

Tips for Facilitating Discussion

Group Leaders should think of themselves as discussion **facilitators**, instead of teachers.

A **Facilitator** encourages others to discuss, instead of lecturing or doing most of the discussing. Success for a facilitator is having a group where all members are sharing their opinions and engaged in the discussion.

Here are some tips to help with facilitation success:

BEFORE AND IN THE BEGINNING

1. Create an atmosphere of **warmth** and appropriate **vulnerability**. Warmth includes starting each meeting welcoming, encouraging the members there, making them feel special. Appropriate vulnerability means that you share your life with this group as well. Has someone been on your mind lately, anything God has placed on your heart lately. Do not make this long, but remember this is about sharing life together not just getting down to business!

2. **Prayer, Prayer, Prayer**...inside and outside of group. Invite the Holy Spirit to edit and have His way during your time and in each members life.

3. **Prepare** for possible responses to questions.

DURING DISCUSSION

1. Do not use leading questions. This doesn't mean don't ask specific questions. Just don't do things like..."So obviously this means Jesus is the best teacher, right?"

2. Ask follow-up or clarifying questions. If something is unclear that someone says, say "now what did you mean by that." Or "I heard you say that you didn't feel like it was as important to read your Bible, then it is to pray. Was I hearing that right?" or "So how does that principle relate to you or to us as a group, do you think?"

3. **Wait** between your question and response. Give people time to think and don't too quickly determine that no one will talk, so out of worry answer your own question. Silence is not a bad thing.

4. **Rephrase** others responses. "so, I heard that Katie feels that she is more like Martha in the story, whereas Jessica relates more to Mary since she's much more apt to stay at in prayer then volunteer to clean the toilets."

5. **Mediate** arguments...by **diffusing** feelings. Such things like, so Leslie, I can see that this is really important to you, could you calm down a bit so that we can understand what you are trying to say." "Or Hallie and Sophia, we want to make sure that everyone gets a chance to hear what you have to say and yelling at each other is not an appropriate way to communicate in this group." It also helps as your group matures, to pull aside certain people that tend to communicate aggressively and discuss this in private.

6. **Correct** heretical responses with the authority of scripture. "Well I believe that all roads lead to God." "That's interesting Felicity, let's explore that, what do you think it means then when Jesus says He is the way, the truth and the light." Do not just ignore them, but respectfully confront when responses are contrary to scripture.

7. Interrupt respectfully. Sometimes group members' stories or explanations can monopolize the discussion. Instead of letting this happen, learn to cut in when they take a breath and say something like, "Michael, that was really a great explanation and I'm sorry to have to cut you off, but I'd like to make sure that I get to hear from a few more people as well."

8. Encourage a timid member to speak. Give them grace for a while, maybe a meeting or so. Then give them an inroad to the discussion. Hopefully you have gotten to know them outside of your meetings, so you could say, "you know I think Lance might have something to say about that subject," or "Lance, Micah said the he thinks that this passage shows us that God is sovereign, do you agree or are there other attributes of God that stick out to you more?"

9. Keep the conversation on track. When members get away from the topic, it is the facilitator's job to get them refocused on the lesson. You don't have to be abrasive about it, just something like, "Wow, we went from Jesus is the light, to nightlights, to fears of dark, to fear of heights; let's get back to what we think it means the Jesus is light. What are the qualities of light that we can think of that can be related to the person of Jesus."

10. Love and Laughter. Don't be afraid to draw out the personalities in your group. When you see special qualities in someone, look for opportunities to highlight those things. This builds a culture of honor between the people in your group. Also, don't be afraid of letting the mood be a little loose. Laughter is a great way to break fear and anxiety in your group and encourage honest discussion.

AFTER DISCUSSION

1. Follow up immediately with anyone that was angry or seemed hurt by the conversation. You don't want them to go home without feeling as if at least their leader attempted to understand their concerns.

2. Encourage those who shared in depth or spoke for the first time. Let them know you appreciate their responses. If someone is searching for answers or was personally challenged by the discussion, take a moment to encourage them in their journey. "Will, I could tell that you were thinking hard about what we talked about tonight. How are you thinking about all of that?"

3. Outside of the weekly meeting, group leaders are part of the lives of the people in their group. Knowing the leader outside the group helps your group members participate more confidently.