

# Effective Study Discussions

Effective discussions are designed to promote participation and personal engagement. Discussions are not about getting the right answers as quickly as possible. Each group member should have the goal of using the discussion to reflect on how biblical truth can shape one's life.

## **Participate, but don't dominate**

Every group member should have the freedom to contribute to a discussion, but every member needs to be responsible to make sure that others have an opportunity to contribute. Make an effort to speak, but also make an effort to not speak too much.

The Discussion facilitator must be comfortable with silence and encourage others to make the observations. For instance: If a person in the group asks a question, the discipleship facilitator could say something like "Does anyone have an idea about this?"

If an individual is frequently dominating discussions, it is best for a leader to speak to them one on one. Bring up your concern that others are not talking as much as you would like and invite that person to help you give others the opportunity to talk. It would help if your group has created a ground rule about this sort of issue.

## **Acknowledge contributions**

The best way for a leader to make comments is to do so in support of what someone else has already said. This can also encourage timid people, when you validate their responses.

For instance: Someone might ask "Why did Jesus hide from the crowds in Mark 1:37-38?" Another group member might respond "Maybe he didn't want it to become a circus." The leader might then say "Good point, Jesus didn't want to become overwhelmed with people looking for miracles. Does anyone else have a thought on this? Is there another reason why he avoided this crowd?"

## **Adapt your study materials**

If you are using a study guide or a list of questions, be aware that you do not need to ask and answer every question. Select the questions which lead to the best discussion opportunities. Feel free to move quickly past some questions.

Be open to the questions that group members are asking, they are often more important than the questions which are provided.

Be sure to manage your time and do not let the study questions crowd out prayer and sharing.

### **Guard against death by tangent**

While it is very important to allow for questions from group members, sometimes the questions or comments can lead the group off focus. Leaders must monitor the feel of the group and pull people back to topic when appropriate.

Sometimes it is as simple as specifically calling the group back to focus. “Okay so have we exhausted question 2 or does anyone else have a thought about ....”

If a person chronically pulls the group off tangent, a leader will need to speak to them one on one and confront the issue.

If a person continues to bring up an issue week after week, it may be necessary to deal with this mid flow. “David, you have brought this up several times before, lets talk about this after the meeting, but for now I feel that I need to pull the group back to question 3.”

A significant personal crisis is an acceptable tangent. If someone shares something deeply emotional or personal it is important to spend time supporting this person by listening and praying. Take a break from the study and meet the need.

### **Use the best questions**

Not all questions are created equal. When questions are too simple, answers come quickly, or worse, people are embarrassed to say the obvious answer. Good questions create thoughtful discussion and help people open up personally. Feel free to move quickly past some questions, skip some questions all together and linger on questions that work.

When questions invite personal response, are sensitive, be comfortable with silence and allow people to contribute. Perhaps lead with a personal response to break the ice and set an example.

If the questions provided do not do their job, come up with your own open ended questions or use some of these general standby questions

1. What does this teach us about God or the why he interacts with people
2. What does this teach us about God’s will for our lives?
3. Which verse stands out to you as the key verse in this passage?
4. How would you summarize the overall message of this passage?
5. Is there anything here that puzzles you or something you would like to comment on?