

‘Living Well With God’: Leader’s Guide

Introduction to the Book

Thanks for using ‘Living Well With God’ in your group. I hope it will be a helpful resource for you.

The topics in the book are all about wellbeing, and explore God’s design for living well in different parts of everyday life.

We start with four topics looking at aspects of our practical and physical life:

- Learning to rest
- Loving my body
- Getting along with people
- My part in God’s plan

Then we look at our inner life (thoughts and emotions) and two important areas of our faith in Jesus:

- Understanding my feelings
- Understanding my thoughts
- God’s special gift of grace
- Who God says I am

Finally we move on to our spiritual life and different parts of our journey with God:

- Getting to know God
- Following Jesus
- Trusting God when life is hard
- Winning the spiritual war
- Living forever with God

Each topic includes four lessons and an opportunity at the end to discuss what has been learned.

You can work through the book in order or select any topic to begin with. You can even use individual lessons by themselves.

Leading Groups with Additional Needs: General Tips

Including members with different needs and abilities

The members of your group will likely have different needs and may have different levels of understanding. Try to provide something for everyone to enjoy, for example include songs, games and/or activities that are accessible for those who find the teaching harder to understand. (See the tips in the next section!)

If anyone in the group has a high level of need or has behaviour that is challenging to manage, ask them to bring someone who can support them more closely within the group.

Identify group members' gifts and abilities, and find ways to involve them in the session. If someone is good at reading, ask them to read the Bible passage. If someone is confident enough to pray out loud, ask them to pray at the start of the session. Ask group members to choose a song, assist with a craft, or help making drinks. This helps to make it feel like a shared group where everyone has a part to play.

If you are inexperienced, it can be tricky to find the right balance of making things simple but also treating the group as adults and equals. This will come with practise! Try to avoid talking down to people or patronising them, but don't be worried about getting things wrong along the way. It can often be helpful for others to see you make mistakes and show vulnerability!

Remember that you are all in this together. You are not doing ministry 'to' your group, you are joining with them to help them grow in their faith, and along the way you will learn from them too!

Making sessions engaging and accessible

Signs and symbols

Some people with learning disabilities use [Makaton](#), a simple sign language that is used alongside speech to aid understanding. If your group members use Makaton you may benefit from learning a few signs to help you communicate effectively with them. [Here's a helpful video teaching some basic signs.](#)

If Makaton sounds daunting, don't worry. You can learn as you go along, or even ask your group members to show you the signs they find helpful. (They will probably be delighted to teach you something they are good at!) If your group

don't use Makaton, you can still use your facial expressions and physical actions to communicate alongside your words. As you get to know your group you will discover other ways to help them understand too.

Many people also benefit from Makaton or [Widgit](#) symbols presented alongside written information. These are not available for free, but you can use any simple symbols in the same way, for example to help explain the structure of the session.

Worship

Everyone can enjoy music, even those who are unable to sing. Including two or three worship songs is a great start to a session.

- Bring some shakers or coloured flags and encourage people to move and dance if they like. (Some people play very loudly, so it's often best to stick to quieter instruments!)
- [Becky George](#) makes videos of Makaton worship songs that you could use. Or perhaps a group member who is good at signing could teach everyone to sign a song?

Bible teaching

Be creative and interactive with Bible teaching. Giving the lesson in more than one way can support better understanding.

- Act out sketches, or ask group members to represent characters. Ask the group to show characters' emotions on their faces, or guide them to repeat a simple response at different points of the story.
- Tell the story in a different way, for example using lego or watching a video.
- Play a game that demonstrates the theme.
- Engage the senses. Visual elements and practical activities can be really helpful for supporting understanding. Sounds, smells and things to touch and pass around are also good.
- Include a simple craft, or provide colouring pages that fit the theme.
- Ask questions as you go along. This is a great way to find out whether the group is following the teaching, and gives you an opportunity to explain anything they don't understand. (In my group, if we get questions that aren't relevant to the current session, we write them down and put them in a box to return to later. This also helps us identify topics that people are interested in for future session!)
- Lead a group discussion to share experiences or thoughts on an aspect of the lesson.

- Choose a simple memory verse and revisit it in different ways for several weeks to help it stick in people's minds.
- If you make any written resources, use large text (16pt) and an easy-to-read font. This font is [Lexend Deca](#) which is free and dyslexia friendly. Use pictures or symbols and a clear, uncluttered layout to make the information easy to visually process.

Prayer

You can get creative with prayer time too. This is an opportunity for people to share what's on their hearts and to care for each other.

- Value everyone's prayers. Some may not be able to pray out loud or to say more than a few words or just 'Amen' – these prayers are precious too.
- Find creative ways to pray. Use playdough or art as well as words to make prayers. Or compose a prayer together using group members' ideas. [The Prayer Experiment Notebook](#) has lots more great suggestions.
- Include a quiet prayer time, perhaps as a break between sections or a lead-in to the main prayer time. Create a calm atmosphere by dimming the lights, lighting a candle or listening to some soft, relaxing music. This only needs to be a few minutes and can be a lovely opportunity for everyone to rest in God's presence.
- Play prayer 'games' – for example passing a ball around and asking each person to say something they are thankful for or need God's help with. Or limit prayers to one sentence to put everyone on an equal footing. These kinds of activities can help people grow in confidence to pray out loud.
- Of course, ask group members what they would like prayer for. If they don't know, ask if the group can just pray for them to have a good week.

You won't use all these ideas in a single session, of course! But hopefully they give you a flavour of the kinds of things that can work well in a group like this.

Using 'Living Well With God' in a Group

In the book, each lesson follows this structure:

- Key Bible verse
- Lesson introduction
- Full Bible passage
- Lesson
- Questions
- Prayer
- Thinking about this week

Lesson Introduction

The introduction sets the scene for the Bible passage. If you like, you can add more context at this point. Who are the characters, or who is writing? If it's a story, what happened earlier? What is the theme of the passage?

Some of the 'Christian' words are printed in red in the introduction and lesson. These words are defined in the 'Word Meanings' section at the back of the book. When these words come up, check whether the group understand them, and explain what they mean.

Bible passage and key verse

The Bible passage is usually 3-8 verses. Depending on your group you can use the full passage or just focus on the key verse. In the book, the key verses are taken from the ERV (Easy-to-Read Version). I recommend reading from the ERV or NIrV (New International Reader's Version). You can explore some easy to read Bibles [in this article](#).

Even in a simple version, the Bible can be hard to understand. Help the group by repeating the passage in your own words or explaining the main point, and/or use one of the tips in the previous section to give the teaching in another way.

Lesson

The lessons are written in the first person to encourage users to apply the teaching to their own lives. It also leaves room for users to have a similar or different experience to the narrator. A great way to engage the group is to ask them about their own experiences of the topic. For example in My Part in God's Plan week 1 (P42), the lesson says "When I am good at something, I feel happy. It makes me think I am important. When I am not good at something, I feel sad. It makes me think I am not important." You could ask your group how they feel in these situations. Are their feelings the same as the narrator, or different?

Use some of the tips in the previous section to make the teaching engaging and interactive. For example, in Loving My Body week 4 (P28) you could bring some gold and silver objects or precious stones to pass round and help people imagine the beautiful temple. In Getting to Know God week 4 (P98) you could give group members different puzzle pieces and help them work together to complete the puzzle, showing that they each bring something important and unique. In Understanding My Feelings week 4 (P58) you could make a list of all the things group members are grateful for, and thank God for them together.

Questions

Depending on your group, you may want to simplify the questions or add more. Give group members an opportunity to give their answers if they want to, write them down, discuss them with a partner or just think about them. If people are shy, you could give your own answer to start things off.

Prayer

You can pray this prayer together to round off the teaching, and/or as a transition to a quiet time of prayer or a longer group prayer time.

Thinking about this week

These questions give group members a chance to talk about how they're doing. If you want to, you can change the structure and use this section as an icebreaker at the start of the session. Or you can go through it before the prayer time as a way of helping people to share the things they're happy about or struggling with. Ask them if they'd like prayer for the hard things and suggest thanking God together for the good things.

Because the book is also intended as a devotional for individuals, some of the questions are quite personal. Don't make people share out loud if they don't want to, but encourage them to think about or write down their answers so they can share with someone or pray about them later.

One question each time is related to the topic. It's a chance to think about what you've been learning together and how God is helping you grow.

Thinking about this topic

At the end of each topic is a chance to look back over what you've learned and discussed. You could add this to week 4 or go through it in a fifth session to conclude the topic. Discuss as a group the things you remember from this topic and what has been helpful. Give your own answers to encourage group members to share their thoughts. If they have any remaining questions, this is a good opportunity to talk about them.

I hope this guide has been helpful. For more easy read Bible resources, visit my website valleyofsprings.com/easyread and [join my email list](#) to hear about new resources when they are available.