

GETTING TO KNOW GOD AND OTHERS—SERMON-BASED SMALL GROUPS¹

Effective small groups help people get to know *God and each other*. Focus on Bible study alone doesn't help others grow relationally. Focus on fellowship alone doesn't help people grow spiritually. An effective approach shines light on people *and* God. Each lesson in our curriculum focuses on the primary theme of a passage from that week's sermon. The text has secondary themes, too. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the primary theme is forgiveness, but the story addresses unfaithfulness, bitterness, self-pity, and celebration. Each study guide question corresponds to the numbered movement below. All questions develop the single organizing theme of the lesson. Answers will vary, but they'll all relate to the lesson's primary theme. Questions #1 and #2 focus on people's experiences, #3 on the text, #4 integrates both, and #5 calls for a response. The chart below summarizes the *five movements* through which the study guides will move the group, the *goals* of each movement, the *roles* of the group leader, and some *suggestions* on how to keep the group on track.

<p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p style="text-align: center;">REMEMBERING</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Get learners to describe their past or present action concerning the theme</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Shine the light on <u>personal</u> experiences, actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help members talk about their experiences as they relate to the topic - Maintain the group's focus on the question 	<p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p style="text-align: center;">REFLECTING</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Help learners reflect critically on the reasons or the consequences of their actions re: the theme</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Shine the light <u>into</u> a person for self-evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encourage members to explore why they think, feel, and act as they do - Help members go deeper into their answer to question #1 	<p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">DISCOVERING</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Expose learners to the Christian Story on the theme and the response it invites</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Shine the light on the <u>text</u> and its <u>meaning</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitate personal encounter with the text, discovery, and disclosure through dialogue - This process may occur over minutes, weeks, or months 	<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CONNECTING</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Connect the Christian Story and the learners' stories; lead them to affirm, question, and move beyond it</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Shine the light on both the <u>text</u> and the <u>person</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connect the Story/text to the members' stories by helping them see themselves in it - Build a bridge between learners and text, connecting movements 1 and 2 with 3 	<p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p style="text-align: center;">RESPONDING</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Prompt learners to respond to all that has come before (application)</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Shine the light on <u>personal</u> action to be taken</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Help members identify as specific a response as possible to the text - Responses may include new understandings and awareness, hope, decisions for future reflection, clarification, overt actions
<p>What do you anticipate will be some of your greatest challenges in leading your small group?</p>	<p>What might you need to meet these challenges and lead more effectively?</p>	<p>What might be some of the benefits of following the five-movement format described above?</p>	<p>Which movement do you think requires the greatest skill development on your part?</p>	<p>What is one thing you could do on a weekly basis to develop your skills with this movement?</p>

¹These five movements are my application of the work of Thomas G. Groome outlined in *Christian Religious Education* (1980) and *Sharing Faith* (1991).