**Facilitating Small Group Discussion**

**facilitate** – to assist the progress of something or someone; to make easier or less difficult.

The role of the discussion/bible study leader is to facilitate a conversation centered on the scriptures. It is not to be the master teacher. The study is more of a dialogue than it is a class. It should be more like a choir than a solo. Contribution from many is valued over the content of the leader.

Therefore: mutual dialogue about the content is of more value than the delivery of the leader’s content. It is essential that the leader write good questions and facilitate conversation more than to develop his own outline and deliver a sermon.

A few tips:

* **Silence is ok.** After launching a question, pause and give the group time to process the question, formulate a response, and then get the courage to answer. Do not fear a little awkward moments, and don’t rescue them with an answer! Most group leaders struggle with moving on too quickly. PAUSE! (even tell them that you have been trained to wait them out)
* **Summarize points** after discussion has occurred. It is good to provide the group with summary of points/thoughts after a good bit of conversation. It helps them stay on track. *“So it sounds like we all agree that the passage says a,b,c and that verse three is a little confusing.”*
* **Ask follow up questions.** When appropriate take the discussion deeper or maybe present a question that looks at the issue from a different point of view. *“as far as verse three goes, let’s think about that a little more, what could be a few options for interpretation?” “Brad, what led you to that thought? That was really interesting.”*
* **Refocus the group** when the discussion strays off topic. “Ok guys, we are getting a little distant from the main point here, let’s refocus on verse 6.”
* **Referee any disputes.** Tension in group is not a bad thing, in fact good dialogue with opposing views should be encouraged. Occasionally two or more group members may need to be encouraged to let discussion center around ideas and to not let it get personal. “Ok guys, let’s not get personal, keep the discussion on the idea here and remember that we can discuss concepts and even disagree without being hurtful.”
* **Involve those who are shy/quiet.** Try to make sure that you call on or direct the dialogue to those who are more hesitant to speak. “Brad, I really would like to know what you think about this issue.” Be sensitive to those who would be devastated by being put on the spot as opposed to those who just need the door to be opened for them and then they are comfortable speaking.
* **Learn to navigate a person who dominates.** Many groups have a person who answers every question or controls the conversation. It may be best to speak with them privately and see if that helps, but you can try to guide them during the meeting. *“Hey Brad, I appreciate your thoughts, but let’s hear from someone in the group that hasn’t commented just yet.”*
* **Handling “wrong” answers.** It is not a good practice to tell someone their answer is wrong. In fact we ought to affirm them for sharing, but steer the conversation towards discovering truth. If someone gives an answer that is obviously unbiblical, then you might ask the group for a different opinion/thought/view. Or ask what the scriptures say about the issue. “I appreciate your perspective Brad, what about someone else, anyone have a thought on this matter or can you think of a verse that might shed light on this?”
* **Don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know.”** The leader doesn’t have to be omniscient. Just plainly tell them that you aren’t sure on the question, but will do some further study and get back with them.
* **Be creative, enthusiastic, and prepared.** Feel free to use object lessons, props, white boards, or any tool that might liven the discussion. Remember that passion is contagious and that if you have done your homework, you can better lead the discussion.
* **Know your group and lead each personality appropriately.** Each person has a personality and will express that personality in the group. Get to know them and guide them according to their makeup and needs.