

Feeling a little nervous about facilitating a small group study for prisoners? That's pretty normal.

Most prisoners have very different life experiences than the people you see at church every Sunday. Prison is a harsh environment and prisoners often do whatever it takes to survive. Many wish their lives were different, but they have no idea how to change.

Prisons have very limited resources for educational and/or religious programs. Your meeting space may be a circle of chairs in a hallway or the corner of a busy activity room. The atmosphere is often noisy and distracting with frequent interruptions for announcements or security checks.

Your group members will have a wide variety of communication styles and emotional needs. A few in your group may be well educated. But the majority will be very limited in their reading and writing abilities.

Despite all these challenges, prisons are extremely fertile mission grounds. Experienced volunteers have described prison ministry as a "Book-of-Acts experience" that requires total reliance on the Holy Spirit for guidance.

## **Here are some practical ways to prepare before the first class:**

- Contact local Prison Fellowship staff at 800-251-7411 to identify opportunities to facilitate classes. Your local staff person will work with you and the local prison facility to determine the best match to the needs of the prisoners. They will also help you coordinate the time and location for the class.
- Make sure you understand what time you should arrive, what time prisoners will begin arriving, and how much actual teaching time you will have.
- Find out as much as you can about the participants, including how many are expected, special needs or interests, and level of previous knowledge about the subject.
- At least a month before the class starts, begin to study the class materials and consider whether you will need to make adaptations to the lessons.
- Be sure you understand exactly what you can and cannot bring into the prison, as well as what you can and cannot give out in class. Allow at least a month if you need to get special approval for class materials.

The time you will have with your group is very precious. As you prepare to facilitate, the most important question to ask is: How does God want to minister to this group of men or women?

As volunteers, it is good for us to realize we are unequal to the task. We need to be totally reliant on God, humbly trusting Him to give us the right words to speak and only desiring to be God's agent of change in the lives of prisoners.