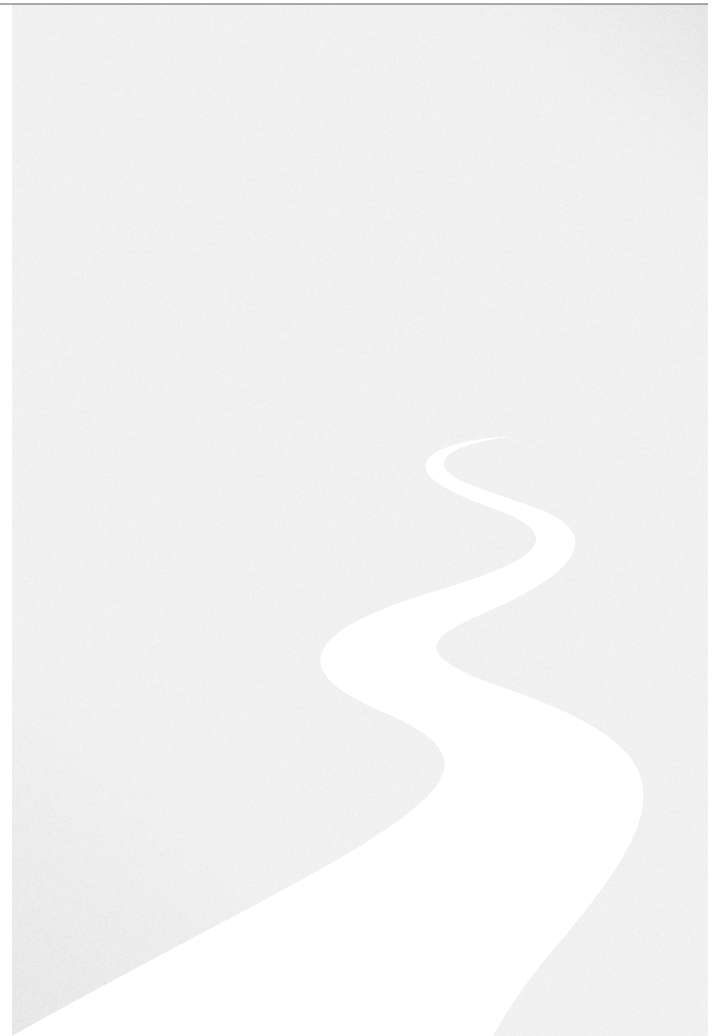
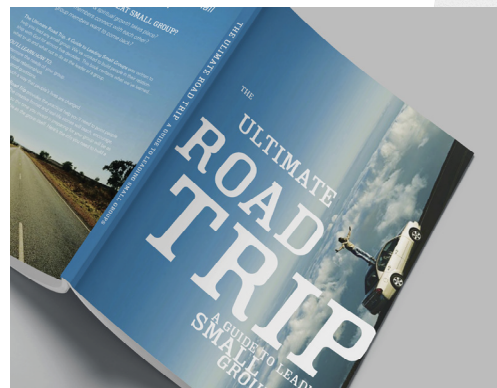


How to Have a Small Group with Purpose

Excerpt from *The Ultimate Roadtrip: Leading a Small Group* by **Rick Hove**.

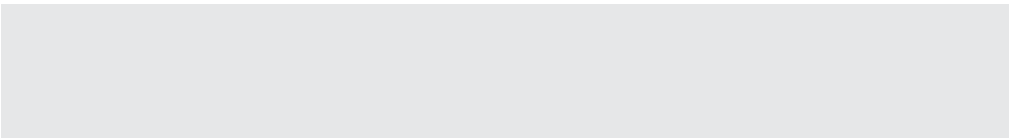


Available at the CruStore.

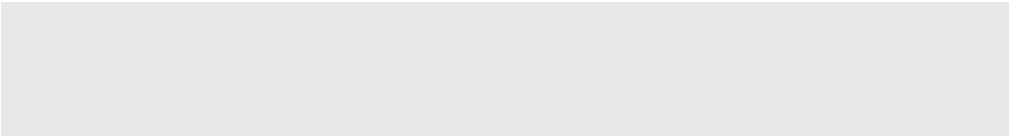


CHAPTER 4

***SO, WHERE YA'
HEADED?***



4.1 ASSESSING THEIR NEEDS
4.2 DETERMINING YOUR DESTINATION
4.3 CHOOSING YOUR CONTENT



People like Amanda take wrong turns all the time, but most people don't start out on a trip without having a destination in mind. Good road trips take planning. You need to know your destination, why you want to get there, and the best route to take you there. If you don't plan, there is little likelihood that you'll make it.

Leading a small group also takes planning. Before you begin your group ask yourself these questions: Why am I leading this group? Where do I want it to go? How do I plan to get there? Your answers will dictate many things, including the content, the length, and how you run your group time. Before you can answer these questions however, you must know something about the people in your group.

4.1

ASSESSING THEIR NEEDS

It's critical to get to know the needs of those in your group. If you offer content that misses the needs of your group, they'll have little desire to return. For example, if most in your group aren't sure they are Christians, it's doubtful they'll enjoy a group lesson on reaching the world for Christ. They probably won't come back.

You may have heard of "felt needs" and "real needs." For example, people have the felt need to be loved and accepted. But people also have the real need of an intimate relationship with God and forgiveness. When the real need goes unmet, the felt need takes priority.

36 To clarify, I want to change the titles of "felt needs" and "real needs" to "surface needs" and "heart-level needs." Surface needs are usually obvious. It's when a girl in your Bible study admits that she has been sleeping with her boyfriend. It's when a guy is struggling with pornography. It's when the newer believer keeps getting drunk at the bars with his friends. But below the surface needs are heart-level needs that, if left untouched, will continue to manifest themselves in surface needs.

But what if you have Sally Sanctification or Bible Bob in your group and they have no obvious surface needs? The thing to remember is that Sally and Bob have the very same heart-level needs as those with more obvious surface needs. In fact, just like the girl who uses her boyfriend for love and acceptance, Sally may be using religious pretense to win acceptance from the religious community. Bible Bob may be addicted to the high of looking more religious than others just like the guy who's addicted to beer. In fact, Sally Sanctification may be using *her* boyfriend, not for love gained through sex, but for a sense of security. If he left, would her world come crashing down?

Your goal as a leader is to move below the surface and uncover the heart-level needs that drive all of us. In other words, we all share a fallen/broken heart condition that needs the healing of Christ applied.

We'll talk more about heart-level needs and how Christ meets those

needs in the next chapter. For now, let's practically look at how to assess the surface needs of your group.

Pray

Pray for insight and wisdom. Ask God for sensitivity to the needs of your group.

Observe

Begin by observing as much as you can about your group members. You can learn plenty from just watching their actions.

- Are they comfortable talking about being a Christian?
- What do you observe about their relationships with Christians and non-Christians? Their roommates?
- How do they interact with others? Are they shy? Outgoing? Overbearing? Controlling?
- Are they involved in church? A Christian group?
- What can you observe about their walk with the Lord?
- Do they seem hesitant to be involved in a small group? If so, why?
- What kind of Bible do they bring? Does it look like it's ever been used?

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JILL'S BOMB

When Melinda, Lee Anne, and I went to our first small group at Texas A&M, we were pretty excited about the idea of being in a Bible study together. The leader, Jill, lost ground quickly by announcing, "You probably already know this, but let's go through it anyway." We weren't exactly won over. The "discussion" didn't help either. Jill tried to field test her elementary education skills by asking questions such as, "OK now, what did Jesus do in this verse? He died for our sins. Good. Let's go to the next question." Soon an uneasy silence fell over the room.

As we laughed and talked on the way home, we made a unanimous decision—no one wanted to go where this group was headed. Next Thursday, no one wanted to go, but we felt sorry for Jill. We figured someone should show, so we drew straws to see who would make the token appearance. For the next few weeks we followed the same routine, drawing straws to pick the "winner."

Ask

Although you may learn a good deal from observing those in your group, your best source of information about their needs will come from asking them. This is especially true when you begin to lead a group. Your observations aren't always as helpful and accurate as what you can learn directly from group members. When you are with group members, ask a few informal questions. For example:

- Why do you have an interest in being in a Bible study?
- Have you ever been involved in a church before? What was it like?
- What is your spiritual background?
- What would you like to get out of this Bible study?

These questions will help you get to know the spiritual needs of your group.

Survey

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There are two ways to do surveys. The easiest is to hand out 3x5 cards in the group and get their input. A second type of survey is longer but will give you more information. They would answer it outside of group time and give it to you later.

THE 3x5 SURVEY: Choose questions that are appropriate for your group and indicate that you will use their answers to help in your planning. Hand out 3x5 cards and let them jot down their input. Some questions you might ask:

- If asked to describe my relationship with the Lord at the present, I would use these adjectives:
- When I struggle in my relationship with the Lord it is generally in these areas:
- If I could have one question answered about how to live the Christian life, it would be...

GARY'S WAKE-UP CALL

One of the men who continued on in my Bible study later faded from the movement after my group ended. I found out why the next semester. I read his article in the school's newspaper where he wrote about his coming-out as a confident and proud homosexual. Talk about a wake-up call! I felt like after all those months I didn't even know the guy.

- The one thing I would like to get out of this group is...

THE LONGER SURVEY: You can gather more information by giving a longer survey to group members and asking them to fill it out. It would probably be best to do this outside of group time. Introduce the survey by saying you want the group to best meet their needs, so you'd like their input. The sample survey in the appendix will give you some ideas. Don't assume you know the struggles and questions of group members.

DAVE'S HOG LOINS

I was leading a group of agriculture majors at the University of Nebraska and stepped into an interesting conversation they were having about hog judging—how to know which hog had the best loin. Being from Detroit, I had a hard time, at first, relating to these guys. I realized before I would ever begin to understand them and what they needed, I had to get to know their world. They taught me about hogs, and I taught them about city life.

As you're thinking through the needs of your group, ask a veteran group leader or a Campus Crusade staff member for input. Since the ability to understand and meet the needs of people grows with experience, their input will be helpful.

Cultural Trends for College Students

Several studies reveal various trends in our culture that might be helpful as you get to know your group. Since you are probably in the same generation as those in your group (unless you've been in school a long time), you're probably safe in assuming that students are like you. Here are some noteworthy trends of students.

- *At least 50 percent of the students are coming from broken homes. Divorce is often viewed as an inevitable part of the marriage process. In the not too distant future, most Americans will believe that a life spent with the same partner is both unusual and unnecessary. So, a group might have needs to learn about God's love and faithfulness, forgiveness, or marriage.*

- Most students are highly influenced by the media. Above all else, college students love to be entertained. This passion for high-gloss, big-screen entertainment is confirmed by the movie studios, who unabashedly admit that they develop most of their movies with the college audience in mind. People under the age of 25 account for more than half of the revenues generated by movie theaters today. And they are responsible for several billion dollars more in revenues generated by the sale and rental of movies and video games. So, perhaps you could use media in your small group, such as looking at the intro to an MTV clip or part of a TV show.
- Most students are skeptical of absolutes. "There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative" (Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*). Maybe your group needs to learn about the character of God and the authority of His Word.
- Many students are sexually experienced and may presently be sexually active. "And among [college students], more than three-quarters claim that they have engaged in sexual intercourse with other single adults. Today, only 23 percent of the single [college students] profess to being virgins" (Barna, *Invisible Generation*, p145). It's probably safe to assume most groups need to address the issues of sex, sexual immorality, purity and forgiveness.
- Because Eastern religions (such as Hinduism and Buddhism), New Age and cults are gaining influence, students may combine various elements from different faiths. George Barna notes, "It is likely that from Christianity they will borrow Jesus' philosophy of love and acceptance. From Eastern religions they will borrow ideas related to each person being his or her own god, the center of the universe, capable of creating and resolving issues through his or her own power and intelligence" (Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle*, p141). So, maybe your group needs to examine the uniqueness of Jesus or the deity of Christ.

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How to Kill Your Group

- Don't make an effort to find out the needs of your group. Trust your feelings.
- Choose content that seems most fun to you, like whale hunting. Never mind they all happen to be members of Greenpeace.
- Just assume whatever you do in the Bible will be just fine for your group...like studying the book of Revelation.
- Write up a purpose statement, forget what it says, and never refer to it again.
- Don't worry about how many weeks you run your group. You'll be able to tell when it has run long enough by the empty spaces on the couch.

4.2

DETERMINING YOUR DESTINATION

Once you get a grip on the needs of your group members, it's time to work on the purpose for your group. How, specifically, can God use you to help meet the needs of those in your group? What content will be most helpful? How many weeks should the group run? These decisions are best prayerfully made with a veteran group leader if possible. Their experience will help you choose content and structure your group.

Here are some questions to help you think through determining the purpose and objectives of your group:

1 *How does your small group fit into the big picture of the ongoing ministry on your campus?*

Your small group leader or staff member can help you think through your small group's purpose in light of that overall strategy.

- Is your small group trying to develop future leaders?
- Is your small group part of a plan to reach a section of campus?
- Is your focus on evangelism? Building new believers? Training believers to minister to others?

2 *What are the specific needs of your group?*

- Do group members understand and apply the basics of the Christian life (assurance of salvation, dealing with sin, etc.)?
- Do group members take the initiative to study God's Word and grow in Christ or are they dependent on someone else to motivate them spiritually?
- Which character and conduct issues need attention (gossip, moral standards, thought life, integrity, etc.)?
- What are their daily concerns and struggles (studying, finances, relationships, family concerns, etc.)?

- Do group members have a growing concern for those who don't know Christ? Do they know how to share the gospel with non-Christians?

3 What do you want to be true of your group members when the group ends?

- What growth would you like to see in their lives? What would tell you they are growing in their relationship with the Lord? How can you help them develop consistent, personal time in God's Word and in prayer?
- How would you like to see your group members change so as to live holy and godly lives?
- What steps would you like to see them take to reach out to others? Or pray for someone? Maybe they need to prepare their testimony, invite someone to a weekly meeting, or learn how to share their faith.
- How will their lives be different if they consistently surrender areas of their lives to Christ (studies, finances, relationships, family, etc.)?

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF COLLEGE FRESHMEN

If your group has freshmen, you can be relatively certain these are important issues for them...

- *Advice on professors, classes, majors, study skills, scheduling time, etc.*
- *Input on how the campus works (administration, etc)*
- *Help making friends at school.*
- *Advice on finding a church.*
- *Help getting around town and campus.*

After you've considered the needs of those in your group, take time to write out the needs of your group and a preliminary purpose statement. You can always adjust it later as you get to know your group better.

You may be thinking, This is such a hassle. I just wanted to lead a small group. However, the more you know about the strengths and struggles of

those in your group, the better you'll be able to point them to God's solutions. As they see God's Word change their lives they'll be more likely to come back. Seeing God change lives is the point, isn't it?

Many group leaders get discouraged when people just don't show up. Often this is caused by offering solutions to problems no one seems to have. Take time to plan for your group. Give them biblical solutions that make a difference—give them something they are hungry for. Brownies help, but that's another chapter.

4.3

CHOOSING YOUR CONTENT

Like any trip you take, not only do you need to know where you're going, but also how to get there. Once you've determined your destination (the purpose of your group) you're ready to choose your route, the content of your small group. You'll also need to determine how long the group should meet to accomplish your purpose.

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There are many potential topics which you could study that would be beneficial to your group. As you review the purpose of your group and assessment of their needs, consider the following:

- 1 Have your group members been in a Bible study before? What did they study?
- 2 What principles, or topics, would benefit them most at this stage in their Christian walk?
- 3 What are their crucial needs? Sometimes students want to study a difficult book of the Bible such as Revelation or the latest hot Christian book. Although this may be a felt need for them, their real need is to understand and apply the basic truths of the Christian life such as salvation, forgiveness, the Spirit-filled life, and how to learn and apply God's Word.
- 4 How many weeks should this group meet? Take into account their commit-

ment level, how well they know each other, and the time constraints of school. Choose a length that complements your purpose. For some groups, such as evangelistic Bible studies, a shorter time period is better.

After you've determined your purpose and gathered all the information you can about your group members, make a decision about what content and time frame will be best for your purpose. Ask the Lord for wisdom and pray about different options. You most likely won't receive your answer on a piece of paper descending from heaven, but it makes great sense to seek God's wisdom. Interact with your Campus Crusade staff member or your group leader. You'll find their input valuable.

Case Study: Geoff

Geoff is starting a small group. He needs to determine the purpose for his group and, in light of this purpose, the best content and duration of the group.

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"I have seven freshmen from my dorm in my group. They all say they are Christians, but I don't think they see how God relates to their daily lives. A few recently placed their trust in Christ. They all need help in understanding the Spirit-filled life. When I took an informal survey to see what they wanted from the group, many of the men seemed to have needs and questions in the areas of dating, sex and stress. I've also noticed that many of them hang out with guys who party a lot."

"I talked to Greg, the staff guy who's my leader, about what content I should cover in my group. He explained how my group fit into the overall purpose of our campus ministry. After talking it over, and asking God for wisdom, we decided upon this purpose statement for my group: 'The purpose of my group is to help establish these freshmen guys in the basics of walking with God and start giving them a vision for reaching out to others.'"

"It seemed like the best time frame for a study with this purpose was about a semester. This gives the guys time to get to know each other and to begin to apply truths they are learning in group. Greg helped me choose the content to best achieve this purpose in light of the guys in my group. We chose some basic topics related to their walk with the Lord and others that are relevant issues they raised that effect their walk with the Lord."

Geoff's Purpose and Content Worksheet

- 1 After prayerfully assessing the needs of my group members, I think their basic spiritual needs are:
Assurance of salvation; What to do when I sin; How to be filled with the Holy

Spirit; How to let God direct and empower me daily; Spending time with God; Sharing God's love with others

2 I think their basic felt needs are:

Dating; Sexual purity; Drinking; Stress; Better grades

3 In light of their needs and the overall purpose of our campus ministry, the purpose of my group will be:

To help establish these freshmen guys in the basics of walking with God and to start giving them a vision for reaching out to others.

4 This purpose is best accomplished by meeting this many weeks: one semester

5 I think that the best topics to fulfill the purpose of our group are:

6 I will pray God changes the lives of those in my group in these ways:

Try filling out questions 5 & 6 for your own group.

CONCLUSION

Assessing the needs of your group, determining the purpose of your group, and choosing the content for the group: we've covered a lot in this chapter! Many group leaders fail to think through these issues. They think, "Oh, we'll just study the Bible." Well, that beats studying Freud or Marx, but it doesn't necessarily help your group members relate God's Word to their present struggles.

An unplanned Bible study causes more stress on the leader and less learning for the group members. A leader can generate a great discussion on a topic but that doesn't mean it is the most helpful for people. Take time to plan; it will help you maintain an effective, life-changing small group.

FOR THOUGHT / DISCUSSION

1 Share experiences in your life when you were supposed to learn something, but what was being taught had no interest to you. (For example, high school history? a small group lesson? a sermon?) How did your lack

of motivation affect your learning? Share experiences when something was taught that really connected with a need in your life. How did your intrinsic motivation affect your learning?

2 What are some ways you can foster goal ownership in your group?

3 What are the risks of choosing topics that interest you instead of topics that interest the group? What are the benefits of choosing topics which you are learning at the time?

4 Talk about Geoff's case study and work through the Purpose / Content sheet for this group. The group consists of sophomore women who are at different maturity levels in their Christian lives. Their key interests are the opposite sex, grades and security. Most are from divorced homes. They seem to have little knowledge of the Bible, and want to have successful careers and relationships more than they want to know God. They seem like they are willing to come to the group and have some interest in studying the Bible.

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"What if I'm still totally clueless about my group members' needs? Is it possible I could teach the wrong material?" These are good questions, but don't worry. If you faithfully teach and apply God's Word, your group members will benefit. As your group opens up, you'll get to know their needs better and, if necessary, you can adjust your content. Spend time with your group members and ask for their honest feedback. They'll tell you if you're addressing areas which are helping them.