



LEADING A SMALL GROUP • GUIDING A DISCUSSION

Group discussion is like a captivating, well-played volleyball game. As the leader, you serve the ball by asking a good question. Then someone answers, setting up the ball for someone else in the group to respond, who then hits the ball to another individual. When the volley is dead, you serve up another question. The goal is not simply to keep the discussion going, but to direct it in such a way as to facilitate learning and life-change.

Many of the questions in the cru.comm small group materials are designed to encourage as much discussion as possible. However, you should add your own back-up questions to make any lesson best fit your group. As you add your own questions, use open questions and share personal examples when possible.

It takes practice, preparation and hard work to play an exciting game of volleyball, and the same is true in making good group discussion work. There are a variety of ways to use questions. For example, if you were summarizing a lesson, it might be appropriate to use a limiting question such as, "How would you summarize the main emphasis of this passage?" However, at the beginning of a lesson you would want a wide open question such as, "Would you consider yourself a patient person? Why?" Note that although the first part of the question is limiting, it sets up the wide open question which asks people to share about their struggles with being patient.

Here are some helpful ways to use questions:

Launching Questions

A good way to start a small group or a particular discussion is by using a wide open question. This launches group discussion in the direction you want it to go. Here are some examples::

"There's often more than one reason people choose to do something. Why do you think people use alcohol?"

"If you could take a one-hour walk with any living person, who would you choose? Why?"

"If you could be told about your future, what would you like to know?"

Follow-Up Questions

Follow-up questions simply draw the rest of the group into the discussion after one member has given an answer. For example:

"What do the rest of you think?"

"Does anyone else have a different opinion?"

Guiding/Clarifying Questions

Guiding questions are follow-up questions that guide your group to accumulate facts, define, clarify, explain, compare, contrast, develop, relate, bring back to the subject or to change direction. In general they are limiting questions intended to help a leader guide the discussion.

"You said you think heaven will be boring. Why do you think that?"

"Let's return to the passage. What do you notice about the verbs?"

“How does your view fit this passage?”

Guiding questions help group members learn observation skills and can help bring them back to the subject when discussion has gone on a tangent. There’s nothing inherently wrong with a limiting question if it’s used appropriately.

Summarizing Questions

Summarizing questions help group members concisely state what they’ve been discussing in a short phrase or sentence. They are good tools to help people learn. In addition, summarizing questions also help the leader determine if the group has grasped the material. Although both summarizing and application questions tend to be limiting, they are helpful to get the group to focus the lesson and apply it. Here are some examples:

“If you were writing in a devotional journal, how would you express the truths of 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 in your own words?”

“What is the main idea that Jesus is expressing?”

“How is a person saved? What is God’s part? What is our part?”

Application Questions

Application questions help group members come to some conclusions on how the material applies to their daily experience. They help put biblical truth into action. It might be more appropriate for people to think through application questions privately, depending on your group. Here are more examples:

What are two or three gray areas you are dealing with in your life right now? How will you apply biblical principles in dealing with these gray areas?”

Think of areas or situations in your own life where you are tempted to compromise. What steps do you need to take in order to respond biblically?”

When you prepare your lesson you should think through each question. It is best to write a follow-up question for each one to clarify the first question.

Reverse/Relay Questions

Often a leader can answer a question with a question.

Reverse questions return the question back to the person who asked it. For example:

“That’s a good question, Mark. What do you think?”

Relay questions can be used to pass a question on to another individual or on to the whole group. For example:

“That’s a good question, Sarah. What do the rest of you think?”

Reverse and relay questions help group members discover truths for themselves.

Remember the goal of asking questions isn’t simply good discussion—it’s to lead people to change. A leader could ask open questions for hours with good discussion by all, but not make any progress toward applying God’s Word. Asking good questions should help group members grasp truth for themselves and apply it.