADERS' GUIDE

Have you noticed that people seem to know increasingly less about Jesus and the Bible, and that the word "God" means very different things to different people? For most people, even those searching for truth, it takes more than a one-off explanation for them to truly understand and make a decision about the person of Jesus and what he accomplished on the cross.

CONNECT was designed to help people explore the biblical foundations of Christianity in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. The series is easily transferable and can be used in any number of contexts. Though the studies work best in a small group, they can also be used one on one. Those at any level of spiritual maturity can gain valuable insight from the rich Bible passages used in CONNECT, but the guiding comments and questions assume little or no previous knowledge of the Christian faith.

As you prepare to lead a CONNECT group, your job is an important one. We've included some guidelines and advice in order to help you get started.

THE GROUP

It can be a benefit to have other Christians in your group. But if your group has been advertised as being for non-Christians, make sure that non-Christians are in the majority. Before the first meeting, ask the Christians to initially hold back from answering questions in order to give others time to think and respond.

Your CONNECT group is likely to include people who are not used to small groups, so they may be nervous and not know what to expect. Creating the right atmosphere will help people to open up and engage with the Bible, the group, and God himself. You can help by:

- Being friendly and relaxed
- Being natural and honest about your own questions and doubts
- Listening carefully and valuing each contribution

- Respecting people's views, even if you don't agree with them
- Being unshockable and gracious
- Not feeling you have to know everything
- Not trying to argue people into believing
- Understanding that who you are is as important as what you say
- Including open questions which don't have wrong answers so that people aren't under pressure
- Avoiding jargon or negativity about particular churches, denominations or individuals
- Praying for each person between the sessions

WHOSE JOB IS IT?

As you lead, it will help to reflect on both God's role and your role in the group:

Group Leader's Role

- To create a relaxed, friendly atmosphere
- To take the group through the questions and help them engage with the Bible
- To ensure everyone is involved and no one dominates discussion
- To address disagreements and misunderstandings

God's Role

- To have been preparing people to meet him
- To provoke questions in their hearts
- To soften people's hearts and convict them of the truth
- To save people

FACILITATING

One of your aims is to develop a balanced group dynamic. Your job is to help people bring out what they think, rather than just tell them what you think. It's worth asking yourself beforehand whether your tendency in a small group setting is to say too much or too little.

As facilitator, you will lead the group through the material on each card, taking no more than one hour to complete each session. Get different people to read the paragraphs. Your role is not to teach the content of each card. Few people appreciate being “preached at” in this setting. Instead, direct the group to the Bible by asking the questions, helping the group explore the passages and setting the pace of the discussion.

It’s important not to go too fast. Don’t be afraid of silence. People need time to think and engage with the Bible, and there are many insights to be gained from each passage and question. Don’t settle for the first “right answer” that’s given. But don’t let the discussion drag either.

OPEN QUESTIONS

Avoid questions that fish for a particular answer. If you need to make a point, make it. The best questions are those which cannot be answered “yes” or “no” as they will open up discussion:

- “Great, what else do we see in these verses?”
- “That’s interesting, what do others think?”
- “Can you explain what you mean by that?”
- “How did you come to that conclusion?”
- “What makes you say that?”
- “How does the passage of the Bible we’re looking at address that?”
- “Does anyone see it differently? If so, why?”
- “Can anyone else relate to that?”

CORRECTING

It’s not your job to corner people with the gospel. Avoid the temptation to correct people every time you disagree with something they’ve said. A mark of a good leader is knowing when to keep quiet.

Sometimes, however, things will be shared that are misunderstandings of the passage and are important enough to correct. There are several ways to do this. You can ask the person how they have come to the particular conclusion about the passage. Or you can ask others what they think about the point that has been made. If neither of these do the trick, you can gently share your understanding (“I think I would see it a bit

differently...”). After you’ve shared your view, give the group a chance to respond to what you’ve said.

TANGENTS

During the study people will ask questions other than those on the cards.

If the question is important to understanding the study, bounce it back to the group. It’s better for them to think it through for themselves than for you to answer. If the group can’t answer, you’ll need to respond. If you don’t know the answer, simply share that you’re not sure and will do some research before the next study.

If the question will be dealt with later in CONNECT, ask them if you can note the question and come back to it. If the question is a tangent to the study or not an issue for others in the group, offer to discuss the question with the person after the study.

DIFFICULT DYNAMICS

Sometimes a group will contain an argumentative member. Often the person is just asserting that he or she will not be brainwashed. Allow them to express their opinion and, if appropriate, you can ask the rest of the group what they think. As the leader, getting drawn into an argument would be very unhelpful.

If there are dominant members of your group, at some point you may want to privately ask them for help involving those who are contributing less to discussions. You can direct questions to quieter members to draw them in, but use questions that invite them to share their thoughts rather than put them on the spot.

This may sound daunting, especially if it’s your first time leading a small group. But the best way to develop the skill of group leading is through practice. It’s a fantastic way to get to know people and to talk about the most important issues in life.

If you would like some more pointers and resources as you lead CONNECT, visit www.agape.org.uk/connect.