

The background of the entire image is a close-up of a white-painted wooden surface with vertical planks. Scattered across this surface are numerous pink rose petals. Some petals are single and lie flat, while others are part of a larger, more complex arrangement in the upper right corner that resembles a blooming rose. The petals vary in shades of pink, from light blush to a deeper magenta.

Reflections For Facilitators

By Sherry Eifler

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Purpose: This mini-book is designed to equip and encourage future and current Bible Study group facilitators as they prepare to serve. As stated this is a mini book. It is meant to be a jump-start

Table of Contents:

Qualified??

Get Ready

Plan the First Meeting

Developing the Foundation of the Group

The First Meeting

Building the Foundation of the Group

The Follow On Meetings

Beautifying the Group

Closing Out the Study Group

Reflections of the Foundation of the Group

Final Thoughts

Qualified??

“But I’m not qualified to teach a Bible Study!”

That was my first response when I was asked to help with a group Bible study for the first time. Through my experience I learned there are different ways to lead study groups. One is the more traditional way, *teaching*, and the other is *facilitating*.

The difference~

A Teacher will provide *direct instruction* to others with the intent to teach new concepts, new ways of doing something, or the combination of both. Typically teaching is provided in a setting with minimal discussion about the material.

A Facilitator will help bring about an outcome in an *indirect way* through providing *guidance* that promotes discussion while managing the flow and interaction of the intended group. Typically facilitating is used in a small group with a common goal of learning more about a specified topic.

I prefer the role of a facilitator because it tends to promote group members taking greater ownership of their learning. Both styles for leading Bible study groups are wonderful. Here we will focus in on the facilitating approach and role.

Get Ready:

Whether we are starting our first or fifteenth group we all need to prepare in advance; I find the best place to start is prayer! Prayer for the group, material, and each meeting, once we pray, then we are ready to start preparing. Here are some things to consider as you move forward:

1. It is important to make time to reflect on the answers to the questions below. Many of them are the foundation to a positive group experience.

- Who will be attending? (gender, ages, and backgrounds)
- Who will be helping?
- What material will the group be covering?
- What structure is the material? (Book, study book with questions, video with questions, a book of the Bible)
- What is the groups' goal?
- Where will the group meet?

2. Prepare with the end in mind; know the purpose of the study group is and make sure the style of leading discussion meets the purpose.

3. Review available material and aim to be a week in front of the group's schedule.

4. Continue to pray for the group, materials, and the scheduled meetings.

Plan the First Meeting:

Developing the Foundation of the Group

The Basic Elements:

1. Pray as you prepare.
 - a. Maintaining a prayerful focus as we prepare to lead a group study will prove to be a blessing and time saver. God cares about the big and little things so nothing is too little of a detail to lift up to him.
2. Gather materials needed.
 - a. Materials will range from the simple study books, nametags, and pens to materials for simple table decorations to lighten the atmosphere and help keep the group focused.
 - b. Will this meeting have refreshments?
 - c. Will we need pens and paper, table and chairs, copies made, or anything else to facilitate a cohesive group?
3. Set and confirm meeting location and time.
 - a. Be sure to establish the length of time for each meeting to allow attendees to plan accordingly.
 - b. Be sure the location is available, accessible, and adequate space for the expected group size. If possible meet in a place that will allow the group to grow.
4. Send invitations or confirmation notes to group members
 - a. When starting from scratch, send invitations 3 months before starting a larger group study. This will allow people to plan and attend with a purpose. But if you don't have the luxury of time just get started with a few committed people. Remember these are guidelines not requirements for a successful study group.
 - b. When time allows start to confirm attendance a month out from the start date and reconfirm 2 weeks and 1 week prior to the start date.
5. Prepare a group time format and flow.
 - a. Create a basic outline for how the class will be formatted. Fill in the outline as a guide for each class. This outline will help keep you on track and make sure you share the important things for that meeting. I also use it as a guide when I prepare my follow up group emails.

Plan the First Meeting: Continued

- b. Time is precious so a plan helps us honor the time of each person. I have found that the ideal length of time for a meeting, which allows for some social interaction, is 2 hours. We are not all given this luxury. I believe even if we only have 30 minutes the Lord will do amazing things in the hearts of his people so don't let time constraints stop you from starting.
 - c. Once you know your time available establish your format with estimated time for each element. The goal is to keep the group flowing. My suggested meeting format is listed below in both the First Meeting and Weekly Meeting sections.
 - i. Introductions and Conversation starters are key elements because they are the relationship and trust building moments. I bring in little get to know you questions or simple sharing of favorite things to build common connections. If you are short on time get creative and build in before meeting get to know you connections through a social media group chat or email.
 - ii. Bible Study discussion can be challenging when you have weeks worth of material to discuss with 10 people in 25 minutes. Establishing expectations is key for group dynamics and growth. When I know I will be cramped for discussion time I set the expectation at the *First Meeting* that we will NOT cover ALL of the discussion questions. We will ONLY cover highlights. This helps the checklist people know that there isn't a list and helps the flow of the class each week. I also let the group know each discussion time will start with an opportunity for them to share a highlight from the week or propose a question they had from that weeks study.
6. Recruit assistance to help care for the group.
- a. We are but one in the "Body of Christ". The Lord created us to work alongside one another to further His kingdom. Therefore, I am always looking for others to help encourage others in their faith.
 - b. Within a group there are always needs for communication, administration, and reconnection. Make it a point to include others in management of set-up, cleanup, follow-up with missing members, and any other things that you don't have to do for the group. It is truly rewarding and provides the opportunity to raise up another group leader. Be sure to maximize any opportunity to multiply the kingdom ministry.
7. Pray for the Lord to have his way with this study group as He uses you as His instrument of grace and love.

The First Meeting:

Building the Foundation of the Group

The Basic Elements: (all times are suggested)

1. Welcome and administration. (10-15 min)
 - a. This is where you will set the expectations for the group. This is a study welcome and your heart for the group. Followed by the overview of the regular meeting structure and setting the expectations for how the time allotted will be used.
 - b. Make sure to collect contact information and establish how the group wants to stay connected and get information and updates.
 - c. Invite others to participate in the management of the group as discussed in the "Recruit assistance" section.
2. Introductions. (1-2 min per person)
 - a. This is a time to get to know who is in the group. Invite everyone to introduce themselves with the basics (name, family members (husband & number of children), why taking the study, and a fun fact. I usually try to theme the fun fact to the study or at least give them a direction.
3. Review materials. (15 Min)
 - a. Pass out materials and provide overview.
 - b. Discuss what personal study options are available outside of meeting time.
 - c. Discuss the layout of the study time. This is where you again set the expectations for how discussion and sharing will take place depending on the time you have available.
4. Shortened study time. (30 Min start with prayer)
 - a. If time allows use this time to go through the first week or day of study together. This could be the first Bible study for some people so it will help introduce them to what it is like, spark interest, and build confidence.
5. Close with prayer and point to next meeting. (10 min)
 - a. Prayer is an important element of the study time. Determine what prayer time will look like:
 - i. Will you have a prayer request time before prayer?
 - ii. Will members write out prayer requests?
 - iii. Will you have prayer partners?
 - iv. Will you always close out the time with prayer?
 - b. Close the meeting pointing them to the study material they will be working through until your next meeting.

The Follow On Meetings:

Beautifying the Group

The Basic Elements: (all times are suggested)

1. Welcome and administration. (10 min)
 - a. Start on time and honor everyone's time.
 - b. Simple admin brings everything into order and helps the group refocus their minds.
2. Conversation starters. (15 min)
 - a. Prepare a question to discuss in a pair and then some share with large group. The goal is everyone gets to share and build connection but no one is pushed out of their comfort zone.
3. Opening prayer. (5 min)
 - a. Bring the group back into focus on the purpose of the meeting and prepare hearts to learn from the Word of God.
4. Study material discussion. (45 min)
 - a. As a facilitator you should prepare an overview of the highlights from the week and key questions that will be good for discussion. This is not a teaching segment but a discussion segment that you prayerfully guide and keep on topic.
 - b. Some groups are quiet. Get the conversation going by starting with them sharing in a pair. Silence means people are thinking. Some people need more space to think so a tip I was given was to count to 17 in my head before filling the space with my thoughts.
 - c. Some people will maximize the quiet space and share far more than others. Tip: When you see this develop make sure you pair with them to share. We are all at different levels of need to share but it is important for all to be involved in conversation.
 - d. Staying on topic can be difficult after someone shares a specific problem or situation that appears to need advice. Key into the shift and help the group avoid fixing it during the meeting time. Suggest following up the conversation after class. Gentleness and kindness go a long way in this area.
5. Close with prayer and point to next meeting. (10 min)
 - a. Prepare a prayer guide and points for next week to help you stay on track.

Closing Out the Study Group:

Reflections of the Foundation of the Group

The Basic Elements:

1. Prepare for a final farewell as the study comes to an end.
 - a. Each group will develop it's own characteristics and needs. Within that group the members will have their own unique needs and connection to the group based on their personality and their life experience.
 - b. It is important to provide closure to a group. Closure doesn't mean a huge final team party. It can be as simple as these two things:
 - i. A reminder at the second to last meeting that the next will be the last.
 - ii. At the last meeting providing a few minutes to share about what this group has meant to them and opportunity to say goodbye to members.
2. Decide if the group will continue to meet.
 - a. Many things will determine what the future of the group will be. Be sure the communication about the groups closure or continuation is shared in a timely manor.
3. Be sensitive to different levels of need for closure.
 - a. Give the group the opportunity to plan an additional closure meeting if they desire. Recognize that you don't have to be the one to plan it or even attend, but if group members want this additional meeting it is to meet their need. Know your limits and release yourself from responsibility.
4. Pray for the group.
 - a. For your own closure pray for the group as you part ways and release them to the Lord. Trust you have facilitated growth for the kingdom.

Final Thoughts:

Facilitating small groups through Bible study is an opportunity to grow so much deeper in your walk with the Lord. I hope this reflection on facilitating has been a helpful starting place as you begin your journey. If you will be facilitating the Bible study that I wrote, “Royal Reflections- The Making of a Warrior Princess”, you will find a more detailed guide and tools for facilitating at my website www.sherryeifler.com just subscribe and leave a comment that you are facilitating “Royal Reflections”. May the Lord bless you and guide you in the truth of His Word.

About the Author:

Sherry Eifler is an author and speaker with over 15 years experience and is passionate for women’s ministry. She delights in the opportunity to bring scripture to life through the study of inspiring Biblical concepts tailored for real-life application. “Royal Reflections~ The Making of a Warrior Princess” is a Bible study full of personal application. She is an agent for spiritual transformation in the lives of many women and organizations as John Maxwell coach, speaker and leadership trainer. This former soldier turned devoted Army wife and mom makes her home where the Army sends her husband of 25 years, Brian, and together they face the adventure of military family life with their three amazing children and faithful pups, Kate and Sol. Be sure to stay connected through her website and social media.

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