

Principles for Leading Community Groups Discussions

1. Remove distractions

Make sure phones, kids, animals are removed. Create a safe, comfortable and distraction free environment.

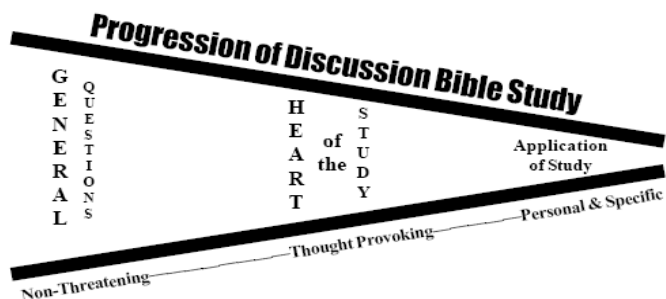
2. Begin with the end in mind.

You need an aim. There should be a few key points to the entire discussion. If you cannot state the lesson aim in a few sentences, then rework and refocus the aim until you can. As the leader, YOU need to create questions that will lead your group into a discussion of the main point of the study material and how scripture addresses the questions & answers given.

3. Initiate discussion by asking general questions → progress towards personal & specific.

General ice-breaking questions are a great first step. Ask general questions with no right or wrong answers, and tell the group that there is no wrong answer. Try to ask general questions that will transition toward the desired end. Overall the group time should move from general and non-threatening questions to more personal and specific questions that lead to application of the study. The goal for you as the leader/facilitator is to ask great questions and create a safe environment for them to answer. If they answer dead wrong, then be patient and ask the group to look together at what God's word has to say about validating that answer. Practice your questions on your wife for feedback before your group starts.

Example of questions flowing from General (Non-threatening) to Personal & specific:



1. **What does our world think about divorce?**

(General open ended questions. No incorrect answers, get discussion going)

2. **What do you think about divorce?**

(No incorrect answers, get people to reveal their thoughts)

3. **In light of what God's word says about divorce, how does that apply to you?**

(Focus on what God's word SAYS → MEANS → APPLYS.)

4. Anticipate answers – avoid rabbit trails/identify the tips of the iceberg.

Direct discussion towards the aim by being prepared for answers to open-ended questions. As you prepare the lesson, jot down possible answers to *each* question. Be prepared for the rabbit trails that could emerge and be willing to re-direct the direction in a sensitive way. In the same way, be sensitive to the leading of God's Spirit and if the agenda is going to be changed, do so intentionally because you are affirmed that you uncovered the tip of an iceberg. The tip of an iceberg is when something is discovered with a group member that temporarily trumps the pre-set agenda and becomes a Spirit-led opportunity to address an issue. Only the group leader can determine the difference between a rabbit trail & the tip of an iceberg.

5. Affirm answers & questions then ask for more.

Affirm answers, then ask others to give their thoughts until everyone has responded. When people ask questions, affirm it as a great question and DON'T always be the first to answer, ask the group what they think. Some may never answer, so be discerning when to move on.

6. Don't fear silence. Restate questions in different terms.

Don't offer an answer immediately after you ask a question if no one is responding. Give people time to think. Be willing to wait... and then perhaps rephrase the question in a different way. Run your questions by your wife/friend before your group time to make sure they are relevant, engaging & non-threatening. DON'T be the first to answer your own questions! It will communicate to everyone you're the expert and don't want any input.

7. Dig Into the Text – Search for Truth – Avoid relativism

Your group wants to share thoughts, enjoy fellowship, and grow closer. But, they also want to learn. They *want* to go deeper. Your task as group leader is not to focus on *telling* people what the Bible says, it is to help them *discover* what the Bible says. This is done by guiding them to think through the text and gently leading, suggesting and questioning. If an answer is given that is dead wrong, ask the group to search the scriptures together for the TRUTH. Gently help them understand that scripture only has ONE correct interpretation. Avoid Relativism – the thought that different & opposing interpretations can both be correct. "What it means to me" does not mean that their interpretation is correct.

8. One Hour or Less – Be sensitive to the time and don't forget to pray

A small group discussion should last about 1 hour. Let your group know what the covering the next time you meet. This will allow them to anticipate the meeting and even read over the passages. At the end, spend time praying that God's Spirit would help us to apply what we have learned by obeying his commands and having faith in his promises.

Always use this formula when leading discussion to a conclusion of application.

1. What does scripture say?

OBSERVE

2. What does it mean?

INTERPRET

3. How does it apply?

APPLY