

# Small Group Values Stories

(For use with chapter 1 of book, page 7 of PowerPoint)

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## Scenario 1

When I was in a college-and-career group at my old church, I was involved in a large dinner and Bible study gathering in a couple's home. Although not everyone was able to participate in the discussion because of the size of the group (it was maybe 30 or 40 people), the quality of discussion was usually rather good. One week the leader and his wife, who were older than the rest of us, had to go out of town, and he asked me to lead the group. I felt honored that he would ask me, but was a bit nervous because I was not an older authority figure, but a peer. I wasn't sure how everyone would respond to my leading the discussion, and thought they might opt not to seriously engage because the "real" leader wasn't there. I prepared a lot of open-ended questions to try to encourage good participation, and I did a lot of research. I started the evening with a historical introduction to set the cultural context, and when I started asking questions, at first I had to wait a while for people to respond. But eventually, the discussion took off, and I was excited to see the same quality of interaction as we usually had. It seemed as if people were really engaged and that they accepted my leadership instead of not taking me seriously. I felt really good about the experience, and it encouraged me to feel much more confident leading more discussions and eventually groups. I went on to start a new men's group.

**Values:** leadership development, giving potential new leaders opportunities, respect, feeling "chosen," autonomy, quality, risk, having someone else believe in me

## Scenario 2

After developing community over the course of a couple years, the co-ed small group I attended recognized the need for a forum to deal with sexual brokenness. Several events led to this conclusion, including indiscretions of group members and the leader's observations of people getting their needs met in illegitimate ways that involved crossing godly boundaries. The leader decided to tackle the topic from several angles, including an evening dedicated to confession and prayer. The small group already had the structure in place of getting in gender-specific groups at the end of the evening for prayer. So, we decided to spend the entire evening in the prayer groups addressing our sexual brokenness.

The group leader called me to prepare me for the evening and asked me to lead the male prayer group. She gave me these words of truth to speak into the hearts of the men in my group, "By the power of your confession and the blood of Jesus Christ I pronounce you forgiven."

In our prayer group that evening, the first man who spoke confessed some sexual sin and brokenness

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that was absolutely startling to us. He looked down in shame as he choked out the words through his tears and then lifted his head, perhaps fearing judgment and rejection. I looked him in the eyes with tears streaming down my face and proclaimed, “By the power of your confession and the blood of Jesus Christ I pronounce you forgiven.” It was a powerful experience for all of us and a moment that I can look back on today and give full credit to the Holy Spirit.

**Values:** intimacy, vulnerability, involvement of the Spirit, powerful moments, addressing the tough issues, sexual purity, speaking into each others’ lives, grace, forgiveness

### Scenario 3

I was coleading a small group with my husband, and we had reached the point where the group members were starting to get to know each other pretty well. Although we had only been meeting for about three months, people had shared personal things and it seemed like the group was beginning to bond. This particular night my husband was out of town, but I felt pretty confident leading the group myself. We usually had snacks in the kitchen and socialized for a while before moving to the living room and starting our discussion.

During the snack time, an argument broke out. The war in Iraq had just begun, and political feelings were running high on both sides. Two of the strongest personalities in the group found themselves on opposite sides of the issue, unable to understand how anyone else could possibly think differently. The argument started to escalate and pretty soon everyone else had stopped their conversations and was listening. Their voices started getting louder. I thought, *Oh no. I’m not sure what to do. I’m the only leader here—we haven’t even started the discussion yet—but I bet people expect me to do something. And this argument doesn’t look like it’s going to end anytime soon. How should I handle this? I want to communicate that it’s okay to talk about the tough issues, but this is really escalating and I want to be sure we’re respectful of each other’s opinions.* I looked around trying to read everyone’s expressions, but they just looked stunned. I remember thinking, *Thank God there are no new people here tonight!*

So I started playing referee a bit, just saying things like, “Let him finish,” whenever anyone got interrupted. By doing that, I had exerted some authority and let the rest of the group know that I was handling the situation. After about 10 minutes, when I felt like both people had made their major points (although they were just picking up steam at that point), I cut in and said, “I’m glad you feel comfortable talking about such a tough issue. . . . This is reality; I know this is on a lot of our minds, and we aren’t here at this group just to be nice and pretend we agree though we don’t. I don’t want to shut down this discussion, because I think it’s important that we are able to talk about these kinds of things and hear other perspectives. However, it’s past time we got started, and I want to honor

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that time as well. So how about we pick up this discussion and continue dialoguing after group.”

We walked silently into the living room—there was a lot of tension. We always started our group with a check-in about where everyone was at and what kind of week they’d had. A few of the people who weren’t involved in the argument shared first, and by the time it got around to one of the people who was involved, she apologized for some of the ways she’d handled the argument. She still felt strongly about her position but regretted some of the ways she’d handled things. The other person apologized too. You could just feel the tension in the room dissipating. Although this is in some ways a strange “peak experience” to relate—because it was not at all fun at the time—I felt good about how I handled a very difficult situation. And although neither of the people involved in the argument has changed their political position, they did go on to become friends. And I think it was a turning point in the group too. I think it helped them realize that this was real life, we were going to be real here, and that even if they thought differently on something, they’d be treated with respect by the group.

**Values:** respecting others, openness, freedom of expression, relationship, willingness to deal with the hard issues, confronting, holding the agenda, reconciliation/asking forgiveness