

GUIDE FOR GROUP LEADERS

From Julea Douglass

Thank you for your willingness and commitment to help guide your group through this journey toward peace and purpose. We hope you find this experience educational and enriching for your group and yourself. To support you through this process, I've included some suggestions for creating an environment conducive to learning and sharing together.

The best way I know to help you prepare for leading this class is summed up on two big plaques at our house...

A while ago, I was looking for a plaque to go over our front door. I was trying to think of the one phrase I wanted our kids and Brooks to carry with them as they went out into the world. I looked online for a phrase and couldn't find it. Then looked to the Bible. As usual, the Bible had what I needed. Inspired by Christ's example and lifetime, I found a company to custom make this:



*Walk humbly [with your God]... eager to learn more from God and our experiences (from Micah 6:8). But sometimes humility alone won't do it. Sometimes you've got to get *courageous*—stand up for what's right, have the hard conversations that are easier left unsaid, and persevere.*

The second wall hanging comes from 1 Corinthians 13:13:



And the greatest of these in love... both God's love and your love. Often the ones who need our love and intervention the most are the hardest to reach. They're the ones most likely to miss class, come late or not sign up at all.

Don't let your resisters slip away. Talk to them after class, meet for coffee, or call them after work. Let your love shine through; it's a powerful heart-melter. Often you won't see the impact for awhile—but it will come and is definitely worth the wait.

Love—both genuine and unconditional—will also help create a class climate where group members feel comfortable talking, are interested in listening, and are open to learning. Before you start each class, pray to yourself that God will work through you to help others

feel the power of his presence. Of His many attributes, ultimately, *God is love* (1 John 4:8 & 16).

SCHEDULING

This guide is designed for **11 sessions total**—one meeting to show the movie and introduce the group, nine meetings for other chapters of this guide, and a 11th meeting for the graduation celebration.

Session 1: Watching *The Amendment* Movie – The first session is to welcome people to the group and show *The Amendment* movie (90 minutes). After the movie, give participants a brief introduction to the purpose of this group and your inspiration for leading it. You can pass out the full guide if all participants plan to return or pass out a copy of the table of contents if you are trying to recruit participants to join the discussion group. Be sure to pass out a sign-up sheet with contact information and follow-up with a phone call before the next session to welcome them to the group.

Sessions 2-10 – The next nine sessions are for discussing each chapter in this guide (60-90 minutes based on discussion time). Schedule 5-10 minutes at the beginning of class for casual meet & greet time. In Sessions 2 and 3, you might be wondering why we’re “finding commonalities” and “tracing family influences,” rather than diving into the underlying themes of the group: grief, loss, and forgiveness. These early lessons are important for building group trust and comfort level before delving into the more personal topics.

Session 11: Celebrating Together – Plan a graduation celebration to recognize your class experiences and breakthroughs. Ceremonies are an important part of the learning and healing process. The graduation celebration is a great time for each person to share what they’ve learned and what they are looking forward to in the future. The celebration can be in the same meeting place, someone’s home, or somewhere else. It doesn’t need to be fancy—just sentimental. Talk to the group about inviting family members and friends to the celebration. If the group consensus is to invite guests, encourage them to do so. Otherwise, it can be just for group members. Consider creating a special keepsake to commemorate your sessions together (e.g., a small smooth rock with “peace” written on one side and “purpose” on the other side).

Follow Up – Many 11-week sessions can create a great sense of motivation but that momentum can fizzle without follow-up. Plan to schedule ongoing check-ins to meet as a group and encourage each other.

LESSON FORMAT

Each lesson follows a similar format:

SHARE A PRAYER: Start each class with a prayer. Ask for any prayer requests and then pray yourself or invite someone else to pray. Sharing prayer requests is an important time for acknowledging what group members are concerned about and for initiating a God-centered discussion.

INTRODUCTIONS: Usually a follow-up from the previous lesson, this gives members a time to reflect on what they learned and applied from the homework.

BEHIND THE SCENES: This section gives additional insight into the movie clip. Sometimes its information about Brooks, Leslie, and their parents not included in the movie or it may be research or Bible references that help put the movie clip in context.

MOVIE CLIP: To access the movie clip, log into the Amendment Faith-based Guide iPortal. The iPortal login instructions are included in the original email you received after signing up for the guide access. Once you’ve logged in, click on the session title then the “Movie Clip” button to get started. *Session 2: Finding Commonalities* also has an additional slide with a picture of the glass butterfly. The

movie clip can be shown on a laptop or plugged into a TV or projector for a larger screen. It works just like a PowerPoint. The clips are streamed from the Internet and cannot be downloaded so test to be sure the clips are working before class starts.

THINK-PAIR-SHARE: Some people are shy about talking in class or formulating their ideas. The think-pair-share model gives everyone an opportunity to first write their responses to the questions (*think*) and talk about it with a partner (*pair*), before having a discussion with the whole group (*share*). You will be amazed what a difference this makes in group member's personal insights, participation level, and class climate. Even if quieter members don't share their ideas with the whole group, they will gain a lot from the one-on-one partner conversations.

FAITH WALK: The main theme of this Bible study centers around the life of Jesus and his 12 disciples. They are one of the most profound examples of love, loss, grief, recovery, and a greater sense of peace and purpose. The main text can be read aloud by you or a group member—or you can just paraphrase it. **All text in bold** are questions to be read aloud to the group to encourage discussion. Many of the questions have an obvious right answer, but some don't. That's OK. The richness of the discussion is more important than agreeing on a "correct answer." Give the Holy Spirit room to inspire a meaningful discussion rather than worrying about a specific answer.

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION: Some but not all sessions include this section, which is designed to apply the movie and Biblical insights to additional activities and reflection.

HOMEWORK: Thinking about and applying the session points is an important process to developing new habits and insights. Encourage members to take the homework seriously and be prepared to talk about it and the beginning of the next section.

CREATING CLASS CLIMATE

This is a "support-group guide" rather than a "self-help guide" for good reason—a significant portion of the power of this intervention will come from the insights, accountability, and relationships of a group experience. As Aristotle first said, *the whole is greater than the sum of its parts*, meaning that together—members will gain more from each other than they could have on their own. Recovering from grief, loss and/or a traumatic experience can be a very lonely place. The comradery of this group is essential to the healing process. Therefore, as a group leader, it is essential that you create a class environment that is conducive to members sharing their thoughts and building authentic relationships with each other.

Discussion group leadership requires patience, skill, and preparation. While most group leaders are already eager to help and motivate others, one of the most valuable characteristics you can bring to this interactive discussion is the restraint to **listen more and talk less**. Creating a space in which participants feel genuinely cared for (and not lectured to) can be a powerful platform for intervention and personal growth.

Create a Comfortable, Inviting Space. Make an effort to create a meeting space that is warm, but not too warm, and comfortable. Consider including:

- Soft background music before the meeting starts
- Yummy food and/or healthy snacks
- Tea, coffee, and/or hot chocolate (Have decaf. available as well)
- Tissue box(es) (for wiping tears)

As people enter the room, meet them at the door as if you were inviting them into your home. Hug (if appropriate), shake their hands, and/or put your hand on their shoulders. *Be sure to **organize the chairs in a circle rather than rows** so people can see each other speak.*

Restrain from giving advice. *Do you like being told what to do?* Most people don't. While advice giving can be helpful, it can also be risky. The recipient may become defensive and close the door to further intervention. When you feel the group would benefit from your experience and expertise, try the "Feel, Felt, Found" method:

Step 1: Feel – Identify what s/he is feeling. [*"Sounds like you are feeling frustrated your son isn't returning your calls."*]

Step 2: Felt – Empathize with his/her feeling and share a time when you felt something similar. [*"I remember feeling that way when my daughter went to college and stopped calling me."*]

Step 3: Found – Share what helped you overcome that feeling. [*"I found that as I continued to support her independence by sending letters of encouragement, she started to call home more often."*]

Listen with the intent to understand. First publicized in Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, this concept is a powerful component of communication and small group facilitation. Take a moment to break this statement down: *What does it look and feel like to "listen with the intent to understand"? How do you know when someone is fully listening to you? How do you know when s/he is not listening?*

Try the "EARS" technique¹ and consider sharing this with group members:

Eye contact (varies with culture)

Acknowledge that you are listening (nodding and saying "hmm"). **A**sk open-ended questions (that lead to more than a "yes" or "no" answer).

Reflect feelings [*"Sounds like you're feeling (emotion)..."*]

Say in your own words what you heard the person say. [*"So you think that _____. Is that right?"*]

Don't let your mind wander to other topics or what you are going to say next. Listen with full effort to try to understand what your group members are thinking, feeling, and experiencing. Gentle, patient listening is essential to helping with the healing process.

Share the floor. If there are 10 people in the group, each person should participate 1/10th of the time (including the group leader). Of course some will talk more and some will talk less, but as the group leader it is your responsibility to keep people on time, on track, and considerate of others.

¹From Beland, K., Douglass, J. & Matheny, R.K. (2015). *School-Connect: Optimizing the High School Experience, Third Edition*. Bethesda, MD: School-Connect.

- **On Time** – Designate a certain amount of time for each section of the lesson. Before the lesson, write in your notes what time you should start and progress to the next section. If need be, introduce a section by specifying time frames. For example, for the first four to five questions (“Think-Pair-Share” section) start by saying, *“We’ll have 25 minutes for these questions. Please take about five minutes to answer the questions for yourself then 10 minutes to share with a partner. We will reconvene at [name a time] to discuss this as a group.”*
- **On Track** – If a participant deviates from the main topic or is monopolizing the conversation, redirect the discussion by paraphrasing what the person is saying or feeling and then ask, *“Can anyone else relate to the feeling of _____?”* While experiences are individual, feelings are universal. All group members can relate to the feelings of fear, frustration, disappointment, etc. If there is not time to continue that part of the discussion, say, *“Thank you [Name] for sharing. I would like to hear more about this, but we need to move to the next section. Can we talk about this after class?”* [Then be sure to follow up after class.]
- **Considerate of others** – Encourage group members to adhere to the Golden Rule: *“treat others as you would like to be treated.”* Start the first class session by reminding the group of the importance of confidentiality, supportive listening, and sharing the floor. As you model empathetic listening by identifying the feelings and perspective of others, you will begin to set the tone for the class. For example, *“It looks like John has something he wants to share. John, is there something on your mind?”* or *“Sarah, you seem frustrated. Do you want to talk about it?”* or *“Jenn, you look worried. How can we support you in this?”* Lead by example, and if necessary, have private conversations after class with any group member who is being inconsiderate of others. In that conversation, cite positive characteristics about that individual that s/he could bring to the group that would benefit others, and be specific about class guidelines and expectations.
- **Rely on Biblical truths** – Let the Bible be your primary resource of wisdom and application. Look to God’s truth and Christ’s example for guidance. The Bible is God’s gift and the greatest owner’s manual for finding fulfillment, forgiveness, peace, and purpose. Include God in the class discussion by opening with prayer and prayer requests. If someone is distressed, ask, *“How can I pray for you?”* and transition the class discussion to a group-supported prayer in class or pray privately with the person after class. In Matthew 7:7, God promises to support us in our journey: *“Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”* Let your class discussion ultimately lead to a strengthened relationship with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit that will last long and strong beyond the course of these sessions.
- **Let Moments and Breakthroughs Happen** – There is a chance some of these conversations will bring tears and grief. That’s OK—and a necessary part of the journey. Let your participants be sad. Let them comfort each other. Accept that some cannot truly be comforted yet. It is a long, winding road back home with no true shortcuts. Let grief be—with the hope to set it free. If someone is overcome with grief during a session, consider letting a trusted group member or another counselor meet one-on-one with that person in the hallway or another room rather than asking them to continue with the session that day.

PLANNING AHEAD

Use the Class Evaluations to Plan Your Next Class. Pages 71-76 are the class evaluations that asks participants to rate each lesson in the guide and their overall experience with the class. Participant feedback is a great way to continue to make the class better and better each session.

****Please send a copy of your evaluation results to Julea Douglass (address included on evaluation form). We too want to continue to make this class the most meaningful it can be and to use evaluation feedback to improve upon the lessons.**

Contact Us. If you have any questions about the guide or facilitation, please feel free to e-mail me at Julea@DouglassHouse.org. We welcome your questions, suggestions, and feedback.

There is an overwhelming, unmet need to help people recover from grief, loss, and victimization. We are very grateful you are joining us in this effort by having a meaningful impact in your community.

Enjoy the journey! ☺