



SOMETHING MORE FAITH SERIES

TIPS FOR USING THE SERIES AS AN INDIVIDUAL

1. Pick a time and place that will work consistently in your schedule. Move through the booklet at your own pace, allowing for reflection and application.
2. Begin with a prayer. A simple prayer to say is, “Come Holy Spirit” slowly. Sit quietly for a few moments of silence. Then say a prayer, such as the Our Father, the Hail Mary, or the Glory Be.
3. Watch the opening session video
4. Read the Scripture passage slowly a couple of times, followed by the commentary.
5. Move on to the questions and prayerfully consider your responses. You might want to find someone to talk to about what you learned or keep a journal with your notes and responses.
6. “Before the Next Session” will give you helpful suggestions for the week ahead. Make a commitment to incorporating some of the suggestions.
7. End with a spontaneous prayer talking to the Lord about what you have just read.



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TIPS FOR USING THE SERIES AS A SMALL GROUP

1. Arrange for five, one-hour sessions (weekly, monthly, or other) with your small group for reflection, sharing, and prayer. Decide as a group where you will meet and whether refreshments will be provided.
2. Pick a facilitator for your group. View “Frequently Asked Questions from Facilitators” for tips on facilitating a small group.
3. Invite the members of your group to read the session Scripture and commentary ahead of time. They may want to also contemplate the reflection questions in advance.
4. Begin with a prayer. Pray, “Come Holy Spirit” slowly. Sit quietly for a few moments of silence. Then say a prayer, such as the Our Father, the Hail Mary, or the Glory Be.
5. Watch the opening session video
6. Invite different group members each session to read aloud the Scripture passage.
7. Assume everyone has read the commentary beforehand. If this is not the case, you might ask one or two people to summarize the main points of the commentary or say what most struck them from reading it.
8. When discussing the questions, strive to create an environment in which all are encouraged to share at their comfort level. View “What to Expect in a Small Group” for some basic ideas to share with participants.
9. The group facilitator should go over the “Before the Next Session” section. Encourage participants to make a commitment to incorporating some of the suggestions.
10. End with prayer. Perhaps someone could pray spontaneously, thanking God for the opportunity to gather together and study God’s Word.



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WHAT TO EXPECT IN A SMALL GROUP

A small group seeks to foster an honest exploration of Jesus Christ with one another. For many, this will be a new experience. You may be wondering what will take place. Will I fit in? Will I even want to come back?

Here are some expectations and values to help participants understand how small groups work as well as what makes them work and what doesn't. When a group meets for the first time, the facilitator may want to read the following aloud and discuss it to be sure people understand small group parameters.

Purpose

We gather as searchers. Our express purpose for being here is to explore together what it means to live the gospel of Jesus Christ in and through the Church.

Priority

In order to reap the full fruit of this personal and communal journey, each one of us will make participation in the weekly gatherings a priority.

Participation

We will strive to create an environment in which all are encouraged to share at their comfort level.

Discussion Guidelines

The purpose of our gathering time is sharing in "Spirit-filled" discussion. This type of dialogue occurs when the presence of the Holy Spirit is welcomed and encouraged by the nature and tenor of the discussion. To help this happen, we will observe the following guidelines:

- Participants strive always to be respectful, humble, open, and honest in listening and sharing; they don't interrupt, respond abruptly, condemn what another says, or even judge in their hearts.

- Participants share at the level that is comfortable for them personally.
- Silence is a vital part of the experience. Participants are given time to reflect before discussion begins. Keep in mind that a period of comfortable silence often occurs between individuals speaking.
- Participants are enthusiastically encouraged to share while at the same time exercising care to permit others (especially the quieter members) an opportunity to speak. Each participant should aim to maintain a balance: participating without dominating the conversation.
- Participants keep confidential anything personal that may be shared in the group.
- Perhaps most important, participants should cultivate attentiveness to the Holy Spirit's desire to be present in the time spent together. When the conversation seems to need help, ask for the Holy Spirit's intercession silently in your heart. When someone is speaking of something painful or difficult, pray that the Holy Spirit comforts that person. Pray for the Spirit to aid the group to respond sensitively and lovingly. If someone isn't participating, praying for that person during silence may be more helpful than a direct question. These are but a few examples of the ways in which each person might personally invoke the Holy Spirit.

Time

It is important that your group start and end on time. Generally a group meets for about ninety minutes, with an additional thirty minutes or so afterwards for refreshments. Agree on these times as a group and work to honor them.



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FROM FACILITATORS

Perhaps no skill is more important to the success of a small group than the ability to facilitate a discussion lovingly. It is God's Holy Spirit working through our personal spiritual journey, not necessarily our theological knowledge, that makes this possible.

The following guidelines can help facilitators avoid some of the common pitfalls of small group discussion. The goal is to open the door for the Spirit to take the lead and guide your every response because you are attuned to his movements.

Pray daily and before your small group meeting. This is the only way you can learn to sense the Spirit's gentle promptings when they come!

As a facilitator, it can be extremely tempting to answer every question. You may have excellent answers and be excited about sharing them with your brothers and sisters in Christ. However, a more Socratic method, by which you attempt to draw answers from participants, is much more fruitful for everyone else and for you as well.

Get in the habit of reflecting participants' questions or comments to the whole group before offering your own input. It is not necessary for you as a facilitator to enter immediately into the discussion or to offer a magisterial answer. When others have sufficiently addressed an issue, try to exercise restraint in your comments. Simply affirm what has been said; then thank them and move on.

If you don't know the answer to a question, have a participant look it up in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and read it aloud to the group. If you cannot find an answer, ask someone to research the question for the next session. Never feel embarrassed to say, "I don't know." Simply acknowledge the quality of the question and offer to follow up with that person after you do some digging. Remember, you are a facilitator, not a teacher.

How do I encourage my group?

We are more likely to repeat a behavior when it is openly encouraged. If you want more active participation and sharing, give positive affirmation to the responses of the group members. This is especially important if people are sharing from their hearts. A simple "Thank you for sharing that" can go a long way in encouraging further discussion in your small group.

If someone has offered a theologically questionable response, don't be nervous or combative. Wait until others have offered their input. It is very likely that someone will proffer a more helpful response, which you can affirm.

If no acceptable response is given and you know the answer, exercise great care and respect in your comments so as not to appear smug or self-righteous. You might begin with something such as, “Those are all interesting perspectives. What the Church has said about this is . . . ”

What should I do when people get off topic?

Nothing can derail a Spirit-filled discussion more quickly than digressing on unnecessary tangents. Try to keep the session on track. If conversation strays from the topic, ask yourself, “Is this a Spirit-guided tangent?” Ask the Holy Spirit too! If not, bring the group back by asking a question that steers conversation to the Scripture passage or to a question you have been discussing. You may even suggest kindly, “Have we gotten a little off topic?” Most participants will respond positively and get back on track through your sensitive leading.

That being said, some tangents may be worth pursuing if you sense a movement of the Spirit. It may be exactly where God wants to steer the discussion. You will find that taking risks can yield some beautiful results.

What should I do when no one speaks up?

Be okay with silence. Most people need a moment or two to come up with a response to a question. It is quite natural to need some time to formulate our thoughts and put them into words. Some may need a moment just to gather the courage to speak at all.

Regardless of the reason, don’t be afraid of a brief moment of silence after asking a question. Let everyone in the group know early on that silence is an integral part of normal small group discussion. They needn’t be anxious or uncomfortable when it happens. God works in silence!

This applies to times of prayer as well. If no one shares or prays after a sufficient amount of time, just move on gracefully.

How can I make my group feel welcome?

A little hospitality can go far in creating community. Everybody likes to feel cared for. This is especially true in a small group whose purpose it is to connect to Jesus Christ, a model for care, support, and compassion.

Make a point to greet people personally when they first arrive. Ask them how their day has been going. Take some time to invest in the lives of your small group participants. Pay particular attention to newcomers. Work at remembering each person’s name. Help everyone feel comfortable and at home. Allow your small group to be an environment where authentic relationships take shape and blossom.

How do I get members to participate?

Help everyone to get involved, especially those who are naturally less vocal or outgoing. To encourage participation initially, always invite various group members to read aloud the Scripture passage that appears at the

beginning of each session. Down the road, even after the majority of the group feels comfortable sharing, you may still have some quieter members who rarely volunteer a response to a question but would be happy to read.

What is a good pace for the meeting?

Generally, you want to pace the session to finish in the allotted time, but sometimes this may be impossible without sacrificing quality discussion. If you reach the end of your meeting and find that you have covered only half the discussion questions, don't fret! This is often the result of lively Spirit-filled discussion and meaningful theological reflection.

In such a case, you may take time at another meeting to cover the remainder of the material. If you have only a few questions left, you can ask participants to pray through these on their own and come to the following meeting with any questions or insights they might have. Even if you must skip a few questions to end on time, make sure you leave adequate time for prayer and to review the "Before the Next Session" questions. This is vital in helping participants integrate their discoveries from the group into their daily lives.

Should I encourage members of our group to build friendships outside of our meeting?

The best way to show Jesus' love and interest in your small group members is to meet with them for coffee, dessert, or a meal outside of your small group time.

You can begin by suggesting that the whole group get together for ice cream or some other social event outside of your small group time. Socializing will allow relationships to develop by providing the opportunity for different kinds of conversation than what happens during the group. You will notice an immediate difference in the quality of community in your small group at the next meeting.

After that first group social, try to meet one-on-one with each person in your small group. This allows for more in-depth conversation and personal sharing, giving you the chance to know each participant better so that you can love and care for them as Jesus would.

Jesus called the twelve apostles in order that they could be "with him" (Mark 3:14). When people spend time together, eat together, laugh together, cry together, and talk about what matters to them, intense Christian community develops. That is the kind of community Jesus was trying to create, and that must be the kind of community we try to create, because it changes lives. And changed lives change the world!

How should I approach the group?

Remember that seeking the face of the Lord brings joy! Nothing is more fulfilling, more illuminating, and more beautiful than to foster a deep and enduring relationship with Jesus Christ. Embrace your participants and the entire spiritual journey with a spirit of joyful anticipation of what God wants to accomplish.

*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.
(John 15:11)*