

Leading Small Group Application

Introduction

The Gospel of Matthew records these very sobering words of Jesus,

This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me... (Matthew 15:8-9)

And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it (Matthew 7:26-27).

We can teach our students a lot of biblical information — and so we should. We should acquaint them with as much Scripture as possible; it is the only means of making them wise for salvation in Christ and living in a way that is pleasing to Him (2 Timothy 3:16-17). But as Jesus' words remind us, it is not enough to simply receive knowledge about God. True saving faith in Jesus involves a radical heart transformation, which produces new desires, attitudes, and actions. While only God can bring about this transformation, it is our responsibility to guide, inspire and implore our students toward a personal and sincere response to God's truth. We must impress upon them that what is learned in the mind needs to be embraced by the heart and will.

Engaging the Heart and Influencing the Will

Each Truth78 curricula lesson is built upon two foundational pillars: the **Large Group Lesson** which emphasizes instructing the mind with God's Word, followed by the **Small Group Application** which focuses on engaging the students' hearts and wills in response to God's Word. The main role of a **Small Group Leader** is to lead a group of 4–8 students through the Small Group Application section of each lesson. Small group leaders are provided specific discussion questions to help children understand what they heard in the Large Group Lesson and then lead them towards a right heart response and examples of actions that would flow from this. The goal is to encourage genuine faith in Christ that is increasingly evidenced by love for God and spiritual fruit and good works. The Small Group Application also offers questions that specifically challenge unbelievers to consider the truths of Scripture.

Small Group Application can be the most challenging aspect of the classroom time. Therefore, understanding the essence and value of application time will help the small group leader properly prepare, lead, and engage students in life-response to the Word of God.

Leading Students from a Heart of Praise

In teaching children it's very important to keep in mind that it is not just *what* we teach that is important but also our *demeanor* as we teach. In his sermon, *One Generation Shall Praise Your Works to Another* (from Psalm 145:4), John Piper says,

It is the Biblical duty of every generation of Christians to see to it that the next generation hears about the mighty acts of God. God does not drop a new Bible from heaven on every generation. He intends that the older generation will teach the newer generation to read and think and trust and obey and rejoice. It's true that God draws near personally to every new generation of believers, but he does so through the Biblical truth that they learn from the preceding generations. The Spirit comes down vertically (you might say) where the truth of God is imparted horizontally.

But there is another reason that Psalm 145:4 is so relevant ... Not only does it speak of the imparting of truth from one generation to another, it speaks of a certain kind of imparting. It is an imparting with exultation and for exultation. Notice the words. It does not say, "One generation shall merely teach Your works to another." It says, "One generation shall praise Your works to another." Praise is exultation in God. The education of the next generation must not only aim at exultation, it must involve exultation.

Teachers and parents who do not exult over God in their teaching will not bring about exultation in God. Dry, unemotional, indifferent teaching about God—whether at home or at church—is a half-truth, at best. It says one thing about God and portrays another thing. It is inconsistent. It says that God is great, but teaches as if God is not great.

Psalm 145:4 shows us another way: "One generation shall praise Your works to another." Let praises carry the truth to the next generation, because the aim of truth is praise. The aim of education is exultation. So let education model exultation in the way it is done.[1]

Therefore, ***the first and most important aspect in leading the Small Group Application of the Truth78 curriculum is the spiritual preparation of the small group leader.*** Good teaching comes from a mind that has been instructed by the Word of God and a heart that has embraced the Word, evidenced by a confidence and delight in God and heartfelt praise of Him, through Christ^[sw1].

The Importance of Prayer in Leading Small Group Application

As you prepare to lead the students in your group, it is crucial to humbly acknowledge and keep in mind that true regeneration and saving faith is by God's sovereign grace, through the work of the Holy Spirit, who makes us alive to Christ and empowers us to walk in His ways. Therefore, it is important to approach every lesson with earnest prayer for yourself and for your students. Many lessons include specific prayer prompts for this purpose and encourage prayer as an integral part of the Small Group Application time.

The Role of Workbooks in Small Group Application

Each Truth78 curriculum has an accompanying **Student Workbook/Notebook**. We highly recommend that each student in your small group be given their own workbook at the beginning of the year. Here are some reasons for using workbooks during the Small Group Application time:

- Workbooks are a tool to enhance the application process. Students are encouraged to move from head knowledge to heart application — responding to the truths learned. (In our Revised curricula, students need workbooks in order to complete certain portions of the application section.)
- Workbooks for younger children provide opportunities for “hands-on” activity — coloring, pasting, stickers, etc. This helps students focus as the adult leader reviews key lesson themes and leads the discussion time.
- Workbooks for older children provide the students with a variety of opportunities for note-taking during the lesson, small group and individual activities, personal application and further study.
- Workbooks provide students and parents with a resource that summarizes the precept-upon-precept study, in its entirety. In other words, if a student misses lessons during the year, he or she will still have a complete outline of the study from beginning to end.
- Workbooks provide the students with a tangible, interactive resource through which the truths presented in the lesson can be reviewed and remembered.

Following is both a reflection of the above convictions and very practical help in preparing and leading Small Group Application.

General classroom issues —

Work in cooperation with the other members of your team.

- Understand your role in the classroom: A Small Group Leader's main role is to be responsible for preparing and leading the **Small Group Application** found in each lesson of the curriculum. Also, you may be called upon to meet with the students in your group when they first enter the class (Transition Time). This time can be used for review from the previous week, lesson-themed activities, Bible memory review, informal conversation, prayer requests, etc.
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of other classroom volunteers: team leader, teacher, worship leader, etc.
- Work with your team in assigning 4–8 students for each small group for the duration of the year. This should be done at the beginning of the year. Allow for flexibility in reassigning students to different groups as the need arises.

Prepare the room and tables for Small Group Application

- It is preferable to have the students sit at tables during the Small Group Application.
- Arrange small group tables to allow for a minimum of distraction from other tables.
- Have the assigned Student Workbooks and pencils, colored markers, and other supplies ready at your table.
- Make sure there are extra Bibles available for students who do not have one.

Get to know your students

- Get to know your students' personalities, interests, etc. This will help you become a more effective small group leader.
- Get to know your students' parents: Connect with them at church or by phone on a regular basis, communicate any concerns, ask for prayer requests, etc.
- Ask about your church's behavioral policy and be ready to clearly communicate and implement it in the classroom in age-appropriate ways.
- Understand the abilities and limitations of the students in your group (i.e. reading skills, attention span, etc.).

Get to know your curriculum

Using your **Teacher's Guide**, become thoroughly acquainted with the content of the curriculum.

- Read through the **Curriculum Scope and Sequence** found in the **Preface**. Notice the flow of the study and the main concepts that will be taught. There is a step-by-step, precept-upon-precept design to the lesson order.
- Carefully read the entire **Introduction**. Make sure you have been given all necessary curriculum components (i.e. workbooks, GIFT pages) found in the **Classroom Kit**.

- Work with your ministry team to design an organized class structure – transition time, worship, lesson presentation, small group time – that incorporates the curriculum as a whole and prioritizes time for the Lesson Presentation and Small Group Application.
- Look at the list of additional helps found in the **Appendix**.
- Read **About Truth78** and the back of the guide.

Preparing to Lead the Small Group Application

During the week before the lesson

- Carefully read and meditate on the Scriptures and biblical truths found in the Large Group Lesson. Next, read the discussion points found in the Small Group Application. Ask the Holy Spirit to use the Word to transform your own heart and will. Are there sins you need to confess? Actions to take? Expressions of praise and thankfulness to God, through Christ? Consider age-appropriate ways that you could briefly share your own personal experience with your students.
- Study the Small Group Application questions in light of the students in your small group. Are there particular questions that you would like to focus on? Highlight these on the copy of your lesson. Are there additional questions you believe would be helpful? Write these down also.
- Read the accompanying lesson GIFT page that will be sent home with the students. Consider writing a quick note of encouragement on these.
- Pray for your students during the week.

During the Large Group Lesson

- Sit among the students in your small group. Observe how they are reacting and responding during the lesson (i.e. attentive, interested, bored, confused, etc.). Deal with any behavioral issues quietly and quickly.
- Listen to the lesson carefully and take notes if necessary. Sometimes a teacher might veer from the written lesson. If this happens, you need to be thinking about how you will address this in your small group time.

During Your Small Group Application Time

Begin with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide the discussion.

- Encourage the students to recall the main points of the lesson. Keep this review as brief as possible. Be prepared to offer correction if necessary by restating the main ideas of the lesson. (The Main Ideas are listed on the first page of the lesson.)
- Follow your prepared Small Group Application discussion questions and notes. Move the discussion along.

- Use the workbooks as described in the Small Group Application. If they become too distracted with the workbook activities, have students stop for a time and redirect their focus toward discussion. Depending on the age of your students, it may be wise to withhold the workbooks until you have focused on your main discussion points. Then, you can take advantage to have one-on-one interaction as students complete their workbooks.
- Lead in a manner that encourages all of your students to be included in the discussion yet doesn't make a shy child uncomfortable.
- Make the discussion personal: Have the children reflect on their own real life experiences and then direct these reflections God-ward.
- Share a brief personal example to encourage children towards a desired response. Personal examples show that you, too, need to respond to God's Word — the need to trust in Christ, and then depend on the Holy Spirit to walk in God's ways.
- Listen carefully to the students' responses. Use these as a means to probe further: Ask for clarification if necessary, relate each response to biblical truth, encourage them to apply the truth in their lives. What might this look like for each of them? Give concrete examples.
- Be careful in the language you use. Do not assume that each of your students are saved.
- Lead and encourage children to praise God for something specific they have learned about Him and/or experienced by applying His truth in their lives.
- Pray with and for the children in your group. Write down specific prayer requests. Lead them to pray for one another.
- Give an application assignment; a way for them to follow through on the discussion and then give a report the next week.
- Send home the GIFT pages.

After the Small Group Application

- If you have a concern about something a student said or did during your discussion time, talk to your class Team Leader and/or teacher. Contact the parents in person or by phone.
- Send a note to students who were absent. Send them the lesson GIFT page.

For further training on leading Small Group Application, we strongly encourage you to listen to [Reaching the Heart: The Importance of Application](#) and read the [accompanying handout](#) (Note: This seminar was produced under our previous name, *Children Desiring God*).

[1] John Piper, *“One Generation Shall Praise Your Works to Another,”*

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/one-generation-shall-praise-your-works-to-another>