

Acts of Compassion

Leader's guide for discussion groups

Introductions

- Introduce yourself to the group.
- Invite each member to provide a one-minute introduction.
- Ask members to answer this opening question:
"Do you consider yourself to be a compassionate person?"

Getting started

- Begin each meeting with prayer.
- Encourage participants to always read the chapters assigned for the week.
- After the first session, ask for examples of acts of compassion observed, done or received by participants.
- The discussion guides contain brief summaries of each chapter. You don't need to read these to the group. They are simply there to remind people of the contents of the chapters being discussed.

Principles for group discussion

- Focus on the theme of the book:
Deepen understanding of compassion and make it a part of daily life.
- Goal is to identify how some of the principles of the book relate to us, not to lecture about what is right or wrong.
- Monitor how much time each person talks. If someone goes on too long, you may need to interrupt "to keep the group going."
- If someone is not contributing, you might turn to them and ask their opinion about the question.
- Monitor group discussion for staying on content.
It's okay to occasionally discuss topics important to participants but when this occurs, allow time to make their points, then gently lead them back to the study questions.
- Encourage participants to move beyond superficial answers such as "It depends" or "yes" or "no." Ask questions that probe deeper. Examples:

What leads you to this conclusion?

What's behind your thinking?

What did you read in the book that leads you to think this way?

Ending the meeting

- Spend a few moments reviewing the most important learning points for the day.
Encourage participants to look for places to express their compassion this next week.
- Close with prayer or invite one of the group members to close the session with prayer.

Problems with discussions

If there is a problem with a group member talking too much or being harsh in opinions, use a break time or time between groups to address concerns.

You might say, "I am concerned that everyone is not getting enough time to participate. You are good about sharing your opinion, but could you help me by being a good listener and getting others to share more?"

Guidelines for Small Group Participants

At the first session, make sure everyone has a copy of these guidelines and remind participants to honor the guidelines during this book study.

The guidelines are included in the participant discussion guide but can also be printed from the list of individual lessons on the website.

Beginning of each meeting

- Start on time and end on time. Arrive early so you are settled when it's time to begin.
- Notice and welcome any new participants. Introduce them to the rest of the group.
- Plan to read the book chapters ahead of time so you are ready for the discussion.
- Silence your cell phone. Avoid texting and side conversations during group meetings.

During each meeting

- Maintain confidentiality. What's said in the group stays in the group.
- Listen well. Be sensitive to how long you share. Don't talk too much or too little.
- Encourage all group members to participate. Ask questions to draw people out.
- No fixing, solving or rescuing. Give encouragement, show warmth and caring but don't try to give solutions.

After each meeting

- Appreciate and thank the group leader. If possible, offer positive feedback.
- Read the book chapters for the next meeting.
- Pray for the group, including individuals who are struggling in their lives.
- Tell others about the book, the lessons and how the discussions are helping you.