

NOTES FOR THE MAIN LEADER OF A FOUNDATIONS COURSE

First of all, I suggest that you read the notes prepared for those who are helping to lead a Foundations Course. They are all highly relevant to the main leader. In addition the following points are important:

Responsibility - This is probably the most critical aspect of the overall leadership of a Foundations Course. If you are even a bit irresponsible in what you undertake, nobody else will pick it up! So it is your job to choose assistant leader(s) who have some Bible knowledge, a heart (and ideally some experience) for leading someone to Christ, and some pastoral skills. If they can speak as well, that is all to the good. It will save you doing all the main talks. Team teaching can be a welcome variety on a single voice. At all events, the choice of colleagues is crucial. And so is your relationship with them. They may never have done anything quite like this before, even if they have been in Bible Study groups for years. This is much more exciting, but they won't know that to begin with. You need to enthuse them with the privilege, hear the story of how each came to faith, calm their fears and encourage their successes, while correcting, gently, what goes amiss. Make sure they know how to lead a small inductive Bible study, helping the members to understand the passage from the questions provided, and to draw out the application. It is your job to pray earnestly for the members, that they come to Christ and grow in him. You are also responsible for the timing of the evening. We have found that if the meeting is advertised as from 7:30-9:00 p.m. we should be strict in starting and ending, and can divide the time roughly as follows. 7:30-7:40 - Welcome, drinks, and mixing. 7:40 -8:25 - Recap on last week, news, any worship, your talk, and learning a verse of scripture. 7:25-7:50 - Inductive Bible study in the small group. 8:50- 9:00 - Prayers in the small group. Then exit to pick up the Notes and have final refreshments if appropriate before leaving.

To lead one of these courses is a very responsible job. But it does not require a clergyman. In fact it is much better if the overall leader is not ordained, or people in the course will over-rely on him.

Oversight of Assistants One of your (hidden) roles is to oversee your assistants. They will need coaching in various areas – a welcoming, hospitable manner, making sure everyone is chatted to as they enter the room for the meeting, leading an inductive Bible study (most leaders are likely to talk too much whereas they should be drawing the members of their group out, so that they learn to feed on Scripture), personal evangelism, and rudimentary pastoral care. This last is the area where they will need most help, because, particularly in the South, people are reluctant to ask someone else if they have yet given their lives to Christ! Yet it is essential that they do engage in this personal work, because members can listen with apparent involvement to all that goes on in the session, and make suitable noises during the inductive Bible study, but have enormous problems that they need to talk about with some understanding person, or else some blockage to their coming to Christ. Share in the joys and disappointments of your colleagues. If you sense that they are finding it too difficult with a particular individual,

make a switch and give them some much easier person to ‘cover’ in personal work, taking the more difficult customer yourself. One of your aims will be to see if any of your assistants has the skills to become an overall leader in future.

Practical Preparation - Unless you delegate it to one of them, it is your responsibility to ensure that there are enough Bibles available of the same translation (NIV may be best). You need to see that the room is clean and ready, that the chairs are laid out in such a way that the one giving the talk can make eye contact with everyone. You need to ensure that drinks and nibbles are available as a hospitable gesture when people come in (though they will often eat and drink more after the session is over – it is a bit further from their supper!). If you are going to use evangelistic booklets like my *Come, follow me*, or books for enquirers such as C.S. Lewis’ *Mere Christianity* or my, *Who is this Jesus?* or *Avoiding Jesus* (a book dealing with common difficulties), make sure they are there. You may also want to leave out a card about your church services for them to pick up, since many people in Foundation courses will not yet have any church connection. When you come to Session 3 on the devotional life, you need to have some initial Bible reading material to give them. Scripture Union and Bible Reading Fellowship both run undated introductory notes, and John Eddison’s *Newness of Life* (Bible Reading Fellowship) is idea for getting people started.

Giving the talk A critical part of each week’s program is the short talk for which there is basic material in the Notes which you work to and which are given to each member at the end of the evening. There is no reason why you should not adapt the material so long as the thrust of it is the same. The talk must be good, or they will not come back! It needs to be succinct, warm, non-churchy, well illustrated and involving them as much as possible. The first night is vital. You have to win their attention and hold it while you explain that Christianity is Christ, and how and why to respond to him. Leave them hungry to do so. The evangelistic booklets you place in an obvious spot will be a help. I suggest you do not ask for an overt response there and then. That is the purpose of the ‘one-on-one’ meetings you and your colleagues will have with each participant. You would probably be wise to do the teaching the first and second nights yourself so as to win their confidence. Thereafter parts or perhaps the whole of some of the following talks can be given to one of your colleagues. You may well not get questions the first night. But in subsequent evenings you will. Your previous discussions with your colleague(s) will have shown who is likely to be the best at answering what sort of questions.

Looking ahead to the following week In the pressure of life it is easy to forget this. But it is a help as you and your assistant(s) gather at the end of an evening to look ahead to the next week and ensure that everyone knows who is leading what, and therefore has plenty of time to prepare and get back to you if there is a problem. If your assistants are up to it, it could be good sometimes to include them in your talk, both to develop their skills and to provide variety for the hearers. But this does require close coordination if it is not to be disorienting. In any case they will be leading an inductive Bible study. You may need to help them with any of the difficulties they are likely to encounter, and also in the de-briefing each evening (when the members have gone). Try to assess from what

they tell you how well they led it, how fully the members took part and chose thoughts, and if they were yet ready to pray aloud.

Oversight of individual members You are responsible not only for organizing who handles the talks (mostly yourself, in all probability) but for ensuring that every member of the group is sensitively invited to a meal or coffee in order that a spiritual conversation may take place, hopefully on two occasions during the Course.

The first of these will involve finding out if the person has yet responded to Christ, or, if not, what the problem is. It will also involve helping them to start or develop some method of devotional Bible reading and prayer.

The second should be to deal with any problems that have emerged during the course, and also to point the person to whatever follow-up is operating in your church. Ideally they should be put into one of the Fellowship Groups that many churches have. This will give them more of the small-group fellowship which is so valuable and which they have come to value during the Course.

Generally it is best to assign members to your fellow leader(s) and yourself after you have had one meeting and have gotten to know a bit about the members and which of you would be most likely to do a good job with them. It is your responsibility to see that these pastoral talks happen and are done well.

At the end of the course You need to be in touch with whoever set up the Foundations Course in the first place, so that handover to a regular home fellowship group can be smooth. You need to:

- a. Encourage group members to attend Sunday worship regularly, maybe taking them along yourself the first time and introducing them to a few people.
- b. Inform the minister of the church, and introduce them to him.
- c. Encourage the members to consider doing some form of service in the church, using the gifts God has given them.
- d. Keep in occasional contact with the members, who will need continued love and support even though the group has ended. Aim to keep in touch until you are sure that they are established in both church and Christian fellowship.
- e. Write a brief assessment of each member (but not breaking confidences) to hand to the minister and/or the leader of the house group to which they go.
- f. Remember that the biggest danger of 'fall out' is after the Foundations Course has ended, before the person gets settled in a new set of Christian friendships. Continue to pray for them.