

SMALL GROUP // LEADER'S GUIDE

GRACE // TRUTH

THE CENTER FOR
FAITH, SEXUALITY & GENDER

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Our Mission

Equipping Christian leaders, churches and organizations to engage questions about faith, sexuality & gender with theological faithfulness and courageous love.

Who We Are and What We Do

The Center is a collaboration of Christian pastors, leaders and theologians who aspire to be the Church's most trusted source of theologically sound teaching and practical guidance on questions related to sexuality and gender. We seek to address two primary needs in the church:

One, to help leaders cultivate a more robust biblical ethic of marriage, sexuality and gender.

Two, to help churches and organizations create a safe and compassionate environment for LGBT+ people, their families, and anyone wrestling with their sexuality or gender identity.

To meet these two needs, we seek to educate not only pastors and leaders, but to help these leaders educate the people they lead by providing small group material, educational videos, podcasts, blogs, youth curriculum, and other resources. For more about us, go to www.centerforfaith.com.

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Leading a *Grace/Truth* Group Learning Experience

“Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” Romans 12:2

Very few issues in Christianity are as divisive as the acceptance of LGBT+ people in the church. Those who are open to being more accepting of LGBT+ inclusion are often labeled as “liberals” and those who are opposed to or skeptical of inclusion are often labeled as “right-wing evangelicals.” While everyone has an opinion about LGBT+ men and women, few Christians have thought deeply about LGBT+ people as being created in the image of God or how to relate to them with the love that God commands.

Yet Jesus was able to love all kinds of people while still holding true to God’s commands as taught in the Bible. We believe that if Jesus can both love and obey, so can his followers! *Grace/Truth 1.0* is a thought-provoking, small group learning experience that will challenge each participant to do just that.

As a group leader for the *Grace/Truth* learning experience, it is your privilege to guide this discussion with both truth and grace. You have the incredibly important role of introducing your group to this important topic. We’re not asking you to teach this material. The videos, the *Grace/Truth 1.0* discussion guide book, the questions at the end of each Conversation (chapter), and the Holy Spirit are the “teachers.” All you have to do is facilitate the discussion and provide a safe place where participants can learn and explore.

The *Grace/Truth* Materials

The following resources can be viewed and ordered at www.centerforfaith.com.

Grace/Truth 1.0 Discussion Guide

Grace/Truth 1.0 is a five-week learning experience that introduces Christians to LGBT+ people, explains the language to use and avoid, presents a theologically faithful view of marriage and sexuality, and offers practical guidance on how to embody the love of Christ toward sexual and gender minorities.

Grace/Truth 2.0 is also available if your group wants to pursue this topic further. You may also want to purchase a copy for yourself as reading it will help you to answer questions that come up in your group that are not covered in 1.0. (However, there is no Small Group Leader’s Guide for 2.0. The ideas in this Guide are all you need to lead a 2.0 discussion.)

Every participant in your small group will need a copy either in paperback, ebook or audiobook, *at least one week* before your first meeting. Your church will have to decide if it will provide a paperback version to each participant or if participants will be asked to purchase copies on their own. Copies may be purchased on our

website, www.centerforfaith.com. They are not available from Amazon, christianbooks.com or other Christian book retailers.

The most economical way to make sure everyone has a book is for you as the leader to purchase what you need for your group and have them reimburse you. Left over books could be sold to other groups, donated to the church or purchased by members in your small group to lead their own study with family or friends.

Grace/Truth 1.0 DVD

One DVD, or a download is required for the five-week group experience. Participants do not need their own copy.

Preparing Yourself to Lead

1 Pray

You likely will experience some conflict and tension in your group, so prepare for it! Everyone comes to this discussion with opinions. Some of their ideas are biblical and others they've gotten from their family and culture, but believe them to be biblical. We suggest you gather a few serious prayer warriors to pray for the group participants, discussions, and for you personally.

2 Contextualize

You can better understand the context for these conversations by acquainting yourself with the mission and ministry of The Center for Faith, Sexuality and Gender, www.centerforfaith.com. Note especially:

- Who is Preston Sprinkle?
- What's The Center's Mission?
- What are "Pastoral Papers" and other resources available?
- Our *Statement of Marriage, Sexuality and Gender*

3 Review

To be an effective leader, you do not have to have all the answers! This is a complicated topic. However, becoming acquainted with all of the material in *Grace/Truth 1.0* will prepare you for questions that will come up. It will also enable you to respond better to the "we'll get to that subject in Conversation Five," type questions.

- Read *Grace/Truth 1.0* completely. Watch all of the videos before week one so you know all the subjects that will be covered. (And not be covered)
- Read the "Pastoral Papers" referred to in *Grace/Truth 1.0*.
- Write down questions you have and either research the answers or ask your pastor or a staff person.

4 Equip

Make sure every member of your group has their own copy of *Grace/Truth 1.0* and has read both the Welcome, and Conversation One, prior to the first meeting!

5 Plan

Plan to set up the room so people can interact with each other well and see each other's faces. A lecture-style set up is not conducive to group interactions. If you have a large group, we

recommend breaking up into smaller groups of 12–16, so everyone has plenty of opportunity to voice comments and ask questions. If you're the leader of a large Adult Sunday School, you may want to recruit a few other small group facilitators to guide the discussion in these smaller groups. They should be asked to prepare as you have.

Recommended Format

We recommend you plan at least 60 minutes for each meeting, 90 minutes is best.

- Opening time of prayer
- Watch the video presentation for each Conversation, prior to the discussion each week. The video for Week One “*Dear Church—I’m Gay*”, is the longest (21 minutes). It introduces your group to a number of LGBT+ people and their families who love God and their experience growing up, coming out and finding their place in the church.

At the end of that video, you may want to ask your group for comments. What questions came to mind as they met flesh and blood Christian “gays” (and one no longer a Christian) who grew up scared to death of other Christians? Does anyone know someone with a similar story? Write down any questions they ask. At the end of the five weeks, voice those questions and ask if they were answered in the course of your group’s conversations, these past weeks. If not, consider asking someone in the group to research the question and report back to the group.

- Discuss the questions at the end of each Conversation.
- Closing thoughts by the leader.

Introducing the Group to *Grace/Truth 1.0*

Consider covering the following thoughts either in your first meeting or at a previous meeting when you introduce the *Grace/Truth 1.0* series:

- 1** Welcome everyone. If the group does not know each other well, we suggest each person introduce themselves and perhaps share what they hope to learn during this study or the challenges and blessings they have experienced in their relationships with LGBT+ individuals.
- 2** Explain why your church has decided to use *Grace/Truth 1.0*.
- 3** Give participants an overview of how you plan to conduct the study. Consider touching on these ideas:
 - “Please read every Conversation thoroughly before each meeting. I won’t be reviewing or teaching it. If you’ve not read the material, it will be difficult for you to contribute to our discussion of the questions at the end of each Conversation.”
 - “I won’t be teaching this subject. I’m not an expert. The videos and the *Grace/Truth* discussion guides are our ‘teachers.’ My primary task is to facilitate the discussion following each video by leading us through the questions. So, let’s let the Holy Spirit,

Scripture, and the material guide us and change us if necessary.”

- “Some topics in *Grace/Truth 1.0*, are too complicated to address in a five-week learning experience, so Dr. Preston Sprinkle makes reference to “Pastoral Papers” and podcasts that are offered free at the Center for Faith, Sexuality and Gender website www.centerforfaith.com. You are encouraged, but not required, to read or listen to them.”
- “Be respectful of each person’s comments. Some of you may have strong feelings and convictions about these topics and if you express them as ‘facts’ it will shut down participation by others. Remember, this is a conversation, not a debate. That is why the author, Dr. Preston Sprinkle, calls each week’s reading a ‘Conversation.’”
- “Practice the gift of ‘listening’ to others before you speak. Consider asking questions about a comment someone made, before you give a counter-argument,” or voice your own opinions.

Tips on Leading

Prior to each meeting, read all the questions at the end of each Conversation. You don’t have to discuss each one. Neither are you required to take them in sequence. Feel free to add questions of your own, or ask the group if they have questions about anything in this Conversation. You’re the leader! You have the freedom to let the Holy Spirit direct you.

We also recommend encouraging people to tell their own experiences with LGBT+ people they

know, or knew. How were they received by family or the church? If you as the leader start with an honest expression of about how you perceived LGBT+ people, prior to reading the *Grace/Truth 1.0*, others will follow.

If an important question is raised in the group that isn’t answered in *Grace/Truth 1.0*, remember that you don’t have to answer every question. However, the more you understand, the more confidence you’ll have to be one of the thought leaders in your church on this subject, so you may need to do a little homework. *Grace/Truth 1.0* is only an introduction to this complex issue. You may find it very helpful to have also read *Grace/Truth 2.0* or Preston Sprinkle’s book, *People to be Loved*. Also, there may be a “Pastoral Paper” on our website that answers your questions. Finally, ask your pastor for guidance.

Some Helpful Dos and Don’ts

Affirm rather than Endorse

As a leader you ought to affirm all responses by acknowledging statements without criticizing or endorsing them. For instance, when a person makes a remark, whether you agree or not, say something like, “Thanks for that” or “That’s an interesting idea or question.”

If anyone makes a comment that you criticize, or allow others to criticize, some people will never speak again. On the other hand, if you endorse an idea by saying something like, “Now that’s a great insight,” or “I agree with you,” others will be unlikely to express a view that may be contrary to yours.

Resist the urge to personally answer all the questions or comments participants raise. One of the strengths of learning in community is providing the opportunity for people to both listen to others and also think for themselves. After everyone has expressed their own views, it is appropriate for you to say "After reading this material, this is how my understanding has evolved on this question..." That not only gives you an opportunity to express your thoughts but lets others know that it's okay to change their opinion on this topic based on new information, if they are convicted to do so. That's what learning does – it gives people new information or experiences that informs a more thoughtful, biblical worldview.

The Loud and the Silent

Some people in your group may tend to dominate the conversation. Here's where good leaders shine. They draw others into the conversation with comments like:

"Let's see how others feel about that."

"Let's give everyone an opportunity to speak before anyone speaks a second time."

"Who's not had an opportunity to speak yet?"

If one person continues to dominate the conversation, consider speaking to that individual privately after the meeting. "John, you seem to be very knowledgeable on this topic, but I'd appreciate it if you'd let others speak more, even if there are some awkward silences. Would you be willing to do that?"

If anyone bullies or demeans anyone else's ideas, stop it immediately with a statement like:

"That's a strong opinion, not all of us would agree with."

"Let's keep these conversations respectful, even if you disagree."

"That's a very judgmental statement that devalues others' opinion."

Speak privately with the "bully" afterward to see if they understood the impact of what they said and suggest that an apology from them may be due the offended party or the group.

Some people almost never speak. They may have nothing to say, be shy, or may fear saying something "stupid." Don't ever put anyone on the spot to speak, or "go around the room" asking for comments. But you may consider privately encouraging them to speak up.

The bottom line is, your ministry is to make your group a safe place for everyone to learn. If you do that and people read the material, the Holy Spirit will do the rest!

How Then Shall We Live?

As you near the end of Conversation Five (the last), pray about this last meeting. Every Christian leader/teacher aspires to help those they lead to become more Christ-like people. Therefore, consider these ideas:

- Ask the question, "What is the most important thing you've learned during the last five weeks?"
- "Is there an LGBT+ man or woman, or family, who God has been impressing on you reach out to?"

- If the group has interacted well and was excited to learn, you may want to consider asking if they'd like to go through *Grace/Truth 2.0*. You may need to take a break for a few weeks to allow them time to purchase and read 2.0. Or, if there's great enthusiasm for this study, you could discuss this idea at the end of Conversation Four, have participants purchase their books, and jump right into it.

- At the final meeting, consider having a time of group prayer. Encourage participants to confess un-Christ like thoughts in the past and to pray for Holy Spirit guidance for how they treat LGBT+ people going forward.

Thank you for leading your small group in this important topic. "Well done good and faithful servant."