

# MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR STUDY

## PRAY

Ask God to empower you to be an ‘inviter and includer’ and to show you who to invite. Make a list of people who come to mind. For those who would like to join the study, ask them if they have someone in mind they would like to invite. Ask the Holy Spirit for the gifting of leadership, hospitality and wisdom as you share in facilitating this series.

## INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE THE FIRST MEETING

- Call everyone that you know has indicated they are coming.
- Ask them if they need directions to the host home, if they have any concerns (such as allergies to pets, food, etc.), or if they need to avoid any uncomfortable situations (reading publicly).
- Give them your phone number and email.
- Give them the host home name, address, phone number, and email.

## BE CREATIVE WHEN IT COMES TO THE GROUP TIME

What would help your group bond? What would help the group build trust and open up? What would help the group care for each other? Don't feel you have to follow the leader's guide legalistically. You may spend more time on one aspect than another. You may carry out the prayer time differently. Follow Jesus, rather than merely following this guide.

## GET FAMILIAR WITH ALL MATERIALS

Read through the questions and daily readings ahead of time. Know the material so you can best facilitate the group. Watch the videos ahead of time and make sure the video/sound is working correctly.

## PROVIDE A WELCOMING SETTING

Be creative. Food always helps warm up a group. If you can have some snacks, or even better, a meal together, like a potluck dinner of some kind, go for it. Before and after your formal group time, you might want to have coffee/beverages available so that those who want to talk personally will feel more comfortable,

and will be more likely to do so. Background music can also promote a more comfortable, open, and thus effective atmosphere for group discussion. You will want to rearrange the chairs so that everyone can face one another. This creates an atmosphere where everyone feels part of the discussion. Let others help you clean up if they volunteer. It'll make them feel like they're a part of things, so if they ask to help, accept it!

## **SMALL GROUP FORMAT**

We realize that small groups come in all shapes and sizes. They are hosted in a variety of venues and settings and have varying time constraints. As the leader, you will need to take these factors into account and structure your group time accordingly.

### **SUGGESTED FORMAT**

- Welcome/coffee/snacks/introductions (15 minutes)
- Testimony time (15 minutes) - Each week a new person share their story.  
During this time, feel free to guide each member that is sharing. Ask questions such as where were you born, what was it like growing up, how long have you lived on Maui and what brought you here. Maybe give a little testimony of how they became a Christian. Think of questions that would help members truly get to know each other better.
- Play the corresponding weeks online video
- Optional - Split up into groups of 4 or 5 for discussion questions.
- Discuss questions from the video, online questions and reading from the week (45 minutes)
- If you split up into groups of 4 or 5, bring group back together & introduce next week's theme (5 minutes)
- Prayer & Praise Time (10 minutes) Read together out loud the "Prayer For The Journey" found with the online questions.

We suggest a total of 90 minutes. You may not get through all the questions each week. That's okay. The important thing is that your group is really engaging with the material and wrestling with it on a personal level. If you find yourself running

out of time on more than one occasion, you'll likely want to read through the questions ahead of your next meeting, and prioritize the ones you feel are the most important. Resist the temptation to run over the time you have set for the group to meet. Respect everyone's time, and you'll have a group eager to return for the next session.

## ABOUT THE SEREIS

Acts Odyssey is the story of how the Jesus movement grew from a few dozen frightened followers to a worldwide phenomenon! The story of Jesus church continues through us and we must learn from the example of the early church. The lessons and insights from the book of Acts provide us with the desperately needed guidance and inspiration we need for today.

This series will retrace the steps of the apostles as recorded in the book of Acts. It's a story filled with adventure and inspiration. A story of how God uses ordinary people in miraculous ways. A story of the faithfulness and sovereignty of God!

In Acts Odyssey, René Schlaepfer journeys to the original sites of the early church. It's like going on a free holy land and journeys of Saint Paul tour! Many of the historical and archeological lessons will bring greater insight and understanding for your faith. And if you ever feel discouraged, exhausted, or in need of a personal word from God, the story of Jesus people in the early church can change the way you see your present... and your future.

Acts Odyssey is a 8-week (*9 weeks in 'Ohana Group*) journey of discovery, with 49 short daily chapters and seven weekly discussion guides for groups. Videos filmed on location at the ancient sites will enhance your journey and serve as discussion starters.

As the group leader, you have the opportunity to play an important part in sharing a message that has the power to transform lives. But please understand, your primary role is that of a friend and servant. It is the leader's job to provide a safe place where participants can honestly explore their faith. It is the leader's

job to model Jesus by being genuinely concerned about the thoughts, questions and struggles of the group members.

### **SMALL GROUP FACILITATOR ROLE**

As the leader, you don't need any special training or leadership experience to facilitate a group. You don't have to be a teacher – in fact, it's better if the leader doesn't teach. All you have to do is facilitate the conversation, keep the discussion moving and make sure the atmosphere is open, non-judgmental, and conversational. The book and video teaching will do the teaching for you, while you trust the Holy Spirit to be dramatically active in the lives of the participants. In fact, perhaps the best way for you to lead a group is to let the study impact you personally. Take the journey yourself. Be frank and honest with your group as you share the things that God is revealing to you along the way. Be as open to learning from the group as you are committed to serving them as their leader. I'm sure that if you approach the study with that kind of open heart and humble spirit, your group members won't be the only ones who are blessed.

Also, as the group leader, we encourage you to attend one of the weekend services as each teaching will be going along with the series. You may also want to send a weekly email or group text to your group as encouragement to go to a service and do their daily reading and questions.

### **TIPS FOR GUIDING DISCUSSION**

Since one of your primary responsibilities is to keep the conversation going, we've included some really important tips for you to consider. Guiding the discussion is important to your group's success. Please, don't skip over this; make sure you really digest these concepts. Go over these tips with other group members and ask them to give you feedback after the discussion time.

**Pray:** Ask God to give you wisdom, to give you a listening ear, and a peace that passes all understanding. 2 Timothy 1:7 says that we should pray for a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.

**Ask Questions:** This guide contains a number of possible questions that you could ask, but these questions don't have to be asked exactly as they're written. Feel free to rephrase the questions to make them your own. The more conversational you can be, the better. The real key is to not just ask one question right after

another, but to follow up with what someone says. This makes the discussion more like a conversation than a lesson. So, here are some good follow-up questions to have in your back pocket: “Explain what you mean.” Or you might ask, “Can you give an example of what you’re saying?” Or “When did you start thinking or feeling that way?” Or “How confident are you that that’s true?” Or “How well does that work in your life?” Maybe you say, “Well that’s interesting. What do the rest of you think?”

**Listen:** Keep in mind that the most important thing you need to do next is LISTEN! Really hear what people are saying. Don’t worry so much about what you’re going to say next. Instead, really listen, and then respond out of what you hear people say. You’ll also want to be careful to talk enough but not talk too much. A little silence can be a good thing for a group; so don’t try to fill every quiet moment. Do your best to listen to the Holy Spirit as well as the conversation. Be praying silently all through the discussion time, asking for the sensitivity and wisdom to listen and then guide without controlling.

**Your Opinion:** Another important key is to be sure not to give your opinion about an issue unless it’s already been fully discussed. Some people will see you as the leader, and once you speak they’ll shut down. So, if someone asks for your opinion you might say, “I’ll be glad to give it, but let’s hear from everyone else first.”

**Affirm vs. Endorse:** It’s important that, as a leader, you affirm all the responses. You say, “Thank you Ben.” Or “That’s very interesting Elizabeth.” No matter what the participants say, don’t criticize their remarks. What they just said may be antagonistic to you, it may be stupid, it may simply sound ridiculous, but don’t directly criticize it. Instead, say something like, “Well that’s interesting. What do the rest of you think?” Once you as the leader directly disapprove of someone’s comments, then some people will never speak up again. They’re going to fear disapproval. Once exploration stops for them, then the journey does too. But on the other side of the coin, while it’s important to affirm all responses, avoid the temptation to endorse them. Don’t say things like, “Now that’s a great comment” or “I couldn’t agree with you more.” Such endorsements tip your hand and leave others feeling like their comments are not acceptable. Also, resist the urge to be too instructional, trying to answer everyone’s questions and solve everyone’s problems. Once a know-it-all person speaks up, conversation tends to shut down.

You can give your own opinion, but do it in a personal and humble way. Maybe you say, “Well my experience has been...” or “This is how I see it...”

**When someone talks too much:** What do you do if you have a difficult, domineering, or excessively talkative person in your group? Here are a few ideas: First, if someone is talking on and on – interrupt nicely, and say, “I see what you mean, and I hear what you’re trying to say, but let’s see how others feel about that.” Or another thing you want to do is if someone is regularly talking too much, you might say, “I’d like to give everyone else a chance to say one thing before anyone speaks a second time.” Also, if someone continues to just dominate the group or the discussion time, step aside with him or her after the session and say something like, “I see you have a lot of ideas, and you’re very willing to express them. That’s awesome, but I need your help. Some of the others in the group are not as bold. So, would you help me draw them out? If you could keep your comments a little briefer, not speak up quite as much. I think they’re going to begin to share. So, if you could help me with that, it would be great.”

**When someone never talks:** What if you have a person in your group who never talks, and they’re reluctant to share? You might say something like, “Does anyone who hasn’t spoken up yet have a thought or an idea?” If that doesn’t work, and if the Spirit is prompting you, then maybe you say

“Hey Kevin, I noticed you haven’t said anything yet – you don’t have to but I’d sure be interested in hearing what you think about this.” We realize this may be a ton of information for you to digest (especially if you are a new leader), but don’t worry. Above all, just love each person in the group because if you truly care about them, they’re going to sense it, and then allow the Holy Spirit to do the rest.

**Groups of four or five:** The ideal size for the small group sharing time each week is four people. If you have eight in your group, divide them up into two groups. If you have ten in your group, divide them into two groups of 5. If you have twelve...then three groups of four each. It is very important to pass on the ‘Ohana Group training to the leaders you assign to lead in each group. Do not assume if they watched you for one or two weeks that they will become able leaders. For the sake of their small group train them.

## GROUP GUIDELINES

It's a good idea for every group to put words to their shared values, expectations, and commitments. Such guidelines will help you avoid unspoken agendas and unmet expectations. We recommend you discuss your guidelines during Session One in order to lay the foundation for a healthy group experience. Feel free to modify anything that does not work for your group. We agree to the following values:

**Clear Purpose:** To grow healthy spiritual lives by building a healthy small group community

**Group Attendance:** To give priority to the group meeting (call if I am absent or late)

**Be Committed:** To commit to purchase a book (1 per person) and to commit to do the daily readings, reflecting, & answering questions

**Safe Environment:** To create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved (no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes)

**Be Confidential:** To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group

**Conflict Resolution:** To avoid gossip and to immediately resolve any concerns by following the principles of Matthew 18:15-17

**Limit Our Freedom:** To limit our freedom by not serving or consuming alcohol during small group meetings or events so as to avoid causing a weaker brother or sister to stumble (1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Romans 14:19-21)

**Welcome Newcomers:** To invite friends who might benefit from this study and warmly welcome newcomers.

**Build Relationships:** To get to know the other members of the group, encourage, and pray for them regularly

Other Guidelines:

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We have also discussed and agree on the following items:

Child Care:

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Start Time:

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Ending Time:

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