

How to Facilitate a Small Group Discussion

10 practical suggestions

From the Church Leaders Answer Book

The success of any small group starts with the leader. Effective leaders are **not teachers or lecturers**. They are **facilitators** and catalysts whose primary job is to get people to interact with each other. **Almost anyone can lead a dynamic discussion by following certain guidelines.**

- 1. Come to the study prepared.** Ask God to help you understand and apply the passage to your own life. Unless that happens, you will not be ready to lead others. If you are using a good study guide, it will probably take you an hour to read the passage, work through each question in the guide, and become familiar with the leader's notes.
- 2. Pray for the members of your group before the study.** If the Bible is to have an impact on their lives, the Holy Spirit must be at work in their hearts before, during, and after the study.
- 3. Begin the study on time.** If people know the study begins on schedule, they will work harder to arrive on time.
- 4. Explain that the studies are meant to be discussions, not lectures.** Encourage everyone to participate, but realize some may be hesitant to speak during the first few sessions.
- 5. Encourage more than one answer to each question.** A good question should have more than one possible answer, and each person has his or her unique perspective. Ask, "What do the rest of you think?" or "Anyone else?" until several people have responded.
- 6. Affirm people's answers.** People often are reluctant to speak up unless they know you appreciate their insights. Simple words such as "That's a great insight," "Good response," "Excellent idea," or "I hadn't thought of that before" are enough to show people you value their comments.
- 7. Don't be afraid of silence.** It usually seems longer to you than to the other members of the group.
- 8. Resist the temptation to answer your own question.** Rephrase the question until the group understands what you are asking. A group will become passive and silent if they think you will do most of the talking.
- 9. Never reject an answer, even if you think it is wrong.** When you reject people's answers, they feel rejected as well, and they may decide it is too risky to give their opinion again. A better response would be, "Which verse led you to that conclusion?" Or let the group handle the problem by asking them what they think.
- 10. End the study on time.** A healthy small group will do more than study the Bible together, so leave enough time for other activities such as sharing and prayer. If these are merely tacked on at the end, the health of the group will suffer.