



HOW TO
start

A Q PLACE

MARY SCHALLER

Published by Q Place
4th edition

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com. The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*. Copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007, 2013 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked *The Message* are taken from *The Message*, copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system without written permission from Q Place, P.O. Box 1581, Wheaton, IL, 60187; 1-800-369-0307; info@QPlace.com.

How to Start a Q Place

Copyright © 2008, 2010, 2016, 2017 by Q Place®

Cover design by Emily Gibbs
First printing, 4th edition, February 2017
ISBN: 978-1-880266-58-8
Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Foreword by Garry Poole	7
Introduction	9
Chapter 1 What Is a Q Place?	17
Chapter 2 Stage 1: Preparation	29
Chapter 3 Stage 2: Invitation	39
Chapter 4 Stage 3: Trial Meeting	49
Chapter 5 Stage 4: Growth: the second meeting	61
Chapter 6 Stage 4: Growth: ongoing discussions	79
Appendix A: Q Place Guidelines	95
Appendix B: Q Place Mission, Vision, Core Values	96
Appendix C: Sample Bible Conversation Card	97
Notes	98

Introduction

A Simple Story

For many years I lived in a small community in northern California with friends I had grown to know and love through countless conversations on the sidelines of kids' soccer games, baseball games, field trips, coffees, parties, and PTA meetings. They were neighbors, educators, coaches, or parents of my three children's friends. Most of them were not Christians.

On many occasions I had invited several of them to attend my large church in our adjacent community. The church was known for its excellent sermons by a gifted preacher, great children's programs, and a talented worship team. And yet it held no appeal for those I invited. Most of them graciously smiled and declined my invitations to church. End of discussion.

Periodically, to my surprise, one of my invitations would be accepted. Each time, I was sure that once my friend came, he or she would become a regular attendee and would learn what it meant to be a Christian. The Sunday messages were so compelling that I thought a decision for following Jesus would be made within weeks or months after that first visit. Someone would give a testimony in our worship services that confirmed the typical scenario of coming to our church and meeting Jesus there. Unfortunately, that had not been the result with those I invited.

Was I a failure, or were the odds against that happening in my secular community? My friends would come once or twice and never come back. *Why?* I wondered. When I asked them, they said that the sermons just didn't seem to address their particular questions about God, or they felt like an outsider, or it just didn't seem relevant to their lives. These people were busy. And they were not sure it was worth investing their time to attend a worship service every week when they weren't sure there was a God worth worshipping.

I couldn't give up that easily. I had grown to love these friends and wanted them to know the same life-giving power that I had found in

my faith. Occasionally I'd have a spiritual conversation with my friends over coffee or lunch. However, these were few and far between. And it seemed it was much more important to me to talk about God than it was to them. I would be so excited when we had the one conversation of the year about God that I'd usually blow it with my overwhelming enthusiasm to "download" everything they should know about Christianity in one sitting.

In late 2001, I spoke to two of my Christian friends, Kristin and Judy, about the possibility of starting a discussion group for spiritual seekers in our community. We started praying about who to invite and when to start. I use the term "spiritual seeker" loosely. Most of the people we considered inviting would have told you at the time that they were not actively seeking anything spiritual. They were skeptics more than they were seekers. But God placed them on our hearts as potential participants in our big experiment to have ongoing spiritual conversations with our friends.

We invited thirty women to come to my house to check out the possibility of a spiritual discussion group, which we described as a nonthreatening place to have conversations about God. We suggested using the book *How Does Anyone Know God Exists?* written by Garry Poole. This is one of seven books in the *Tough Questions* discussion guide series that is designed specifically for skeptics and spiritual seekers.

So much has happened since that first day. Each person who came back in the subsequent weeks and years has been profoundly touched by this life-changing experience, including me. I believe that God guided us through our discussions about faith-related issues and, as a result, each person's understanding of him deepened. We came to genuinely love and respect one another as well. Many participants had not known what it meant to be a Christian, to admit that we are sinners who need a rescue plan. Some had thought they were Christians, but had never invited Jesus into a personal relationship, and they became true followers of his. Others, who had no background at all in Christianity, learned what it meant to be followers of Jesus and decided to become Christians as a result of our discussions and the

love that they received from us. God used this group process to bring people to himself! Clearly this idea was a success.

I believe that my failure to reach my friends through inviting them to church is a common story. In retrospect, I realize I had wanted to point my friends to church so that someone else could point them to Jesus Christ. Why? Because I didn't really know how to point them to Jesus without bringing them to church. I thought I had to tell them the right things about God and defend the Christian faith in order for them to believe in him. I discovered through this experiment in my living room that asking good questions, listening, and when appropriate, sharing my story of what Jesus has done in my life create an effective bridge to connect with people who are distant from God and disinterested in the Bible.

As a result, I became passionate about helping other Christians start groups that were similar to mine. In fact, I began to envision the possibility of supporting a large movement of small groups where people in an increasingly secular culture could find a relationship with Jesus Christ.

In 2008, I became the president of Q Place, an organization whose purpose has always been the same as the one I envisioned! This book is part of that purpose; it is designed to guide you through the process of launching a small group with spiritual seekers, a group that we call a Q Place—a place for questions.

The Q Place approach is built on a foundation of more than fifty years of experience and the premise that people learn best when they discover truth for themselves in a small group setting. In 1960, former InterVarsity staff members Marilyn Kunz and Catherine (Kay) Schell launched a ministry in Dobbs Ferry, New York, called Neighborhood Bible Studies (NBS), an outreach ministry primarily to spiritually hungry people, most of them well-educated but biblically illiterate. Some attended a church. Others did not. NBS group discussions were focused on the Bible: its facts, meaning, and application. Over five decades, forty different NBS guides covering two-thirds of the Bible were developed, helping people discover God's message for themselves. From the beginning, this inductive learning approach was focused on asking

good questions and listening well in the context of a nonthreatening small group discussion.

Neighborhood Bible Studies' small group discussions were effective not only in the U.S.—with NBS groups in all fifty states—but across the world, in at least ten different countries and with one or more guides published in twenty-five different languages. In these groups, a rough estimate of a million people encountered God himself through his Word. Many of them discovered for themselves that they needed a Savior, put their trust in Jesus Christ, and then continued to grow in their relationship with him through Bible study.

In the fall of 2008, the name Neighborhood Bible Studies was changed to Q Place. Here's why: In the early 1960s when NBS began, most people believed that the Bible was worth studying. They were willing to try a small group where they could figure out what to believe about God, humanity, Jesus, and the church through studying the Bible. However, general respect for the Bible has diminished. As a result, most people in the western world aren't immediately interested in finding out what the Bible says. Nonetheless, people still have a hunger for spiritual truth, and under the right conditions, they will be willing to talk about spiritual questions. Some will ask questions that seem impersonal at first: "Is the Bible a reliable source of spiritual truth?" or "How can you know God exists?" or "How could God allow so much suffering in the world?" A growing number of people, though, are asking spiritual questions that come directly from the struggles they are facing, questions such as "What is my purpose in life?" or "Does God care about what I'm going through?" or "How can I be a good mom?"

The new name, Q Place, reflects an approach that engages people where they are in their spiritual journey, with questions that they care about. In a group where exploring what you believe is a natural, non-threatening process, looking into the Bible can become more and more appealing.

Four Simple Stages to Start a Q Place

How do you start a Q Place? We would like to make it as easy as possible for ordinary Christians everywhere to launch an effective Q Place. The process of initiating a Q Place has four simple stages:

Stage 1: Preparation

Stage 2: Invitation

Stage 3: Trial Meeting

Stage 4: Growth

This book introduces the basic concepts of starting a Q Place, with one chapter for each of the first three stages and two chapters for Stage 4: Growth, since it is the longest stage of a Q Place.

There are three essential elements in any Q Place: inductive resources, time-tested guidelines, and trained facilitators who are prepared to initiate conversations about life, God, and the Bible.

Q Place's inductive resources enable skeptics and seekers to wrestle with basic questions about God and the claims of Christianity in a small group. When people begin investigating questions that key into their needs, reading short portions of Scripture becomes more appealing. Q Place offers Bible Conversation Cards as a nonthreatening way to help groups enter into discussions of the Bible. As groups grow open to exploring more of the Bible's message, Q Place's Bible study guides provide rich, insightful questions that help people discover and apply what the Bible says.

Time-tested guidelines create an environment for transparent sharing and vibrant discussions. The guidelines encourage group ownership, sharing the question-asking responsibility, refraining from tangents, listening well to one another, discouraging any person (including initiators) from being the expert at the expense of self-discovery, and allowing the Bible to speak for itself. These guidelines will be discussed in Chapter 5 and are also listed in Appendix A on page 95.

Q Places start with trained facilitators—ideally three Christians who have prepared together to get a group started and keep it focused. We call those who launch and facilitate Q Places *initiators*. They are not leaders or teachers or experts. They don't have all the answers, but together they build a respectful, safe, and loving community where everyone in the group can make discoveries. Questions form the framework for discussion, with the foundational principle of letting the Bible speak for itself.

The Q Place approach can be developed into an effective outreach strategy for your church—a Q Place ministry. See QPlace.com for more details.

A Simple Way to Get Started

With preparation, most Christians are capable of becoming Q Place initiators. This book is like a roadmap. Its purpose is to explain the Q Place approach, giving you practical tools and confidence and guiding you through the process of starting your own Q Place. Chapter 1 gives a basic explanation of Q Place concepts, and Chapters 2-6 cover all four stages in the process of starting a Q Place. In addition, there are appendices that provide the Q Place Guidelines, Core Values, and a sample Bible Conversation Card.

Three or four Christians can walk through a chapter a week together, supporting, encouraging, and praying for one another as they learn and practice principles that will equip them to start a Q Place. A small group could also go through the book together and then start multiple Q Places. In addition, Q Place offers coaching for those who would like to have the guidance of someone who has experience as a Q Place initiator and can come alongside them in the process of starting a Q Place. See QPlace.com for details.

As you prepare together, the format of your group time will be simple:

Pray to open your time.

Review the chapter, going over main topics.

Discuss questions at the end of the chapter.

Identify next steps that you will take.

Pray to close your time.

When you get together, always open in prayer. This is God's work and it's important to invite him into the process.

After this, briefly review the chapter (or if the group hasn't had a chance to read it ahead of time, read it out loud together). Each chapter in this book includes the following sections:

Key Scripture (Bible verses relevant to the topic)

The Main Idea (summary of the chapter)

Understand It (explanation of the principles)

Mary's Story (a personal example of each stage)

Discuss It (questions for discussion)

Next Steps (actions to move forward in starting a Q Place)

After you have a chance to comment on the chapter's content, go through the discussion questions (Discuss It section), starting with the icebreaker that is included as the first question. Allow time for everyone to share their thoughts.

When you have discussed the questions, review the section called Next Steps. Determine which next steps your group will take, and agree on what you need to do to prepare for the following week's discussion. Write prayer requests down in a journal or in this book, so you'll remember to pray for those needs. The prayer requests will enable you to know each other better and to support one another. Finally, close with prayer. One person can pray out loud, or the group can pray conversationally as several people pray aloud for the prayer requests.

Why start a Q Place? It's probably the closest parallel we have in the 21st-century church to making disciples the way Jesus did. He chose twelve ordinary people to be on a journey with him to discover God's Kingdom and a way of life that was full of grace and truth. The early church followed his example in how they made disciples as well. Twenty-first-century small group guru Bill Donahue notes:

Small groups were an integral part of the early church structure. They were small enough to allow individual members to minister to one another, use their spiritual gifts, and be discipled in the teachings of Christ. In addition, they were vibrant and life-giving communities where evangelism could take place as unchurched people watched a loving and compassionate community in action.¹

Facilitating these small group communities called Q Places is an honor and a privilege for all followers of Jesus. Enjoy the journey! It will change you and will give life to all who participate!

WHAT IS A Q PLACE?

When [Jesus] looked out over the crowds, his heart broke. So confused and aimless they were, like sheep with no shepherd. "What a huge harvest!" he said to his disciples. "How few workers! On your knees and pray for harvest hands!"

- Matthew 9:36-38, *The Message*



The Main Idea

The primary goal of a Q Place is to give spiritually curious people a safe place to find God as he's revealed in the Bible through a facilitated small group process where the majority of the participants are not Christians.

Understand It

Jesus' heart was broken by his observation of the crowds around him. He saw that they were confused and aimless, similar to sheep when there was no shepherd to guide and protect them. Like sheep, people wandered off, got into trouble, made bad choices, were attacked by predators, hurt one another, and didn't find what they needed to survive. There were so many in the crowds like that! He called it a huge harvest.

Jesus knew that people needed someone to guide and protect them. There were not enough workers to shepherd those who were lost, confused, and aimless. So he asked his followers to pray fervently for more workers. Who were the workers Jesus wanted? People who followed Jesus who could see the same thing he did: lost, confused, and aimless people looking for someone trustworthy to guide them. Jesus wanted his followers to love, guide, and care for these aimless people, having compassion on them like he did.

Has anything changed in the 21st century? There is still a huge harvest of people far from God and still very few workers willing to love them and build trusting relationships. Every day the newspaper is filled with stories of people who are lost, confused, and aimless who have gotten into trouble. You personally know people like that. What would happen if there were enough workers in God's Kingdom who genuinely cared about people far from God and could serve as guides to Jesus, the ultimate Good Shepherd? You may be the answer to a "harvest worker" prayer as you listen and walk alongside someone who is wandering like a lost sheep and genuinely love that person through life's ups and downs.

While most churches today focus on attracting people to Sunday worship services, a growing number of people aren't interested in attending church on Sundays, listening to sermons, or praying a prayer to Jesus.

Yet, Jesus was clear about whom he came to reach. In Mark 2:16-17 (NLT), he was asked why he spent time with tax collectors and other known sinners or "such scum," as the Pharisees labeled many of the people Jesus attracted. These shunned people were clearly outside the established religious institution. Jesus said, "**Healthy people don't**

need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call, not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.” Time and again, Jesus modeled the principle of reaching out to people who didn’t have a place in Jewish synagogues. He touched unclean lepers and healed them, cast out demons from people enslaved by them, and struck up conversations with outcasts, such as a Samaritan woman at a well.

In Jesus’ earthly ministry, he gave ongoing attention to the twelve whom he had deliberately and prayerfully chosen. It’s natural to assume that from the beginning they believed he was God. But the Gospels reveal that they did not. After Jesus’ followers had been with him for quite a while, witnessing many healings, miracles, and power over nature by calming a storm, ***their hearts were hardened*** (Mark 6:52).

Jesus surrounded himself with a small group of people who were willing to be with him. He spent time with them and informally discussed spiritual matters with them. He enabled these followers to discover answers about who he was at their own pace. You might say that this was the first Q Place.

What is a Q Place?

A Q Place is a group of two to twelve people who get together on a regular basis with two or three Christians (called *initiators*) to discuss spiritual topics about life, God, and the Bible. The Q is for questions, because questions are at the heart of every Q Place. Q Place participants are people who are willing to explore spiritual topics in an ongoing small group discussion. When a group is starting, it is important that a majority of the participants are not Christians. By being in the majority, they will feel it is safer to raise questions and discover for themselves what they believe, since they are all on a journey of exploration together.

The Q Place approach helps Christians go where people are, as Jesus did, and be the church among them. Like Jesus, a Q Place initiator enables participants to self-discover answers about God and the Bible. People can learn and accept new spiritual truths at their own pace as they experience a caring, nonjudgmental community.

What makes this approach doable?

Ordinary Christians can really do this, as long as three essential elements are in place: *time-tested guidelines*, *trained facilitators*, and *inductive resources*.

Time-Tested Guidelines. People with diverse opinions about God can discuss their beliefs without serious conflict or arguments, but those discussions have to start with guidelines.

Q Place Guidelines help everyone come into the discussion as equals; no matter where each person starts, everyone has more to learn. When initiators pass out Q Place Guidelines cards and the group reads through them together, everyone can agree to the principles that set the tone for the group. From the outset everyone understands that they are there to wrestle with questions about God, the Bible, and what they believe, and discover answers for themselves. In the course of meeting together, it's simple to refer back to one of the guidelines on the card to help keep group discussions on track.

See Appendix A for the list of group guidelines. A Q Place Guidelines card is sent with every discussion guide order from Q Place.

Trained Facilitators. We use the term *initiator* for a Christian who learns how to facilitate respectful, safe, loving discussions, and then starts a Q Place—ideally with two other initiators. The most important aspect of initiator preparation is a close relationship with Jesus; to introduce Jesus to someone else, it's essential to know him well yourself! Your close relationship with Jesus enables you to genuinely love people. Prayer and Scripture are essential for growth in that relationship. Spiritual friendships with others and a heart for serving are additional important traits.

With the essential foundation of a growing relationship with Jesus, a crucial aspect of initiator preparation is learning not to teach or become the expert in a group, but to facilitate and make discoveries along with everyone else, quietly communicating Q Place's four core values.

Q Place Core Values

Self-Discovery

People grow and learn best when they discover truth for themselves through discussion and study.

Safe Place

An ideal environment for spiritual growth is in a small group where personal dignity is valued and leadership is shared.

Spirit

God's Spirit will guide those who are spiritually open.

Scripture

The Bible and the life of Jesus are worth serious examination.

These core values provide common ground and create an inviting environment for the group. As participants continue to sense these values in the group you facilitate, they are likely to engage more and more fully, to take risks, and to experience God's work in their lives.

Q Place has many resources for training, including this book and *Practicing the 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations*. Additionally, coaching is available to support you through the process of starting a Q Place.

Inductive Resources. Solid inductive resources are essential for dynamic discussions in a Q Place.

In traditional educational and religious institutions, a deductive learning approach tends to be more prevalent than an inductive approach. Learners are generally passive recipients of information—say in a lecture hall or a church. If there are study materials, they present a lot of content and are geared toward obtaining “right” answers to test understanding. With this kind of learning approach, you don't have to think much for yourself and discussion tends to shut down rather than ramp up.

An inductive learning approach allows you to be involved in what you learn, asking questions, making discoveries, and finding connections to your life. Thoughtful, challenging questions guide the process.

Inductive materials create stimulating and diverse small group discussions through which people learn from one another with focused thinking about the topic. They help everyone in a group to make careful observations, well-founded interpretations, and meaningful applications to their lives as they discuss a topic or book together.

When participants have doubts or major questions about faith-related topics, an inductive approach provides ample opportunity to question, examine, discuss, and come to conclusions. Inductive resources open up the learning process so that participants can see for themselves and “own” what they learn.

The Q Place website and web store offer a variety of resources and inductive Bible study guides to fit the readiness and interest of all participants. Those resources cover topics about life, God, and the Bible.

From the beginning in a Q Place, initiators model a simple approach of reading good inductive questions so the group can discuss them. As the group continues to meet, every participant can take a turn in asking discussion questions from an inductive Bible Conversation Card or Bible study guide. This way, participants sense that the group belongs to everyone and they are all more engaged in the process of learning and applying what they learn.

So how do you start a Q Place?

There are four simple stages in the process:

Stage 1: Preparation. As presented earlier in this chapter, preparation starts with your own relationship with Jesus and a mindset of facilitating rather than teaching or telling. It also involves finding two Christians who will join you as an initiator triad, getting to know them, walking through this book together, practicing the 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations as you build relationships with people who believe differently than you, praying for God to show you who he wants you to invite, and planning your invitations and your start date and arrangements for the first meeting.

Stage 2: Invitation. This is the shortest stage in the process, but it's a pivotal point! In Chapter 3 we will offer guidance for extending compelling invitations to “Come once and check it out.”

Stage 3: Trial Meeting. This first meeting is all-important, and it's also fun! At the Trial Meeting, participants will receive their first impression of a Q Place and see if it is something that they would like to continue. Everyone will have a good taste of an ongoing Q Place when you as initiators have planned well and when you are carrying out your plan together. The plans will include refreshments, icebreaker questions, asking the main question, a short discussion of a small section of Scripture, and a time to discuss everyone's impressions and interest in meeting again. The main “God” question will help you as initiators to mention options for future discussions.

Stage 4: Growth. In the second meeting and beyond, the group will explore their questions about God and the Bible together. As everyone understands the guidelines for the group, you as initiators will model them in your interactions, cultivating an environment where it's safe to be transparent and to learn from each other. For future Q Place gatherings, there are three paths of discussion:

1. **Discuss Life:** Choose a life topic (such as marriage, parenting, pain, anxiety, identity, or life's purpose) that participants recognize as important to them at this time.
2. **Discuss God:** Choose a question about God that the participants identify as a key issue for them. They might question whether God exists, how he could allow suffering and evil, or whether he cares and involves himself with people.
3. **Discuss the Bible:** Choose a book or small section of the Bible and use either a Bible Conversation Card or a Q Place Bible study guide with inductive questions to observe, interpret, and make applications.

Mary's Story

I had been a Christian for thirty-four years when I first considered starting a small group for spiritual skeptics and seekers. Even though I had become a Christian at age sixteen, for many years I did not take my faith seriously. I didn't attend church regularly, read the Bible, spend time with other Christians, or pray regularly. I barely knew what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.

About fourteen years after I became a Christian I was invited to join a small group. It was there that I learned through others and studying the Bible what it meant to be a Christian. I grew in my relationship with Jesus Christ. I started spending regular time in prayer. My everyday behavior and choices slowly began to change.

As time went by, I was more loving toward others, joyful, peaceful, and kind. I wanted my friends and family to experience the same thing. Eventually, I started to see those who were far from God the same way Jesus did: with a broken heart. By the time God started to "nudge" me to reach out to my neighbors and friends, I genuinely wanted them to know the source of my growing joy and peace.

Discuss It

1. *Icebreaker* (Choose one or more.):

- Where are you from and what did you like most about living there?
- Next to your job, what consumes most of your time?
- What room in your house best reflects your personality?
- What movie have you watched over and over again?

2. What made you decide to read *How to Start a Q Place*? What expectations do you have? What do you hope to learn?

3. Why do you think Jesus' heart broke when he saw the crowds ***confused and aimless*** (Matthew 9:36-38, *The Message*)?

4. Jesus said there is a huge harvest but few workers. Do you see yourself as a worker for the harvest? Among your own friends and acquaintances, who can you envision as part of that harvest?

5. Who else do you know who could be a fellow worker alongside you?

6. How does what you're learning compare with what you have been taught in the past related to helping people find Jesus or turn to God?

7. What are the four stages of starting a Q Place? Which one will be most challenging for you personally?

8. Imagine you had never read the Bible, rarely had spiritual conversations, and had never been in a small group for discussing spiritual things. If a friend invited you to join a small group that was going to be talking about God, what would you need to know about this group before coming?

9. What do you think is the goal of a Q Place?

10. Why do you think guidelines would be important in a Q Place?

11. At this point, what value do you see in an inductive approach and inductive resources for discussing spiritual matters?

Next Steps

1. Read Chapter 2 and be prepared to participate in the next group discussion.
2. Think about which of your own friends and acquaintances might be interested in coming to a Q Place, and why they might come.
3. Spend time this week studying one or all of these Scripture passages. Ask God to use these verses to help you understand what he wants you to do regarding reaching out to those who don't know him.
 - Matthew 9:35-38
 - Matthew 28:16-20
 - Luke 15:1-32
 - Luke 10:1-20
 - Mark 6:6-13