

synago

Light in the Dark

Student-Led Senior High Small Groups

A small group ministry resource for reaching, nurturing, encouraging, and discipling senior high youth

by Karen Kluever

Leader Sample Session

© 2001, 2002 by Abingdon Press

SYNAGO: LIGHT IN THE DARK is intellectual property copyrighted by Abingdon Press. You are permitted to download this product for personal or educational one-time use. Reproduction of the product, by mechanical or electronic means, for further distribution (to colleagues or any other person) or for resale is unethical and expressly prohibited and will be enforced to the full extent of the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which includes criminal and financial penalties.

Scripture quotations in this publication, unless otherwise indicated, are from the *New Revised Standard Version* of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture Credits

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

Scripture quotations marked (CEV) are from the Contemporary English Version copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

The Message (Message)

Scripture taken from THE MESSAGE. Copyright © Eugene H. Peterson, 1993, 1994, 1995. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

New Century Version (NCV)

Scriptures quoted from The Holy Bible, New Century Version, copyright © 1987, 1988, 1991 by Word Publishing, Nashville, Tennessee 37214. Used by permission.

New International Version (NIV)

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989, Divisions of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

What's Synago All About?

First and foremost, the goal of the small group is to strengthen members' spiritual relationship with God and Jesus Christ.

The sessions are led by trained student leaders, who are committed to living out,

growing in, and encouraging their peers in the Christian faith. These student leaders are nurtured, supported, and supervised by one or more Christian youth workers—the counselor who is a member of their small group and possibly a small group coordinator and/or a youth ministry director.

Small group sessions are designed to help youth connect their “story” with “the Story” of the Christian faith. They discuss where their own experience and understanding of a particular life or faith issue comes together with the Scripture. Then they consider how God’s love, grace, forgiveness, and call to faithfulness can have an impact upon that area of their lives.

Sessions explore topics such as anxiety, gossip, prayer, family relationships, friends, suffering, service, dating, confrontation, self-esteem, setting goals, and lots more. Generally, each session is topically based and explores one or more Bible readings, which group members analyze, interpret, and then apply to their own lives.

The second purpose of the small group is to build Christian community within a circle of friends, in which group members practice and experience what it means to be in ministry to and with one another.

The small group is friendship based. Members are not assigned to a group, but invited to the group by the group leaders or other members. Invited friends may or may not be members of

the church or organization sponsoring the small group ministry, which makes this ministry an excellent way to reach beyond the walls of the church to youth who are unchurched or currently inactive.

Synago groups usually meet in the homes of group members. Since one of the goals is to reach out especially to unchurched youth, having the meeting in homes can overcome the reluctance some youth may feel about coming to something at a church building.

To encourage intimacy and trust, a policy of honesty, openmindedness, and confidentiality is communicated at each session: “What is shared in the group, stays in the group.” This policy frees students to talk about very personal and sometimes painful circumstances of their lives in a loving, compassionate, and supportive environment.

Each small group has two student leaders, an adult counselor (or couple) and up to seven other student members. When there is a consistent participation of ten members, the group “multiplies” into two groups. Typically, the original co-leaders each go to one of the new groups and begin leading with a new co-leader. Additional adult leadership is then assigned to one of the new groups. Recruitment and training for both student leaders and adult counselors should happen at least two times during the year, in order to have leadership available when it comes time for a group to multiply.

For more nuts and bolts info, check out pages 13 and 19.

Contents

What's Synago?

- 6 From the Author
- 7 Biblical Foundations: The Word on Small Groups

Getting Started

- 10 To the Ones in Charge
- 11 What's *Synago* All About?
- 12 Great Reasons for Student-Led Small Groups
- 13 How to Do Student-Led Small Groups
- 14 Typical Format
- 15 How to Use This Resource
- 16 Who's Who: Student Leader Roles and Responsibilities
- 17 Who's Who: Adult Roles and Responsibilities
- 19 Q & A

Help for Student Leaders

- 22 A Word of Encouragement
- 23 Getting Ready to Lead
- 24 Weekly Checklist (pre-session prep, weekly sheet)
- 25 Bible Study Tools You Can Use
- 26 Discussion Tips
- 28 Ways to Close in Prayer
- 29 It's Important! The Purpose Statement

Small Group Sessions

- 32 Purpose Statement
- 33 What's New?
starting something new, becoming "new" in Christ
- 36 Child of Mine
from childhood to adulthood, being a "child of God"
- 39 Stress-Less
dealing with stress, trusting God with your needs
- 42 Love Story
role of the Bible in the Christian faith
- 45 The Outsiders
feeling left out, reaching out to others
- 48 Prayer 101
what prayer is and how to do it
- 51 Getting Directions
finding guidance for making decisions
- 54 What Are Friends For?
qualities of a good friend
- 57 Thirst Quencher
feeling spiritually dry or empty
- 60 Serve It Up
following Jesus Christ by serving others
- 63 When Life Hurts
hurting and suffering, experiencing God's comfort
- 66 Zip the Lip
gossip, swearing, and obscenity
- 69 Loving God
relating to God, what it means to love God
- 72 Loving Myself
loving and caring for yourself
- 75 Loving Others
relating to others, responding to others' needs
- 78 Light in the Dark
feeling hopeless, finding hope and peace in Jesus Christ

Life Issue

Feeling left out; reaching out to others

Faith Connection

Christians should invite, accept, and include others, just as Jesus Christ invites and accepts us into relationship with him. Jesus modeled a lifestyle of reaching out to include all people, especially those whom society and the culture excluded.

Main Ideas

Have you ever felt like you were the only one sitting at home on a Friday night, and you were just praying the phone would ring and that a friend—or anybody—would invite you out? Is there a group you'd like to be a part of, but can't seem to get into? Or do you have a pretty tight group of friends who always seem to be doing something together? How open is your group to accepting newcomers, especially people who are different from you?

Most of us tend to see ourselves and others as belonging to one of two groups: insiders and outsiders. You are either in a group or you're not. Feeling like you belong to a group that wants you and accepts you gives an incredible sense of identity and worth. Feeling like a group doesn't want you can be devastating. Why do we place so much importance on being included? It's because God made us to be social beings. It's part of our God-created nature to want to be in relationship with others. We NEED to be in relationship with others.

As Christians, it's not enough to be aware of this aspect of human nature—we must act on it. We have to step outside our “comfort zone” and invite others into our groups. That includes friendship groups as well as youth groups, small groups, churches, and clubs. A first step is to identify who the “outsiders” are in our lives and have compassion for them. (Try imagining how they must feel. Remember times when you felt left out.) The next step is to do something about it. Invite them “in” to your group and shower them with Christian love and acceptance. Be persistent—it shows someone you really do want to include them.

If we faithfully follow the example of Jesus, we will intentionally seek out and hang out with “outsiders.” And if you're one of those feeling excluded, take heart in Jesus' genuine love and acceptance of you. Having confidence in being lovable will help give you the confidence to reach out in love to others!

Read, Research, Reflect

Psalm 113:4-8; Mark 2:14-17; Colossians 4:5

Read the Scripture passages and the additional info in your *Synago* Notebook. Make notes on the following:

- Who is speaking or telling the story in each passage? Who is the intended audience? What is the context? (What do you think the situation is? What's happening before and after this passage?)
- Pray about and reflect on the reading. What does it say to you?

Memorize

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.
(Colossians 4:5, NIV)

Prepare

- Note your own answers to each question.
- Decide what type of prayer you will use for the closing. (See page 28.)
- Get supplies.

The Outsiders

Session Plan

Supplies:

Synago
Notebook for each person who doesn't have one (or Bibles or copies of the Bible readings and note cards), pencils or pens

* *Questions with an * should be answered by everyone.*

Opening

5 minutes



Welcome/Announcements/Purpose Statement/Prayer

Warm-Up

3 minutes



In three minutes, brainstorm as many groups or clubs as you can that a teenager can belong to? (Leader: watch the clock and keep count of how many things the group comes up with.)

Topic Talk

15 minutes



1. a. What groups or individuals at school would you describe as “outsiders”?
b. What identifies them as outsiders?
2. What groups or individuals in your community would you identify as “outsiders”—not socially acceptable, intentionally left out, or actively excluded?
3. Think about a time when you felt left out. Tell the group about it. *

Word Search **Psalm 113:4-8; Mark 2:14-17; Colossians 4:5**

20 minutes



Ask a volunteer to read aloud Psalm 113:4-8.

1. a. Who would be the insiders and outsiders in this reading?
b. In what ways do the rich and poor continue to be insiders and outsiders today?
c. In the reading, what action does God take with the poor and the powerful?

Have another volunteer read aloud Mark 2:14-17.

2. Who were the insiders and outsiders in this reading, and why?
3. Why do you think this story is included in the Bible? What does it tell you about Jesus Christ?
4. How do you think the tax collectors and other designated “sinners” felt when Jesus ate with them? (To eat with someone was a sign of friendship. It still is, isn't it?)

Ask a volunteer to read aloud Colossians 4:5.

5. In this context, “outsiders” were persons who were outside the Christian faith. Why do you think the Apostle Paul thought it necessary to give this advice to some early Christians?
6. How does Paul's advice relate to us and our friends and acquaintances?

R&R—Reflect and Respond

 5 minutes

1. If God were hosting a dinner in your community, who would be seated together at the table?
2. If Jesus were hanging out during lunch time at your school, with whom would he be eating? Are there specific tables where he would sit?
3. How inviting and accepting is our small group? In what ways, as a small group, are we being Christlike with outsiders? How can we be more invitational and accepting of others? (Be really honest here.)
4. Take a moment to think of one person “outside” your small group, youth group, or peer group, whom you can befriend. Share that person’s first name with the group. By sharing these names, we can hold each other accountable to follow through on reaching out to include them.

Wrap-Up

 2 minutes

Most of us tend to see ourselves and others as belonging to one of two groups: insiders and outsiders. You are either in a group or you’re not. Feeling like you belong to a group that wants you and accepts you can give you an incredible sense of identity and worth. Feeling like a group doesn’t want you can be devastating. Why do we place so much importance on being included? It’s because God made us to be social beings. It’s part of our God-created nature to want to be in relationship with others. We NEED to be in relationship with others.

As Christians, it’s not enough just to be aware of this social aspect of human nature—we must act on it. We have to step outside our “comfort zone” and invite others into our groups. That includes friendship groups as well as youth groups, small groups, churches, and clubs. A first step is to identify who the “outsiders” are in our lives and have compassion for them. (Try imagining how they must feel. Remember times when you felt left out.) The next step is to do something about it—invite them “in” to your group and show them Christian love and acceptance. Be persistent. This shows someone you really do want to include them.

If we faithfully follow the example of Jesus, we will intentionally seek out and hang out with “outsiders.” And if you’re one of those feeling excluded, take heart in Jesus’ genuine love and acceptance of you. Having confidence in being lovable can give you the confidence to reach out in love to others!

Celebrations and Concerns

 15 minutes

Ask group members to share recent celebrations and prayer requests for themselves or others.

Closing Prayer

 5-10 minutes

Encourage group members to pray for each other’s concerns and to name a person God is leading them to reach out to and invite to the small group. (Leader: Write down these names and follow up with your group members during the week.)

Notes

Read aloud, or restate in your own words, to the group.

synago

Light in the Dark

Student Sample Session

The Outsiders

To eat with someone was and is a sign of friendship.

Psalm 113:4-8 (NRSV)

The LORD is high above all nations,
and his glory above the heavens.
Who is like the LORD our God,
who is seated on high,
who looks far down
on the heavens and the earth?
He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
to make them sit with princes,
with the princes of his people.

Mark 2:14-17 (NRSV)

As [Jesus] was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.

And as he [Jesus] sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples—for there were many who followed him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well do not need a physician, but those who are sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

Colossians 4:5 (NIV)

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

A “psalm” is a Hebrew poem often prayed or sung in worship by groups or individuals.

The tax collector's booth was probably a toll booth located on the major road from Damascus to Egypt.

The word "sinners" could refer to evil people as well as those who didn't follow the law God gave to Moses, as it was interpreted by the teachers of the law (the Pharisees). Seen as spiritually unclean, sinners were outcasts of the Hebrew community and included tax collectors, thieves, adulterers, prostitutes, and others.

Notes

Pray for

Next Meeting at

Date

R & R

REFLECT AND RESPOND

Think of a time when you felt left out or excluded; describe what that was like. Then, do the same for a time you felt included, a part of the group.

Reread Mark 2:14-17. Imagine yourself in the scene. Fill in the details.

- Where are you? What do you see?
- What's the temperature? What are you wearing?
- Who is with you?
- In the story, who are you—a teacher of the law? a tax collector friend of Levi's? just a curious bystander?
- Keeping in mind the cultural and religious implications of being clean and unclean according to the Law, what do you make of what Jesus says and does?
- What feelings are stirred up? What do you think about Jesus?

Write the name of someone you consider to be an outsider—either to your peer group, youth group, small group, or at your school. Write three specific ways you will reach out to this person, showing genuine hospitality and friendship, as Jesus did for outcasts. Pray for God's guidance as to who needs you to befriend him or her and for opportunities to do it.