

ONLINE WORKSHOPS ON BIBLICAL EXPOSITION

SMALL GROUP LEADERS GUIDE

We are having this Workshop and gathering in Small Groups in order to increase our capacity and confidence in handling God's Word faithfully and accurately. Our hope is for each person to make progress on their own work, year after year.

GOALS OF THE WORKSHOP

Throughout the Workshop we will endeavor to help the participants rediscover the power and relevance of God's Word through biblical exposition with the following goals:

- *Convince* them biblical exposition must be done.
- *Encourage* them that biblical exposition can be done.
- *Show* them how biblical exposition is done.

METHODOLOGY

Our three goals are accomplished through three parts of our Workshop. Each is carefully designed to be interrelated with the others for the greatest value in improving your work.

- *Instructions*: hands-on principles for how to better handle biblical texts
- *Expositions*: meant to encourage you as you sit under the teaching of God's Word (these are meant more to *convince*, not merely *show*—the goal is to provide the participants an experience of submitting to the Word preached, not a model for analysis)
- *Small Group Practice*: work on our Bible-handling skills and hopefully get a little better at the work of biblical exposition

BEFORE THE PRE-WORKSHOP/WORKSHOP STARTS

- Prepare each of the Small Group texts and be ready to discuss them. Going over the Small Group texts is how we will spend most of our time at the pre-Workshop.
- Familiarize yourself with the names of the people in your group and be in prayer for them. Make the most of your introduction time during the first small group. Much of their experience at the Workshop will be formed by your role as their leader.

AT THE FIRST SMALL GROUP MEETING

- Take leadership of your group. Welcome everyone. Reinforce the goals of the Workshop and its three parts (Instructions, Expositions, Small Group Practice).
- Have each person introduce themselves to the group: name, church name, time in ministry, number of times at a Workshop. *Take notes.*

- Introduce the On-Call Leader and explain the role.
- Explain the purpose of the Small Group times: *the purpose of the Small Groups is to help each participant take one step forward in their Word work, to make progress.* This is important to state because the group will naturally focus on their own interpretation of the text rather than on the presenter's interpretation and presentation of the text. The Small Group Leaders will especially be tempted to focus on what they learned in the pre-Workshop. This can be good, but it should not overpower the task at hand. While offering a compelling interpretation of the text can help presenters realize something they missed, focusing on your own interpretation must not be at the expense of interacting with the presenter's work and actually helping them to improve. *It is not nearly as important to get to the right answers on the text as it is to help the presenter identify the most important ways that they can improve in their handling of the Scriptures.*
- Reinforce the *Small Group Preparation Worksheet* they received prior to the Workshop. Explain that they must follow the prescribed format and present their material succinctly. Their entire presentation should take approximately five minutes.
- Explain the various roles:
 - *Reader:* reads the passage and prays for the group
 - *Presenter(s):* having prepared ahead of time, they present their material succinctly in five minutes or less
 - *Responder(s):* in one minute offers an encouraging word and asks a question to probe the presenter's work to help them make progress
 - *Timekeeper:* keeps people within their allotted time (the Group Leader may serve as time keeper)
- Explain the format. You will have 60 minutes per small group, which covers one passage.
 - identify the presenters and assign the reader, timekeeper, and responders
 - 1-2 minutes—read the text and pray
 - 5 minutes—first presenter
 - 5 minutes—second presenter
 - 1 minute—first responder (responds to first presenter)
 - 20-25 minutes—open discussion on the first presentation
 - 1 minute—second responder (responds to second presenter)
 - 20-25 minutes—open discussion on the second presentation

We recommend that you prepare the assignments in advance for the small group (who will read, present, respond). Type these out in three concise lists, one for each passage. At the beginning of each small group gathering, copy/paste the list for that passage in the chat box. Only your breakout group will see this chat. This way, if your Internet goes out, everyone has access to the roles (especially the on-call leader).

ON-CALL LEADERS

In each small group there will be a person on-call to lead the group in the event that the small group leader experiences technical difficulties. This person should be a trained small group leader and is not considered an apprentice leader. If not needed to lead, the on-call leader will act as a regular participant throughout the Workshop, presenting one text. The small group leader should make the group aware of the on-call leader during your first small group meeting so that they know what to expect if you experience problems with your Internet or computer.

The on-call leader should participate in the pre-Workshop and have access to all of the same training materials and Zoom controls as the small group leader.

In the case where there are not enough on-call leaders, the small group leader should appoint an experienced Workshop participant to take over if his or her connection goes down. "Experienced" means having attended at least two Workshops. Their job is to keep the group moving until the small group leader can return.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE PRE-WORKSHOP: COMMAND OF THE TEXT

One of the two reasons for gathering in the pre-Workshop is for the Small Group Leaders to gain familiarity with the passages. While Small Group Leaders should prepare all the texts in advance, it is still an invaluable time to get on the same page on the passages.

OBJECTIVES FOR THE PRE-WORKSHOP: EQUIPPED TO LEAD

In Plato's dialogues, the Socratic Method (debate or cross-examination) is a dialectic method of inquiry applied to the examination of key concepts. That is, it is a way of exploring ideas through discussion. It is used by teachers to foster as much interactive learning as possible by drawing the student into and arriving at their own conclusions. In this way, they do their own work, often being driven to frustration (*aporia*), so that they realize that their answers were insufficient and have to work to come up with new answers. At Workshops, we strive to use this modified Socratic Method. We want participants to engage in the independent critical thinking that leads to a deeper understanding of the principles and better use of them when they go home to do their own work. In other words, as a Small Group Leader, you should use questions to drive the discussion.

- Use questions to get the participants to learn the material through their own discovery. In so doing, they will develop their own emotional ownership to the principles.
- Reinforce content of the instructional sessions. Draw the principle picture and outline the work by sharing your screen (using Zoom's whiteboard function or a similar program on your device).
- Do not (immediately) answer the questions you (or others) raise, or you will lose an opportunity to help participants discover the answers on their own.
- Remember, the goal is to help the presenter take the next step for their work—not to get everyone on the same page about the *right answers* or the *right understanding* of the text.

A weakness of the Socratic Method is that it can make the Small Group Leader the guru instead of pointing participants directly to the text. Be careful and work hard to keep the participants in the Scriptures and your own approach very accessible. Never justify your conclusions with references to work that you have done or secondary works that you have read and that they have not seen (e.g., commentaries). Likewise, you will want to be careful if and how you reference original languages in most contexts.

TONE

It is our conviction that the Small Group time is the most important aspect of a Workshop on Biblical Exposition. Because the Small Groups are so important, the tone is critical to our success. Anytime critique is invited, tensions will inevitably rise. Your goal, as Small Group Leader, is to set the tone for mutually beneficial group critique. Think about parity, equality, and the idea of *spring training*. Remember:

- Everyone is here to learn. Get the participants to interact. They will surprise you.
- Opening yourself up to critique is a vulnerable thing. Very few pastors and teachers do this with any regularity or purpose.
- Balance reassurance and correction to help the presenter. Your ability to help each participant is maximized if you genuinely care about each person.
- Your single best tool is a well-crafted question. Model constructive criticism that pushes the participant forward (it is not how you would do it or your homiletical hints, but what they need to improve that drives the discussion).
- Leave your ego at the door. Critique is not personal, but pastoral! You are the leader, not the expert. Your perspective may be right, but...
- Your goal is to help each participant get a little better, not become experts. You might only have time to focus on one issue and leave the other five issues unresolved.

DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

Without hearing the presentations in advance, it can be difficult to anticipate what will make a good question from the Small Group Leader. Nevertheless, there are generally a few areas of weakness in all presentations. These questions are meant to help you think through the presentation and begin to tackle your response. These questions are listed in a specific order to help you identify problems. For example, if the main idea is off, the argument will likely also be off.

1. Did the participant explain how the text fits within the context? You might ask:
 - How did the passage before this contribute to your understanding? What's the bigger theme in this section of the book? How does your passage function in its context?
 - How did you understand the historical context? How is it relevant to your passage?

2. Did the participant explain the structure of the passage? You might ask:
 - What was your structure again? How did you arrive at that structure?
 - What strategies did you use to arrive at your structure?
3. Did the participant explain how the text fits within the message of the book (relate to the melodic line)? You might ask:
 - What is your melodic line for this book? How does your passage contribute to it?
 - How does the melodic line give you guidance on your passage?
4. Did the participant state the author's aim clearly and accurately? Was it grounded in the text? You might ask:
 - Can you please repeat the author's aim? Where in the text is this grounded?
 - How might you change your understanding of the author's aim in light of our discussion? What does the group think of the revised aim?
5. Did the participant make good gospel connections? You might ask:
 - What strategies did you use to find your gospel connections?
 - Of the possible connections listed, which is most closely connected to your aim?
 - How is our view of God and Jesus expanded from this text?
 - What part of the gospel is in view from that connection?
6. Did the participant provide a good conclusion and applications? Are they grounded in the text? You might ask:
 - Given what you know of the author's agenda, what do you think he intended for his readers to think or do as a result of this passage? Where in the text might you point your people to see that conclusion?
 - How does your conclusion follow from the author's aim?
 - What would these applications look like in your church?
7. Did the participant provide a good preaching outline? Our goal here cannot be to judge the poetic quality of the outlines so much as to assess whether it effectively communicates the aim of the passage or their conclusion/applications without undermining the nuances and details of the passage. You might ask:
 - How does your preaching outline relate to your conclusion? How does *this point* in your outline flow from the author's aim? How does it contribute to the argument you are making? How does your outline capture the essence of the text?

- What might be a better way of arranging your points to serve your argument?
- Are there too many (or too few) points in your outline? How might we combine/separate points in order to better capture the main idea of the passage?