

Ten Tips for Facilitating Small Groups

“The facilitator does not make a discussion good;
he or she makes a good discussion possible.”

- Sarah Christmyer

1. **Pray for the Holy Spirit’s presence as you prepare and lead the session. We are aiding the Spirit for conversion—to help people *to encounter Jesus, form them, and send them as missionary disciples.***
2. **Be well-prepared:**
 - a. Take time to review the entire session: what are the main themes, the relevant discussion questions, the necessary breaks?
 - b. Take the materials to heart: how does this affect you personally?
 - c. Consider real life examples and ask yourself, “What difference should this make in our lives?”
 - d. Know your goals for the session.
3. **Welcome and Hospitality:**
 - a. Set a space that is comfortable, convenient, and sacred.
 - b. Create a safe atmosphere of respect and trust through confidentiality, attentive listening, and authenticity.
 - c. Be enthusiastic about the participants and the material.
 - d. Begin and finish on time.
4. **Affirm and Encourage:**
 - a. Welcome each person, by name, every time—without partiality.
 - b. Thank and validate every comment.
 - c. Never shame, ridicule, judge, or use sarcasm.
 - d. Never put a participant on the spot (always allow for a “pass”).
 - e. Be attentive to the needs of each person and the group.
5. **Facilitate, but don’t Lecture:**
 - a. Guide the conversation and keep it on track (use good judgment and remain open to the Spirit).
 - b. Try a variety of ways to start the conversation.
 - c. Value shared participation—be sure everyone has the opportunity to share and refuse to be the *one* with all the answers: “What does the group think of this?” “I’ll check and get back to you next time.” “That’s interesting.”
 - d. Be sure no one dominates the conversation: “Thanks for your comments, but we have a lot of material to cover and need to keep moving.”
 - e. Clarify questions or statements: “Is this what I heard you say?”
 - f. Be sure you are leading a conversation, not acting like the leader is greater than the participants.

6. Ask open-ended questions:

- a. Use “What?” and “How?” questions, not “Have you?” or “Do you?”
- b. How did you feel when...? What would you do if...?
- c. What were the highs/lows of the day?
- d. What are your concerns?
- e. How did the content presented speak to you?
- f. What questions do you have?
- g. How does this content relate to your life experiences?
- h. What action is God calling you to take?
- i. What one idea will you take home?

7. “Listen with the ear of your heart”

- a. Compassionate listening: look for the real message.
- b. “Be quick to hear, slow to speak.” (James 1:19).
- c. Always look for their personal story.
- d. Avoid always sharing your story/opinion.
- e. Be comfortable with silence (silently count to ten or say a “Hail Mary,” creating space for silence and sharing). Silence does not mean boredom or disinterest.

8. Accompany/love your participants:

- a. Show genuine concern.
- b. Check in on them one-on-one, when doable.
- c. Walk with them in their current life experiences.
- d. Accept them for who they are, including their opinions.
- e. Do not accept disrespectful behavior.

9. Be patient with yourself and others:

- a. Belonging/trust takes time.
- b. Sharing starts slow.
- c. Some sessions may be great, others may be marginal—it’s okay!
- d. Do not be frustrated if you don’t get through all the material—stay focused on the main message.
- e. Continually seek the Spirit’s guidance.

10. Enjoy this ministry and share your Joy!

