

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your desire to facilitate this study group. We pray that God will use your ministry to bring meaningful impact within your community. More importantly, we trust that God will bless you through this experience and that you will hear His voice saying well done good and faithful servant.

While we place our ultimate trust in God to lead we hope this guide will help you prepare for your very important.

The following outlines what you will find on these pages.



BUILDING A PRAYER-CENTERED GROUP.....	3
YOUR ROLE AS A FACILITATOR.....	3
ESSENTIALS OF ACTIVE LISTENING	4
ASKING QUESTIONS THAT FOSTER'S ENGAGEMENT	5
ENCOURAGING GROUP PARTICIPATION.....	5
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND CARING FOR MEMBERS	5
GROUP DYNAMICS AND TROUBLESHOOTING.....	5
TOOLS AND RESOURCES	6
ABOUT TECHNOLOGY:	6
PROCESS	7
YOUR SELF-CARE AS A FACILITATOR.....	8
PRACTICAL TIPS AND RESOURCES	8
ONGOING SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT	9
APPENDIX.....	10
COMMUNICATION EMAIL SAMPLES.....	10

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Affirming Your Calling

This should be the most important question you need to answer about your role as a facilitator for Your Freedom Years. While we are pleased to organize and provide the teaching resources, we hope that you see this as your opportunity to develop your own ministry, shaped by your heart and supported by others who know you and love you. The following key points will help consider your calling:

1. **Your Caring Heart.** God has given you a caring heart. Your success as a facilitator will be measured by how loved the people in your group feel as a result of taking part in your group.

While the principles of this study are transferable, the focus will be on individuals in the freedom years (50+) who represent more than 20 % of your community.

In the flipped classroom model, The book Your Freedom Years, the audio overview, as well as the study guide, are the teaching and study resources. As a facilitator, you, and others in the group, will be a channel of God's love, grace, application and encouragement.

2. **Do Not Do This Alone:** God affirms the desire of your heart by bringing the right people who will partner with you in this ministry:
 - **We are Here For You.** By Prayer and honest conversations we trust the lord to affirm the desire of your heart. In addition, we recommend that you seek the support and or encouragement of your church pastor or a spiritual mentor who knows you and has a good understanding of God's call on your life.
 - **Your Substitute Facilitator** is a key part of God's affirmation of your calling. Your substitute facilitator is your key partner, someone who understands your role and is prepared to support or substitute for you when are unavailable. For example, you are called to an emergency, or your Wi-Fi goes down. This is also someone who through this experience may follow your example becoming a group facilitator as well.
 - **Your Prayer Partners:** We can not overstate the importance of having people pray for you. As you seek to impact the lives of others for the kingdom of God, you are entering into enemy territory. We do not wish to scare you, but everyone may seek to discourage you and or disarm you. This is what the bible calls spiritual warfare. Your protection will come from the Lord, but you will also need what we call prayer cover. Please take time and read "**Lord is It Warfare**" at <https://nomoreoverload.com/Data-Web/eStore/Papers/Lord-Is-It-Warfare.pdf>.
3. **Time.** You are a steward of the time God is giving you. In addition to the one hour per week that you will spend with your group session, we suggest you allocate at least one more hour per week to prepare and connect with individuals in your group.

Building a Prayer-Centered Group

- **Commitment to Prayer:** Commit to daily prayer for your group members. This fosters a spiritual foundation and invites God into your group, setting the tone for sessions and encouraging a supportive community.
- **Leading Opening and Closing Prayers:** Learn how to lead simple, heartfelt prayers to open and close sessions. This practice sets a spiritual focus, helps calm nerves, and reminds participants of the group's purpose.
- **Encouraging Member Prayer:** Create an environment where group members feel comfortable sharing their prayer requests. Encourage them to pray for one another, enhancing relationships and fostering a sense of community.

Your Role as a Facilitator

Purpose of the Role:

Your primary goal as a facilitator is to create a welcoming engaging environment that encourages participants to explore and support each other. You will guide discussions, helping members to share insights and questions freely while fostering a space that values everyone's voice and feelings.

Essential Qualities Of The Facilitator:

With a caring heart, an effective facilitator demonstrates a genuine love for people, a commitment to prayer, and strong listening skills. By asking thoughtful questions and encouraging open dialogue, you create a supportive community where each person feels heard and valued.

Facilitator, Not Teacher:

This study follows a “flipped classroom model”, where most learning happens in advance. The group sessions are meant for interaction and practical application, not lecture or instruction. Your role as a facilitator is distinctly different from that of a teacher. Rather than giving answers or imparting knowledge, focus on creating opportunities that encourage participants to learn from each other.

In his best-selling book “Just Listen” Mark Goulston says that ***“People do not change because of what you say, but much more because of what you get them to say”***. Your success as a facilitator depends on motivating members to complete the preparatory work and encouraging an active group dialogue. In discussions, you aim to guide rather than inform. If you're tempted to teach or to provide answers, remember that questions are more powerful than answers. Rephrase your opinion as questions that deserve an answer. Practice asking good questions that demand a good answer. Learn the art of asking questions that prompt members to reflect and share their own thoughts. Let the group's shared insights shape the learning experience.

Tips for Avoiding a Teaching Role

It's common for leaders, especially pastors or other teaching experience, to guide the group by providing answers or interpretations. However, for this format, your success is directly related to your ability to motivate your members to do their homework, share their study findings, and engage and support each other. It's vital to let participants develop their own understanding and application. Here are some tips to help you avoid falling into a teaching role:

1. **Limit Your Speaking Time:**

A practical approach comes from leader training provided by the Bible Study Fellowship (BSF). BSF could be the most successful Bible study movement, more than half a million people in more than 100 countries study the same lessons in small groups. BSF leaders receive more than 50 hours of training annually. In their training, they are encouraged to speak for only about 10% of the group's discussion time. For example, if you are planning a 60-minute session, you aim to speak for around 6 minutes. To help you stay within this guideline, share this goal with the group asking them to help you by being engaged. Further, you may ask group members to hold you accountable to this limit and let you know how you are doing against this benchmark.

2. **Encourage Questions, Not Answers:**

Instead of providing answers, ask open-ended questions that help members dig deeper into the topic. For example, if a participant seeks your opinion, you might respond with, "That's an interesting point! What do others think?" More on this later.

3. **Prompt Group Reflection:**

When discussions are quiet or you sense a need to steer the conversation, try asking reflective questions. Encourage members to explore how their insights connect to their lives or faith journeys.

Essentials of Active Listening

- **Key Principles of Listening:** Active listening involves fully concentrating on what is being said rather than just passively hearing the speaker's words. Strive to understand the emotions, thoughts, and feelings behind the words, validating members' experiences.
- **Practical Techniques:** Use reflective listening techniques, such as paraphrasing what members say to confirm understanding. For example, responding with, "It sounds like you're saying..." helps to clarify and engage the speaker.
- **Avoiding Pitfalls:** Avoid common listening pitfalls, such as jumping to conclusions or providing unsolicited advice. Instead, focus on creating a safe space where everyone feels free to express their thoughts.

Asking Questions that Foster's Engagement

- **Types of Questions:** Learn about the differences between open-ended and closed-ended questions. Use open-ended questions to invite deeper reflection and discussion, while recognizing that closed-ended questions may limit responses.
- **Examples of Effective Questions:** Prepare a list of sample questions that prompt sharing and reflection. Questions like “How has this passage impacted your understanding of faith?” can spark meaningful conversations.
- **Follow-Up Techniques:** Remember the importance of asking follow-up questions to explore initial responses. This deepens the discussion and encourages participants to share more personal insights.

Encouraging Group Participation

- **Creating a Safe Environment:** Establish ground rules that promote respect, confidentiality, and kindness. When members know their thoughts and feelings will be honoured, they are more likely to participate fully.
- **Strategies to Foster Participation:** Use strategies to encourage quieter members to share, such as directly inviting them to contribute or creating small group discussions where they might feel more comfortable speaking up.
- **Handling Disagreements:** Learn how to manage disagreements constructively. Promote respectful dialogue and remind group members that differing opinions can enrich discussions if handled with grace.

Building Relationships and Caring for Members

- **Beyond the Sessions:** Check in with your group members outside of Bible Based sessions. Simple messages or calls can show that they are valued and encourage ongoing connections.
- **Practical Ways to Show Care:** Use practical examples, such as sending birthday cards, following up on prayer requests, or offering assistance during difficult times, to foster a nurturing atmosphere.
- **Modelling Love and Support:** Demonstrate Christ-like love in all interactions. Being patient, showing kindness, and actively listening sets a positive example for group members.

Group Dynamics and Troubleshooting

- **Understanding Group Stages:** Familiarize yourself with the stages of group development (forming, storming, norming, performing). Understanding these stages helps you recognize and respond to the group’s evolving needs.

- **Dealing with Common Challenges:** Prepare to identify and address common challenges, such as members dominating discussions or others remaining silent. Provide specific strategies for engagement to facilitate smoother sessions.
- **Seeking Guidance:** Don't hesitate to seek advice and support from experienced leaders or pastors when facing challenges, you may not know how to navigate.

Tools and Resources

- **The Participant's Resources:** Take time to become very familiar with the resource book, the video clips and the participant guide. These provided all the learning resources in addition the study guide explains what the participant may expect from you and what will happen in each session. This will guide what you will do as well.
- **A Good Watch:** As a facilitator, you set the pace. Your role is to stay within the agreed-on time limits without being a hostage to impersonal timekeepers. This requires flexibility in what to cover and how much time you spend on the most important questions. In your role you are a conductor of an orchestra, allowing everyone a fair chance to share without using more than their fair share of the overall time. In other words, as a facilitator and responsible for keeping the discussion moving while staying within the overall time limit. In other words, while giving each person a chance to share, avoid the temptation to always go over time.
- **A Note Pad or Communication.** The quality of your role depends on the quality of your communication with your group members. It is very helpful to have a record of important information your members share during the group or your one-on-one communication.

About Technology:

To avoid complexity and administrative overhead, this group study is designed to use the least technology possible.

1. **The study administrator**, the Caregivers Community will:
 - Create an online registration system
 - Manage the online registration and collect registration fees. The study registration will close 7 days before the start of the study.
 - Send the registration confirmation which will include a link to the study guide and include the facilitator's contact information.
 - Provide you, **the facilitator**, with a spread worksheet with all participant's contact information.

2. **You are responsible** for selecting all other tools that you will need to conduct the study and communicate with our group members including:

- Your choice of email
- Instant messaging system if desired
- The Online meeting platforms that you are most comfortable with such as Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Team.

Note: Have a permanent meeting link that does not change with every group session. Be sure to send this meeting link with your first communication. Refer to YouTube for instructions on how to create a permanent meeting link for Zoom, Google Meet, or Microsoft Teams.

Process

Initiation:

Your Initial Contact is vital. It sets the tone of your relationship. Once you have a list of your group members it is important to connect with each of them. We have found that:

- A confirmation email is a good starting point. **See the sample in the appendix.**
- This should be followed by a phone call to:
 - Build a personal vocal connection and show personal interest
 - Confirm that your member has received your confirmation email
 - Has downloaded the study guide and resource book
 - Answer any outstanding questions and offer help where needed
 - Commit to praying for any special needs

Facilitation:

- Before each Lesson go through the material as if you are one of the participants. Each lesson is divided into three sections. At the end of each section, you will find discussion questions. Your participants are expected to answer these questions before your group meeting. **Ask God to lead** you in defining which questions or points He wants you to focus on. Highlight those points and prepare to give them higher priority.
- The study guide is designed to help your group know what to expect in every session. Please follow it as closely as possible.
- Take note of personal needs or challenges that may require your one-on-one follow-up.
- Remind the group of the topic and time of the next Lesson. Close in prayer on time.

Post Lesson Activities

- Act on any one-on-one follow-up that you noted during the session
- Pray for each group member.
- **Make a personal contact.** As the lord leads be sensitive to individual preferences, For some, a phone call, others an email, or a text.
- A day or two before the next Lesson send a reminder email: **See the sample in the appendix.**
 - List the expected homework
 - Provide a link to the online meeting URL
 - Ask each participant to let you know if they are unable to attend or may be late.

Note: These are just a sample to save you some thinking time. Be sure to create something that fits your style.

Your Self-Care as a Facilitator

- **Avoiding Burnout:** Remember that taking care of your own spiritual and emotional well-being is essential. Prioritize personal prayer and time for yourself to recharge.
- **Setting Boundaries:** Understand the importance of setting boundaries to balance your facilitation responsibilities with your personal life. This ensures you can serve effectively without becoming overwhelmed.
- **Maintaining Spiritual Growth:** Engage in personal spiritual growth opportunities. A strong personal relationship with God enhances your ability to support others.

Practical Tips and Resources

- **Navigating the Online Platform:** Familiarize yourself with how to access and utilize online study materials and resources. Being comfortable with the platform ensures you can confidently lead your sessions.
- **Resource Library:** Refer to a library of helpful resources, such as study guides, video links, and supplementary reading materials. This equips you with the tools you need to lead effectively.

Ongoing Support and Development

- **Continued Learning:** Participate in workshops, webinars, or online forums for ongoing growth. Lifelong learning enhances your skills and provides new ideas for facilitating discussions.
- **Feedback and Improvement:** Constructive feedback helps you improve your approach and better meet the needs of your groups. Using simple online survey tools, seek feedback from group members.
- **Regular Check-Ins:** Establish a system for regular check-ins with your pastor or mentor. These meetings provide opportunities for discussion, support, and encouragement, fostering a sense of community among facilitators.

APPENDIX

Communication Email Samples

Subject: Registration Confirmation, Welcome to Freedom Years Study

Greetings (Name),

Thank you for registering for Your Freedom Years! We're excited to embark on this journey with you as we share, pray, and learn together.

To get started, please go to <https://www.NoMoreOverLoad.com/FY.Book.p.pdf> and download The Study Guide. These notes are designed to help you get the most out of our study.

We aim to create an informal, supportive environment. Please examine the Small Group Process and read the Member Agreement and Guidelines.

You are in our prayers this week. To answer any questions and provide you with assistance, one of the facilitators will be happy to call you.

Yours in Christ's service,

Your name

Phone 055-XXX-XXXX

SUBJECT: Session One: Kick Off (Day, date (time)

Blessings to you (Name),

We hope you had a great week!

"Add your personal note ..."

For our next session, We plan to start at (Time sharp) Here is your meeting link: https://yourmeeting_URL. Let us know if you are unable to attend or think you will be late.

In preparation for this important topic, please be sure to follow your prep resources in your study guide <https://www.caregiverscommunity.ca/cc.study.p.pdf>. And do the Kick-off exercises in your study guide.

We are here to help you so please feel free to call us.

Yours in Christ's service,

Your name

Phone 055-XXX-XXXX

SUBJECT: Lesson What Are The Freedom Years (Day, date (time))

Blessings to you (Name),

We hope you had a great week!

“Add your personal note ...”

For our next session, We plan to start at (Time sharp) Here is your meeting link: [https://yourmeeting URL](https://yourmeetingURL). Let us know if you are unable to attend or think you will be late.

In preparation for this important topic, please be sure to follow your prep resources in your study guide <https://www.NoMoreOverLoad.com/FY.Book.p.pdf>. And read *What Are The Freedom Years 16 of your Your Freedom Years Book*.

We are here to help you so please feel free to call us.

Yours in Christ’s service,

Your name

Phone 055-XXX-XXXX

SUBJECT: Session Three: How To Live Life To The Full (Day, date (time))

Blessings to you (Name),

We hope you had a great week!

“Add your personal note ...”

For our next session, We plan to start at (Time sharp) Here is your meeting link: [https://yourmeeting URL](https://yourmeetingURL). Let us know if you are unable to attend or think you will be late.

In preparation for this important topic, please be sure to follow your prep resources in your study guide <https://www.NoMoreOverLoad.com/FY.Book.p.pdf>. Read *HOW to Live Life To The Full, page 56 of your Your Freedom Years Book*.

We are here to help you so please feel free to call us.

Yours in Christ’s service,

Your name

Phone 055-XXX-XXXX

SUBJECT: Session Four: Pathway To Purpose (Day, date (time))

Blessings to you (Name),

We hope you had a great week!

“Add your personal note ...”

For our next session, We plan to start at (Time sharp) Here is your meeting link: <https://yourmeetingURL>. Let us know if you are unable to attend or think you will be late.

In preparation for this important topic, please be sure to follow your prep resources in your study guide <https://www.NoMoreOverLoad.com/FY.Book.p.pdf>. And read *Pathway To Purpose* - Page 112 of your *Your Freedom Years Book*.

We are here to help you so please feel free to call us.

Yours in Christ’s service,

Your name

Phone 055-XXX-XXXX

SUBJECT: Session Five: How To Finish Well (Day, date (time))

Blessings to you (Name),

We hope you had a great week!

“Add your personal note ...”

For our next session, We plan to start at (Time sharp) Here is your meeting link: <https://yourmeetingURL>. Let us know if you are unable to attend or think you will be late.

In preparation for this important topic, please be sure to follow your prep resources in your study guide <https://www.NoMoreOverLoad.com/FY.Book.p.pdf>. And read *How To Finish Well*, page 134 of your *Your Freedom Years Book*.

We are here to help you so please feel free to call us.

Yours in Christ’s service,

Your name

Phone 055-XXX-XXXX

SUBJECT: Session Six: Celebration And Review (Day, date (time))

Blessings to you (Name),

We hope you had a great week!

“Add your personal note ...”

For our next and final session, We plan to start at (Time sharp) Here is your meeting link:
<https://your meeting URL>. Let us know if you are unable to attend or think you will be late.

In preparation for this visit, please review the note on Four Spiritual Laws and the Letter to Our Children as well as the final page on your study guide. The di resources in your study guide
<https://www.NoMoreOverLoad.com/FY.Book.p.pdf>. And read *Dealing With Depression*, page 237 of your *Your Freedom Years Book*.

We are here to help you so please feel free to call us.

Yours in Christ's service,

Your name

Phone 055-XXX-XXXX