

# Small group guidelines 101

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**E**stablishing and maintaining adult study of contemporary themes in light of Bible guidelines enables Sabbath School members to develop and nurture relationships, share their varied spiritual journey experiences, and help others. Helping others is the lifeblood of the group. The basic agenda guides members in sharing their lives and discovering life-changing Bible gems—and also challenges them to reach out to others.

## Facilitators

Small group studies are led by facilitators, who ask questions, listen, guide the flow of discussion, and then summarize the participants' contributions. *Facilitators don't need to feel pressured to know all the answers.* Their mission is to pass questions to group members and to suggest methods of finding the answers in appropriate cross-reference tools, such as a Bible dictionary, concordance, illustrated encyclopedia of Bible facts (on people, places, and customs), and maps.

## Members

Most members are not professional counselors. They can pray for and with other people, however, as well as encourage and strengthen others. They can point other group members to Jesus. Groups who have excellent discussions make sure there is substantial input from all the different personalities. Group members respect one another and are considerate when responding to opinions and understandings of Scripture that are different from their own. Members prayerfully share their own experiences and chosen texts.

## Prayer

*Conversational prayer* leaders introduce the following structure before prayer time: prayer will be divided between praising God, addressing the needs of participants, and presenting the needs of people outside the group. The prayer leader

will introduce one topic at a time by modeling it in prayer. So that no one feels pressured to pray, participants should not expect the prayer to follow an organized pattern, such as waiting for the person next to them to pray. Prayer will be spontaneous. Silence is OK because it provides space during which quiet persons can pray silently.

*Application prayer* is led like conversational prayer, except that the only topic is how your life will be different now that you have studied the Bible passages. Some people find this scary, but when taken seriously, it is exciting.

## Covenant discussion

The covenant includes the purpose of the group and the assignment of responsibilities, specific positive contributions to the church, and community outreach. In addition, open and honest sharing of joys and struggles is encouraged. Sensitivity and confidentiality are essential. New members are welcomed.

This is the time for group planning. Success is turning knowledge into positive action. Therefore, your group will value this time to establish guidelines, challenge them, and plan socials, other functions, or outreach projects.

## Group size

The size of the group enhances or diminishes its success. The word *small* indicates a size that allows face-to-face communication. Research and experience have shown that the best interaction is seen when there are five to 12 people, depending on the purpose of the groups.

When group membership reaches 15, plan to become two groups at the end of the covenant period. During the transition time, set up study subgroups of four or five people for optimum interaction. Then bring all groups together at the end of the study to pool principles and applications.

—Ruth James