

Facilitator's Guide

How to be positive when it doesn't come naturally

Introduction

How to be positive when it doesn't come naturally is a series of four sessions designed to encourage positive engagement with the Bible in a small group context.

To this end the series addresses a theme of high interest and significance. Happiness isn't a product of genetics and environment. We can "train our brain" to be more positive using repeated exercises over 21 days. We can make the choice to be happy, but this doesn't explain what is happening to us, particularly in the face of suffering and loss. Can we do better than just saying: "It is what it is" or "everything happens for a reason"?

In each session participants have the opportunity to participate in a "train your brain" exercise before delving into select passages from the book of Job to see how the book addresses the question of why there is suffering.

Who is this series designed for?

This series is for participants who are new to reading the Bible or reading it like we do. They are also interested in discussing topics of interest and open to exploring what the Bible has to say in the context of that discussion.

Preparation before a session

Read the session resource in its entirety.

Answer the questions for yourself.

Think of some stories or illustrations for the introductory questions around the topic (step 1 below) and the application questions (step 4 below).

The structure of a session

Each session takes around 45-60 minutes.

The sessions follow essentially the same seven-step format.

1. An introductory question(s) on the theme.

These are safe questions designed to stimulate interest and discussion.

This is also some explanatory material on the "train your brain" thinking as well as some introductory material on the book of Job. This can be read or summarised.

2. Excerpts from Job

Read this to participants or ask for a volunteer. Only ask someone to read if you know they are comfortable reading out loud.

3. Two questions:

- What interests you here?
- What questions do you have?

These are safe, comfortable questions with no right or wrong answers. Give participants ample time to think and explore because the experience is as important as the learning.

As participants speak, circle or make notes as to what interests them so that you can refer to this later.

4. Notes on the passage

Read each of these paragraphs or ask a volunteer to read.

The notes will cover the important content in the passage. These notes are designed to aid the facilitator and stimulate the upcoming discussion.

5. Two questions:

- What interests you here?
- What questions do you have?

Check that participants have made some progress to finding answers to what interests them (step 3 above). Ask: *"So the question you asked earlier about...what do you think now?"*

6. Two questions:

These questions differ each session. They are designed to stimulate participants' thinking in terms of application of the material. The questions work best if participants are prepared to be vulnerable. As a facilitator you can help shape a safe space by being honest and acknowledging your own weaknesses.

7. Prayer

If appropriate, ask participants if they would be happy to have a short time of prayer. Prayer aids sharing and building community, teaches how to pray and models humility before God.

To make prayer a comfortable experience, let participants know that you will be the one to pray and ask them if there are things they would like you to pray for. Give concrete examples so they know what you are after - you could say: *"Happy to pray for anything - it might be for a new job, or a health concern, or something else that's on your mind"*. Once everyone has shared, lead in prayer. Make your prayers short and concise and use the words the participants used.

Troubleshooting

What if participants don't speak?

Ask participants to share their answers to a question in pairs first. This gives more reflective participants time to think. Then ask the pairs to feed back to the large group.

What if a participant speaks too much?

Ask participants to share their answers to a question in pairs first. When you ask each pair to feed back to the large group, this gives space and permission for others to speak.

What if I do not know the answer to a question?

Be honest because it models humility and the nature of faith (we don't know everything). Consider doing some research and coming up with an answer.

What if participants disagree with the passage (or each other)?

Since the purpose of the series is to encourage positive engagement with the Bible in a small group context, there needs to be space for a variety of opinions. Take the longer view that over time their opinions could change.

Additional resources

To encourage participants to think further on the themes, you might like to refer them to the following articles:

<https://hbr.org/2012/01/positive-intelligence>

Where to next?

This depends on the participant. Options could be another series like this one. Or the participant might be open to reading a biography of Jesus (for example using Word 1:1, which explores John's Gospel).