

TIPS FOR LEADING A GROUP DISCUSSION

You probably have a mental picture of what it will look like to lead—what you'll say and how group members will respond. Before you get too far into planning, there are some things you should know about leading a small group discussion.

CULTIVATE DISCUSSION

It's the ideas of everyone in the group that make a small group meeting successful. Your role is to create an environment where people feel safe sharing their thoughts. That's how relationships will grow and thrive among your group members.

Here's a basic truth about spiritual growth within the context of community: the study materials aren't as important as the relationships through which those materials take practical shape in the lives of the group members. The more meaningful the relationships, the more meaningful the study. The best materials in the world won't change lives in a sterile environment.

POINT TO THE MATERIAL

A good host or hostess creates an environment where people can connect relationally. He or she knows when to help guests connect and when to stay out of the way when those connections are happening organically. As a small group leader, sometimes you'll simply read a discussion question and invite everyone to respond. The conversation will take care of itself. At other times, you may need to encourage group members to share their ideas. Remember, some of the best insights will come from the people in your group. Go with the flow, but be ready to nudge the conversation in the right direction when necessary.

DEPART FROM THE MATERIAL

The curriculum we recommend for groups has been designed with questions to elicit the kinds of conversations we think will be most helpful to your group members. That doesn't mean you should stick rigidly to the materials. Knowing when to depart from them is more art than science, but no one knows more about your group than you do.

Stories, questions, and exercises are here to provide a framework for exploration. But different groups have different chemistries and different motivations. Sometimes the best way to start a small group discussion is to ask, *"Does anyone have a personal insight you'd like to share from this week's material?"* Then sit back and listen.



STAY ON TRACK

This is the flip side of the previous point. There's an art to facilitating an engaging conversation. While you want to leave space for group members to think through the discussion, you must also keep your objectives in mind. Make sure the discussion is contributing to the bottom line for the week. Don't let the discussion veer off into tangents. Interject politely to refocus the group.

PRAY

This is the most important thing you can do as a leader. The best leaders get out of God's way and let him communicate through them. Remember: books don't teach God's Word; neither do sermons or discussion groups. God speaks into the hearts of men and women. Prayer is a vital part of communicating with him.

Pray for your group members. Pray for your leadership. Pray that God is not only present at your group meetings but is directing them.

