



Leader's Guide

Introduction

This Leader's Guide is a little different from others. In our normal studies, each Leader's Guide is custom-made to help engage the accompanying Participant Handout. In an effort to make studies about breaking news available immediately, we have created this rather generic Leader's Guide for the studies in this section.

This will require a little more effort on the leader's part. This guide has been created not knowing whether the piece will be about some controversial dispute between political leaders, a human or natural tragedy, or some surprising news. For that reason, we have provided some options for prayers and activities. You will need to read these first and decide which ones to use. We will still use the same format of our regular studies, which assume you have forty-five minutes to lead the group in study.

For your information, authors of the Participant Handout are asked to do the following:

- Describe the event or situation with the news known to date.
- Name the ethical or theological issues raised by this event or situation.
- Suggest possible actions to take if appropriate.
- Raise some questions for discussion.

As in our other studies, authors are not prohibited from sharing their own opinions about the matter, but they are obliged to clarify the rationale from various angles even if they disagree.

Goals for the Session

The goals for this session are to clarify the facts known about the situation, equip participants with an ethical and/or theological framework in which to deepen the

discourse they might have about the situation, provide an opportunity for participants to share their own feelings about the situation, and discuss ways to respond.

Preparing for the Session

- Before beginning the session, take a few moments to be quiet and think about your own feelings on this topic. If you find yourself extremely emotionally involved on one side of the issue or extremely upset about a tragedy, consider whether or not you are the right person to lead the discussion. The leader needs to be someone who has a position on the issue but is able to support people who have a different position. You must be able to listen respectfully to opposing positions and encourage participants to do the same. Likewise, in the event of a tragedy, you need to be able to support others who may be having a difficult time. It is okay, in fact it is very responsible, to admit every now and then your strong feelings and recognize the need to find another leader for the session. It is best to do so with plenty of time before class begins.
- Pray for guidance as you lead the session. Also pray for all the participants you know will come and those who may come.
- Read through the Participant Handout at least once.
- Make copies of the Participant Handout so that each participant can refer to it during the session.
- Have Bibles available in case anyone wants to look up a verse that may become part of the discussion.

- Have paper and pencils or pens available for the participants to take notes if they so wish.
- Bring copies of news articles on the issue. If there is time, you might encourage participants to do the same.

Teaching Tips

- If this is a political discussion, it could be a volatile issue, especially when discussed among people with differing points of view. If the participants in your group are all like-minded on the topic, be sure to encourage them to explore the opposing point of view sympathetically. Don't allow this to become an opportunity for the group to justify positions it already holds by criticizing opposing arguments. If your group includes participants with opposing points of view, it is especially important to encourage them to listen to one another respectfully as brothers and sisters in Christ.
- If this is a human or natural tragedy, emotions may be varied among members. Sometimes tragic events that affect others far away can trigger memories and feelings of a tragedy in our own lives. While the session should not turn into group therapy, you may need to allow some persons to deal with their strong emotions. It is usually best to affirm their emotions and allow them a minute to speak if they so desire. If they choose to not speak, you can offer them a tissue and say something like, "This situation may bring up a number of reactions in many of us, and it's important that we allow ourselves some space to deal with them." Invite the persons to choose whether to stay or leave, assuring them that you will be in touch with them after the session if they leave. And then continue with the session.

Opening (10 minutes)

1. Prayer

Choose one of the following prayers or one of your own.

O God of all creation, we come before you as brothers and sisters in Christ seeking both truth and com-

passion. Guide our conversation during our time together so that we may be your disciples as well as servants to one another. In Christ's name we pray. **Amen.**

We cry to you out of the darkness, O God,
Hear the pain and the tears of our brothers and sisters.
Allow them to feel your healing presence in the
midst of their tragedy.

Make us instruments of your love and show us how
to best be of service in your world. **Amen.**

2. Introducing the Topic

Take a few minutes and allow participants to share aloud what they know about the situation. Allow participants to correct one another if misinformation is shared rather than you supplying all the answers. Remind people that one of the goals is to get the facts right and not further rumors. If there are newspapers or other printed resources on the situation available, use them to clarify information if necessary.

3. (Optional) Setting Some Ground Rules

If the situation is controversial and you know the group members differ strongly in their opinions, it may be wise to agree on some rules for discussion. First, remind people of the goals of the session. One of them is to clarify the facts. Another is to define the ethical and/or theological issues that are at stake. These two goals can be met before participants share their personal views. In the third part of the session, participants will be encouraged to share their views, but they can do this without trying to persuade others of their point of view. They will be encouraged not to attack but rather to share what they believe and why, knowing others may not agree.

Exploring (20 minutes)

4. Read the Participant Handout

It is assumed that participants have come without reading the Participant Handout. Distribute the handout at this time and allow the class ten minutes to read it. If people finish early, they can begin reflecting on the questions raised by the author at the end of the handout.

5. Clarify the Ethical/Theological Issues

If the group is larger than eight persons, consider dividing it into groups of eight to ten people. In this way, everyone who wishes to speak can have the chance to do so.

Name the ethical or theological issues raised by the author. Even if the group does not agree with the author's position or one another's positions, they should be able to agree on the principle at stake. If it is helpful, write the issues on the board.

If a tragedy has occurred, ask the group if the author has framed the issues that may have contributed to it in a helpful way. Are there other ways of looking at the situation? What are they?

6. Discuss the Questions in the Participant Handout

While being careful of time, ask participants to comment on any of the questions raised by the author. Was there one question that struck them as more urgent or more important than the others?

It may very well be that more questions arise out of this session than anyone has answers to. If it appears that you are overwhelmed and underprepared to deal with them, write the questions on the board and promise to follow up with them at a later time. That is, rather than get defensive and feel you need to answer everything, affirm the questions and promise to help figure out a way to deal with them at some time, even if you can't do so today.

Responding (10 minutes)

7. Large-Group Discussion

If the event is a tragedy, this time can be spent brainstorming about ways your group might respond. While

we often want to respond immediately, it is usually wise to take time and plan our response. Perhaps other groups are already responding, and your group can support them. Perhaps you need more information to make sure what is most helpful and needed.

If the event is controversial, this is a good time to allow participants to express how they feel about the situation. Remembering that the goal is to help one another clarify their own position rather than change other people's positions, invite persons to speak for themselves while respecting the time constraints. If someone is having a hard time defining his or her position, encourage the group to help out that person, even if they do not agree with that position.

8. Next Steps

Survey the participants to see if they desire to continue the discussion. What more information do they need? Would they like to invite an expert to talk with them? Have you identified some theological or ethical concept that requires further study? Is there desire to do a study on the situation? If issues or questions have arisen during the session that have not been answered, who will answer them? When?

Closing (5 minutes)

9. Prayer

Conclude with the following prayer or one of your own.

O God, be with us as we leave this place and make us aware of your presence throughout the week. Give us the wisdom and power to glorify you in all that we do. In Christ's name. **Amen.**