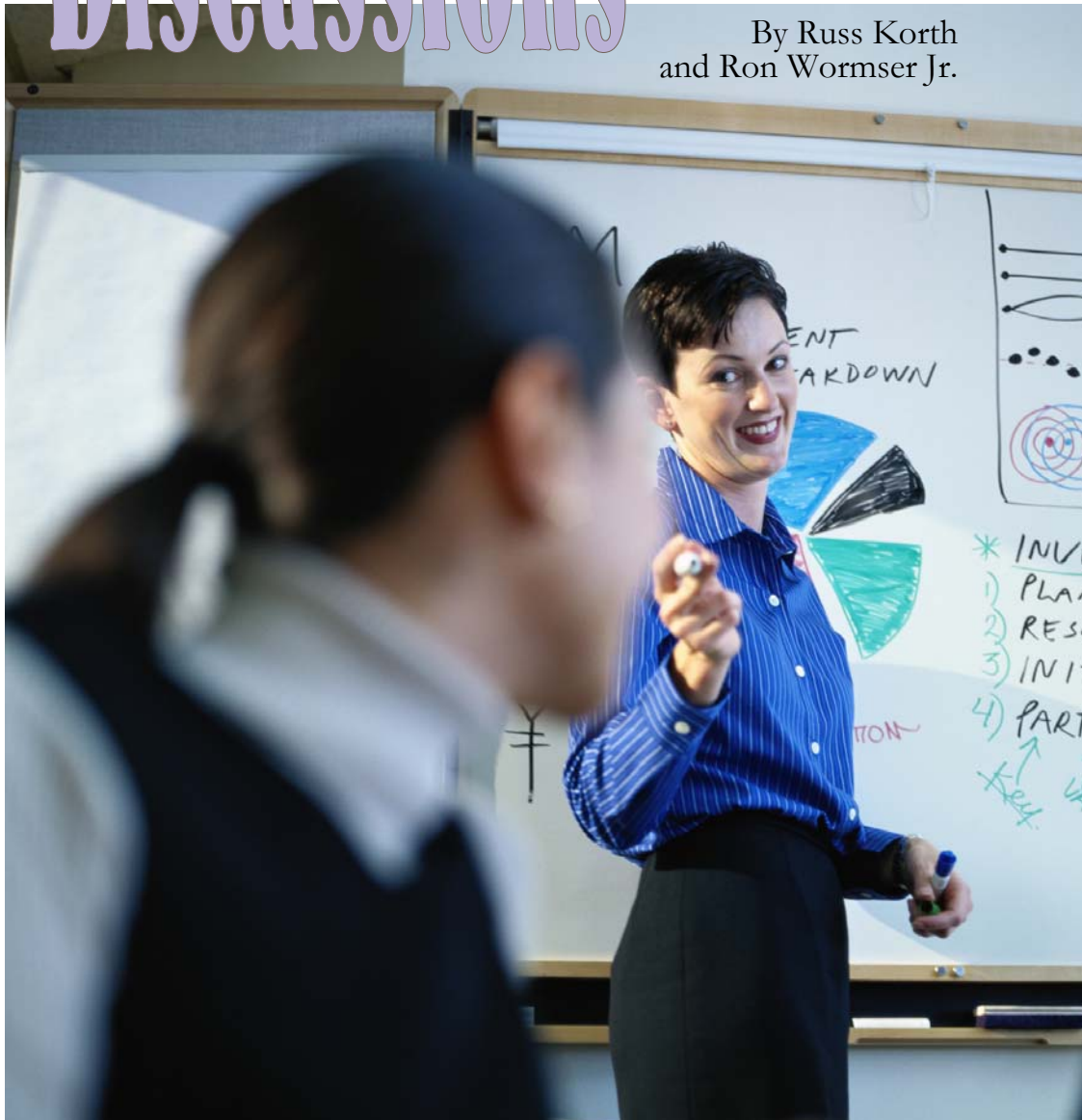


# Lively Discussions

By Russ Korth  
and Ron Wormser Jr.



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## About the Authors

Russ Korth and Ron Wormser, Jr., joined the ministry of Churches Alive in 1976. Prior to that time, Russ had been on the staff of The Navigators for 17 years. In addition to field responsibilities with that ministry, he directed their publications ministry and was the key developer of the *Design for Discipleship* Bible study. Ron has a background in journalism and television production. Prior to joining the staff of Churches Alive, Ron was production manager at a television station in Phoenix, Arizona.

Russ and Ron, together with Ron Wormser, Sr., have written and developed books and Bible studies including the *Love One Another* Bible study series, the *God in You* Bible study series, and *God's Family—What the Bible Says about the Church*. Russ and Ron continue to be involved in small group ministries and in teaching principles of small groups. They especially appreciate teaching invitations from churches or ministries located near major bodies of water and which offer a fishing trip in conjunction with the seminar.

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# Introduction – Do as Harold Does

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Harold's a leader. His objective is clear. He wants his group to be more like Jesus. He wants them to become better acquainted with Him. Harold wants to make disciples.

There's a funny thing about Harold, though. When he concentrates on the techniques for reaching his objective, he often loses sight of the target. Knowing this, Harold makes a point to keep his goal clearly before him. He doesn't want to end up in the familiar rut of serving his techniques.

To keep his objective in mind, Harold meditates on four of Jesus' imperatives about disciples.

## **Love One Another—John 13:34,35**

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

## **Bear Fruit—John 15:8**

“This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

## **Abide in Christ's Teaching—John 8:31**

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.”

## **Follow Christ—Luke 14:26,27**

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

One day, while studying some techniques of discipling, Harold discovered he absorbed more when he discussed the concepts with others. The most logical people to interact with were other leaders like himself. In fact, they began meeting weekly to discuss each technique.

It dawned on Harold that what he'd been learning wasn't much good until he put it into practice. So Harold applied the techniques. He expanded them, altered them,

and experimented with them. And Harold discovered new aspects to these concepts. He learned new ways to use them.

Time passed. Harold had read the techniques. He had applied them. Harold thought he had exhausted them. Then Harold reviewed the techniques. And he learned new things!

Harold now approached the same information from a new level of experience. New thoughts developed in his mind. And so Harold determined to go through these concepts once every six months as long as he was in the position of discipling a group of people. Harold wants to be as effective as possible.

Harold leads a small group.

His objective is clear.

He is using the following techniques to disciple others.

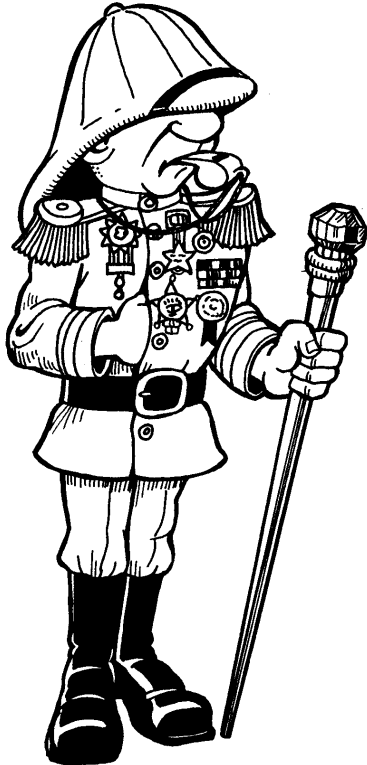
Harold continues to discuss, apply, and review these concepts.

Harold is a good leader

Do as Harold does.

# Be a Leader

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What a privilege! The opportunity to lead a group of people toward becoming more like Christ. Someone has said, “I’d consider my whole life worthwhile if I could but lead 10 people to a closer walk with the Lord.”

You now have that opportunity!

## Your qualifications

As a small group leader, you set an example for others in your relationship with God and with those around you. This doesn’t mean you’re expected to be perfect. Rather, it means you identify with Paul’s viewpoint when he said, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me” (Philippians 3:12).

## “I Can Do It”

Two attitudes can keep people from being leaders.

The first is the “I can do it” attitude. This attitude produces pride, cockiness, and bossiness. It causes a person to act hastily and independently, disregarding others.

- ☞ The “I can do it” attitude led Abram to have a child with Hagar.
- ☞ The “I can do it” attitude led Moses to kill the Egyptian in an attempt to deliver the Israelites. Instead, he ended up in Midian tending sheep.
- ☞ The “I can do it” attitude led James and John to seek positions on Jesus’ right and left hands.
- ☞ The “I can do it” attitude led Peter to draw his sword and cut off Malchus’ ear.
- ☞ The “I can do it” attitude is typified by self-effort and failure.

## “I Can’t Do It”

The second attitude, “I can’t do it,” is equally weakening. This attitude produces fear, cowardice, and hopelessness. It causes a person to make excuses, to ridicule, and to rebel.

The “I can’t do it” attitude led Sarah to laugh when the angel told her she would bear a son.

The “I can’t do it” attitude led Moses to make excuses by telling God that no one would believe him, follow him, or listen to him.

The “I can’t do it” attitude led the 10 spies to give an evil report of the promised land.

The “I can’t do it” attitude led Zacharias to question the angel’s prophecy of John the Baptist—resulting in him being struck speechless.

Whenever you find the “I can’t do it” attitude, you find disbelief and failure.

“I can do it” and “I can’t do it” have the same result—failure.

### **The Right Attitude**

There may seem to be no alternative to these two attitudes, but Paul expressed quite a different outlook in 2 Corinthians 3:4–6, “Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”

This same attitude led Caleb to say, “We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it” (Numbers 13:30). “If the Lord is pleased with us, He will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us” (Numbers 14:8).

This same attitude led Jonathan and his armor bearer to attack 20 Philistines, saying, “Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act on our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few” (1 Samuel 14:6).

This book is written in the spirit of this third attitude. It is written to help you gain greater competency as a leader.

### **Leadership**

You should lead your group into discoveries through discussion. You should lead your group in spiritual growth. You should lead your group without dominating it.

Many people confuse the function of a leader with that of a lecturer. They try to give the answers to everyone’s questions and to lecture on important topics. These may be important activities—but not in a discussion group. Sharing, participation, fellowship, interaction, cooperation, and love are the elements of a small group whose members desire to grow in their faith and in their relationships with one another. These functions need leadership—not just instruction.

A leader is one who sets the direction and determines the pace. Sometimes leadership is like a ring in a bull’s nose—a small item controlling a great force. Sometimes it is like a rudder—effective without being seen. Sometimes it is more obvious. But it is always determining direction and speed.

Your job as a leader is to guide group members to their own discoveries in the Bible, much the same as a guide in the wilderness. A photographer hires the guide to lead her to the wildlife she desires to photograph. Once there, the guide lets the photographer do the “shooting.” He does not take that thrill away. In the same way, do not take the thrill of discovery away from your group.

As a leader, you will be involved in teaching, by word and by example. But your primary method will be to skillfully guide your members to your desired goal through the wise use of questions.

### The Direction

The direction you lead is toward Christ-likeness. “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Beholding Jesus through God’s Word is the beginning of becoming Christ-like. The other activities of a well-rounded group support this process. Prayer, fellowship, and outreach are each important and significant in becoming more like Christ. As the leader, you must constantly be aware that Christ-likeness is your goal. Create an appetite for this kind of discipleship in the hearts of your members and lead them toward that goal.

### The Speed

As the leader, you set the pace. That means keeping the group moving. Too often, leaders let group spend three, four, and even five weeks studying a single chapter in a Bible study. The discussion becomes tedious. Interest wanes. There’s no incentive for the group members to do new studying at home each week. Don’t try to be exhaustive in your study. Be sensitive to the needs of the group.

On the other hand, don’t move too fast. Again, be sensitive to the spiritual needs of the group. and use appropriate opportunities to meet those needs.

Find that middle pace. Maintain a speed that keeps your group in a consistent study of the Scriptures—a pace that doesn’t keep them hopping from one chapter to the next, but sets an appropriate stride to keep the study fresh and consistent.

In most cases, Bible study workbooks are designed to be completed at a pace of one chapter every one to two weeks.

### Summary

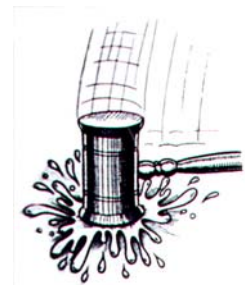
The two attitudes that can keep people from being leaders are the “I can do it” and the “I can’t do it” attitudes. God expects us to have confidence in Him and in His enabling power.

A leader sets the direction and determines the pace. The direction for small group Bible studies is to move people toward spiritual maturity. The pace must be adjusted to accomplish the objective.

### How to Squash Enthusiasm in Your Group

Deliver lengthy lectures on every topic of study, being careful to avoid any subject in which you are not an expert. Otherwise, someone else may have a valid contribution.




Make sure you absolutely exhaust your treatment of every topic in your study. Leave no stone unturned. After all, your group members may never study these topics ever again.





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THINGS TO DO IN A LEADERS' MEETING

-  Discuss how some of the following people fulfilled the functions of a leader in setting the direction and determining the pace: Noah, Moses, Esther, David, Jesus, Paul.
-  Discuss the difference between a teacher and a leader.
-  List some examples, other than those given in this chapter, of the “I can do it” attitude and the “I can’t do it” attitude.

Evaluate your leaders' meetings to decide whether it is primarily a teaching session or leading session.

# Motivate Your Group

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One leader put it this way:

I'm not worried about motivating the people in our group. They're already motivated. I'm concerned about keeping from demotivating them. God has put a desire in their hearts to do something and to grow as part of this group. Satan wants me to say something foolish, cruel, or out of order. He wants me to offend someone. I need God to keep me from doing anything unloving or insensitive, so that they will maintain their motivation.

In the final analysis, we want people to operate in the will of God. We want God to motivate them, and we must depend upon Him to do it.

Emotionalism, trickery, or a join-the-bandwagon approach doesn't compel people to do God's will. These superficial stimuli won't support a person's interest for long. Each person must sense that he or she is acting in obedience to God and is motivated by Him.

Although we're to depend upon God, we must also be careful to do all we can to create a positive environment for the group. Many factors help to produce a good atmosphere. Different people respond in different ways. Three main motivators are:

Involvement.

Encouragement.

Support.

## Involvement

People get involved in a project because they're motivated, and involvement motivates people. Much like the chicken and the egg, it isn't always possible to determine which comes first.

No matter what commitments your group members made when joining your group, enthusiasm will wane unless they're drawn into a deeper involvement in each meeting.

The most effective tool available to you for involving people in your small group is using questions. Properly asked, the right question will help people to grow spiritually by involving them in discussion, discovery, sharing, application, participation, and spiritual growth. And they will be eager to do more.

Questions are so important that the next chapter is given solely to discussing the process of forming good ones.

Other forms of involvement that will help you involve people are:

- ☞ Hosting a group
- ☞ Preparing refreshments
- ☞ Acting as secretary
- ☞ Studying a special topic of interest
- ☞ Room setup or cleanup
- ☞ Leading the group (when you need to be away or as a change of pace)
- ☞ Extra-curricular study on a difficult question that has arisen and giving a report the following week

## Encouragement

A father relates this story—

Scott was three years old when we started him in an exercise program. He had many coordination problems, and we were sure this would help. One of the first objectives was to have him grab a bar and hang by his hands for a full minute. On the first attempt, he hung for two or three seconds. Fortunately, we were warned ahead of time not to be negative and say, "No, son, that's not right." Instead, I exclaimed, "Wow! That's fantastic. You hung there all by yourself. Let's get Mommy and show her how good you can do it!" We kept repeating this kind of response until he had shown everyone in the neighborhood his skill in hanging. It took only a few weeks before he was hanging for one minute at a time five times a day. By the time he was five, he could hang for well over two minutes while traversing a 30-foot overhead ladder hand over hand.

People enjoy doing what they do well. People enjoy what they're praised for doing. People enjoy doing what elicits positive responses from others. True, we can't treat adults like three-year-olds, but the principle is the same. Many positive and sincere responses are available to us. You must provide that positive feedback.

## Support

People are motivated when they're genuinely helped in their lives. People are helped when they learn to appropriate the solutions God has for the problems they're facing. "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

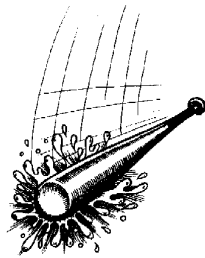
You help people by helping them study God's Word. Follow the study material according to plan, and you will most likely be helping the greatest number of people. The material will eventually cover areas that will apply to their needs.

Of course, not all the needs of people will be discussed specifically in your material. As a leader, you should be sensitive to everyone's needs. If several people indicate special interest in a topic that may be related to a need in their lives, you may want to prepare a special study or presentation. Be sure you're addressing a need that is common to a large segment of the group. If only one or two people are interested, you can meet the need on an individual basis with appointments outside the group meeting.

## Summary

Three means of motivating people in small groups are:

- ☞ **Involve** people in the process of learning, primarily by asking questions.
- ☞ **Encourage** people by giving them positive feedback at every opportunity.
- ☞ **Support** people by making sure the needs they have in their lives are being met.



## How to Squash Enthusiasm in Your Group

Quickly correct every misconception or miscommunication. Be sure to use an authoritarian tone so everyone will know how serious you are.

Answer all questions raised by group members rather than asking for other group members' ideas. After all, who could respond with more clarity and expertise?

### THINGS TO DO IN THE LEADERS' MEETING

- ✎ Discuss the participation of members of your group and come up with some definite plans to involve some of the less motivated people in ways other than discussion.
- ✎ Find examples of the three types of motivation (involvement, encouragement, support) in the life of Jesus as he interacted with the twelve apostles.
- ✎ Discuss other things that have motivated you to be a part of a small group.

# Use Launching Questions

---

Jesus used over a hundred questions as recorded in the gospels. He used them:

- ☞ to make people think
- ☞ to define terms
- ☞ to appeal to the conscience
- ☞ to refute criticism
- ☞ to present a problem
- ☞ to present solutions
- ☞ to accomplish other goals



Developing good questions is a skill you can learn. In leading a small group, the most important type of question is a launching question—one that launches people into discussion and discovery. This question grabs people’s attention and creates a desire to share what they know.

Though this chapter focuses on launching questions, they shouldn’t be used alone. They should be accompanied by guiding questions. Guiding questions keep people focused on the correct subject and steer the conversation away from pitfalls and unnecessary diversions.

Launching questions and guiding questions, together, are much like a rocket. Launching questions provide thrust and power and get things off the ground. Guiding questions are the fins that steer the rocket toward the correct objective. You’ll learn more about guiding questions in the next chapter.

Three characteristics of good launching questions are:

- ☞ They have many right answers.
- ☞ They have suitable difficulty.
- ☞ They focus on the right subject.

### Many right answers

Launching questions must have many right answers, or no discussion is initiated. Suppose you ask a group, “Is Jesus the only way to God?” Someone answers, “Yes,” and the discussion is over. Instead, you should reword your questions so that several people can respond with correct answers. For example, the questions could be:

“What would be some of the implications if Jesus was not the only way to God?”

or:

“Why are many non-Christians offended when we say Jesus is the only way to God?”

or

“What are some passages in the Bible that teach that Jesus is the only way to God?”

As you look over the examples above, notice that each will probably create a slightly different discussion. You could choose the question that would start the discussion in the direction you want it to take.

Now, evaluate the questions below. Do they each have many right answers? If any does not, reword the question so it does.

☞ “Did God create us for His glory?”

☞ “How much does God love us?”

☞ “What does it mean to be created in God’s image?”

*Compare your answers with these—*

☞ **Did God create us for His glory?**

This doesn’t meet the criteria for a good launching question. It’s a classic yes/no question. The answer is either yes or no, right or wrong. One of several ways of rewording it is, “What are some ways God is glorified by us?”

☞ **How much does God love us?**

This isn’t a yes/no question; but even though many different words might be used in giving an answer, they’d all be saying substantially the same thing. It could be restated: “What are some ways God shows His love for us?”

☞ **What does it mean to be created in God’s image?**

This one is tricky. There are many answers, but who’s to say how many of them are correct? It would be better to look at what you can learn rather than try to answer a question with so many possible interpretations.

One way to accomplish this is: “The Bible says we are created in God’s image and likeness. What are some ways we are like God?” Answering this question will help people arrive at their own conclusions about the definition of being created in God’s image without any pressure being exerted on others to conform to their thinking.

## Suitable Difficulty

To be answerable and interesting, a launching question must have suitable difficulty. If it's too difficult, people will be discouraged, embarrassed, and silent. If it's too easy, people will be embarrassed, silent—and bored.

Suitable difficulty changes for every group. “What are some things God has created?” is too easy for adults, but fine for young children. “What are some passages that refer to justification?” is a correct level of difficulty for people who have been studying the Bible for awhile, but not for new Christians.

Questions that are long, involved, confusing, and that use difficult words or technical terms are usually too difficult. Rhetorical questions, or those that ask the obvious, are usually too easy.

Evaluate the following questions for difficulty for your small group:

- ☞ “What are some indications of God’s love for us?”
- ☞ “Explain the process by which a person becomes a child of God.”
- ☞ “What are some of the Old Testament promises about the Messiah that Jesus fulfilled?”

*Compare your answers with these—*

☞ **What are some indications of God’s love for us?**

For the average group, this should be about right. It may be improved slightly by taking away the one obvious answer: “God’s great demonstration of loves was on the cross. What are some other indications of God’s love for us?”

☞ **Explain the process by which a person becomes a child of God.**

Too hard. The question is unclear. (It also is asking for only one answer.)

☞ **What are some of the Old Testament promises about the Messiah the Jesus fulfilled?**

Probably about right. It may be too hard for some in the group, but others will probably respond. It would be too hard if you ask for the references of these Old Testament verses.

## Right Subject in Focus

There’s no value to discussion just for the sake of discussion. The launching question should be pointed at the right target. Guiding questions can then maintain the proper direction.

You want to lead your group to the right facts from the Bible. You want to encourage a good application so they can grow. Four general areas on which questions will focus are:

- ☞ **Information** — What does the Bible say?
- ☞ **Opinions** — What do you think about it?
- ☞ **Feelings** — How do you feel about it?
- ☞ **Application** — What are you going to do about it?

If you focus on any one of these without the others, the discussion won’t be as fruitful as it should be.

Be sure not to use questions to focus attention on your own answers. Once people discover you are leading them only to your conclusions, they’ll feel pressured

and resent it. Others will try to figure out what you have in mind and won't share their own thoughts and ideas. When this happens, any applications people make will be based on your idea—not their own. Until they personalize application, people won't grow.

Evaluate the focus of each of the following questions for your group:

- ☞ “When did creation take place?”
- ☞ “What are the responsibilities of a shepherd?”
- ☞ “What emotions does God’s total knowledge of you evoke?”

*Compare your answers with these—*

☞ **When did Creation take place?**

It’s on the subject of Creation, but focuses on information not readily available and that doesn’t have much practical application. It’s a poor question.

☞ **What are the responsibilities of a shepherd?**

Good focus. This launching question also rates high in the other two areas of having many right answers and suitable difficulty. It should, however, have guiding questions with it. They could point out how Jesus, as our Shepherd, assumes these responsibilities and could ask what our response should be.

☞ **What emotions does God’s total knowledge of you evoke?**

This focuses on feelings, which may or may not be appropriate, depending upon how comfortable your group members are with one another.

Launching questions should provoke people to share their thoughts and ideas. Sometimes they don’t. If no interaction begins, don’t be afraid to repeat your launching question. If you’re in a group of quiet people, you may need to repeat it several times, calling upon a different person to answer each time.

Too often, leaders are embarrassed by silence and begin telling their ideas on a question. Don’t fear silence, and don’t feel it’s your responsibility to fill the void it creates. Give people time to think and respond. When you’re in a group situation, 10 seconds seems like a long time, and a minute seems like an eternity. Even so, wait for others to respond.

For your next small group leaders’ meeting, come prepared with three good launching questions on the material you are studying.

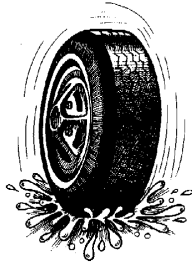
## Summary

Small group leaders primarily use two types of questions: launching questions to start a discussion and guiding questions to direct a discussion toward the objective.

Good launching questions must meet three criteria:

- ☞ They have many correct answers.
- ☞ They are of suitable difficulty.
- ☞ They focus on the subject.







### How to Squash Enthusiasm in Your Group

Ask only complicated and difficult questions. You want everyone to realize how much they don't know and how smart you are.

Never use questions that cause others to think. Once they start, they may never stop. They may even challenge a few of your ideas.

#### THINGS TO DO IN A LEADERS' MEETING

-  Discuss the three characteristics of good launching questions and the good and bad examples given.
-  Discuss the launching questions that you prepared for the meeting, evaluating them against the three criteria.

# Use Guiding Questions



One of your challenges as a leader is keeping the discussion moving. Without good guiding techniques, a leader finds the small group situation much like an amateur soccer game. Time after time, the ball is put into play with a good launching question, participants begin to get involved, and then someone kicks the ball out-of-bounds and the game grinds to a halt.

There's a real skill in developing guiding questions and techniques that will keep your group's discussion in-bounds and stimulating.

Once discussion is under way, you must guide your members to the correct objective. Guiding takes some preparation, but much of it is spontaneous in response to the needs of the group.

Your most important preparation for guiding the discussion is knowing the general direction you want the discussion to take. Some ways to guide the discussion toward the goals you want to accomplish are to emphasize, relate, define, correlate, summarize, and assure application.

## Emphasize

Help people see the significance of some of the observations they've shared in response to the launching question. You can do this by simply asking, "What's the significance of what we've been discussing?"

Sometimes that will get a good response; often, it won't. Usually, you'll have to address the subject more directly (but always without domineering the group).

Imagine, for instance, that you're discussing Creation. One way of guiding the discussion toward personal application might be, "We have seen that God created us. What does that imply about His prerogative to handle us any way He chooses?"

As people in the group answer, continue to bounce one answer off another person by asking, "How do you respond to that answer?"

### **Relate**

Relate the discussion from the launching question to other verses in the Bible. You may ask, "Can you think of any other teachings in the Bible that apply to this?" Or, you may choose to supply a verse or two and ask the group, "How do you feel this Scripture relates to the subject?"

Another way to help tie your study together is to ask, "How does this apply to what we studied a few weeks ago about \_\_\_\_\_?"

You may also relate the discussion to a situation that people in the group are aware of. If you were studying the Creation, you may ask how the latest developments in modern science support the scriptural account of Creation.

### **Define**

Guide the discussion through proper definitions. Many times people are confused because they don't know what certain words mean. You may ask the group, "How do you suppose we should define the word \_\_\_\_\_?"

If you have a dictionary with you at your small group meetings, you can use it to clarify group members' thinking on the definition of certain terms.

Another way of determining meaning is to use various Bible translations. Often, it helps to have a critical passage read in as many translations as possible.

### **Correlate**

Guide the discussion by discovering the context of the scriptural passage (if the discussion is centered on a passage). Ask the members what they think the context is and how it should be applied. For example, you maybe discussing a question related to Philippians 4:4, "Rejoice in the Lord always . . ." The preceding verses show that this rejoicing should take place even during conflict. Euodia and Syntyche were fighting with each other. Paul and Timothy tell the church and these women to "Rejoice."

Seeing the context is essential to properly understanding God's Word. By doing this in the group, you will help the members develop the habit of evaluating the context in all of their Bible study.

### **Summarize**

Guide the discussion by summarizing and asking more questions based on the summarization. For example, after discussing the answer to, "What are responsibilities of a shepherd?" you might summarize like this: "We have been talking basically about the shepherd's responsibilities in three broad areas—his care, his provision, and his protection." After this summary, you could continue with a

further question: “Since we know that Jesus is our Shepherd, what should be our response to His care, provision, and protection?”

The methods listed above should help you get started in effectively guiding the discussion. As you go along, you undoubtedly will develop a style of your own.

Remember—as you’re guiding the discussion, you’re not jamming, cramming, or forcing; and sometimes the discussion will not go exactly as you had planned. When this happens, evaluate your leading techniques. You may be guiding poorly or, on the other hand, it may be the Holy Spirit leading the group into an important subject.

### Assure Application

You can’t be sure whether people are applying God’s Word to their lives. But, as the leader, you should do all you can to stimulate your group to do so. One of the basic goals of small group discipleship is progressive life-change through the Word of God.

When you formulate application questions, keep in mind the difference between general and specific questions. A general application question asks how a teaching from Scripture can be applied in a broad sense. A specific application question asks what is to be done in particular. For example:

☞ **General**—“What can we do that glorifies God?”

☞ **Specific**—“What do you plan to do to glorify God?”

At times, each type of question is appropriate. Most of the time, however, the broad question is best suited. If you want to be more direct, you can address the specific question to the entire group, giving volunteers a chance to answer. Take care to be sensitive to the needs of people and not to embarrass someone by asking a specific question at the wrong time or on the wrong subject.

Try it for yourself. For each of the following subjects, write out one application question.

☞ Jesus Is God.

☞ God Loves You.

☞ You Are a Member of God’s Family

*Compare your answers with these—*

☞ **Jesus is God.**

What does Jesus’ life on earth demonstrate about God’s character?

Why is it important to you that Jesus is God?

☞ **God Loves You.**

How can we show love back to God?

How can you follow God’s example of love in your relationship to others?

☞ **You Are a Member of God’s Family.**

How does the example of God’s family apply to families today?

How should the fact that God is Your Father affect your life?

## Summary

Always keep the **objective** in mind. **Guide** the discussion toward the objective.

☞ **Emphasize**

“Why are we studying this?”

☞ **Relate**

“How does this apply to \_\_\_\_\_?”

☞ **Correlate**

“What is the context of this passage?”

☞ **Summarize** “We’ve decided that \_\_\_\_\_ . Does this mean that \_\_\_\_\_?”

Guide the discussion toward application of the Bible teaching through general and specific application questions. Usually, begin with general application questions.

## How to Squash Enthusiasm in Your Group

Never attempt to involve the quieter members of the group. Once they get started, you may not be able to stop them.

Always guide discussion to topics that you know well. Don’t let the group suspect that you’re not an expert on everything.

Call on individual members to answer specific application questions. Don’t be afraid to embarrass them. They’ll get over it.



### THINGS TO DO IN A LEADERS’ MEETING

- ✎ Spend 15–20 minutes discussing a portion of your Bible study. Afterward, evaluate how you used launching and guiding questions.
- ✎ Discuss the question, “When is it appropriate to ask specific application questions?”
- ✎ Share and discuss the general application questions you prepared during your study of this chapter.

# Encourage with a Positive Response

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The best encouragement you can give to the participants in a small group is your positive response. When you respond favorably to other people's ideas, they feel secure, accepted, and encouraged to share more and more. When you respond negatively to others' ideas, they feel insecure, unaccepted and tend to withdraw.

Your positive responses set an example for the others in the group, and encourages them to copy your example without thinking about it. This makes the group experience a very happy time as well as a time of growth.

You can direct your positive responses to three things that people enjoy all of the time:

- ☞ Being right
- ☞ Being original
- ☞ Being appreciated

## People Like Being Right

When people in your group spend personal time in Bible study preparation for the group meeting, they usually feel God has taught them something. Your positive response confirms this to them, and they're encouraged to spend more time studying and learning.

Before you read on, think of three or four responses that you can give which show that a person is correct.

Some other responses to encourage people are:

- ☞ "Very good!"
- ☞ "That shows insight!"
- ☞ "You have been thinking about that, haven't you!"
- ☞ "Wow!"
- ☞ "That's profound."

In making these affirmations, be sure to be sincere and not overstate your approval. People will know if you're patronizing them.

### People Like Being Original

One of the ways to tell that a subject has been mastered is observing people's ability to translate old concepts into new expressions. When people express a concept in fresh terms, they've demonstrated a grasp of the subject, usually with true insight. Recognize and laud this kind of originality.

Think of a couple of responses you can use to show you appreciate someone else's originality. Here are others you may wish to use:

- ☞ "I really like the way you put that."
- ☞ "I never thought of it that way before. That's good!"
- ☞ "That's a great illustration of that concept."

### People Like Being Appreciated

Often participants in a small group hesitate to share certain ideas or experiences because they don't think others will want to hear about them, or they're afraid no one will appreciate them. In particular, when people share their lives or reveal they do not understand something, it's a good idea to express your appreciation for their honesty. Never allow others to ridicule them for their ignorance.

Before you read on, think of some expressions that show you appreciate what has been shared.

Again, some examples that might fit certain situations are:

- ☞ "I really appreciate you sharing your life like this."
- ☞ "I'm glad you asked that. Many people need to know."
- ☞ "Your sharing really speaks to my heart. Thank you."

### Wrong Answers

One of the big questions small group leaders ask is, "How can I react positively when people give wrong answers?"

Four approaches you can use when you believe a person in the group is wrong are:

#### **Step 1—Determine whether the answer is wrong or just different.**

Many ideas are different from yours, but still acceptable. Be sure the person really is wrong before you try to correct an idea. You may discover the answer is as valid as yours.

If you determine the answer wasn't wrong, only different, acknowledge that you hadn't thought of things in that light, and ask the person to develop the idea further. Perhaps others in the group were thinking along the same lines. Ask the group to share their views.

Sometimes you'll discover different views on a subject, and, as a result, some tension occurs. If this happens, guide the group toward the common elements taught in the Bible and draw personal applications from them.

For example, there are several views regarding the order of events at the Second Coming of the Lord. If people are debating these different views, you can point out that the Bible plainly teaches that Jesus Christ is coming again

(John 14:1,3), and we should be continually prepared for His return (Luke 12:40). We may have differences of opinion on other aspects of the Second Coming, but of these two facts we are assured.

Another illustration is differing opinions of the importance of certain gifts from the Holy Spirit. Again, point to the plain teachings of Scripture on the important issues; namely, every believer has the Holy Spirit's indwelling (1 Corinthians 3:16), and every believer has a spiritual gift designed to enable him or her to minister to other people in the Body (1 Corinthians 12:7).

### **Step 2—Redirect the question.**

If you determine that the response someone gave was wrong, not just different, continue to be as positive as possible. Don't react with a, "No, that's not right." Instead, give a positive response that doesn't evaluate the answer, and ask the same question of another person. For example, you could say, "That's interesting. How would you answer that question, Bob?"

By turning the original question over to another member of the group, you can get a second response without having to refute the first. Many times, you'll find that people who responded with wrong answers will either change their minds to agree with the group, or you will find out that they expressed their thoughts poorly and were misunderstood.

### **Step 3—Point to Scripture.**

If you don't get a correct answer from other members of the group, focus everyone's attention back on scripture and ask, "What does it say?" Drive hard for the plain statements in scripture rather than opinions on the topic. Help people to see that what the Bible plainly says is the most important thing to believe.

### **Step 4—Make a short presentation.**

If, after going through the first three steps, you still find people viewing the subject wrongly, you can make a short presentation. But please remember that your presentation should be the last effort. If at all possible, lead the group to discover the truth of Scripture for themselves.

## **Summary**

Encourage people in your group with a positive response by:

- ☞ showing that they are right
- ☞ showing that they are original
- ☞ showing that they are appreciated

Four approaches to handle wrong answers are:

- ☞ Determine whether the answer was wrong or simply different.
- ☞ If the answer was wrong, redirect the question to another person.
- ☞ If wrong responses continue, direct everyone back to the plain statements of Scripture.
- ☞ If the first three steps don't work, make a short presentation.





### How to Squash Enthusiasm in Your Group

Be careful not to smile or show any enthusiasm for others' comments. It may stimulate them to talk too much.

Demand that everyone use the same expressions that you use. A different way of saying something is probably wrong.

#### THINGS TO DO IN A LEADERS' MEETING

- ✎ Find illustrations of Jesus using a positive response to encourage His disciples.
- ✎ Find illustrations of times when Jesus did not encourage His disciples with a positive response.  
Discuss why He did not always encourage them.
- ✎ Discuss why good launching questions afford the greatest opportunity for positive responses.
- ✎ Share other expressions you can use to encourage people when they are right, original, and appreciated.

# Chart Your Course



Grab your gear; you're going on a hike.

Group discussions compare closely with a planned hiking excursion. At least, they should. As leader, you have surveyed the territory, plotted your path, and prepared for the expected rough spots. As you set out with your group, you'll take full advantage of the scenic "turnouts" to help them gain perspective on their hike.

This chapter gives you some ideas on how to plan your discussion time by determining your objective, identifying points of interest, developing a discussion plan and adapting to the needs of your group.

## Determine Your Objective

Many Bible study workbooks state an objective for each week's study. If yours doesn't, the first think you should do, after

completing your initial overview of the material, is to identify the objective for your group discussion time.

Just as you would plan a hike, you should determine whether you're going for the peak, the waterfall, or the shady grove. Your objective will vary with the group you are leading. Set the objective you feel will be best for them. For example, if you were studying John 1, your objective could be to help group members understand the implications that Jesus is God, or it could be to explore and follow John the Baptist's example of preparing the way for Christ.

Once set, your objective serves as a beacon during your group discussion time. It helps you to evaluate whether a potential discussion path interjected by a group member will lead to your goal or merely prove to be an interesting tangent. Guide all discussion to contribute to your discussion objective.

## Identify Points of Interest

Along the way, Your Bible study workbook offers several points of interest on the theme you are studying. As a group leader, you can make note of them, but don't feel obligated to stop and rest at each one.

As presented in Use Launching Questions, most questions you'll use fall into four categories:

- Information** — What does the Bible say?
- Opinions** — What do you think about it?
- Feelings** — How do you feel about it?
- Application** — What are you going to do about it?

Usually, information questions should be handled quickly, without much discussion. The purpose is to get the facts “on the table,” to be able to interpret and apply them.

Your group will probably want to pause on opinion and feelings questions when they discover diverse views and perhaps even mild tension between those views.

Another point of interest where your group should spend time is on application questions, where there may also be diverse answers, but probably without tension. Applications may vary greatly from member to member.

Allow appropriate time for exploring and reflecting, but also help the group move on to other subjects at the right time. Remain alert to the need to restate the discussion objective for your meeting and to relate the recent discussion to the objective.

Conclude your scenic overlook times by summarizing what has been said and linking it to your objective. Several ways to summarize these points along the way are:

**You do it.**

Simply capsulize what has been said and relate it to the subject you're studying. Example: “What we seem to be concluding is that Jesus was fully God, yet fully human. This helps us to understand that He knows what we're going through and can give us the help we need to live successfully.”

**Ask someone else to do it.**

You can do this by saying, “Barbara, would you sum up what we've been saying?” Then follow with, “How does this help us live successful Christian lives?”

**Find a verse that does it.**

Locate a verse, either from your study or elsewhere in the Bible, that states the point of the section.

**Ask your group to do it.**

You can toss out a question for a response from anyone in the group, “How do you see our discussion fitting into our overall study of successful Christian living?” or, “What do you feel is the most important point in this section we've been discussing?”

Without conclusions and summaries, your group will find themselves plodding along without the advantage of the big picture—seeing how each piece of your journey contributes to reaching your goal.

## Develop a Discussion Plan

Before leaving on an extended hike, a prepared leader will mark the map to identify approximately how long each section of the trip will take. Bible discussion leaders should do the same.

Some leaders find it helpful to note the margins of their workbooks with time markers to help them sustain the pace of a meeting. For instance, if their group begins at 7:00 pm, the first section of their material would be marked “7:00,” and the second section might be marked to begin at 7:15, indicating that it will take approximately fifteen minutes (from 7:00 to 7:15) to discuss the first section.

Another important part of the discussion plan is the additional questions, illustrations, and activities you develop to encourage interaction. Again, these ideas can be marked in the margins of your workbook. By placing all of your discussion plan, both times and ideas, in the margins of one book, you make it much easier to lead the group, because you have fewer pieces of material to juggle.

## Adapt to the Needs of Your Group

The greatest danger you may face when you have thoroughly prepared a lesson plan is the compulsion to use every bit of it.

After all, you’ve put a lot of time into studying for this meeting. You’ve developed all of these creative questions and activities and illustrations. You’ve marked it all in your workbook. You’re ready to dazzle your group with your remarkable leadership skills. . . .

Don’t do it!

Jesus clearly demonstrated and taught how necessary it is for a leader to be a servant. You serve your group when you invest time and energy preparing a discussion plan for your meeting. You also serve your group when you lay aside some of those plans and preparations to allow others to contribute what they’ve learned and to minister to needs that arise during your meeting.

One group was studying Romans 14. That chapter centers on the issue of not passing judgment on other believers who choose to participate or not participate in certain activities because of their faith.

The leader had prepared many guiding questions, expecting a spirited discussion on what was and wasn’t acceptable behavior for Christians today. He anticipated differing opinions and possibly uncovering some harbored resentment against some believers because of their lifestyles. But when the group began to discuss the issue, he found great acceptance and unanimity among the members of the group.

It wasn’t a need area in their lives. There was no use laboring the point. Rather than try to drum up controversy and disagreement, the leader simply moved the group through the material quickly.

7:15



Use reference material to determine the current value of:

10,000 talents Several million Dollars

100 denari a few dollars

(DIFFICULT VERSE)

What is the one main point of the parable?  
Matthew 18:35

*Forgive others sincerely or God will judge.*

7:20

DONT ALLOW LONG DISCUSSION

4. What did Jesus say was the consequence of not forgiving others? Matthew 6:14,15

*God will not forgive my sins.*  
SINGULAR, "WORKS" VS 19 PLURAL

(BEING UNDER CONTROL OF SPIRIT WILL CAUSE YOU TO BE FORGIVING)

7:25

ASK EACH TO NAME A FRUIT AND WHY IT WOULD CAUSE TO BE FORGIVING

5. Which fruit of the Spirit do you think would cause you to be a forgiving person? Galatians 5:22,23

How can you be a forgiving person? Galatians 5:24,25

*Love, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness.*

*By staying in step with the Holy Spirit, using His power.*

CR (ROMANS 7:14 - 8:14)

7:35

IMPORTANT YOU CAN FORGIVE BY GODS POWER YOU MUST WANT TO BE FORGIVING SOME PEOPLE WANT TO ENJOY BEING MAD

Discuss with group

*If I was a Christian, I would review some of the answers in this chapter in Chapter 1. Point out how Jesus forgive and we are commanded to also forgive. The strongest example of forgiving was Jesus on the cross. Coupled with the power given by the Spirit, anyone is able to forgive. The real issue is "I don't want to forgive John." Through Christ he is able. He must also be willing!*

Sample of how a leader marks his book

Another leader came to a group thoroughly prepared. As they began to discuss their study, she noticed that one woman, who normally actively participated, was reserved and quiet. The leader asked if something was troubling her, and the woman revealed many recent difficulties in her life, including a lawsuit and financial problems. At that point, the leader let the woman talk out her concerns and allowed the group to demonstrate their care and interest in her. They concluded their interaction by praying for the woman. The study that everyone had prepared was discussed in the remaining minutes of their meeting.

Some leaders look for one or more of the following indicators to decide whether or not to pursue a subject raised spontaneously by a group member:

- ☞ Do many group members show an interest in the issue?
- ☞ Is it basic to understanding for future meetings of your group?
- ☞ Is it within your general subject area?

Generally, a leader deviates from the discussion plan when it is in the best interest of the group. If the question or issue relates only to an individual or couple in the group, it may be best to offer to discuss it outside of the group meeting. In that way, you can meet the need without forcing the rest of the group to mentally “twiddle their thumbs.”

In the example of the women’s group above, the leader determined it was best to set aside the prepared study time to minister to the concerns of the woman. This was consistent with the group’s purpose, which included not only studying the Bible, but also developing a caring and sharing attitude toward one another.

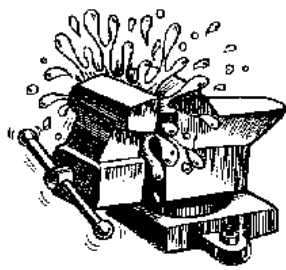
Whatever direction your discussion takes, you’ll encourage the group by ending your time on a positive note. Meetings that end in argument or frustration are often followed by poor attendance the next week. People don’t need more problems in their lives. They’re looking for solutions and encouragement from their small group involvement. you can help them to feel good about coming back next time.

## Summary

Leading a group discussion is much like guiding a hike. It requires:

- ☞ setting discussion objectives
- ☞ identifying points of interest
- ☞ developing a discussion plan

A prepared leader, though, is always ready to set aside his or her preparation in order to minister to needs in the group.






## How to Squash Enthusiasm in Your Group

Always “shoot from the hip” in your discussions. Don’t prepare for leading your meetings. It will only draw attention to yourself.

Don’t worry about the needs and interests of people in the group. Their questions probably aren’t worthwhile. Besides, most people don’t know what’s best for them.

THINGS TO DO IN A LEADERS' MEETING

-  Exchange ideas on how to prepare for leading a group.
-  Discuss possible discussion objectives and points of interest for your next small group meeting.
-  Identify the kinds of situations in past group meetings where you could have used more flexibility from your discussion plan in order to meet a need.

# Maintain Control

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Healthy group interaction thrives when you, as a leader, exercise good control. Without control, your discussion can end up like the novice camper's fire. He carefully gathered and stacked dry tinder, branches, and logs. With determination, he rubbed two sticks together and endured the tedious task until a spark ignited a bit

of tinder. Sitting back with a sigh of relief, his enjoyment turned to horror as he watched the fire ignite the wood he had stacked nearby. Soon the whole campsite was ablaze.

Lively discussion is much like fire. Though it is exactly what you want, without control, discussion can be devastating. To make the best use of lively discussion, you must do two things—keep the discussion from becoming a problem and end the discussion in a profitable way.

Maintaining control doesn't mean that you do all the talking. It doesn't mean you monitor everything the others say or that others can talk only when you give them permission. You are maintaining control when you direct the discussion toward the proper goals.

You should be prepared to adapt your style of control to the needs of the discussion. There will be times when all you do is sit back and listen. At other times, you may lead the discussion by calling on specific people to respond. Sometimes you will maintain control by entering the discussion and sharing other viewpoints. You may interject guiding questions or make statements. On occasion, you may need to speak bluntly and forcefully. Sometimes you may think that you have things well in hand only to discover that they're not. You must then take quick and definite steps to regain control before the discussion has a destructive effect on the group.

Remember, lively discussion isn't your enemy. You shouldn't fear or resent it. At the same time, don't assume that lively group discussion means the members are growing spiritually. Lively discussion can become a problem in several ways.

## Too Much Time

When people are very interested in a topic, everyone wants the last word. People tend to think, "If only others could see my side, they would agree with me." So the





discussion tends to continue, and people may resist the idea of moving on. But it is always better to end a discussion a little early than a little late. This keeps interest high and boredom low.

One way to move the discussion along is to ask that only two or three more people speak on the subject. You can do this by saying, “I know this is interesting to all of us, and a lot of good ideas have been coming out; but I think it is best that we move ahead. So I am going to ask that only three more people speak on this subject.”

There may be more than three who want to speak, so you’ll have to make a selection. This is a good opportunity for you to bring in some of the quieter members of the group.

### **Off the Track**

When enthusiasm runs high, it isn’t uncommon for one thing to lead to another, and soon someone is telling a joke or describing the plot of a television program. While some side issues can be important and helpful, many lead only to a waste of the group’s time.

When you see the discussion veering off target, you can redirect it by reusing your launching question. Or, you may have to jump in the middle by saying, “Wait a minute! Excuse me for breaking in here, but I’m afraid that we are beginning to discuss things that are not really a part of our Bible study. Let’s get back to the subject by looking at what you wrote down in your Bible study this week.” This may seem abrupt, but it’s far better to use your leadership to focus on profitable topics than to allow discussions in the wrong areas.

If one person, week after week, persists in steering the group off the main topic with humor, personal experiences, and other things, you should speak with that person privately. Ask for his or her help in getting the discussion to center on the most important issues for the good of the group.

### **Taking Sides**

Many topics in your Bible study discussion will have more than one acceptable conclusion. When interacting on these topics, don’t allow an “I’m right—you’re wrong” attitude. This attitude forces members to choose one side or the other. Polarization can result.

Instead, you can maintain control by explaining that there are good reasons to accept either conclusion. Neither position on the issue may necessarily be wrong. Promote an atmosphere that accepts differing points of view.

As a leader, when you see people begin to take sides, redirect their attention by using guiding questions to focus on a more important issue that is part of the same discussion. For example, imagine that your group is discussing what day Christ was crucified. Some members feel that it was on a Friday. Others are convinced it was a Wednesday. After allowing different people to discuss their views, you sense polarization beginning. This is your cue to maintain control by saying, “There is a lot of good thought set forth by scholars for both positions. Rather than pursue this further, let’s consider some things that Christ accomplished by His crucifixion.” A profitable discussion generates light that increases understanding, rather than heat that increases tension.

When you do find yourself in a heated debate, with the group taking sides, control can be restored by saying something like, “Excuse me for interrupting, but I feel that we’re on the verge of making a mistake. If we’re not careful in our discussion, we’re going to say things that will hurt someone’s feelings. Later on we’ll wish we could retract some of our statements. Let’s stop and have a word of prayer about this, because we don’t want to be criticizing or condemning others.”

After prayer, it will be up to you to redirect the interaction by either asking a guiding question or by moving on to the next topic.

### **Opinion Only**

If you allow the group to go on and on, sharing only their opinions, you’ll be fostering frustration. People can’t base their lives on the “authority” of an opinion. People need the truth of the Word of God.

This doesn’t mean you should prohibit opinions. If people are sharing their ideas on how to teach a Sunday School Class of 10-year-old boys, more than likely, much will be learned from one another. But suppose someone stated an opinion that, as Christians, we should always vote for the candidates who are Christians regardless of their political stand. You should immediately recognize the possible danger of that kind of discussion. Exercise your leadership by saying something like, “Before we end up in a hassle about politics, I’d like us to take a look at our Bible study and share what we learned about . . .” Don’t let “opinions only” discussions throw your group out of control.

### **Ending Profitably**

Lively discussions rarely die a natural death. People become too involved emotionally and they are often having too much fun to want to quit. Often you will need to bring the discussion to a conclusion. For the comfort of your members and the ongoing success of your group, you should end discussion in a profitable way.

### **Project Assignment**

Occasionally, there will be a thriving discussion where members aren’t certain of their facts, statistics, or what the Scriptures say. In situations like this, ask for a volunteer to do a special study project and give a report to the group at a future meeting.

It is wise to have this kind of report given at the end of the meeting. If presented at an earlier time, you’ll find it difficult to avoid a time-consuming discussion on the subject all over again. By having the report at the end of the meeting, members will be able to choose to stay for further discussion or to go home after the report is given.

### **Sum It Up**

Many times in a lively discussion, people concentrate more on their own ideas than on the ideas of others, and they miss the benefit of other points of view. A good summary can help you compensate for this tendency.

To give a good summary, listen carefully to all that is said. Then, when it is time to move on to the next subject, you can say, “Let’s summarize what we have learned about this. Here’s what I’ve heard . . . .”

### **Make Statements**

Some important Bible study topics don’t have conclusive answers from the Bible. In this kind of discussion members can become frustrated by the lack of clear directives. Instead of being authoritative where the Scriptures are not, direct the members’ attention away from what is not known to what is known.

For example, many groups discuss appropriate Christian behavior. Although the Bible does not address many activities specifically, you can still end the discussion by making statements rather than leaving the group with only their unresolved questions.

You can direct their attention to the clear statement of Scripture in passages like 1 Corinthians 10:23, “Everything is permissible—but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible—but not everything is constructive.” Another principle on these topics is given in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” This will not answer every question, but it will lead toward the truth, which will help people settle questions for themselves.

### **Encourage Application**

Lively discussion can become more and more theoretical and less and less practical. It’s far easier for people to discuss the effect of missions in Africa than to discuss ways of reaching out to their neighbors. Use a good application question to end these interactions. You may say, “This discussion has all been very interesting. Now, in order to profit the most, what can we be doing about it?”

Education on an issue is needed less often than putting into practice what is already known. Make sure your discussions lead to applications.

### **Summary**

Maintain control by avoiding problems and ending in a profitable way.

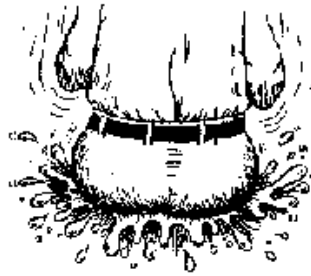
Lively discussion that is poorly controlled can:

- ☞ take too much time
- ☞ get off the subject
- ☞ result in polarization
- ☞ become a time of only sharing opinions

Positive conclusions can be reached if you:

- ☞ end with a report
- ☞ end with a summary
- ☞ end with statements, not questions
- ☞ end with applications

## How to Squash Enthusiasm in Your Group



Make a decree at the outset of each meeting that you will not tolerate any spirited interaction. Be sure to enforce this by ridiculing anyone who dares to express an opinion that does not agree with your own.

Never bring a lively discussion to a conclusion. Always leave things up in the air and jump into the next subject.

### THINGS TO DO IN A LEADERS' MEETING

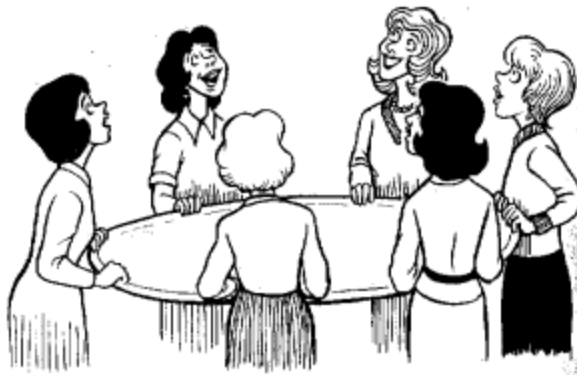
- ✎ Role play ways to transition from counter-productive discussion back to appropriate subjects.
- ✎ Develop some guiding questions that will help maintain control and profitable discussion on each of the following subjects:
  - Spiritual gifts
  - Future events
  - Church programs
  - Questionable activities

# Develop Trust



Many group leaders find, especially in the first few meetings of their group, that people are reluctant to reveal themselves. Most of the interaction remains in the “safe zone.” When asked to share information, group members respond openly, but many people don’t share much of their feelings or needs.

In many cases, openness may depend on the group rules of the group. If it is a “closed” group where members will remain the same over a period of time, helping people to open up can be easier. However, if different people attend every week, including newcomers, developing trust and breaking into new depths of open relationships can be more difficult.



## How People Avoid Being Open

People avoid disclosing themselves in many ways. One way is through humor. When feeling pressed or uncomfortable by a question, some people respond by making a joke. This helps them to take the tension off their area of discomfort without being embarrassed. “Sure my wife knows I love her. I kissed her two weeks ago.”

When some people feel uneasy about exposing their feelings, they may shift the discussion to talk about other people. They may cite an example on the subject, either from the Bible or from people they know. This example can often focus on the negative performance of someone else. “That’s the treatment I always get from Jane . . . .”

Still another way to avoid uncovering inner needs is to change the subject. “Speaking of trusting God with our future, I’ve always wondered—will we know each other in Heaven?”

Not saying anything also avoids answering difficult questions. Just silence. Long, uncomfortable silence.

This can be especially unnerving to a group leader who is trying to keep the discussion on track. The leader often finds it awkward to continue to restate the question or redirect discussion onto the subject matter, but it must be done.

## Relationship Building Exercise

The guarded responses that people give at the beginning stage of a small group are normal. For the first weeks, or even months, leaders may encounter a resistance to questions that require transparency. But you can take steps to encourage openness.

To help her group to open up to one another, one group leader set aside time each week to do a relationship building game or group exercise. This included using non-threatening approaches to help others open up. Some examples are:

### 1. Two Truths and a Lie

Ask each group member to write down his or her answers to three questions. On two of the answers, they are to tell the truth, and on the other question, they should tell a believable lie.

The questions might be:

- ☞ “What was your favorite game when you were a child?”
- ☞ “What is your favorite television program now?”
- ☞ “Where would you most like to go on a vacation?”

As each group member shares his or her answers, the group tries to guess which one is the lie.

### 2. Sometimes I Feel This Way

Give each group member a lump of clay or pipe cleaner, and ask them to shape it to show how they feel about their relationship with God. After group members have finished shaping their answers, ask them to explain what they have made and what it indicates.

### 3. Play a Game

You may want to play a party game or do an outdoor activity together to build better relationships. This often helps group members because, many times, they only see one another when in your group discussion meeting. By sharing food together and doing a fun activity, they can develop a more well-rounded appreciation for one another.

## Your Example of Trust

Perhaps the most fundamental way to encourage people to trust you is by first trusting them. As leader, you can do this by revealing your feelings, problems, and hopes to your group. This can be done over a period of time through the natural course of group discussions.

When asking a question that requires self-disclosure, you can lead the discussion by answering first. Your example should encourage some of the others in your group to follow. Your candid answers pave the way for greater trust within your group. Along with this candor, you may wish to explain to group members that they should be sensitive to what others say and reveal in your meetings. Many comments may not be appropriate for members to share outside of the context of your group meeting.

An important “don’t” in the process of developing trust is—don’t talk about other people, especially in derogatory ways. It is harder for people who have strong opinions about people and issues to develop trust with other people. When a leader speaks negatively about someone else, group members will probably begin to wonder, “What does he or she say about me when I’m not around?” This creates a barrier to an open, trusting relationship.

Your loving and concerned attitude towards others will not only help members of your group to feel comfortable with you and each other, but also will set an example for their conversations.

### **Minister Outside the Meeting**

Successful group leaders also are active in ministering to members’ needs outside of the group meeting. You could help someone with a project, meet for prayer and support, or have group members in your home individually. All of these activities open channels of trust and enable a group leader to increasingly minister to the group.

An important consideration is when to ask your pastor to be involved in meeting a special need. People in your group may reveal personal concerns that you feel ill equipped to meet. When you need assistance in dealing with a member’s problem, it is often best to just ask the person, “Do you mind if I talk to our pastor about this?” Being open with people in this way continues to contribute to a strong trust relationship.

### **Summary**

Small discussion groups often begin by sharing information and not inner feelings. A small group should grow into a warm, open fellowship where people feel comfortable revealing their triumphs and failures as they grow in Christ. As a group leader, you can encourage openness by being open yourself and providing activities for your group that promote trust. You can promote trust by trusting your group with information about yourself and by ministering to members outside of the group meeting.

The rewards of a trusting relationship are the spiritual strides made by the group members because they were able to get beyond surface conversation and trust others to help them grow.






### **How to Squash Enthusiasm in Your Group**

Maintain a theoretical and intellectual atmosphere during your meetings. Lace your discussion with names like Barth, Schleiermacher, Tillich, and Kant. Never allow personal ideas or feelings to be shared.

Be sure to shape the opinions of your group members by quickly criticizing the actions and motives of other church members.

THINGS TO DO IN A LEADERS' MEETINGS

-  Locate and discuss biblical examples of things that were said and done that promoted trust or were a barrier to a trusting relationship.
-  Discuss what to do when someone in a group is too open, revealing embarrassing information about themselves that makes others feel uncomfortable.
-  Discuss what you plan to do to promote a more trusting relationship in your group.



# Vary the Format



The adult class turned to the Acts account of the apostles' arrest for preaching Christ. As they settled in for the Sunday morning lesson, a policeman in full uniform clipped into the room. He strode solemnly to the front, presented an arrest warrant, handcuffed the teacher, and led him away.

"Would someone please take over?" asked the teacher shakenly as he was taken out. "I don't know when I'll be back."

The teacher had set up this event with a friend to illustrate what it would be like to witness sudden arrest and imprisonment as the apostle's had. The variation from the

usual class format was an effective way to capture the members' interest.

As the group leader, your main task is to involve your group in interaction, sharing, and discussion of the Bible study material. These stimulating times will keep your group highly motivated. Even so, it is a good idea to add variety to your meeting.

Try to incorporate at least one of the following ideas every month to further amplify the subject you are studying.

## Visual Aids

Many concepts in the Scriptures are illustrated by everyday items. Jesus often referred to His surroundings as an illustration of some spiritual truth. Evidently, many times, these items were within view as He was speaking. We are told in Matthew 18 that Jesus brought a little child and set him in the midst of the disciples and told them they were to be like this little child.

You, too, can use visual aids to help further people's understanding of the Bible. Pictures are helpful, but bringing in an actual item will impress the concept on people's minds more deeply. Here are some ideas that may help stimulate your thinking.

- ☞ Light a candle and put it in the middle of the group as an illustration of Matthew 5:16
- ☞ Bring a model ship and point out the size of the rudder and how it is like the tongue (James 3:4,5)
- ☞ Put a piece of chocolate and a piece of clay under a lamp and leave them for a few minutes to illustrate two reactions—both the hardening and the softening—when people are exposed to the light of the gospel.

- ☞ Christians are likened to plants in the Scriptures. Bring a plant and put it in the middle of the group and ask the group how they are like the plant.
- ☞ Lego building blocks or Tinker Toys can be used to illustrate the body being fitly joined together (Ephesians 4:16)

Use your imagination, and undoubtedly you will come up with several visual aids you can use.

### **Role Playing**

Role playing is arranged by asking members of the group to act out different roles in a situation which you describe. Then, without any script, they play the parts assigned to them. For instance, you may ask one person in the group to take the role of a parent and another the role of a 12-year-old boy who has just broken a window while playing ball.

The value of role playing isn't in the acting, but in the insight gained from seeing the situation and discussing what is seen. If people see a real situation where a parent is handling a child unwisely, they probably won't say anything about it. But in a role-playing situation, they'll voice their opinions because it's only "acting." A great deal can be discovered in these situations. Like a mirror, role playing will show people what they're like in a way that they're unable to see without help.

Role playing is also a good way to get some of the quieter members involved in a more active situation. It's amazing how often a person who is normally very quiet will do a good job acting and be rather expressive. However, be sure not to pressure anyone into the situation. It's a good idea to call people you would like to be in a role-playing situation a day or two in advance, tell them what you have in mind, and ask them to participate.

### **Problem Solving**

Many problems that people face in life are not easy to handle. Often, the Scriptures don't seem to have a great deal to say about these situations, and they may not be addressed in your Bible study series. Generally, these are problems that people would like to avoid, but are forced to encounter from time to time.

A friend of a woman in one small group was raped the previous week. This opened the door to a discussion about the whole issue. How to take some preventive measures, how to relate to the person just raped, and God's protective care were all discussed.

There are many kinds of problems for which you can have a problem-solving session. "What to do when you are fired." "What to do about teenage drug usage." "What to do if your boss tells you to record deceptive figures on some form." "What to do if your honest day's work will create problems for everyone else at your job." "What to say to a friend whose loved one has just committed suicide."

Sometimes in a problem-solving session, you can divide your group into two or three smaller groups and ask them to discuss the problem for ten minutes and report their proposed solutions.

## Special Reports

Many times, members of your group will sense that a topic has not been discussed in enough depth or that they haven't arrived at a good conclusion. One way of handling this situation is to have a special report. This may be done by one member of the group or by someone outside the group.

Whenever you have a special report, tell the person reporting how long to take in their presentation. Then, allow an appropriate time for questions and answers.

As mentioned before, a good idea for scheduling special reports is to assign them as the last item of the meeting. If you put a report at the beginning, it will tend to drag into the rest of the schedule and keep you from accomplishing some of your other important goals.

## Debates

Many people fear the concept of debate because they equate it with heated arguments. A debate is not an argument. It's a presentation of two sides of an issue.

For Christians, many issues don't have two sides. We believe the Bible, and that settles many matters for us. This doesn't mean there are issues that concern us as Christians that can't be debated profitably.

To have a successful debate, you must have good organization. First, find two people who would like to present the two sides of the issue. Then, organize your time similar to the schedule below:

Schedule	Minutes
Presentation of first side	5–10
Questions for clarification only	2–4
Presentation of second side	5–10
Questions for clarification only	2–4
Rebuttal from first side	3–6
Rebuttal from second side	3–6
Questions from floor to both	5–10

Don't expect to arrive at a unified conclusion. That isn't the purpose of a debate. A debate is for the presentation of information and conclusions that may not have been previously considered.

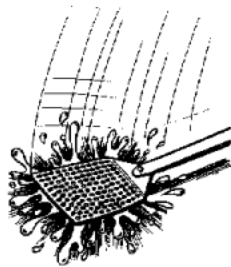
As you use these ways to vary the format of your group, remember that discussion should continue as the normal plan, and you shouldn't have so many varieties that you lose the benefits of this constant interaction.

Note: For your next leaders' meeting, bring a visual aid to illustrate your group's current topic of study.

## Summary

Use some of the following ideas to help add variety to your small group format:

- ☞ Visual aids
- ☞ Role playing
- ☞ Problem solving
- ☞ Special reports
- ☞ Debates



## How to Squash Enthusiasm in Your Group

Never add variety. It takes too much time and effort to develop new ideas. Nobody appreciates it anyhow.

Hold a business session each week, carefully following established rules of order.

Resist any attempts to use the ideas of others. This is easily done by assigning a committee to investigate them thoroughly.

### THINGS TO DO IN A LEADERS' MEETING

- ✎ Have everyone share their visual aid.
- ✎ Choose one of the other ideas in this chapter and report a plan to use it to vary the format of your next group meeting.

# Occoquan Bible Church

*The purpose of Occoquan Bible Church is to develop a faith community where we are taught the Word of God and encouraged to obey it, so we may be transformed into the image of Christ. (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 4:11-16)*

We believe the Church is an elect company of believers baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body; its mission is to witness concerning its Head, Jesus Christ, preaching the gospel among all nations. We believe in the autonomy of this local church with Biblically designated officers who serve under Christ as elders, also called bishops and pastors and they lead and direct as servants of Christ, with the congregation submitting to the leadership. [Titus 1:5-9; Ephesians 4:11; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-5; 1 Timothy 3:1-17; 1 Timothy 5:17-22; Hebrews 3:7, 17]

We believe the purpose of the church is to glorify God. We do this by edification which involves building one another up in the faith, by instructing in the Word of God, and bringing every believer to maturity in Jesus Christ; by evangelism to advance and communicate the gospel of Christ to the entire world; by discipleship [Matt. 28:19, 20];

by devoting mutual accountability of all believers to each other; by discipline of sinning members of the congregation in accord with Biblical standards [Matt. 18:5-14]; by fellowship [Acts 2:42,47; 1 John 1:3]; by prayer and by keeping the ordinances.

We believe that water baptism and the Lord's table are two ordinances to be observed by the church today. While neither add to or in any way aid an individual in meriting salvation, both should be seen as a necessary expression of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in someone's life. Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water symbolizing the believer's death to sin with Christ, burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in the newness of life [Romans 6:1-4; Matt. 28:19-20].