

# Life Groups Leadership Training

## 04 How To Lead Engaging Discussion

Welcome to how to lead engaging discussions. Jesus was the greatest teacher our world has ever known and he regularly asked questions. In fact the Bible records more than 300. His questions were provocative, they cut to a deeper level of understanding. Just quickly, let's look at a few of them.

One of the things he asked was, **Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life. Why do you break the command of God, for the sake of your tradition? Who do you say that I am?** He also said why are you so slow to listen? which I kind of feel like Jesus asked me every day.

No doubt questions are powerful. **Proverbs 25** says this, the purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but he who is insight draws them out. And one of the best ways to go deep and to get personal is to ask a question.

So let's move quickly through a bunch of ideas to help you ask better questions. This isn't the kind of list that you're supposed to memorize and read. My goal is that you would walk away with two or three ideas that you might apply to your group time.

**So the first one is this, believe that questions are more powerful than answers.** You see your group does it need more lecture, it needs more conversation, and these come from great questions.

If you only ask questions so that you can follow up with your answers, well, I think that you're missing the point.

Next, before your group meets, **define the goal for that night's conversation.** In our last video we talked about the importance of preparing for your group time and now I'd like to get just a little bit more specific.

You see a group conversation can take on a life of its own and this is a good thing. However you need to be able to bring the conversation back to the topic. But without a clear goal, this is more like herding cats. Ideally, you need to be able to summarize the meetings' goal in a sentence or two. Your curriculum may have one and that's great. And you might want to adjust it, that's great too.

But just as an example, your goal for the evening might be forgiveness isn't something we do once but many times. And the deeper the hurt, the more times we'll need to forgive. So if that's your focus, your conversation might wander into different topics that are all related to forgiveness.

Conversation might wander into how withholding forgiveness hurts us, or you might be talking about forgiving others is not the same as trusting them. All of these things have to do with forgiveness, but they don't really relate to your goal for the evening. When you have a clear goal you can focus the conversation. You will have some meetings that won't reach your goal of course and this is okay, but my suggestion is that you would make this the exception rather than the rule.

**Next is to be ready to really listen and learn.** See Paul wrote something very interesting in Romans, he said that you and I might be mutually encouraged by our faith. You see, Paul was expecting a bunch of people who he didn't even know to have an impact on his faith.

And so even though you are leading your group, you can still learn from them. And not only will God speak to you through the people in your group but you will become a better listener.

The next tip is that you would address the **over talkers**, and this is a tough one. And my encouragement to you is that you wouldn't let one person dominate your group time. This can ruin the experience for the other people in your group.

So if you do have an over talker. Start out gentle! Often they're unaware of what they're doing and they will appreciate the feedback.

Consider beginning a question something like this. Hey, let's hear from someone who hasn't shared yet. Now if the over talker persists, if they don't get the hint, you need to talk to them one on one. Still be gentle, but you also need to speak the truth in love. This can be difficult but remember it's for the good of your group.

You might say something like, I appreciate all the sharing that you do, but maybe you can consider pulling back just a little bit so you can give other people a chance. Now if the over talker keeps dominating conversation, you're going to need to say something during the group time while it's happening. This is not easy but it is necessary.

**Next, be ready to rephrase your question.** Sometimes a question will make perfect sense to you, but not anyone else in your group. And this is when you need to be able to say the same thing in a slightly different way. You might have a great question but you just need to tune it slightly so that everyone else can get it.

My next encouragement to you is **to challenge common assumptions** and this is a tough one. Fair warning, because it takes a serious reflection upfront, but when you're prepping for your lesson, ask yourself, **What are some common assumptions about this topic that need to be challenged.**

You know, for example, Jesus says to turn the other cheek. But does this mean that we should let other people take advantage of us? Here's another one, when I'm talking to a close friend and, and I'm trying to share my struggles with other people, how can I do that without it being gossip.

The next one is that you would **be comfortable with silence.** Discussions will have silence and it will be tough, you will be tempted to fill the silence. Trust me I know, I understand, but I strongly suggest you don't. You see, if you fill the silence once your group will be ready for you to do it again. And the conversation will come to a halt.

The next tip is that **you wouldn't answer your questions.** I know this can be a tough one, but as a group leader, it's okay to move on to another question without you offering your own answer.

This might be mind boggling, but just try it a couple times and see how it goes. Consider making it a goal to speak as little as possible. Facilitate the conversation don't dominate it.

The next tip I have for you is that **you wouldn't settle for the first answer.** *(Do acknowledge and affirm the person that spoke)* You see this is a good way to get everyone involved after you ask a question and one person answers it. Don't quickly move on to the next one, even if they have the right answer.

Instead, you might say something like **well, does anyone else have something to add?** Or how would you say that in your own words.

Finally the last tip is this, **that you would avoid closed questions.** You see, closed questions typically have one word answers.

Here's a couple of examples. Does Jesus want us to forgive? Well, yes. What verb did Paul use in verse seven? Do you get angry? It's usually a bad idea to ask close questions because they can shut down the discussion.

However there are some times that they can be very powerful, and especially when they set up a second question. So you might ask, Does Jesus want us to forgive other people? Well that's a closed question, yes. Well why is forgiving others so difficult? Why is it so difficult to offer forgiveness when they are not ready to accept it?

You see a closed question can be good also when you're trying to focus the conversation. When the group is discussing an issue and there's not a consensus, you can ask a closed question to get everyone to pick a side, and then you can follow up with why.

**So here are the 10 tips.**

- 1. Questions are more powerful than answers.**
- 2. Define the goal for the group's conversation time**
- 3. Come prepared to listen & learn from others.**
- 4. Be willing to address the over talker.**
- 5. Be willing to rephrase your questions.**
- 6. Be willing to challenge common assumptions.**
- 7. Be comfortable with silence**
- 8. Be willing to not answer your own questions.**
- 9. Don't settle for the first answer.**
- 10. Avoid closed questions.**

I know this was a lot of content but I hope they will help you. My encouragement is that you take a little bit of time, and you review your notes, identify two or three things that you might try the next time you lead your group.

Now you don't want to miss our next video because we're going to talk about how to build deeper relationships.