

GUIDING DISCUSSION

Teaching or leading discussion for a small group can be tricky. It doesn't matter if it's adult Sunday School, ladies Bible study, or a home group. Dealing with different personalities and members with various levels of Bible knowledge can leave you feeling like you're driving across country without a road map.

I've encountered lots of different kinds of people and had many challenging classroom experiences during my twenty-plus years of teaching the Bible in various small group settings. The following helps will not cover everything you might encounter, but they do address many common situations.

DEALING WITH DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES

Hog or Monopolizer

A discussion hog dominates the discussion. They have something to say about almost everything. It's important to reign in the hog because others in the group will begin to say less and less while the hog says more and more.

- Don't make eye contact
- Give little or no response to their comments
- Body language – turn away from them
- After they have spoken give a general invitation to the group such as, "Let's hear from someone who hasn't spoken today."
- When all else fails – talk to them. Enlist their "help" in encouraging the quieter members of the group.

Introvert

The introvert is quiet and rarely, if ever, participates in the discussion. Introverts don't open their mouths for various reasons. They may be naturally shy or lack confidence in their answers or merely over-powered by stronger personalities in the group. Your job is to draw them out. This will require not only encouraging them, but possibly also modifying the atmosphere of the group. For instance, you may have to muzzle a hog!

- Make eye contact with them
- Don't call on them – unless they tried to speak and the monopolizer talked over them
- Body language – turn towards them.
- Make use of silence. Sometimes these "introverts" will speak up given enough opportunity.
- Encourage them to participate again by responding when they do comment

Emotionally Needy

There is no end to the painful situations of life. From divorce and illness to wayward teens and the loss of a loved one, people to whom we minister are sometimes emotionally consumed by the things they have to face. These needs are usually better dealt with outside the small group, Bible study setting. However, occasionally raw emotions need immediate attention.

- We definitely need to offer help
- Follow the Holy Spirit in each case
- You can stop, pray for them and then continue
- If it's an ongoing situation offer to talk to them outside of class and help them find the right venue for their need

Challenger

The challenger is a member who questions the leader on one or more statements in front of the group. Sometimes they're right and sometimes they're wrong. Either way it's important that biblical truth come to light and that the "challenge" doesn't become an uncomfortable confrontation.

- Ask them to tell how Scripture teaches their viewpoint
- Restate the Biblical evidence for your teaching
- "Based on my study of this passage..... but I'm certainly not perfect. Let's both do some more study on this....." (If you think they may be right)

HANDLING DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Someone makes a comment that biblically is just plain wrong

- If it is trivial, let it go
- Address it if:
 - o Leaving it will hurt someone else
 - o It involves an important doctrinal point

A question is asked that you don't know the answer to

- Commit to further study and a future report
- Ask for a volunteer to do further study and make a report

Hen Parties (class members are chatting with each other)

- Use humor to bring them back, such as the "kindergarten" clap
- Be direct. "Let's get started (or back on track)."

Rabbit Chasing (the discussion ran off in a completely different direction)

- Rely on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to determine if a rabbit is worth chasing & for how long
- Be adaptable. If a particular rabbit really does need chasing you may have to adjust your class agenda.
- "This is so interesting. Can we pick up this discussion after class?"

Silence – usually people are uncomfortable with silence in a group situation, but you can use it to your advantage

- Don't be afraid to let a question hang in the air. Generally we step in and answer it ourselves too quickly
- Great tool for getting those who don't often talk to participate