

# Group leader's guide

**This course aims to help people explore some of the spiritual practices that lie at the very heart of Christian discipleship. This group leader's guide will give you the information you need to help the people in the group follow through the materials, and learn from one another and from God.**

## Venue

A private home can be the most comfortable venue for conversation, but it is not always easy to break into small groups. In a house, there is also the temptation to socialise rather than to have a focused and challenging conversation.

Some church venues are flexible and comfortable, others a little constrained. Make an effort to create a safe and comfortable atmosphere – think about the need for additional heating or ventilation. A circle of chairs will often allow people to speak more freely.

## Refreshments

Have some refreshments available, including snacks for people to eat during the session. But don't overdo it. It is not easy to act as both host and group leader – it may be an idea to separate these roles with the host laying out the venue and providing the refreshments, while the other leads the session.

## Hints for group leaders

The overall aim is to create a space in which individuals can hear from God through the various elements of this course.

Through the publicity, let people know the length of the course (ie number of sessions and the duration of each session) and what each session might include.

For some people, the course may be demanding and difficult. For others it may be a fun and easy exercise. The role of the group leader is to enable each group member to be comfortable enough to share at a deep level, while respecting each others' contributions.

It can be helpful, even in a small group, to split people into twos or threes. This can seem a little odd, but it does mean that people who are less confident in sharing, have an opportunity to do so.

## How to use the course

Remember that for many people it is a very sensitive thing to talk about something as personal as their faith, their relationship with God and their discipleship. Be aware, too, that within your group there may be people who have differing opinions held with passionate belief.

The 'ground rules' (see **Introducing Spiritual Practices**) are there to enable conversation to be a process of speaking and listening. They will help the group to explore the issues raised in the session rather than making quick jumps to a conclusion.

If conversations go off topic, it is the group leader's task either to keep the discussion going, or to make sure that people are brought back to the session. The broad aims of the session should be covered, but there is enough flexibility for you to add your own illustrations or to let conversation continue for a particular activity (if it fits in with the overall session aims).

## The materials

Everyone in the group should have a copy of the **Session notes**, downloaded from the Methodist Church website ([www.methodist.org.uk/exploringspiritualpractices](http://www.methodist.org.uk/exploringspiritualpractices)).

It will also be helpful if all participants have a copy of **Introducing Spiritual Practices** (4pp) and, at the end of the course, the notes on **Going further with the Spiritual Practices** (2pp).

Each session follows a similar pattern:



**Connect**



**Contemplate**



**Consider**



**Commit**

These are explained below.

One of the leader's main responsibilities is to pace the meeting so that you cover the outline materials. Approximate timings for each section are indicated below, but be flexible according to the way the session is going. There may be times that you feel it right to slow down, or other times when you need to move things along.

There are some times for quiet reflection built into the meeting outline. Space to be still and listen to God is in short supply in our world, so do not be tempted to short-circuit these times: they are very important!

Feel free to be creative and adapt the materials to your own group if necessary.

### **Connect: Share with the group (15 mins)**

There are typically three 'warm-up' questions:

- one 'ice-breaker' question, to help the group get used to talking together
- one to follow up the action point from the last meeting
- one to share something about each person's spiritual life, related to the session's theme.

This last question reinforces the importance of putting the learning from the group times into practice between meetings. This is a most important part of how this course 'works'. It is about exploring spiritual practices *by practising them* – not just by talking about them! If this section takes too much time to do as a whole group, ask people to share in twos or threes.

### **Contemplate (15 mins)**

A short centring time of worship. There will sometimes be some simple materials for you to gather and take to the meeting (see below for a list). In most sessions there is a suggestion for a short prayer for each person to say. Some people have never prayed aloud in a group, so this is a simple way to start. If it's too much for some people, though, don't force it!

### **Consider**

There are four parts to this section:

#### **Consider 1: Read (5 mins)**

Bible passages and some quotations from John Wesley (see **Introducing Spiritual Practices**) can be used to introduce the theme, and provoke reflection. These should be read aloud within the group. To allow them to 'sink in' read them slowly and you might read them more than once.

#### **Consider 2: More about (5 mins)**

This provides pointers to some of the wider context for the readings and for the theme of the session.

These can either simply be read around the group, or one person could summarise them for the group (give them advance warning though!).

#### **Consider 3: Your response (5 mins)**

This is an important moment where everyone in the group pauses to consider their own response to the

readings and background information. There are spaces in the materials for people to jot down their thoughts. They don't have to fill every box – they are just there to provoke people's thinking.

### **Consider 4: Sharing wisdom (25 mins)**

This is where the group starts to listen to one another and engage together in conversation about the theme for the session. The two aims are *to learn from one another* and *to listen to what God may be saying* to each person in the group through the conversation.

As the leader, try to encourage everyone to get involved. Affirm people's contributions and restrain any one person from taking over.

### **Commit**

The Commit section is very important. It is where the general discussion becomes a specific action point for each person in the group. *Make sure that enough time is left for this section.*

There are three parts to this final section:

#### **Commit 1: Reflect (10 mins)**

A pause for personal reflection after the group discussion. What is God saying to each one?

There are some questions to help shape this reflection – but they should not be pressed. God may be saying something else entirely!

#### **Commit 2: Focus (4 mins)**

Each person identifies one thing – an action point – that they want to take away from the meeting. There is a space for them to write it down.

#### **Commit 3: Pray (1 min)**

A closing prayer. A simple prayer is suggested in the notes, but feel free to use other appropriate written prayers, or to pray openly as God leads!

### **What you will need for the sessions**

As well as a Bible, you will need:

Session 1: a bowl of dry sand or a wilting flower or plant

Session 2: a candle (plus matches)

Session 3: some postcard-sized pieces of card and scissors, one for each group member, a candle (plus matches) and a recording of "Jesus be the centre" or words and music

Session 4: (nothing is required)

Session 5: a ball of string or wool

Session 6: a 'reserved' sign to put on a chair

Session 7: a loaf of bread or a bread roll