



Principles for Smaller Scale Ministry | Facilitating Meaningful Discussion

The Why

- Meaningful discussion drives movement, builds trust, and forms disciples. This is the “meat” of your small group time.
- The content of your group may be why people chose to be a part of your group.
- Good meaningful discussion brings people back week after week, and meaningless or poor quality discussion could leave people feeling hungry for more or lead them to consider leaving your group.

Preparing for Meaningful Discussion

- Pray! For each group member by name and with the content of your discussion.
- Study and pray with the content for your next session for yourself first.
- Write good questions for your group based on your study, prayer, and knowledge of your group
 - Observation Questions - what does this passage say?
 - Understanding Questions - what does it mean?
 - Experiential Questions - what is the story of a time when you experienced this?
 - Application Questions - what can you do this week to put this in action?
 - Rework questions that could be answered with “Yes” or “No” or a single word.
- Then consult any resource or guide you are using. You know your group better than your resource, discern which of the questions you developed and which of those proposed by your resource are the best fit for your group this week.
- Pray again.
- Set up your meeting space with seats in a circle and on the same level if possible

Facilitation Skills

- Model good group behavior for your group
 - Practice active listening
 - Affirm group members
- Facilitate discussion
 - Set the pace
 - Leave enough silence for internal processors (pray a Hail Mary in your head)
 - Rephrase the question if everyone is silent (and pray another Hail Mary)
 - Move on to the next question when needed in order to get to application before the end of the session
 - Redirect questions to the group (rather than becoming the “teacher”)
- Consider ways to encourage everyone to participate
 - Invite quiet people to share at their comfort level

- Encourage more talkative members to internal processors the opportunity to have silence or speak first
- Have people share in pairs
- Suggest “around the world” sharing, that for a particular question, everyone will answer
- Watch the Holy Spirit barometer
 - Discern if exploring tangents are of God or getting us off track
 - Pause to pray and ask the Lord for wisdom when to move the group in a different direction
 - Intervene to stop any group members’ behaviors that are damaging to persons or the trust in the group
 - Follow-up with conversations outside of the group if necessary

At the End of Each Session

- Jot down any notes for next time, such as questions to return to, prayer requests, etc.
- Follow-up with individuals as needed - consider meeting outside of group with anyone in particular need or on a growing edge who is hungry to grow deeper.
- Plan when you will plan your next session

See Lab Times and Additional Resources for more tools for Facilitating Small Groups