

EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION IN YOUR SMALL GROUP

Facilitating effective discussion can be a challenge, particularly at the beginning of a group when people have not yet had time to get to know one another. Overcoming the silence and getting people to feel comfortable to share their opinions sometimes takes time. As a leader it is good to be prepared with some tools and skills on leading effective discussion. Consider the following question types:

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| LAUNCH QUESTIONS | These questions are aimed at trying to launch a discussion by asking what people learned by themselves, how do they feel about it, what do they sense? For example, “How do you think Jesus felt at this point?” or “What impressed you the most about this?” |
| OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS | Try to avoid questions with “Yes” or “No” answers as this kills discussion (except perhaps to establish some facts). |
| CLARIFYING QUESTIONS | After someone has spoken sometimes its good to put what they said into your own words for clarification and perhaps ask them to go a bit deeper. After clarification you could ask “What makes you say that?” or “Can you explain that a bit more for us?” |
| GUIDING QUESTIONS | Sometimes its necessary to guide the discussion along a bit by asking “What do other people think about this?” or “Would someone else like to comment on what’s been said?” You might also personalize what’s been said by saying “How would you respond to Paul if he asked you this question?” |
| DEBATE QUESTIONS | It’s good to get people to think a bit wider and consider some other options. It’s good to be challenged to consider variant views to one’s own. As such you might ask |

something like, “Thanks John, what do others think? Are there some other options for understanding this?”

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

Sometimes it’s good to take a moment to summarize what’s been said so far in order for everyone to re-gather their thoughts.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

It is good to ask some application questions so that the discussion moves from the theoretical to the practical. You could ask “What difference does this make to you and me?” or “What do you think Jesus is calling us to do with this today?”

FOUR FACILITATOR ACTIONS¹

A leader *ACTS* to facilitate discussions by

- Acknowledging everyone who speaks during a discussion

Even if several people speak at once, make sure to recognize each one. Also, respond to laughter or a groan or a deep sigh – remember, 90% of communication is non-verbal.

- Clarifying what is being said and felt

Say, “Let me see if I understand what you are saying.”

- Turning it back to the group as a means of generating discussion

Don’t be the answer person. Ask, “What do others of you think about what was just said?”

- Summarizing what has been said

¹ Bill Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2002): 114

Offer statements like, “So far it seems like we have been saying...”

YOUR DISCUSSION

It is important to create a safe place in your small group; therefore calling on individual people to answer the questions may create anxiety and embarrassment. Remember it takes differing amounts of time for each individual to warm up to the small group experience. Some people will also more naturally talk more and others less. Remember to encourage everyone and lead in a way that does not allow for one ‘talker’ to take up all the time. Questions like “What do others think?” are great at avoiding this. People should be affirmed when they speak their hearts and minds and facilitators should lead gently without becoming obtrusive. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to be sensitive to where everyone is in their journey. Leading with humility, love, sensitivity and wisdom creates the kind of environment where people can find hope, encouragement, healing and ultimately become more devoted followers of Jesus.