

# WHAT IS THE *best* CURRICULUM?

*Choosing group study curriculum can be an overwhelming task considering the number of options available. The Choosing & Using Group Curriculum flowchart is designed to help you sift through the myriad of materials to find the curriculum your group needs. Your goal is ultimately to make disciples—Christ followers—who are obedient to Jesus, yielded to the Spirit, and loving toward others. Always remember that the curriculum is merely a tool—it should never “drive” the group. Use the guidelines below as your filter in overall evaluation of a group curriculum or study materials.*

**Bible-centered and sane.** Never substitute a curriculum for the Bible. Curriculum and study materials should be used to enhance the disciple-making nature of the group and help move people into the Scriptures. Technically, the terms “Bible-centered” and “sane” are redundant because God is the author of sanity. However, just because study materials include Bible verses does not mean they are conveying God’s meaning. Cults have been built on the strategy of using Scripture the wrong way. So check out the materials and the authors to ensure the content aligns with Scripture and our church’s core beliefs. An author’s background or credentials can often be a good indicator of his or her reliability.

**Recommended.** Begin with study resources in the *Curriculum Guide* and recommended at *Leaders Roundtable*. Get input from your Community Director, or consult leaders who have successfully led groups for some time and ask them about materials. Their experiences have taught them a wealth of knowledge about what works and what doesn’t. They can save you not only time and energy, but help you avoid potential pitfalls.

**Group-friendly.** Many study materials are designed for understanding the Bible, not building relationships or generating a deep sense of community and caring. Look closely at not only the questions but also the process. Does the curriculum allow for lots of interaction? Does it ask personal disclosure questions that challenge people to open up and share their lives? Or is it filled with content-based “what” questions, often ignoring personal “why” questions? These materials may still be of value, but be conscious of the fact that you will have to work that much harder to bridge the gap from content to personal impact.

**Has substance.** It is important that the material go beyond the obvious solution of “do what you’re suppose to do.” Transformational groups do more than just read the Ten Commandments and stop. An application section that simply asks, “How would this apply to your life?” is weak! Choose substantive studies that deal with the underlying cause, motives, injuries, values, misunderstandings, sins, failures, and weaknesses that impede growth. Materials should offer real hope and solutions. Only then will real biblical community begin to take root.

**Practical.** Concepts and principles need to be easily translated into application. Many study materials have homework or follow-up thought questions. These help to put flesh on the skeleton ideas being taught. You will be the key to making a study practical to your group, but look for materials that can help “expand your horizons” a bit, addressing different learning styles or personalities, or practical application ideas.

**Treats members as adults.** Make sure the study materials take clear positions where the Bible takes positions, yet leaves the same room and freedom that the Bible leaves for people to make choices. For example, you may choose several ways of “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) to your teen: tone of voice, environment and setting, the topics you bring up. Avoid materials that instruct you to use their exact words or rigid rules to convey something to your child.

Pray and keep an open mind as you search out topics and materials. It is an exciting part of the process!