

Teaching Truth Through Discussion

Pooling ignorance is not our goal!

What are some ways discussions can become hampered, unproductive or worse?

IS DISCUSSION BIBLICAL?

- Jesus engaged in the give-and-take of questions and answers.
- Paul lectured and the Jews in Berea “examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” -Acts 17:11 This was their “discussion section” after the lecture.
- The early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Acts 2:42 They probably mostly listened in silence during the apostles’ messages. But there must have been much discussion in the other activities—not just “Pass the matzah.”

Discussion is the normal process of intellectual digestion. It is our way of assimilating and deploying information we have been exposed to.

Our goal is that Christians will not only be regular hearers, but also active believers, doers and speakers of the word.

Discussion helps them take those steps mentally and verbally and relationally and practically.

Discussion is how people move from idea to life.

GOOD DISCUSSION:

-Prepare in Advance.

Clarify your goals.

What do you want the group to Know, to Feel and to Do?

Plan your questions.

Give out guiding questions early so members can prepare.

-Lead the Discussion Toward the Goals.

Begin with content questions, observation questions, “What does it say?”

Progress toward thinking and judgment questions, “What does it mean?” How does it compare with X” or “relate to Y?”

Watch and listen for understanding and progress. Ask follow-up questions to keep people pressing ahead.

From Colin Marshall, *Growth Groups*:
FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

- Extending: What can you add to that? Could you explain that more fully?
- Clarifying: What do you mean by that? Could you re-phrase that?
- Justifying: What reason can you give for that? Can you explain that from this passage?
- Redirecting: What do others think? Mary, what do you think?
- Reflecting: What I think you’re saying is . . . Is that right?

Don’t be content with facts only or feelings only. Discipleship requires all faculties to be engaged and integrated!

-Summarize the Discussion.

Make little NOTES of contributions to jog your memory.

Summarize the actual GROUP conclusions, not just the goals you had.

Ask people what they LEARNED.
Summarize QUESTIONS raised by the discussion. Will it be profitable to pursue any of these topics together in the future? How will you do that??

WHAT IF THE GROUP IS WRONG?

Don't fire the baker because he made batter instead of a cake! The cake might still be coming!

Maybe people need time to find out why a misstep is wrong. Don't interrupt their learning before they have the chance to think for themselves about it.

If you put yourself in the role of the parent or policeman, then discussion will be killed. Everyone will wait for you to lecture because it's too risky to proceed with trial-and-error learning while you are ready to pounce.

Listen and think! You might actually learn something too! Don't correct people before you understand very, very well.

Use your follow-up questions rather than correction. This keeps discussion and tension going.

Ask people to read or remember another passage of Scripture and compare it with their wrong idea.

Challenge people to think!!!

Your plans and goals for the session may go out the window at this point because a different learning opportunity has surfaced.

But don't throw away your plan everytime the group gets sidetracked. There is a time to just say "Let's come back to our passage. Jeff, can you tell us what the author might have meant when he said . . ."

Maybe this discussion will end up just raising a question which you will come back to in another study.

Some disagreements can be accepted and need not be resolved for the sake of discipleship. Some will need to be resolved later. Others might be left indefinitely.

BAD DISCUSSION:

Let's list some of the ways we can accidentally sabotage learning and discussion.

- *Environmental/setup issues:*
Answering machine volume
Light that turns off at 9:00 P.M.
- *Answer your own questions*
- *Keeping control*
- *Not listening*
- *Filling the silence*
- *Over-general questions: "Does anybody else have anything to say?"*
- *A quizzical facial expression—which looks like something is bothering you.*
- *Evaluating and judging people's answers.*