

Facilitating a Bible Study / Life Skills Seminar

Prayer and Personal Preparation

- Prayer is the work and our ministry inside the prison or jail is the fruit of our prayer labor.
- Develop a heart attitude: as we become more Christ-like, we develop a mindset centered upon others...
 - Real love for God and people;
 - Truly caring for others;
 - Being dead to self, but alive to Christ;
 - Exhibiting humility vs. pride;
 - Showing sensitivity to the leading of the Spirit; etc.
- Facilitators pray for discernment about “rabbit trails” - the inmates; and YOURS.

Set-Up

- Facilitators, try not to sit where you are focused on the same people each week.
- Position yourself so you can be aware of everything around you.
- Conversation is facilitated as inmates sit in circle so that every person can see every other person or around tables facing each other. Sometimes this is not possible due to arrangement of room (i.e. in chapel setting), so be creative.

Opening

- Encourage an attitude of adoration and praise in prayer before getting to the “gimmees and the I wannas”; consider using prayer template A-C-T-S (Adoration-Confession-Thanksgiving-Supplication).
- Know the main point of the lesson - the heart of the life skill emphasized in the study - then “tell them what they are going to learn; tell them; then at the end tell them what you told them”

Facilitating

- You are a role model. You are not THE role model...Jesus Christ is.
- Do not ask men or women what was their crime that caused incarceration. If they want to share it they will. Remember if they are Christians their sin, like yours, is forgiven and forgotten by a merciful redeeming God. Remember that any of us, but for the grace of God, could be in such a position as they. None of us is above acting upon the evil in our hearts.
- If they become aware that it is their sin that got them there -- and not the drugs, poverty, abuse, upbringing, etc. -- then it is a short step to show them Jesus as their answer.
- Hopefully you can get them to the point they understand that their incarceration is part of a sovereign God’s loving plan for their lives in which all things are working together for their good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose.
- Christian inmates might have their bodies incarcerated, but their spirits can be set free. At this point the study of the Scriptures, the life skills and serious application of the lessons to their lives form a framework for hope for the future.
- Remember that the purpose of Bible Study / Life Skills Seminars is to experience Christ Jesus in our midst ministering to us and through the Word lives and relationships are transformed.
- Enthusiasm – your attitude sets the tone.
- Honesty – Be a model for honest sharing.

- Understanding – Assess your ‘audience’; use simple language if needed.
- Affirmation – Never ridicule or make light of what people share in sincerity, instead affirm them for their honesty.
- Freedom - Don’t put inmates on the spot; respect their right to speak or not.
- Establish your authority; if you encounter a problem inmate and you think he or she will be a constant disruption to the class, that inmate can be removed by PPM informing the Chaplain.
- Equal Access – Tactfully control dominating extroverts, “Ok, let’s hear from some others.” Gently encourage introverts, “Is there something you would like to add to this?”
- Be sensitive. Some inmates you deal with may be serving long or life sentences. Do not always focus on getting out of prison in every one of your examples.
- Use variety:
 - Try not to lecture;
 - Perhaps let an inmate (who has skills) lead a class - with you following closely;
 - Break up into small groups to answer different questions, then have group leaders report conclusion;
 - Use white board (if available) to solicit answers, etc.
- Ask leading questions to pull the answers out of them rather than you always giving the answers; ask:
 - Why is that important?
 - How can we apply this inside these walls? Upon transition to another facility? Upon release? In building bridges with our families? In the workplace upon our return? In church and ministry upon our release?
- Facilitators keep class on track by maintaining focus on God’s Word and its application to our lives.
- The environment ought to be one where people can share honestly, openly, and appropriately about their lives or the topic in question, always with the truth of the Scriptures in view, but remember:
 - Inmates may not want to share openly...
 - for fear of showing signs of weakness;
 - for fear of retribution;
 - to avoid embarrassment or excessive hurt; etc.
 - Second leader in class can be offered for side conversations for some one-on-one sharing.
- Be very thoughtful about your comments and your answers. Be wise. Read up on life in prison. The web is full of sites about prison life. Keep in mind a few things:
 - Christian inmates will be challenged and tested by non-Christian inmates to see if they live by the courage of their convictions;
 - The fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, etc. in a prison setting are taken as signs of weakness by members of the general inmate population and Christians may be put at risk for doing and saying things on the inside that we take for granted on the outside;
 - Telling the truth can get you killed;
 - We must articulate, however, that does not absolve them of living for Christ -- not in their own strength, but by the help of the Holy Spirit in that dark setting.

Closing

- Summarize – Get feedback, ask thought provoking questions like:
 - What conclusions have we come to?
 - What is the one big thought will we carry away from this lesson?
- We must finish and be out on time. Being late:
 - Creates problems with inmate operations / movements and upsets correctional officers; and
 - Does not honor God and negatively impacts our witness.