

## 5 Tips for Leading Small Group Discussion

### 1. Edit confusing questions and eliminate unhelpful questions.

- The material you will be given has questions, but you may need to tweak them to make them easier for students to answer. Also, it is often the case that you will have too many discussion questions and will need to narrow it down. Handling both of these issues well requires that you know the teaching material thoroughly. Once you know it, consider the following tips when considering rewording or eliminating questions for discussion...
  - ◆ Consider how you would answer the question you are asking.
  - ◆ Ask yourself: "Would I enjoy answering this question?"
  - ◆ Is the question too complicated? Too complicated might mean you're asking several questions rolled into one and therefore people don't know which one to answer. Or the question is simply too long, making it difficult to follow and therefore difficult to answer.
  - ◆ Conversely, is the question too easy to answer? And too easy could mean you are asking "Yes" or "No" questions (Did you like this chapter?). Or questions where the answer is obvious (What's the name of the author?) or a question in which there will be little disagreement or engagement (Who loves Jesus?).
  - ◆ Good questions often sound like this: "What did you think about..." "How do you think we could live this out?" "What was most impactful to you in this lesson?" "What did you find confusing about this lesson"

### 2. Don't answer your own question after you ask it!

- Get comfortable with the awkward silence that can occur after you ask a question. Don't jump in with an answer. Give people time to think and offer their own response. If you just can't take it, count to ten really, really slowly.
- If still no one speaks up, try rewording the question or ask if the question makes sense.

### 3. Really listen to the answers people give.

- Sometimes we listen long enough to form our own thoughts and then we just think about how we can express them rather than staying tuned in to what others are saying. Avoid listening to respond. Practice listening to understand.
- Listen so you can affirm what they've said as right, good, helpful. "I think you're right about..." "Your answer is so helpful because..." "That

was really well put. Thank you."

- And listen so you can ask follow-up questions, "What did you mean by..." "Can you say some more about that?" "What makes you say...?" "Why did you say..."

**4. Gently, but firmly, work with those who dominate the discussion.**

- Find a way to affirm their eagerness to respond by saying something like, "Thank you so much for engaging in this conversation and taking these questions so seriously. Great job!" and then ask others to chime in with their thoughts about the question you've asked the group: "Now, let's get some different perspectives. Who else is willing to share?"

**5. Engage the seemingly unengaged**

- Sometimes people are not engaged and sometimes they are listening intently and have valuable thoughts but need some coaxing to share. Either way, ask them specifically to respond to a question. "You've been awfully quiet. We want to hear what you think. How would you respond to the question?"