

BLUE SKIES

SMALL GROUP READING GUIDE

In His lifetime, Jesus ministered to great numbers of people -10,000 or more at a time, a sea of humanity gathered on hillsides and sandy beaches. However, He spent most of His time with a small number of hand-picked devotees.

The small group of twelve who Jesus chose as His disciples came from a variety of occupations that included fishermen, a tax collector, a politician, a bookkeeper, and several businessmen. These men varied greatly in temperament as well. Peter was bold and belligerent, John quiet and affectionate. Thomas was pragmatic and methodical, while Judas was sneaky and underhanded. Jesus clearly appreciated the power of a small, diverse group. We should too.

SMALL GROUPS WORK BEST IN A RELAXED, INFORMAL ATMOSPHERE.

Choose a host and/or hostess who truly enjoys hosting. Don't worry about finding the "perfect" home – when you start spending more mental energy on the details than the connection, you miss out on the entire point. People tend to feel most comfortable in a home that feels inviting, lived in - like their own. When group members see the host or hostess getting comfortable on the floor or in their favorite chair, they will likely feel they can get comfortable as well.

SMALL GROUPS REQUIRE A FACILITATOR RATHER THAN AN INSTRUCTOR.

A good facilitator knows how to present a simple issue, ignite discussion, encourage input from less assertive individuals, steer the group away from generalizations and judgements. This can be tough until group members get to know and trust one another. As the group comes together over the first weeks, emphasize fellowship, keep the atmosphere light, and have fun together.

SMALL GROUPS ARE ENHANCED BY DIVERSITY.

This will happen naturally if you let it. It's just good to know that it's usually not necessary to try to limit your group based on age, gender, or some other variable. Having a grandfather and a teenager in the same group, for example, has been known to lead to wonderful and unexpected outcomes. Getting to know a person one-on-one is a great way to break mindsets and stereotypes. So it's best to relax and let your group find its own dynamic.

When it comes to small groups, a little planning goes a long way. Once everyone is comfortable with the boundaries, these groups require little maintenance while spawning meaningful relationships, stimulating mental and spiritual growth, and providing emotional support. These groups can also become a rich source of just plain fun.

As you work through Blue Skies: How to Live in Extraordinary Expectation of What's Around the Corner, be sure to really dig into the study guide questions at the end of the book for each chapter. Each question was written to spark conversation amongst the group, recall nostalgia, make you think, prompt you to read through the Scripture, and grow together as a group in your faith. Don't hold back in conversation – instead, come to the group ready and willing to listen, share, and learn from others and what God might be putting on your heart throughout these pages.