

TEACHING THAT CHANGES LIVES

Purpose: to explain methods of application of scripture and to reinforce the principle that changed lives is the goal of all teaching.

Objectives: by the end of this lesson you will:

1. Be able to explain how life change is brought about in a small group.
2. Be able to build into a lesson or group of lessons appropriate avenues for encouraging life change.
3. Become committed to bringing about life changes in a small group.

Key Verse: Colossians 1:28-29

I. Introduction

Have you ever been to a hospital and seen doctors and nurses who smoke? These are men and women who have studied the body and know the effects of different behaviors on the body's health! And, it is their job to take care of us and help us take care of our bodies. Yet, some of them have failed when it comes to applying their learning to their own lives. If there is any class of people who know the dangers of smoking, it would be those in the medical profession. But they sometimes take the worst care of themselves. They know the material, but just don't apply it. Knowledge without application is innocuous.

In this lesson, we will look at how to apply what we are learning. Before we do that, let's quickly review what we have learned about small groups to this point.

A. Essential elements of leading a small group.

1. **Preparation and Evaluation.** Often, the most innovative, smooth, fun, spontaneous, and beneficial group meetings and talks are those in which the leader has done a superb job of preparation. Preparation includes: the setting, the purpose, assessing student needs, studying the lesson yourself, leading the discussion and evaluation.
2. **Discussion.** There are four basic types of questions that you will use to create discussion and self-learning: **Closed, Limiting, Open, and Re-directive.**
3. **Environment and Atmosphere.** The atmosphere must be safe, warm and accepting. It should also be informal and accessible. Time, seating arrangement, as well as refreshments and good lighting, all lend to a favorable environment for an effective small group.

One of the most important, but least thought of aspects of a small group, is the goal of life change. Not only do we want to increase knowledge and change attitudes, but also more importantly we want to see lives changed.

II. Teaching for Life Change

One of the most crucial characteristics about a good small group is personal application. Paul says in Colossians 1:28-29 that "...he strives mightily in order to present everyone complete in Christ." God doesn't leave out the key ingredient of a changed life, and neither should we.

"Leading a group toward life-change isn't something you add on to your group, it's the focus of your group. Pray for life-change. Work toward it. Expect it. Model it. Build it into your group. Don't become enthralled with producing excellent discussion and lose sight of the goal of application which leads to life-change." Ultimate Road Trip, page 94

What are some of the elements in a small group that contribute to life change? The question is not asking what dynamics make for successful group interaction, rather what happens to produce change in the lives of the group members, including you. Write down your ideas before proceeding.

Top Ten Ways You Can Encourage Life-Change

A. **Prayer:**

We can work hard and plan well, but ultimately God is the one who causes the growth. Paul says in First Corinthians 3:6, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow". Examine and pray through examples of prayer from Colossians 1:9-12, Ephesians 1:15-19, and John 17:6-19. Use index cards: put the name of the person you are praying for on a card, a Scripture verse pertaining to that person, and the desired results on the card. Then take the card with you and pray for the person on the card during the day.

B. **Modeling:**

This is very important. The people in your group will model after you. You must be committed to living out what you want them to learn. Jesus tells us in Luke 6:40 that, after a person has been fully trained, they will be like their teacher. 1 Thessalonians 1:5-9 gives a good example of this:

- Paul and others preached.
- The people imitated him and Christ.
- The Thessalonians were changed and spread the Word.

As you can see, modeling can be very powerful! What are some things you need to model in your small groups?

- C. **Be Open and Real:** (1 Thessalonians 2:8). Be appropriate with what you share, but ask the group to pray for you in an area in which you struggle. Encourage others to share. The things shared should remain confidential in the group.
- D. Be prepared to **Confront** group members (2 Timothy 4:2; Matthew 18:15-17). Have the courage to humbly, graciously, lovingly, and firmly confront another when necessary. Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses (Proverbs 27:6).
- E. **Mutual Accountability:** (Hebrews 3:13). Encourage the group to encourage, sharpen, and look out for one another's well being. Walking the Christian life is so much easier when others are walking with you.
- F. **Personal Responsibility** is critical for life change to occur (2 Thessalonians 3:7-10). Make sure the group members take responsibility for their own lives. Too often we blame others for our poor decisions. You need to be a resource, but only they can make the decision.
- G. **Leadership Commitment:** (1 Peter 5:1-5; Hebrews 13:17)
Commit to making life change a primary objective of your group by actually planning it into your session. Do not just tack it on to the end of the lesson. Ask yourself, "What kind of change am I trusting God for in the group members, and what can I do to facilitate the change and work toward it?"
- H. **Structure of Group Time:**
Group time should be structured to encourage personal application as the lesson goes along. Don't let this vital aspect fall to the very end where it will be cut short or cut out altogether because of time constraints. Be sure to **leave time** to discuss, interact, and implement application. Begin each study by asking about the application from the **previous** lesson. Encourage application discussion and research from week to week. This will help reinforce the learning and life change that is so important.
- I. **Understanding Change:**
Understand why people change and adjust your application to the people in the group (1 Corinthians 12:12-25). This will help identify and overcome barriers. Moreover, you will be able to more effectively plan for future lessons.
- J. **Use Learning Activities:**
Role playing, watching videos, debates, research and reports, storyboarding, demonstrations and discussion, assigned acts, going someplace, etc., are all ways to incorporate the group members into their own learning. What are some activities you have experienced or heard of others doing that you thought would be effective in your small group?

III. Application:

Spend some time now reflecting on the small group(s) you are leading. Evaluate how it is going and whether or not life change is taking place in the group members. Are you seeing them mature in their faith? Following are some questions that will help you think strategically about your small group. Take time to answer them and then pray for each of the members.

- Evaluate your current group in the area of life change. Are the people changing?
- Evaluate your commitment to make application a crucial component of your group.
- Evaluate how well you've been doing in implementing each of the steps mentioned in the chart that follows.
- Where can you make changes and what changes will you make if any?

Application Evaluation Chart

Evaluate how you are doing in application. 1 is poor, 3 means fair, and 5 is great.

Application Method	Evaluation	How To Improve, Maximize This Area
Prayer	1 2 3 4 5	
Modeling	1 2 3 4 5	
Be Open and Real	1 2 3 4 5	
Confront	1 2 3 4 5	
Mutual Accountability	1 2 3 4 5	
Responsibility	1 2 3 4 5	
Leadership Commitment	1 2 3 4 5	
Structure of Group Time	1 2 3 4 5	
Understanding Change	1 2 3 4 5	
Use of Learning Activities	1 2 3 4 5	

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe how life change is brought about in a small group?

2. How would you build into a lesson or group of lessons appropriate avenues for encouraging life change?

3. What has this lesson done to help you become committed to bringing about life changes in a small group?