A Way to Lead a 3-Month, 6-Session In-Person or Online Small Group Gathering [1]

Here's a way you could structure and lead a **3-month, 6-session gathering** (in-person or online) so that it is both engaging and sustainable, and also sets up the possibility of continuing for another cycle:

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1. Core Structure for Each Session (1.5 hours)

a. Opening (10 minutes)

- Light ritual, check-in, or centering practice (breath, silence, short reading, or prayer depending on context).
- Quick "round robin" check-in: one sentence about how each person is arriving.

b. Main Engagement (60 minutes)

- **Content input**: a short summary or excerpt from the book/topic (could be pre-read, or leader gives a 5-minute refresher).
- **Small group or partner share**: allow more people to speak in a safer space.
- **Whole group dialogue**: open conversation where participants reflect, ask questions, and build on one another's ideas.
- Practice deep listening—remind group to let each person finish without interruption.

c. Personal Reflection (10 minutes)

- Journaling, silence, or paired sharing on "What touched or challenged me today?"

d. Closing (10 minutes)

- Short go-around: one word or sentence about what they're taking with them.
- Preview the next session's focus.

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2. Overall 3-Month Flow (6 Sessions)

- **Session 1** – Welcome, introductions, group agreements, and overview of the book/topic. Establish a rhythm for sharing and listening.
- **Session 2–5** – Focus on sections or themes from the material. Each session highlights a different perspective, chapter, or core idea. Encourage participants to rotate leadership (summary, opening, or question-asking).
- **Session 6** – Integration. Reflect on big takeaways, personal changes, and how the learning might be carried forward. Discuss whether and how to continue for another 3-month cycle.

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[1] Used ChatGPT to create a way to lead a 3-month, 6-session in-person or online small group gathering, August 31, 2025.
Check out Storytelling in Small Groups at Storytelling in Small Groups Menu - Life's Journey

3. Group Agreements

- Confidentiality ("what's shared here stays here").
- Equal voice: each person gets time to share without interruption.
- Deep listening: listen for understanding, not debate.
- Respect for differences.
- Shared leadership: everyone contributes to holding the circle.

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4. Building for Continuation

To help the group continue beyond 3 months:

- **End Session 6** with a discernment conversation: Do we want another cycle? What material or theme would we like to explore?
- Rotate leadership—different members can take turns facilitating or leading the check-in, reading, or summary.
- Keep the format consistent (people feel safe with rhythm) but allow flexibility (new topics, new practices, guest facilitators).
- Document the flow (a one-page outline with time blocks) so the group has a guide anyone can follow.

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5. Extra Options to Enrich the Gathering

- **Pre-work**: assign short readings, videos, or journaling prompts between sessions.
- **Shared artifacts**: participants bring a quote, image, or object each week related to the theme.
- **Ritual elements**: candle lighting, shared silence, or a blessing to open/close.
- **Check-in questions**: "What stayed with you from last week?" or "Where did you notice this theme in your life?"

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