

## MAXIMIZING DISCUSSION IN ADULT SMALL GROUPS

This workshop is based on the concepts presented in the study book *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader Ever in the Whole History of the Universe*, by Israel Galindo (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2006), which leaders will need to have on hand for the workshop. Don't be misled by its hyperbolic title—this book presents an educationally solid approach to learning in small groups. The dialogical learning approach to adult small group study can revolutionize the way teachers of adult classes or study groups go about helping adults learn. For this workshop, leaders will need to read and prepare presentations based on material in *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*. [Call 1-800-4JUDSON, ISBN 978-0-8170-1500-8 (\$16.00), or order online for a 20% discount (\$12.80) at <http://www.judsonpress.com>.]

This workshop plan should serve only as a guide to planning your workshop. You will want to adapt the outline, learning activities, and time frame to your audience and your context. However, because of the nature of this workshop we encourage you to resist the temptation to reduce the time commitment needed to provide an effective learning experience. It is usually better to challenge your participants to commit the time to engage in a meaningful learning experience than it is to accommodate their desire for something “short and convenient.”

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this workshop is to introduce the dialogical learning approach to group study as presented in *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*. Participants will learn the basic concepts of dialogical learning in small groups through presentation of material and experientially by participating in a group dialogical learning experience.

### WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

By the end of this workshop participants will be able to:

- identify and define three specific small group member roles
- apply good group participant behaviors during a dialogical learning Bible study
- prepare and use effective dialogical learning questions
- lead a small group study using the dialogical learning approach

**TIME FRAME: 2.5 hours with one 15-minute break**

## **BASIC WORKSHOP OUTLINE** *(All times are a guide; adjust as needed.)*

- I Introduction and Overview *(15 minutes)*
- II Defining the Problem *(15 minutes)*
- III Defining the Dialogical Learning Process *(10 minutes)*
- IV Understanding Group Norms and Group Roles *(15 minutes)*
- V Preparing Dialogical Questions *(20 minutes)*
- Break *(15 minutes)*
- VI Experiencing a Dialogical Learning Study *(30 minutes)*
- VII Debriefing *(15 minutes)*
- VIII Application and Closure *(15 minutes)*

## **PREPARATION**

- Review *How To Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*, focusing on the following information (listed below in the order that you will address them) that you will need to present:
  - the definition of dialogical learning on pages X and 55 (also on Handout #1)
  - the learning objective checklist on page 61
  - the concept of the Null-Expectancy Factor from pages 3–7
  - the list “The Solution” on page 10
  - the technique for asking questions found on pages 50–54
  - pages 7–9, including the chart “Teaching-Learning Assumptions” on page 8
  - the teaching role information on page 30
  - chapter 8
  - “Phases of Group Development” on page 31
  - the “Group Math Chart” on page 35
  - the three categories of group roles (see pages 36–42)
  - pages 45–50, including the chart “Questions and Domains” on page 46
  - chapter 9
- Prepare presentation materials for following items on a flipchart, posterboard, chalkboard or whiteboard, or PowerPoint:
  - the workshop objectives
  - the definition of dialogical learning
  - the list “The Solution”
  - the chart “Teaching-Learning Assumptions”

- the teaching role information
  - “Phases of Group Development”
  - the chart “Questions and Domains”
- Review the technique for asking questions found on pages 50–54 of *How To Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*, so that you can practice the method as you present the workshop.

## **MATERIALS**

- snacks and drinks for break
- Bibles
- copies of the study book *How To Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader Ever in the Whole History of the Universe* for participants who might be interested in purchasing copies. (Call 1-800-4JUDSON to discuss return policies and/or the Judson Book Table Ministry.)
- nametags
- newsprint and markers, or paper and pencil
- either flipchart, posterboard, chalkboard or whiteboard, or Power Point
- copies of the handouts for participants

## **CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOP**

### **I Introduction and Overview (15 minutes)**

Welcome the group and explain where the facilities and drinks are so that the participants feel free to attend to their needs throughout the session. Distribute nametags and ask the participants to introduce themselves, sharing a bit about their teaching/small group experience.

Introduce the learning objectives for this workshop by displaying them on a flipchart, posterboard, a chalkboard or whiteboard, or on a Power Point slide if you are using that medium. Read each objective and share how the participants will demonstrate that they have achieved each as follows:

- identify and define three specific small group member roles  
[*How demonstrated: At the end of the dialogical learning study each participant will be asked to match three participants and their role behavior.*]
- apply good group participant behaviors during a dialogical learning Bible study  
[*How demonstrated: Participants will practice specific good group behaviors during the dialogical study.*]
- prepare and use effective dialogical learning questions  
[*How demonstrated: Participants will write out and evaluate dialogical learning questions for a passage of Scripture.*]
- lead a small group study using the dialogical learning approach

[*How demonstrated: Participants will describe how they will lead their next small group study using the dialogical learning method.*]

Explain that you have just modeled one of the important components of effective dialogical learning: the use of learning objectives. Distribute Handout #1 and review the definition of dialogical learning in small groups: “*Dialogical learning is a structured, intentional process that leads to insights and deep understanding and, ultimately, application in the life of the learner.*”

You may want to present this definition on a flipchart, posterboard, chalkboard or whiteboard, or Power Point since you will be referring to it again in the session. Explain that by the end of the workshop, the participants will be able to lead a dialogical learning experience.

Review with the participants the following learning objectives checklist (from page 61):

- Is the learning objective written from the standpoint of the learner?
- Is the terminal learning behavior specified?
- Are the conditions under which the behavior should be applied specified?
- Are the criteria of acceptable application specified?
- Can your group members understand the full intent of the objective?

Invite the participants to discuss whether or not the workshop objectives you presented for this session meet the criteria of the checklist. Allow about a minute and a half for discussion.

## **II Defining the Problem (15 minutes)**

Distribute Handout #2 and give the participants a couple of minutes to complete the true-false quiz—working in pairs is an option. Review the answers in a playful manner. All of the items are *false*. Ask the participants to share how they feel after taking the quiz. Explain that the purpose of the exercise was to accomplish two things:

- (1) to remind everyone that even experienced teachers have more things to learn, and
- (2) to shake them out of the complacency of the Null-Expectancy Factor—a key concept in dialogical learning.

Describe the concept of the Null-Expectancy Factor (pages 3–7 of *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*). Explain that using the dialogical learning method in adult small groups is one way to overcome the Null-Expectancy Factor. Explain (see page 10 of *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*) that the key to overcoming the Null-Expectancy Factor is to find ways to lead that make for meaningful learning and this requires moving:

- from teacher-focused methods to learner-centered methods
- from teacher-dependent to learner-motivated learning
- from content transmission to discovery learning

- from passive listening to active participation
- from external-focused learning to internal-focused learning
- from content-focused instruction to relationship-mediated experiences

You may want to present the list on a flipchart, posterboard, chalkboard or whiteboard, or Power Point. Being sure to model the technique for asking questions found on pages 50–54 of *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*, engage the participants in reflecting on their personal teaching experiences with questions such as:

- Which of these moves would you most like to be able to make?
- How will these moves will make for a better experience for learners?

### **III Defining the Dialogical Learning Process (10 minutes)**

Refer again to the definition of dialogical learning from Handout #1 or your flipchart, posterboard, chalkboard or whiteboard, or Power Point and ask the group to review it: “*Dialogical learning is a structured, intentional process that leads to insights and deep understanding and, ultimately, application in the life of the learner.*”

Referring to the chart on page 8 and material from pages 7–9 of *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*, compare and contrast a traditional instructional approach with the dialogical learning approach. Invite discussion among the participants of what they see as the potential value and challenges of moving toward dialogical learning in their teaching.

After some discussion, explain that one of the biggest challenges to switching to dialogical learning will be changing teachers’ self-understandings. Present the teaching role from page 30 of *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*. You may choose to list the statements on a flipchart, posterboard, chalkboard or whiteboard, or Power Point and invite the participants to recite these commitments to the dialogical teaching role.

Point out that there really are only three tasks of the dialogical learning group facilitator. These are:

- (1) clarifying learning objectives
- (2) providing dialogical questions
- (3) managing the group process

Explicate these three points based on your reading of chapter 8 of *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*.

### **IV Understanding Group Norms and Group Roles (15 minutes)**

Present “Phases of Group Development” from page 31 of *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader* on a flipchart, posterboard, chalkboard or whiteboard, or Power Point.

Drawing on the material in pages 30–34, prepare a mini-lecture to explain the process depicted on the chart. Below is a sample outline for this mini-lecture:

I. Introduction: Explain that effective group leaders understand how groups form and how they function.

II. Discuss how groups form.

A. The phases on group formation

1. The Invitation and Orientation phase
2. The Norming and Forming phase
3. The Trust and Differentiation phase
4. The Closure and Dissolution phase

B. How numbers affect group dynamics: Review the Group Math Chart (p. 35)

C. Application: ask the group to:

- identify where they think they are in the group formation phase
- identify where they are in the Group Math category

III. Ask for any questions for clarification.

Explain that understanding how a group functions also involves understanding how the individual roles of its members affect the learning process. Briefly review the three categories of group roles found on pages 36–42: (1) Group Task Function Roles, (2) Group Maintenance Roles, and (3) Unhealthy Group Roles. (Review only the *categories* and resist any temptation to cover any of the individual roles listed under the categories.)

Invite the group members to form pairs or groups of three and give them the following directions:

*Share with your partner(s) which roles you typically assume when you are a part of a formal study or work group. Do you adopt that role consistently? What does it look like when you play that role? Do you play more than one role? How does that happen?*

Allow a few minutes for participants to share, then regroup and summarize what you've covered so far in the session:

- (1) defined a key problem, such as the Null-Expectancy Factor
- (2) defined dialogical learning
- (3) examined how a group forms
- (4) identified the roles we play in small groups

Take a brief “stretch break” before moving on.

## **V Preparing Dialogical Questions (20 minutes)**

In preparation for this portion of the workshop you need a working knowledge of the material presented in pages 45–50 of the *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*.

Review the definition of dialogical learning with the group. Explain that the use of effective dialogical questions is at the heart of dialogical learning. Define effective dialogical questions as *questions that help learners achieve insight, understanding, and application*.

Display the chart “Questions and Domains” from page 46 of *How To Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader* on a flipchart, posterboard, chalkboard or whiteboard, or Power Point. Drawing on the material from pages 45–50 of *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*, review the concepts related to: (1) the three categories of questions, and (2) the types of questions in each category.

Ask the participants to form groups of two or three and to work together to create dialogical questions. Distribute Bibles and direct the participants to John 3:1-16. (As an alternative, you may choose a Bible passage from the upcoming week’s lessons based on your church’s curricular resource materials.) Distribute Handout #3 and instruct the group to follow the directions on the handout. While the groups work, visit each group to provide help and to clarify any questions they may have. After about 10 minutes, invite the participants to share their dialogical questions and allow for discussion.

**BREAK (15 Minutes)**

Remind the participants where the facilities, drinks, and snacks are and give the time frame for returning to the group.

**VI Experiencing a Dialogical Learning Study (30 minutes)**

This part of the workshop consists of experiential learning through participation in a simulated dialogical learning session. In preparation for this step, review Chapter 9 of *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader*, “A Dialogical Learning Topical Study Illustrated.” Be intentional in assuming the role of a dialogical learning facilitator so that you can serve as a model for the participants.

Once the participants have gathered from their break, provide an orientation to the dialogical learning simulation, using the chapter introduction on page 105 of the book. Distribute Handout #4. If you have a large group of participants in the workshop (between 15 and upward), review the information about group dynamics and work together to determine how to best organize into smaller groups for the simulation. Allow members to naturally develop their own “group roles,” and pay attention to the group dynamics so that you can offer observations during the debriefing.

Follow the dialogical lesson plan in Chapter 9, adjusting the time as follows:

- Orientation—skip
- Scripture study—5 minutes (reduce to two texts; do not summarize texts, provide background, or ask interpretive questions)
- The story— 3 minutes

- Dialogical reflection and sharing—10 minutes (ask participants to select two of the four questions)
- Application—7 minutes (ask participants to select one of the three activities)
- Closing—skip

Note: The participants will be evaluating the facilitation of this simulated study as a way to apply what they are learning. You may want to plan to make some obvious mistakes, engaging in behaviors, such as over-directing, to see if they catch the mistakes. Sometimes learning is more powerful when we see negative examples.

## **VII Debriefing** (*15 minutes*)

Reconvene the total group for a time of debriefing. Encourage the participants to share reflections on the study experience by asking one or two questions such as:

- How different was this experience from what your class usually does?
- Do you think you can change your teaching style to become a more dialogical teacher? What would be your biggest challenge in doing so?
- What observations can you make about group dynamics during the study?
- Can you identify at least three group roles that members in your group adopted? Which did you adopt?
- How comfortable did you feel in responding to the questions and sharing your thoughts?
- Did your group get “stuck” at some point? When? How did it get unstuck?

Open up the floor for general comments. The participants may have some practical questions at this point. It is more important to allow them to ask the questions than to have the “right answer.” Remember that the participants in the workshops are your resource, so feel free to redirect the questions to the group by asking, “Does anyone have a thought about that?” “Does anyone have an answer to that question?” “Has anyone had experience with that?” “How would you respond to that question?”

## **VIII Application and Closure** (*15 minutes*)

Invite the participants to apply what they have learned about dialogical learning by evaluating your facilitation of the dialogical learning simulation using the following questions:

- What actions helped the dialogical learning process?
- What could have been handled better to facilitate the dialogical learning process? (Remember that this step is not about you or your competence as a teacher. It is an opportunity for the participants to apply what they have learned through evaluation. If you feel comfortable doing so, you may want to intentionally throw in some blatantly unhelpful behaviors for the group to identify.)

Ask the participants to share how they will apply the dialogical learning approach when they next lead a group. If your group is large, ask the participants to share their response with the person seated next to them.

Offer words of encouragement and a challenge to the teachers to adapt the dialogical learning approach in their teaching adults in small groups.

Distribute the evaluation form (Handout # 5) and ask the participants to complete it before they leave. Provide a place (box, for example) where they can submit the form anonymously.

End the session in prayer, perhaps offering a prayer of blessing on the teaching ministries of the participants.

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*“Dialogical learning is  
a structured, intentional process  
that leads to insights  
and deep understanding  
and, ultimately, application  
in the life of the learner.”*

(As found on page 55 of *How to Be the Best Christian Study Group Leader Ever in the Whole History of the Universe* by Israel Galindo)

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## True or False? A General Knowledge Quiz\*

### True/False

- 1. There are fifty states in the United States of America.
- 2. Hair and fingernails continue to grow after death.
- 3. Noah took two of every living creature into the ark.
- 4. America was named after Amerigo Vespucci.
- 5. Charles Lindburgh was the first to make a transatlantic flight.
- 6. The sap of a tree travels up and down, depending on the season.
- 7. Woodstock, N.Y. was the site of a famous concert in 1969.
- 8. The Grimm brothers wrote fairy tales.
- 9. Sardine is a species of fish.
- 10. The doctrine of Immaculate Conception refers to Jesus' birth.
- 11. Robert Fulton invented the steamboat.
- 12. Autumn leaves turn color in the fall.
- 13. Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone.
- 14. Witches were burned at the stake in Salem, Massachusetts.
- 15. Atlas was condemned to hold the world on his shoulder.
- 16. During prohibition, it was illegal to buy, possess, or drink alcohol.
- 17. The Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves.
- 18. George Washington was the first U.S. president.

### **SCORING** (based on the number of correct responses):

10 + You should be teaching this workshop.

5 – 9 This is above-average. You probably read a lot, wear glasses, and watch Jeopardy religiously.

3 – 4 This is pretty good for this quiz. Pat yourself on the back.

1–2 You probably guessed on a couple of these (hey, it's a 50/50 chance, right?)

0 You don't know as much as you thought. Pay close attention during the workshop!

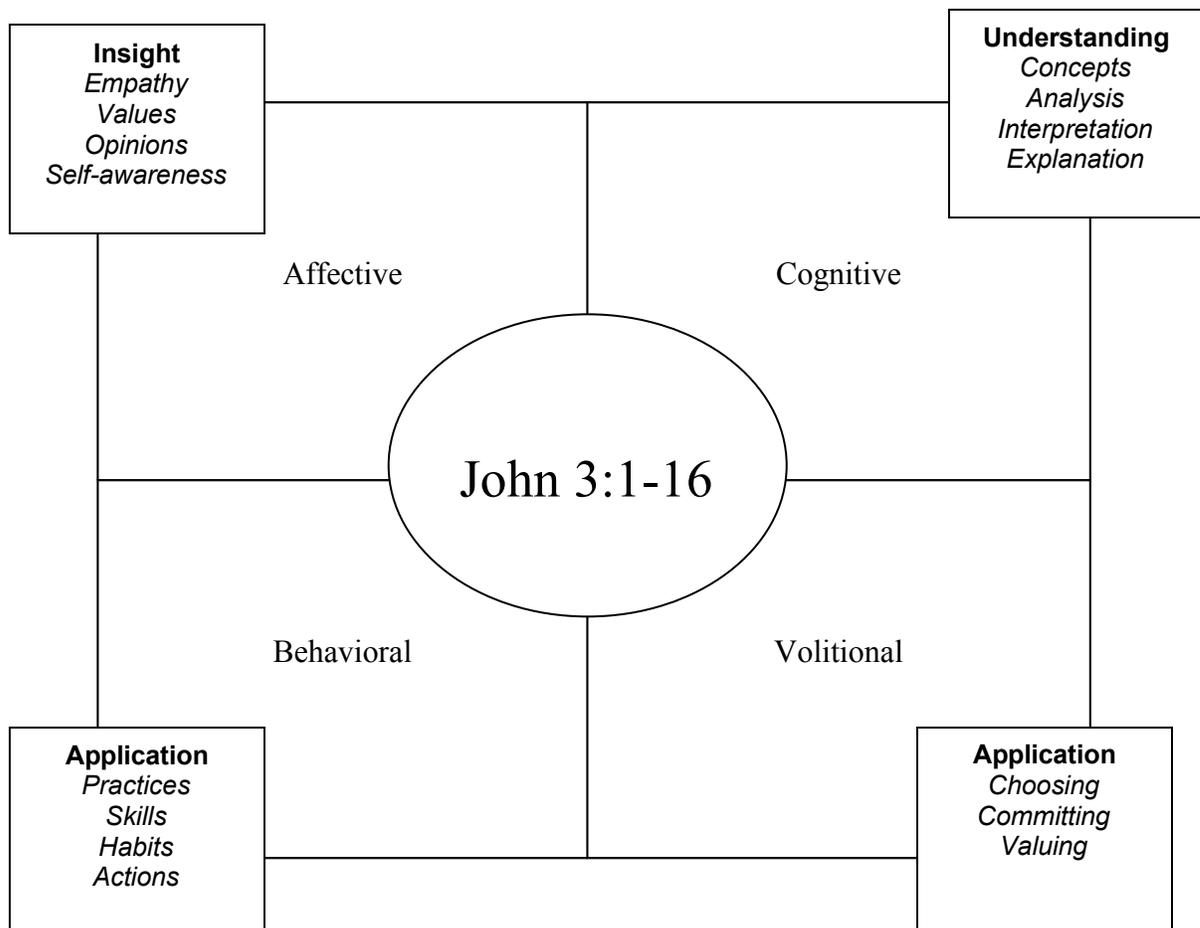
\*For background on the answers, see Israel Galindo, *Myths: Fact and Fiction about Teaching and Learning* (Educational Consultants, 2004). ISBN 0-9715765-4-8. Available from Educational Consultants, [www.galindoconsultants.com](http://www.galindoconsultants.com).

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## Creating Dialogical Questions

Select a timekeeper/prompter. This person will keep track of time, help the group stay on-task, and ask prompting questions to help the group achieve its goal.

**DIRECTIONS:** After reading the passage, decide on what you want group members to learn from the text. Write ONE or more dialogical learning question for TWO of the domains on the chart. Remember that not every concept, Bible passage, or content requires that *each* of the domains be addressed. Choose the domain (affective, cognitive, behavioral, volitional) that you feel is most appropriate to what you want participants to learn.



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## Questions for Dialogical Learning Simulation

### Dialogical Questions

1. Have you ever had to find a new home and a new community? What was the most difficult part of becoming part of a new community? Have you ever felt like an “outsider” who did not belong? Share that story.
2. Do you think your church does a good job of welcoming new people into community? How so?
3. Have you ever visited a place for the first time that felt like “home”? Describe it.
4. To what extent do you think God welcomes all people “home”? Are there limitations or exceptions to God’s welcoming posture? Why or why not?

### Application Questions/Activities

1. Share a story or describe how hospitality was practiced in your culture, your family of origin, or your current family.
2. Reflect on your experience of your church. If you were to help your church become the “Church of All Hearts,” what changes would you need to make? What practices of welcoming and hospitality can you identify that you will keep?
3. Using a flipchart, posterboard, chalkboard or whiteboard, brainstorm with your group ways you can help make your church a more welcoming and inviting church. When you have completed the list, state which one you are committed to practicing in the next month.

## EVALUATION

*Thank you for participating in this workshop. To help us improve on the presentation, please take the time to complete this questionnaire for your workshop leader.*

What have you learned from today's time together?

What part of the workshop are you most eager to share when you get home?

What helped you the most?

What was not as helpful for you?

How could the workshop have been improved?