



Christian Foundations: Tips for Group Facilitators

Christian Foundations is a study program to help give people an introductory overview of: the gospel message, the story of the Bible, the Creeds and Church history, key Christian disciplines and Christian vocation.

While the CF workbook and a good study bible is all that participants will need, those *facilitating* this study program in a small group context will be helped by the following preparation:

1. Prepare to lead confidently by becoming familiar with the course content.

- Be well acquainted with the workbook and how to use basic reference texts. *Bible Dictionaries* define and describe key terms in the Bible. *Concordances* use key words to identify and help the reader locate particular scripture verses. Many study bibles include a small concordance and dictionary in them, but these reference books can be ordered separately and kept on hand for the group's use. By the end of the course, be prepared to suggest follow-up study options (i.e. other small group study series such as Pilgrim, can be ordered on-line directly from the UK or local bookstores.)
- Model behaviours that encourage healthy group dynamics: share freely yourself, encourage everyone to participate according to their own comfort level. Be careful not to let any one person (including yourself) dominate the discussion. Don't feel the need to answer questions yourself. Rather, encourage the group as a whole to contribute towards finding answers; drawing on everyone's knowledge.

2. Set some clear foundations for the group and your active role as a facilitator.

- Time management is important. Start and stop at the agreed upon time. Cover the content while allowing for some flexibility. We suggest that to allow time for both prayer, fellowship and full use of the study material, small groups do only one (or a max

of two) sections in one gathering. Encourage time-sharing during discussions and give time warnings when the group is completing written exercises.

- Before beginning the course content spend some time discussing the following question: “What are you hoping for by being a part of this study group?” Revisit these comments at the course’s completion.
- Establish *at the first meeting* some ground rules for discussion. We suggest sharing these in writing with the group, and reviewing them from time to time as the course proceeds:
 - (1) Come prepared for God the Holy Spirit to guide the group. Begin each gathering with prayer.
 - (2) Come to each meeting expecting to both learn *and* help others learn.
 - (3) Watch particularly for new learning that comes from the study of Scripture.
 - (4) Listen for the ‘mind of the group’ (an emerging key focus).
 - (5) Maintain confidentiality. When you talk about the course to those outside of the group, speak only about your *own* learning.
 - (6) Avoid cross-talk (repeated exchanges between two members).
 - (7) Use “I language” whenever possible, focusing on your own learning and reflections.
 - (8) *Expect* and *respect* differences of opinion, based on different knowledge levels, experience and perspectives.
 - (9) Allow time for others to talk. Avoid monopolizing.
 - (10) Refrain from criticizing or defending others.
 - (11) Enjoy each other! Make encouragement and the building of friendships normative.

3. Use these practical tools for facilitating adult learning in group settings

- Use *questions/prompts* to flesh out discussion rather than asking questions that can be answered with yes or no, or with one word answers. Here are some examples of such open-ended questions:
 - What now – why do you think what we’ve learned matters?
 - How so? Can you think of an example of that?
 - Does this resonate with any else’s experience?
 - What do you think might have been some possible reactions to this?
 - Can you think of why this might have been the case?
 - Interesting. What do you think led you to that observation?
- Use *feedback* to encourage participation (and prevent yourself being viewed as the expert):
 - That’s interesting. Say more.
 - That really resonates with my experience as well.
 - Interesting. That doesn’t resonate with my experience but here’s what I’ve seen.
 - Thanks for that insight.

What a unique perspective. Was anyone else making that connection too?
What a great way to express that.
So how are we doing as a group? What would you say is our group learning?

- Use your authority as facilitator to move the conversation on from an impasse:
Let's hold that thought and come back to it.
We've spent a fair bit of time on that point, so let's carry on.
It sounds like we might not find perfect agreement on that but that's okay. Let's continue.

4. Certain logistics can help promote learning within a group context

- Pay attention to the lay-out of the room (i.e. seating, lighting, temperature, writing surfaces), hospitality measures (i.e. Directions, signage, refreshments, washrooms), timing of program.

5. Pay particular attention to unchurched people exploring Christian teaching and practices

- Be especially aware of terms that may need explaining: Scripture/Bible/New Testament/Old Testament, denominational terms, book/chapter/verse references, words specific to Christian worship, spaces or practices. Engage such folks by asking directly if there are any terms that have been used that people are unfamiliar with. Help such people feel less awkward by yourself suggesting such phrases or terms.

6. Be aware of any specific challenges:

- Language challenges (i.e. ESL, dyslexia, differing reading rates, hearing loss, speech impediments). Invite people who 'enjoy reading' to read the narratives aloud for the whole group. Encourage the group to move through the exercises 'as slowly and patiently as necessary for everyone to move at their own pace'.
- Group dynamic challenges (i.e. The Monopolizer, The Silent One, The Judge/Sage/Expert). For fun, as facilitator you might 'role play' such challenges at the start of the group, discussing how these can negatively affect group interaction and learning.