

Facilitator's Guide

Wired for social connection

Introduction

Wired for social connection is a series of five sessions designed to encourage positive engagement with the Bible in a small group context.

To this end the series addresses a theme of high interest and significance. Social connections are very important to us – loneliness kills. Yet relationships are messy and complicated and take hard work over the long term. According to Jesus, the good moral teacher, what makes for good relationships?

In each session participants have the opportunity to explore the concepts of respect, trust, selflessness, genuineness and acceptance before delving into select passages from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew's Gospel).

Who is this series designed for?

This series is for participants who are new to reading the Bible or reading it like we do. They are also interested in discussing topics of interest and open to exploring what the Bible has to say in the context of that discussion.

Preparation before a session

Read the session resource in its entirety.

Answer the questions for yourself.

Think of some stories or illustrations for the introductory questions around the topic (step 1 below) and the application questions (step 8 below).

The structure of a session

Each session takes around 45-60 minutes.

The sessions follow essentially the same seven-step format.

1. An introductory question(s) on the theme.

These are safe questions designed to stimulate interest and discussion.

This is also some explanatory material on the Sermon on the Mount. This can be read or summarised.

2. Excerpts from the Sermon on the Mount

Read this to participants or ask for a volunteer. Only ask someone to read if you know they are comfortable reading out loud.

3. Two questions:

- What interests you here?
- What questions would you like to ask Jesus?

These are safe, comfortable questions with no right or wrong answers. Give participants ample time to think and explore because the experience is as important as the learning.

As participants speak, circle or make notes as to what interests them so that you can refer to this later.

4. Notes on the passage

Read each of these paragraphs or ask a volunteer to read.

The notes will cover the important content in the passage. These notes are designed to aid the facilitator and stimulate the upcoming discussion.

5. Two questions:

- What interests you here in what you have just read?
- What questions do you still have?

Check that participants have made some progress to finding answers to what interests them (step 3 above). Ask: *"So the question you asked earlier about...what do you think now?"*

6. Story

The story is included to show what application of Jesus' teaching could look like. It also shows how Jesus' teaching connects with the concept in question (respect, trust, selflessness, genuineness or acceptance).

7. Two questions:

- When it comes to X, what do you need to work on?
- What will motivate you to do this?

"X" is the concept being considered (respect, trust, selflessness, genuineness or acceptance). These questions are designed to stimulate participants' thinking in terms of application of the material to their own lives. The questions work best if participants are prepared to be vulnerable. As a facilitator you can help shape a comfortable space by being honest and acknowledging your own weaknesses.

8. Prayer

If appropriate, ask participants if they would be happy to have a short time of prayer. Prayer aids sharing and building community, teaches how to pray and models humility before God.

To make prayer a comfortable experience, let participants know that you will be the one to pray and ask them if there are things they would like you to pray for. Give concrete examples so they know what you are after - you could say: *"Happy to pray for anything - it might be for a new job, or a health concern, or something else that's on your mind"*. Once everyone has shared, lead in prayer. Make your prayers short and concise and use the words the participants used.

Troubleshooting

What if participants don't speak?

Ask participants to share their answers to a question in pairs first. This gives more reflective participants time to think. Then ask the pairs to feed back to the large group.

What if a participant speaks too much?

Ask participants to share their answers to a question in pairs first. When you ask each pair to feed back to the large group, this gives space and permission for others to speak.

What if I do not know the answer to a question?

Be honest because it models humility and the nature of faith (we don't know everything). Consider doing some research and coming up with an answer.

What if participants disagree with the passage (or each other)?

Since the purpose of the series is to encourage positive engagement with the Bible in a small group context, there needs to be space for a variety of opinions. Take the longer view that over time their opinions could change.

Additional resources

To encourage participants to think further on the themes, you might like to refer them to the following articles:

https://www.ted.com/talks/robert_waldinger_what_makes_a_good_life_lessons_from_the_longest_study_on_happiness?language=en

Where to next?

This depends on the participant. Options could be another series like this one. Or the participant might be open to reading a biography of Jesus (for example using Word 1:1, which explores John's Gospel).