

The Literature Windshield by Eli Bernard

If you've never done this, then give it a try. Find a stretch of road without any oncoming traffic and while moving the speed limit, look AT the windshield. Now, no cheating. This will only take a second. Don't look through the windshield, look at it. It might help to find a spot to look at.

A normal reaction would be panic! If you don't feel panic, try it with oncoming traffic (no, not really – don't try this. Just imagine that there are cars coming at you!) There is an immediate sense that you've lost control of this moving vehicle, that you have no idea what's coming at you from any direction, because you're looking AT the very thing that is intended to be looked through. It doesn't matter if the horizon is bursting with the joy of a purple-mountain sunset or the splashing of a trout filled stream. You don't see any of that if you're looking at the windshield instead of through it.

But the windshield is helpful. It allows us to take in all the beauty before us, without the worry of bugs in our teeth or flying objects in our face or wind-ravaged hair. It is a tool best used when considered invisible.

If you've never done this, then give it a try. Become so familiar with the elements of the small group lesson, that you don't look at the material the entire time. You look through the material at the eyes of the people in your group. You listen through the material to their responses to the questions and their dialogue with one another. You react and respond to the life around you rather than to the next question or activity in the lesson. Here is the splashing of trout and the burst of sunlight that we all crave



in our small groups. It doesn't exist in the windshield; it is on the other side.

Now let me quickly say that the material you choose to use is indeed vital. It can keep the bugs out of your meeting; stop frustrated members from flying in your face, and keep from blowing people away. The material gives you a plan, a way to see and get to the beauty of the group. But let's stop pointing at the windshield, and point to the beauty beyond.

Many small group leaders are afraid of losing control of their "vehicle." While God's Word and relationships are the stuff of life change – the beauty of his creation – we often point at spots on the windshield rather than taking in all that is available in the group. It happens like this:

"The first question in the material is...."
"We need to get back to the lesson..."
"Everybody turn to page 14 for an activity..."

These statements (and subsequent page flipping in the material) tell the group participants that the material wants to know that they think; the lesson is interested in their response.

Can you sense the difference in these questions?

"Let me ask you a question..."
"Let's relate that thought back to the passage..."
"Let's try something together..."

Questions like these are generated by familiarity with the scope and sequence of the lesson elements. But the difference is that the material is "invisible" to the

Articles of **DISCOVERY**

The Literature Windshield (Continued)

discussion. Eye to eye and ear to ear, participants can grow together with each other and with God.

Try this in preparation for your next small group session:

1. Write down your questions and activities in the order they should occur.
2. Re-write this list in short-hand and abbreviations. After all, you are the only one that needs to know what the abbreviations mean.
3. Re-write the list on a sticky note using only one or two words (OK, use 3 or 4 if you need to) for each question or step. By the time of this third draft, you should be able to just glance at a phrase and know what to ask or do. (Writing a list 3 times like this will make you very familiar with the content and sequence. However, you may find you can skip step 2 once you become comfortable with this process.)
4. Place this sticky note in your Bible next to the passage you will study.

When the study begins, just glance at your sticky note and you will be reminded of the ice-breaker/opening question you have planned. But look at their eyes, listen to their words. Let them know that you want to know what they think and feel. While the group is responding to your question, just glance again at your list, and you'll know what comes next. And you won't have to juggle two books in your lap!

Bonus: In being comfortable in what comes next, you will often be able to sense the exact time to move naturally on to the next step. You'll be able to say something like, "That's a great question! Let's try something to see what we can learn about that." Natural transitions and good eye contact communicate volumes to your group as to what kind of listener you are.

Lead them to the beauty of the relationships in the group. Use your small group material. Use it well. Use it as a windshield.

GIVE IT A TRY!

Condense your lesson notes until they fit in this space!