

Facilitating a Community Group Discussion

A Community Group discussion is not like one that happens at a Bible Study - although they both intentionally dive into God's Word, the end goal of each is different.

Community Groups discuss, not just to gain knowledge, but to apply biblical principles faithfully and in community. It is a place for discipling and disciple-making in relationships. We want Community Groups to discuss God's Word so it is not just head knowledge, but moves into their hearts (conviction) and motivates them to change their actions .

How to facilitate a discussion

Facilitating is like exercising a muscle - it will take effort at first and may be difficult. Over time, with consistent work, it will get easier. The primary goal of facilitating your Community Group discussion isn't to answer questions, it is not even to guide people to the right answer. Rather, it is to create a space where people feel safe to talk, share their personal stories and struggles and what God is teaching them, be accountable to others and encourage each other in their walk with God.

Tips for facilitating your Community Group discussion

One of the difficulties with group discussion is that it's not natural to be in a group of 5+ people and only have one dialogue happening. Here are some ways to make this easier and have conversation flow.

1. 30 second rule. This can be the hardest, but most beneficial tip . After asking/reading a question, wait 30s before you answer or move onto another question. Practice how long this feels.

- Generally, someone will answer before the time is up.
- If not, usually someone will ask what the questions means or for clarification indicating the question was not clear.

2. Ask everyone to share their answer in a certain time or number of sentences. This gives space for the quieter members and allows the group to hear everyone's response.

- For example, go around the group and ask everyone to answer in 45-60 seconds or 2-3 sentences.

3. Break off into groups of 3-4 or 2 larger groups

- Although we all want to hear others answers, this allows for more people to speak and often encourages a greater depth to the conversation.

4. Resist the large group effect (diffusion of responsibility). The greater the number of people, the less obligation each person feels to step up or be the first one to speak.

- Ask someone to read the question aloud and then briefly answer what their first reaction to the question is. This can be enough to spark the discussion to start.
- Ask someone “____, what are your initial thoughts on this question?”

5. Follow the rabbit trails. The goal of the night is NOT to complete all the questions, rather to have good discussion that results in your group to get to know each other better, feel challenged and grow together.

- Caution, be aware if it just one member (re)directing the conversation or if it is a topic that everyone is interested in discussing.
- When the conversation goes in another direction, but results in discussion that is positive, affirm this to the group so they know the goal is to have a constructive conversation rather than just completing all the questions.

6. Make eye contact. Look around the room, most people have something they could say to contribute and making eye contact with them can be the encouragement they need.

7. Prioritize questions. Knowing how much time you have, plan which questions you can skip and which ones you want to save enough time for.

- Be respectful of people's time. People appreciate if the meeting is always done at a reasonable time, especially as it allows for social time after.

8. Think ‘Air Traffic Controller’, not ‘Pilot’. Your guiding the discussion, don’t expect everyone to be travelling at the same speeds. Your group will have people that may answer at a deeply philosophical level and then next on an emotional level. Your job is to just create an environment where they can both answer.

For Example:

- “Thanks for sharing that! Does anyone else feel/think the same or differently?”
- “Thanks for sharing those thoughts! I particularly found it interesting when you said...”

- “Does anyone else have something they’d like to add?”
- “What did you mean by....?”
- “When or how did you come to realize or believe...”

9. Open ended questions are ones that do not require yes or no. A great time to use these is after answering a curriculum question or when opening up the evening.

- “How can we apply this?”
- “Does this challenge you in any way?”
- “What do you find hard to grasp or understand about the topic?”
- “What is one thing you want to see change in your life as a result of this discussion?”
- “Why do you think this was included in the bible?”
- “Can you think of a personal example of ____.”

10. Application Questions can be helpful particularly if groups discuss the topic, but are not moving from head to heart and hands.

Here are some examples:

- “How can this change what you’re currently doing or how you’re living your life? What would you start or stop doing?”
- “What do you find most challenging about this?”
- “What did you learn about God? How will this impact your relationship with him?”
- “Where have you seen these things being lived out well?”
- “How does this relate to the cross?”
- “How does this resemble our church for good or for bad?”
- Ask someone to read a bible verse and share their initial thoughts on it.

11. Launching Questions: Even if a group knows each other well, launching into a discussion right away can be difficult. Think about when you first meet a close friend, you typically have some small talk before diving into more personal questions. The same will be true with your group.

- Have everyone share a highlight from their past week. This is helpful to find out where people are at and help them feel that you care about them .
- “Share one thing from the previous weeks meeting that stuck with you. Did it make you do or think about something in a different way?”
- “What were your initial reactions or thoughts about the message?”