

# Sensory Small Groups

Using all five senses to help group members engage

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Danny R. Von Kanel

Research indicates that we retain only 10 percent of what we hear; 20 percent of what we see; 65 percent of what we hear and see; but 90 percent of what we hear, see, and do. Add in taste and smell—though a challenge in a small group—and you have the opportunity to use all of the senses to help your group members engage.

Below are just a few examples of what you can try.

## **If You Do It, They Will Find Meaning**

Imitating the true Story can move group members to a deeper walk with the Lord. So, consider enlisting students to act out key moments from Scripture. Simulate Jesus' interaction with the woman caught in adultery, for example. Follow that with a modern-day story of a woman caught stealing merchandise from a retail store and discuss both simulations. How are they alike? How are they different? What other Scriptures come to mind in regard to forgiveness?

Sometimes physical movement can enhance engagement and lead to greater application. Ask your group members to move to one wall if they totally agree with a statement and to the other if they totally disagree. Then say, "Forgiveness is hard for me" (or something similar). After they move, ask why they chose that particular wall.

There are many ways to help your group get moving, of course. Draw a line on the floor and have them "cross over" if they hold a certain belief, or want to learn about a specific principle. Have people change seats from one side of the room to the other when holding various views or opinions. Placing your physical body in one place or the other forces you to grapple with the subject matter at hand.

## **If You Taste It, They Will Experience a Moment of Historical Place**

Just as beignets, coffee that kicks, gumbo, and crawfish symbolize the taste buds of New Orleans, other foods can take us to biblical places and locations.

Consider the following:

- Barley ([Ruth 2:23](#))
- Bread ([Luke 22:19](#))
- Corn ([Ruth 2:14](#); [1 Samuel 17:17](#))
- Figs ([Numbers 13:23](#); [1 Samuel 25:18](#))
- Honey ([Deuteronomy 8:8](#))
- Olives and olive oil ([Leviticus 2:4](#); [Deuteronomy 8:8](#))

Each time you study these kinds of passages, find ways for your group to experience the food product by tasting the item after reading. Ask your group to imagine the biblical location and let their taste buds carry them to that place.

## **If You Smell It, They Will Find Reference Points**

The sense of smell is powerful, so allow odors to describe elements of God's story. When addressing romantic love, consider the smell of lilies and roses from Song of Solomon 5:13. When talking about the anointing of a priest ([Exodus 30:24](#), for example), use the ground bark of Cassia and cinnamon. When studying the way Mary graced Jesus with oil, bring out some form of expensive perfume and allow the odor to waft around the group.

Other smells can transport your group to other reference stops throughout God's Word. Consider:

- Calamus or sweet cane ([Isaiah 43:24](#))
- Hyssop ([Leviticus 14:4,49](#))
- Cumin ([Matthew 23:23](#))
- Saffron ([Song of Solomon 4:14](#))

### **If You Speak It, They Will Hear**

Group members connect with your speaking when they sense you feel their needs and hurts—when you demonstrate empathy, in other words. This is best accomplished by identifying the emotion displayed by each group member. Notice gestures, facial changes, and tone of voice. Echo back their sentiments and ask, "Is that what you are feeling?"

Speaking and facilitating with compassion comes through extended time spent on your knees in prayer for your group. Also, your personal walk with the Lord plays into speaking with love. The more you fall in love with Jesus, the more you will love your group members. Such emotions spill over into our communication.

### **If You See It, They Will Comprehend**

Biblical understanding takes two leaps forward when conveyed using visuals and word pictures. Visuals can come in many forms: drawings, photos, objects, paintings, displays, banners, and PowerPoint are just a few. Practice using each type before showing it to your group, of course. Work for a smooth flow so that the visuals enhance your words.

Nothing grabs people's hearts like a well-told story. Word pictures conjure up precious memories, explore the depth of emotions, and inspire listeners to greater service. Use verbal pictures in close proximity to Scripture. Let the story enhance God's Word rather than using Scripture as an embellishment to some other story.