

How To Lead A Discussion

How To Prepare And Teach A Bible Study

Session 5

Introduction:

- Robert Louis Stevenson: "You start a question and it's like starting a stone. You sit quietly on the top of the hill; and away the stone goes, starting others."
- H. H. Horne: "Jesus came not to answer questions, but to ask them; not to settle men's souls, but to provoke them." (*Jesus: The Master Teacher*, 1920)
- **Orchestra Conductor:** Make sure the symphony (your Connect Group) plays with balance. Guard against dominant soloist taking over the orchestra. Set the tempo and make sure the group is in tune with God's Word. The Conductor doesn't make music but gets everyone else to play in sync. The leader facilitates discussion by asking questions and encouraging participation. Balanced participation is the goal. Tone down the louder instruments and raise the voice of the quieter ones.
- **Volleyball Coach:** The discussion leader is a facilitator. Think about the volleyball team warming up in a circle volleying the ball around among themselves - we're trying to get everyone involved. When the ball drops, the facilitator throws in another ball (question) to be volleyed. Encourage questions from the group. Don't be afraid of questions you can't answer. This leads to greater discussion and don't be afraid to say "I don't know. Let's find out."
- **Airplane Pilot:** Take off to explore possibilities, but land on God's truth.
- **Workout Instructor:** Be united on God's truth and flexible where God's Word isn't clear. The goal is to help individuals become spiritually fit by applying God's Word.

I. How To Come Up With Discussion Questions

A. The Benefit Of Discussions

- Enables the student to discover the answer
 - We remember 10% of what we hear, 50% of what we see, 90% of what we do.
(Howard Hendricks, *Teaching To Change Lives*, pp. 81-82)
- Greater transformation comes from self-discovery (versus being told what to do)
- The burden of being perceived as an authority figure is removed from the group leader by being more of a facilitator.
- How the students answer enables the facilitator to assess the learning level (Bible knowledge) of the group.
- Discussion deepens one's reading ability and content comprehension
- Discussions can bring mutual understanding through dialogue with opposing parties

B. The Goal Of Discussions

- Encourage the spiritual maturity of everyone in the group

Hebrews 10:24-25 ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

- Help people apply Biblical principles to situations in their daily lives outside of church

Ephesians 4:15-16 ¹⁵Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Philippians 2:12-13 ¹²Therefore, my beloved, ¹³as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

- Provide a safe place where people can ask questions and share transparently, including their own personal struggles

C. The Type Of Questions

- Hook, Book, Look, Took
- Andrew Mason repackaged these questions:
 - *“Connection Questions—Intro and Icebreakers*
 - *Dissection Questions—Observation and interpretation questions about the Scripture passage*
 - *Reflection Questions—Questions that relate to our experiences and help us apply Scripture to our daily lives*
 - *Inspection Questions—Application questions that focus on self-awareness and personal transformation”*

(“How Can I Lead Great Small-Group Discussions?”

<https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2016/how-can-i-lead-great-small-group-discussions.html>)

D. Know what makes a good question

- *“Clarity...Does the question ask, What does it mean?
Does it help clarify the meaning?*
- *Relevance...Does the question relate to truth already discovered?
Are the questions in order of importance? Will the answers reveal what the Author of Scripture meant?*

Response... Does the question lead to personal involvement by the group members? Do they have the personal knowledge to answer it? Is the question aimed at their personal understanding?

(12 Steps To Leading Better Bible Studies, Navpress)

- **Clarity**
 - Easily understood
 - Easily remembered
 - Avoiding carry-on sentences and questions (*and, but*)
 - Focus on a single issue not cluttered by several issues

- **Relevance**
 - Purposeful question
 - Anticipated practical answer
 - Connected to another biblical truth
 - Relatable to person's life
 - Response elicited
 - Brings understanding to the passage

- **Stimulating**
 - Attention grabbing
 - Interesting to group
 - Personal involvement
 - Creative expression
 - Response invited
 - Group comprehension
 - Avoid embarrassment

(adapted from Navpress *How To Lead A Small Group Bible Study*, p. 34)

- "Writing Questions That Spark Discussion" By Rick Lowry
<http://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2010/writing-questions-that-spark-discussion.html?paging=off>
 1. *Good Questions Create a Conversation*
 2. *Good Questions Focus on One Thing*
 3. *Good Questions Can Be Understood By Everyone*
 4. *Good Questions Say What They Mean*
 5. *Good Questions Are Open-Ended*
 6. *Good Questions Involve Emotions*
 7. *Good Questions Deal with People's Interests*
 8. *Good Questions Are Sometimes Answers to Other Questions*

E. Ask open-ended questions

- Avoid questions that can be easily answered "Yes or No," "True or False," or multiple choice.
- Don't ask simplistic questions (e.g. Why did Jesus die on the cross?)
- Aim for questions that require thought
- Aim for questions that elicit emotions

- “What have we learned?”
- “How do we know this is true?”
- “Why is this important?”
- “Who does this apply to?”

F. Find the median between too broad and too narrow of a question.

- Gross: “Some discussion questions can be too broad to empower your group. The group can’t discern where to begin. On the other hand, some discussion questions can be too narrow to instigate discussion, inviting snap judgments and quick answers instead. Remember: questions are meant to fuel the discussion, so ask questions that give your group a clear start on a long journey.
- Example:
 - A broad question would be something like “What is love?” It’s just so hard to know where to begin!
 - A narrow question would be something like “When have you demonstrated love?” Group members can give one answer, then it’s done.
 - A balanced question would be something like “Why is love patient and kind?” It’ll take a while, but you see where to start: at the relationship between patience, kindness, and love.” (p. 62)

II. How To Lead A Discussion

A. The Keys To A Good Discussion Leader

- Good Listener
- Spiritual Discernment – knows the determination and application of truths from Scripture
- Sympathy/Empathy – able to relate to
- Logical – knows what a good argument is
- Patient – will let the participants discover the answer the facilitator already knows
- Prepared – know the material and objectives before the others do
- Wonder – can expand others thoughts and imagination
- Humility
- Safe – participants feel secure to not be ridiculed by a bad answer or dumb question
 - Carter Moss: “Trust is perhaps the most vital key to really making your small group a place where genuine community can be formed. Group members need to be able to trust each other that the group is a safe place—a place where they can get real and know that they will not be judged, gossiped about, and so on.”
“Tips for Facilitating a Group Discussion,”
<http://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2008/tips-for-facilitating-group-discussion.html>

B. Know Your Role As The Facilitator

- *Launching* the discussion;
- *Guiding* the discussion;
- *Summarizing* the discussion;

- And helping the group members *apply* what they have learned." (*A Navigator Guide: How To Lead Small Group Bible Studies*, Navpress, 1982, 1984)
- **"Never tell what we can ask"**

C. Remember The Purpose Of A Discussion: Discussions are like a funnel that narrows down to one concept.

- Remember that the Bible only has one interpretation that matters: God's.
- We need to use discussion and discovery to determine God's meaning of the verse.
- A verse can have one interpretation but many applications.
- Peter David Gross: "What is a discussion? Two or more people seeking a single, unknown truth together." (*Discussion For Transformation*, Wheatstone, 2013)
- "Discussions are unique safe havens for acknowledging different opinions without abandoning a deep commitment to objective truths." (p. 8)
- What a discussion is not:
 - A lecture
 - A chat
 - A therapy session
 - A debate
 - Mob rule

D. Launch: Draw Interest In To The Topic

- Launching questions are generally open ended questions that have many potential answers that will stimulate discussion.
- **For those who prepared beforehand: Allow those who have prepared to share what they've learned.**
 - What were some of your initial observations you gleaned when reading the passage?
 - What key thoughts did you learn from the passage?
 - Who else has some thoughts on this passage?
- **For those coming in cold: Use hook questions that relates the topic of the text to their personal lives.**
 - "Describe a difficult time in your life when you were trying to determine God's will?"
 - "Does God only have one person in mind for you to marry or could you select from several godly options and still be in God's will?"

E. Guide: Keep The Discussion Moving

- Guiding questions get the participants to comprehend, identify through illustrations and seeking openness and vulnerability.
- When someone asks "What does it mean?" Don't answer, as the group leader. Volley it within the group.

- Don't be too impatient with silence. Allow the group to think.
- But sense when the silence goes too long and ask a prompting question.
- "Who else has something to say about this?"
- "What else do you see in this verse?"
- "Does anyone have anything to add to this?"
- While a small group isn't a debate, playing "**devil's advocate**" could make it interesting in examining opposing points of views.
- "**Ask follow-up questions.** Many people default to staying pretty surface-level with their answers to your questions, so get in the habit of not letting them off the hook. Ask more questions that follow up on their response. Here are some examples of good follow-up questions for the short/simple answers that people often give:
 - What makes you say that?
 - How do you feel about that?
 - How do you think that would've affected you if you had been living in the time of Jesus?
 - How would you explain your answer to a non-Christian friend or neighbor?"
 (Carter Moss)

F. Summarize: Review what the group discussed, not your own agenda. Avoid preaching.

- Summarizing questions draws up the fishing net to see what the group has concluded.
- "So what have we learned?"
- "Can some of you summarize what the passage means in one sentence?"

G. Apply: Gather group ideas on how to apply the passage.

- Application questions is where the "rubber meets the road"
- What we've learned about God and how that relates to us
- What to do in obedience to Scripture
- How to formulate ethics from God's laws and righteous principles
- We don't want the group to leave just smarter, but wiser.
- "How does this truth impact our lives here and now?"
- "How does this change your perspective on this issue?"
- "How have you applied this truth before?"
- "What can you do this week to glorify God through this lesson?"
- "How has Christ modeled this?"
- "How would you reply to someone who disagrees with this principle?"
- "How could we use what we learned to help someone else grow spiritually?"
- "What is the motivation for my application?"
- "What hinders me from obedience?"

H. Manage Group Dynamics

- **Know your group**

- Identify the talkative participants
- Identify the quiet participants
- Identify the natural leaders and use them well
- Know what motivates some to speak

- Peter Gross adds:
 - How does my group receive and process information?
 - Do they talk a lot before acting or do they act right away?
 - Does my group flourish with more or less instruction?
 - How does my group respond to sudden changes in the current task?
 - What sorts of rules does my group create for itself?

(Discussion For Transformation, Wheatstone, 2013, p. 55)

- **Manage moments of silence**

- Involve others by calling on names
- But call names of each person so one individual doesn't isn't put in the spot light
- Evaluate the relevance and clarity of our question and rephrase

- **Manage moments of too much talking**

- Call upon others to share as well
 - "Calling for contributions from others often helps - *What do the rest of you think?* In very difficult situations you may have to take control of the discussion and call for a show of hands before anyone responds. Then you can call on the group members in turn. Sometimes it may be necessary to talk privately with the 'talker', explaining how group participation is imperative. You may enlist him to draw in others. This may not only solve the problem of his dominating the discussion, it will also help him become more sensitive to other people." (Navigators, 12 Steps To Leading Better Bible Studies)
- Remind participants to honor others by allowing others to complete their thought and not to interrupt

I. Manage Challenging Participants

1. **The Onlooker** – silent spectator, passenger not a crew member
2. **The Monopolizer** – chatty, takes over conversation, tenacious about being right
3. **The Belittler** – Mr. Gloom, minimizes contributions of others, finds other people's opinions wrong
4. **The Wisecrack** – Feels called to a ministry of humor. Indifferent to subject but ready with a clever remark.
5. **Hitchhiker** – Never had a original thought. Unwilling to commit. Sits on sidelines until group reaches conclusion, then joins bandwagon.
6. **The Pleader** – Chronically afflicted with obsessions. Pleads certain causes. Shares burdens frequently. One track mind.

7. The Sulker – Lives in resentment. Group disagrees with his view so he sulks.
(adapted from Howard Hendricks, Navpress, *How To Lead A Small Group Bible Study*, pp. 40-41)

J. Employ Mature Participants

- 1. The Proposer** – Initiates ideas and actions. Keeps things moving.
- 2. The Encourager** – Brings other into the discussion. Encourages others to contribute. Values suggestions and comments. Stimulates others to greater activity by approval and recognition.
- 3. The Clarifier** – Has ability to step in when confusion, chaos, and conflict occur. He defines the problem concisely and points out the issues clearly.
- 4. The Analyzer** – Examines issues closely. Weighs suggestions carefully. Never accepts anything without first thinking it through.
- 5. The Explorer** – Always moves into new and different areas. Probes. Not satisfied with obvious or traditional viewpoints.
- 6. The Mediator** – Promotes harmony between members – especially those who have trouble agreeing. Seeks conclusions acceptable to all.
- 7. The Synthesizer** – Puts the pieces together from different ideas and viewpoints.
(adapted from Howard Hendricks, Navpress, *How To Lead A Small Group Bible Study*, pp. 41-42)

K. Tips:

- Sitting in a circle helps everyone to be seen, heard and valued equally
- The raising of hands limits free flowing discussions and establishes an authority/submission relationship
- Don't limit movement as stretching, getting snacks, using the restroom helps people stay engaged longer
- Eliminate distractions
- Take breaks if sitting too long, discussion stalls or things get too heated