

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

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GUIDANCE FOR THE PERSON LEADING DISCUSSION

THE TASK OF LEADING A DISCUSSION GROUP

The best discussion groups involve the participation of every person present at the meeting, with just a few prods and suggestions from the group's leader. Your role as facilitator of discussion can be seen in many different ways, depending on your personality and the needs of the group. At any particular time you might be coach, networker, sympathizer, expert (only for a minute), encourager, pray-er, or organizer. Depending on your spiritual gifts and those of your small group members, you may only have to say, "Let's start," and the group galvanizes into action. Most groups take some time to build trust and a rhythm of working together, and your leadership will help steer the process in the right direction.

The truth is, a small group develops over time, and it would be your goal as its facilitator to foster an environment in which every voice can be heard and respected (not necessarily agreed with), where God is sought and honored, and where the Scriptures are "handled rightly." At the beginning of a group's life, the leader is more directive until each person feels comfortable with the reason for being together, practiced in the routine of getting together, and familiar enough with one another to be able to share at a deeper level.

If your group has been together for awhile prior to starting *Understanding Jesus in the World of Luke*, many of the developmental dynamics have already taken place. You should have no trouble digging into this study, and even rotating leadership. However, I would not advise newly formed groups to rotate discussion leaders for at least four weeks, until the patterns have been established and buy-in to the study is complete.

The discussions will go much, much better if your participants actually do the homework in the first few pages of each lesson. Those questions are not reiterated in the group time, which assumes that each member has accumulated the knowledge of the texts and thought about their personal application. Urge your members to read the material that appears at the beginning of the workbook, where the case is made for coming prepared.

In the event that you have group members who are not able to do the homework ahead of time, you may ask at the beginning of the discussion what the main points of the Luke texts were and have others report their findings. This is time consuming, but it may be necessary for the sake of the whole, until the others get their rhythm. One of our overarching goals is to encourage participants to open their own Bibles, feel comfortable finding and reading passages, and seeing how it applies to their lives. If Bible study is new to them, this format is a good way to start.

THE MATERIAL IN UNDERSTANDING JESUS IN THE WORLD OF LUKE

The first few pages of introduction in the book explain some of the basic assumptions that governed our approach to the gospel. The background on Luke is meant to offer a common knowledge base to everybody, assuming this experience is new to at least a few.

Each lesson begins with an opening thought which introduces the general theme of the lesson.

“Time Travel Research: Gather the Data” pages identify Luke passages relevant to the lesson’s theme. We ask each person to find and read these selections, establish their immediate context in the story, and remember the gist of its content. In an “inductive Bible study” this would be the **OBSERVE** phase. Then in “Time Travel Research: Interpret the Data,” learners are asked some questions, either sending them to different passages to augment the first set, or to try to interpret the meaning and purpose of the data collected earlier. This is the **INTERPRET** phase, in which you unpack the text in light of its context and as the original readers understood it. By the end of this phase, you should feel that the theme has focused.

The last couple of questions in private study point toward personal application, particularly if the questions are more personal in nature. Since these questions are pursued individually, one can perhaps be more honest without the fear of telling the whole group. Having said that, the “Back to the Future: Group Discussion” questions are intended to be a vehicle for trying out new ideas for personal application. For those who want to avoid disclosure until it is less threatening (perhaps in the next meeting or two), the questions can usually be answered in a more distanced fashion. Be alert to this dynamic, and take cues from your group members about what constitutes a “safe” environment for sharing.

By the end of the meeting, each participant should have a pretty good idea of a basic application of the lessons and one concrete idea (at least) for implementing it in real life. Urge them to this end.

Just a note here about format: regardless of the way the layout sets up the questions on the page, the intended order of the questions follows down one page and then resumes at the top of the next page. In Lesson 1, for instance (pages 6 & 7), the white box across the top half of both pages suggest that those questions within it go together. But the intended order of questions is achieved by working down page 6 and then continuing at the top of page 7. This is the pattern throughout the study.

HOW TO USE THE LEADING NOTES

Your best preparation for leading the discussion of these lessons is by doing the Understanding Jesus in the World of Luke workbook yourself. In fact, please do this before you refer to the Leading Notes for help! You have only one chance to experience the lesson the way your group participants are experiencing it (ambiguities, anxieties and all), so please give yourself that insight. After you have completed the personal study pages, then read and absorb the Leading Notes provided in this guide.

The Learning Objectives at the top of each guide are designed to alert you to the intended direction and focus of the lesson. Some of these objectives may be met by individuals working at home on the workbook, but the Relational Objectives and the Process Objectives can only be met in the discussion time itself. If you have these objectives well in mind before the group meeting, you can keep the discussion focused and on track with where the lesson is going.

How small groups work together develops over time. As personalities emerge and gel (or perhaps clash), as spiritual gifts come out, or as personal lives are made known, a small group becomes something larger than the sum of its parts. The processes at the beginning are fairly straightforward, but later in the series, you'll see the process goals get more challenging as the group is expected to accomplish more, to feel more deeply, or to analyze more maturely the material presented.

After the learning objectives, you'll find informational notes on the content asked for in the study pages of the workbook. They are general comments meant to give you a good sense of where we hope the discussion will focus. They are not to be used as "the right answer" in discussion; they are offered to reassure you that you have found the links and meanings of the texts.

The group discussion section of the guide focuses more on the intention of the discussion questions and the process you can expect to lead. It is here that we offer concrete suggestions for how to conduct the meeting, though not an exhaustive play-by-play.

Each meeting is to be opened and closed with prayer, and suggested topics are included here. It is understood that at the beginning of the group's life together, prayer aloud might be awkward for some. We have taken that into account and made suggestions for easing into the group prayer discipline over the course of the nine meetings.