



## LEADING A SMALL GROUP • How to Use *Cru.Comm*

Last week, I was invited to a friend's home for dinner. We hadn't had a chance to see each other for a while, so I was eager for the companionship, as much as a good meal. Shortly after I arrived, we were alerted that dinner was ready, so we headed into the dining room. When I got there, I was expecting to find some sort of main dish – perhaps a casserole, or maybe some baked chicken. I was also hoping for a steaming dish of vegetables, and maybe some bread, served in a basket. Instead, sitting in the center of the table, with its jagged lid mostly pried back, was a five-pound can of cold green beans. “Dig in!” my friend said.

Disgruntled may be too strong a word, but I was certainly hoping for more. The beans were fine, and no doubt full of good nutrients. The can itself was sturdy and clearly labeled. But the meal lacked a certain presentation, not to mention flavor. Don't get me wrong – I don't have anything against cans – they do a great job preserving their contents, and enabling us to transport food across thousands of miles. It's just that they make lousy serving dishes.

I may not have had an experience exactly like that, but I have had many that are similar. So have a lot of our staff and students. Every week, on campuses across the country, our students attend Bible studies that are served right out of the can. This year that “can” may have had the label *Cru.Comm* emblazoned on it. *Cru.Comm* is, unapologetically, Bible study in a can. That is, it is a curriculum of solid biblical data that has been packaged so as to protect its contents from decay, and enable broad distribution. It's not, however, a serving dish. It's the job of the chef (read: Bible study leader), to open up the can, add a little seasoning, and make the meal presentable.

*The Ultimate Road Trip* identifies five elements of a healthy small group:

1. Quality biblical content
2. Community
3. Self-discovered learning
4. Progressive life-change
5. Outward impact

*Cru.Comm* is designed to provide you with quality biblical content, with which you can help people through a guided process of self-discovered learning, resulting in progressive life change. Notice two things in that. First, *Cru.Comm* doesn't even touch on *community* or *outward impact*. It's difficult to provide a one-size-fits-all program for community. If each study included a few jokes for you to tell to warm up the group, I can just about guarantee you that they'd flop, and you'd feel like a dork. You can't “can” community. Similarly, evangelism strategies would likely not fit in with the realities and plans already in place on your campus. It's up to you, locally, to interact with your group, spending time together to build relationships, and to figure out how you can best make the gospel known.

Second, notice where *Cru.Comm* does attempt to resource you. *Quality biblical content* is what the studies major on. We chose a curriculum of books, and/or passages, that cover topics critical to developing Christ-centered laborers. It has frequently been the case, that our staff and students lead studies on whatever book or topic happens to interest them. While it's obviously true that all Scripture is profitable, it doesn't necessarily follow that any



collection of books, passages, or topics studied, will be equally helpful in producing an effective laborer. We want to make the best use of the four years we have with a student, to prepare them for the forty years that will follow. A student, who has learned the material in *Cru.Comm*, over a three to four year period, should have developed the worldview that prepares them for a lifetime of ministry.

Students will get the most out of a *Cru.Comm* study when the leader is prepared to guide them through a process of *self-discovered learning*. A leader could just pass out the student notes, ask each question just as it's written, and then read the answers from the key. But it wouldn't be a very engaging study. Rather like a can of cold green beans.

It would be far better, if a leader would adequately prepare, so as to stimulate the group to discover biblical truths. Below are four tips that may help you do that:

1. *Make sure you understand the material yourself.* Read the passage, and the entire *Cru.Comm* guide. Look up parallel texts that are mentioned in the "What Do I Need to Know about the Passage?" section, as well as cross references or footnotes in your own Bible. Make sure you understand the main point of the study, and how it flows from the text. (This is succinctly stated in "What's the Big Idea?") But, the best thing you can do, to prepare for any study, is to read and study the rest of your Bible. The broader your knowledge of Scripture, the more insights you are likely to have into any one text. Commit to growing in your own knowledge of the Word.
2. *Bring your own experiences into the study.* It is likely that for every *Cru.Comm* study, there are unmentioned passages of Scripture that are meaningful to you and relevant to the topic at hand. Share those with your group. Perhaps you have an illustration that you find superior to something suggested in the guide. By all means, do whatever will best help your group learn and discover. You will be a better teacher of the things you are passionate about, and that have been significant to you. In the same spirit, don't be afraid to omit a question that you find unhelpful. You are encouraged to customize, and personalize, the studies.
3. *Don't be afraid to teach by making statements.* "Self-discovered learning" should not be a euphemism for the pooling of ignorance. We want the students to learn; it's your job to guide them. As such, there will be times every week, where you will need to tell them what they won't otherwise know. In every study, there is information in the "What Do I Need to Know about the Passage?" section that is not included in the questions. Those represent your chance to be the expert, to teach. In between questions, give some background data, share an illustration, or point them to a parallel text that can give clarity. Some kernels of truth along the way, can form the foundations from which the group can make discoveries.
4. *Don't pass out the student notes*, at least not exactly as they are printed. Heresy, I know, but in my experience, students don't respond well to studies that are over-produced. To that end, the students' notes have a very simple look and feel. But even those, can stifle freedom, and feel too programmatic, so I prefer not to use them. I'd recommend two options. It's very easy to copy the content out of the student notes with the text select tool in *Acrobat Reader*. Then, you can paste the questions into a word processor, cut the ones you don't like, add a few of your own, and personalize it. That way, the notes you pass out are truly your own.

Better still, though, is not to pass out any notes at all. When I lead these studies, I copy the questions I want to use, and comments I wish to make, onto a post-it note or two, that I stick in my Bible. That gives me a structure to follow, but allows greater freedom to follow worthwhile tangents, and enables me to edit on the fly. It makes the studies, in fact, and in appearance, more personal and interactive. By the way, tangents are your friends. They represent the topics about which your students are most interested, engaged, and therefore, best able to learn. If you can engage them with interesting content, they will learn a ton.

The final element of a healthy small group is *progressive life-change*. In fact, that is the ultimate goal. Our job is not to produce smarter sinners, but to help people be more like Jesus. To that end, make sure you are suggesting a small, practical way, that your students can begin to apply the lesson of the week. Each study guide includes application points in the section, "What's Our Response?" But also be sure to consider how your life has changed



over the years. It's very unlikely that you attended a Bible study on generosity, and have been generous ever since. Rather, we learn layer by layer, as the Word of God slowly transforms our minds, and changes our worldview. The most important application of any study, is to be willing to yield yet another area of our lives to the Holy Spirit. As we study His Word accurately, and assume a humble posture before Him, the real, life-long applications will occur as a matter of course. Make sure your people understand this, so they move toward real maturity, and are not simply jumping through hoops.

It's our hope that *Cru.Comm* would be a helpful resource – not to make it easy to lead mediocre studies – but to make it easier to lead great studies that will help us produce Christ-centered laborers. As our leaders learn to take them out of the can, and skillfully serve them up, we can expect to see significant growth in the biblical knowledge and maturity of our students, to the praise and glory of our Lord.

End

Cru.Comm is the small group material for Campus Crusade for Christ's Campus Ministry. It was created by Centerfield Productions, the field based division of CruPress. We'd love to hear your feedback on this study. Please write us at [centerfield@uscm.org](mailto:centerfield@uscm.org)