

ONLINE LEADERS GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Jesus doesn't just offer us hope when we die, he teaches us how to live lives of joy, love and significance in this world. The Christian life is meant to be lived in moment by moment friendship with the Living God and to bring a foretaste of heaven to the broken and hurting world around us.

When we're born we need to grow and learn how to live in the world. In the same way when we're born again spiritually we need to learn how our new life works. It's God who causes us to grow, but he does so with our willing involvement. Looking at what the Bible has to say, Online is a nine-session series designed to help you get to grips with how to build a strong and secure friendship with God himself and how to make an impact for him wherever he takes you.

THE PRINCIPLES OF LEADING ONLINE

Online has been designed to be used with other people, either one-to-one or in a small group. It's probably most effective in groups of 3-5. The following tips will help you use it with others. Pray before you meet up with the others that God will speak to you as you study the card, and pray for each member between 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 LEADERS ROLE

- To create a relaxed, friendly atmosphere
- To model honesty and willingness to learn
- To take the group through the questions and help them engage with the Bible
- To ensure everyone is involved and no one dominates discussion

GOD'S ROLE

- To give people the desire for growth and a deeper walk with him
- To convict of sin, righteousness and judgement
- To reveal spiritual truths to those who are seeking him
- To cause their spiritual growth
- To help you lead well as you share his truths with others



THE HOLY SPIRIT DIRECTS

Whilst there's specific teaching content on each card, Online has been designed to provide space in which the Holy Spirit can direct each session according to the needs of the group. Because of this it's important that the leader allows space for people to engage with the content, the Bible and their experience and understanding. Every card includes open questions which give the opportunity for many different perspectives and insights from each member of the group. The cards aim to direct the group to the Bible and allow it to speak into people's lives, whilst maintaining a focus on the theme. In addition, each card has a number of questions which encourage the group to share their personal experiences of what is being discussed.

FACILITATING, NOT TEACHING

The leader's role is to facilitate the group to explore the theme of the card, the Bible and the group members' personal experiences in that area. The leader is a facilitator for this, not a teacher. This is not the context for the leader to present lots of additional material in a lecturing style. The aim is to create a context in which the leader and the rest of the group discover and learn together. People learn much more deeply if they explore and discover truths for themselves rather than simply being presented with the answer. It also engages them more fully with the material they're looking at.

During the study, it's helpful for the leader to get different members of the group to read the paragraphs on the cards that are not specifically questions. When such a paragraph has been read it's helpful to ask if there are any comments or questions about what's been read. It is also helpful to get different people to read out the scriptures which are referred to and for everyone in the group to turn to each one as it is read.

LETTING THE BIBLE SPEAK

It's important to remember that as each member of the group comes to the Bible, they bring their own set of thoughts, hopes, fears, understandings, experiences, assumptions and circumstances. Some of these will be known to the individuals and the group as a whole and some won't. Because of this the Holy Spirit may speak to different members of the group very differently from the same scripture. Different dimensions, insights and applications will jump out to each individual. This is healthy and a sign that people are really engaging with the Bible and with their own experience in light of it.

The aim of the studies is to help people grapple with understanding and applying what they're learning in their real life circumstances. Occasionally things may come up which are blatantly error or heresy, in which case the leader will need to gently correct this. However, the leader and the rest of the group should be prepared to discover fresh insights and understanding from each question as they go through.

INVOLVING EVERYONE

Each member of the group should be involved in each session. The questions about our own experience should be addressed to each person in the group, although people shouldn't be pressured to share beyond that which they are comfortable. Hopefully, trust within the group will grow as the weeks go by. Some people will need help to be drawn into the group or to stay involved with the discussion. This can be done by directing open questions to individuals, e.g. "What do you think Simon?"





LIFE SHARING

Online aims to convey basic principles for living the Christian life, but it's vital that those principles are worked out and applied in the individual lives of those in the group. ONLINE is not simply about learning principles but about getting to know each other, about sharing joys and struggles, about learning to walk together as God's people and helping each other along the road. Central to this is learning to be honest and real with each other about what's really going on in our lives. There are plenty of questions on the cards which give opportunity to be vulnerable and talk about what's really going on in each other's lives. This gives the possibility of real application, accountability, prayer and friendship. At the start of each Online session it's great to spend a few minutes catching up with what each member's been doing since the last session and how they've found life with God. At the end of each session, take some time to pray for each other.

GRACE, NOT LAW

With the personal questions people should be encouraged to be as honest as they're willing to be, but not pushed to disclose things without a sufficient level of trust and love in the group. It's really important to remember that the personal questions are not examinations or performance reviews. Real honesty and transformation takes place in a context of unconditional love. The freedom to admit failure and the acceptance of the group in the face of struggles are prerequisites to giving each other the support, friendship, encouragement and prayer needed to find victory in those areas.

SPECIFIC, NOT GENERAL

If people are sharing generally, where appropriate encourage them to move from the general towards the specific. As the group leader, you may well not know the specifics before they tell them to the group and you won't know whether or not they are prepared to be more specific and therefore vulnerable.

One way to approach this is to invite them to further disclosure without demanding it. You can do this by asking permission to ask further, e.g. "Can I ask why this has been a hard week for you?" This way of phrasing the question gives people the option to say no.

APPLYING TRUTH

The aim of Online is not to end up with a head full of right answers, but to work out day to day how to walk with God. With this in mind, it's important to explore how to use the concepts that the group is learning in every day life. Each study has application questions and reflection verses to be done between the sessions. The previous card and its application should be very briefly reviewed at the start of each session. It's also good to pray for specific things that people want to apply at the end of each session and ask them how they're doing with the application at the next session.

MULTIPLYING LEADERSHIP

Online is a very simple tool for helping people to get a clear grounding in how to live out a life committed to following Jesus. It has been designed so that people who have gone through the material will in turn be able to take others through it. This has two key benefits. Firstly, an individual will learn the content in a much deeper way from taking other people through the studies than simply going through them as part of a group. It also means that more leaders are being trained up so that more people can benefit from doing the studies. There are three ways to emphasise this element of Online. Firstly, at the prayer time at the end of





each session each person should be encouraged to pray for their friends outside of the group. This helps keep the group outward looking. Secondly, the group members should take it in turns to lead different sessions and receive feedback to help them develop their leading skills. Thirdly, it should be emphasised that you don't complete ONLINE by finishing the ninth card but having done them, to take others through the cards.

