

## *Facilitating Group Discussions*

### **Basic Bible Study Steps:**

Always begin Bible study in prayer. We need God's help to understand His Word!

#### **1. Observation – What does it say?**

Read your passage several times, including the surrounding text for context. Ask questions of the text:

- Are certain words/phrases/ideas repeated?
- What attributes of God are being highlighted or illustrated?
- Does the text make several points in a row?
- What is the flow of the passage? Is there an assertion being made? A contrast being drawn? A principle being illustrated? A pattern being established (or continued)? A response being encouraged?
- How are the sentences connected?
- Are there words you don't understand? (Look them up)
- Are there key transition words? (If/then, therefore, likewise, but, because, in the same way)

*My Observations of Philippians 4:10-19:*

#### **2. Interpretation – What does it mean?**

What is the main idea of the passage? Write a summary sentence or two that conveys the main idea or theme. Next, examine how your passage relates to Jesus. What does it tell us about Jesus and the gospel?

*My Interpretation of Philippians 4:10-19:*

#### **3. Application – How should it change me?**

To arrive at application, it is helpful to ask these questions:

- What does this passage teach me about the Triune God?
- How does this aspect of God's character change my view of self?
- Are there any principles in the passage that are true for all people at all times? How does this principle relate to my life right now?
- What should I believe, feel or do in response? Be specific and personal.

*My Application of Philippians 4:10-10:*

### **What is the role of a Bible Study Group Leader?**

- To enable each group to have a beneficial and complete discussion of the material each week.
- To encourage each woman to participate as she is able.
- To create a safe environment for group members to share.
- To redirect groups if discussion gets off-track or does not echo biblical truths and principles.

### **Tips for Being a Great Facilitator**

- Be yourself!
- You are the leader, not the teacher.
- The leader sets the tone. Often for a group to grow in transparency or depth, the leader must model it.
- Don't always answer your own questions.
- Come to Bible study prepared and ready to facilitate.
- Pray for the members of your group each week.
- Don't feel like you have to be the expert or have all of the answers.

### **Tips for Facilitating a Great Discussion**

- Steer the discussion away from theological debates and other topics that distract from the main point of the text.
- Use eye contact to help direct the group.
- Don't let one person monopolize discussion time. Our primary purpose during discussion time is to discuss the Bible passage for the week.
- Trust the Lord with the results.

### **Time Management**

- Let the text be the main focus of your time.
- Start your discussion on time.
- Move through the questions intentionally so as to get through the lesson each week.
- Map out which questions you definitely want to get through and how long you will spend on them.
- Stick to your schedule.
- End the study on time.

### **Respect the SILENCE!**

- Don't be afraid of silence. Silence almost always seems longer to the facilitator than to others.
- Give women time to think.
- Consider following the "30 Second Rule."

## *What Can I Do If...?*

### **1. Someone is monopolizing the discussion time:**

- Remind everyone in the group that equal participation is beneficial for all.
- Sit next to someone who has a tendency to do this.
- Avoid making eye contact with this individual when you ask questions. People are naturally more apt to answer a question if you look directly at them while asking the question.
- If it's happening regularly, talk to them outside of group. Consider asking them to partner with you in ensuring that everyone participates equally. You may also ask her to come prepared ahead of time with several questions that she knows she wants to talk about. Perhaps point out that her input is valuable but may get lost when she is giving input to every question.
- If it's happening because a woman has something on her mind or heart: stop and pray for her with the group and consider connecting with her outside of the group meeting time.

### **2. Someone gives an answer that is not Biblical or is wrong?**

- Be discerning. Not all errors need to be corrected. However, blatant "wrong answers" need to be addressed. We don't want anyone to be led astray and we don't want to allow false teaching or doctrine. We also don't want the group to feel uncomfortable by the wrong answer and thus distracted from the study of truth.
- Always be gentle and respectful.
- Avoid directly pointing out the error. This can be humiliating, embarrassing, and uncomfortable for everyone.
- Casually turn it over to the group by asking, "What do others think?" or "Does everyone agree?" or "Did anyone see anything different here?"
- Turn it back to the text by asking, "What does our passage say?" or "How does this fit with Scripture?" or "Where did you see that?"
- Keep the correction as brief and gracious as possible.
- If necessary, make time to talk to the individual after Bible study for further discussion.

### **3. Someone does not participate in the discussion?**

- Call on her by name. You will want to limit this to questions that are likely to have short answers or obvious answers that won't put her on the spot.
- Make eye contact with her as you ask a question.
- Encourage her to speak out at the beginning of discussion time. It gets harder to speak up as time progresses.
- Consider speaking to her outside of Bible study time. Ask her what you might do to help her feel comfortable participating. Encourage her that the group as a whole will benefit from hearing her answers. Often, the most reflective individuals are the quietest individuals, and she mostly likely has some excellent insights to share with the group.

#### **4. Someone regularly leads us on tangents?**

- This person habitually gets the group off track by making unrelated or seemingly random comments.
- Remember that she may not realize her comments are off track. She may just be someone who easily relates information to whatever is on her mind.
- Don't let her continually distract the group. Be quick to direct the group back to the question you are looking at or the Scripture you are discussing.
- Try not to show any exasperation or frustration. Stay neutral and be loving. If this is a regular problem, and it's impacting the way you feel about this person, do make an effort to pray regularly that God will soften your heart for this individual.

#### **5. Someone tends to make insensitive remarks?**

- This person may give unsolicited advice, cut others off, make offensive or inflammatory comments, etc. By God's grace, these individuals seem to be few and far between in our women's Bible study, but we may encounter them at times. We will likely more often encounter individual moments where insensitivity occurs.
- Remind everyone of the guidelines again, emphasizing the need for discussion groups to be a safe place for all to share.
- Be prayerful! Ask the Lord to show this woman the unkindness of her words and to change her heart.
- If you are comfortable, you may need to address the situation with the individual outside of the group. Lovingly and graciously point her to Christ.

#### **6. Someone is visibly upset?**

- Don't ignore the emotion. If a woman is in tears or otherwise visibly upset, do address it within the group. Give her the opportunity to share what is upsetting her.
- However, don't let her emotion sidetrack the entire morning. Let her share, and then lead the group in praying for her. Remember to address her pain again during ending prayer time.
- Allow the Word of God to minister to her. Once her emotion has been acknowledged and prayed over, continue with the lesson. Remember that the Lord knows her pain fully and knows exactly what she needs to hear. He most often speaks to us from His Word.
- If necessary, you can ask someone to step outside of the room with her to attend to her needs. This could be your co-leader or someone you know is close to her.

## *Resources for Small Group Facilitators*

[www.knowableword.com](http://www.knowableword.com). This website is a fantastic resource for Bible study leaders, Bible study participants, and for personal Bible study.

<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/top-commentaries-on-every-book-of-the-bible/>  
<http://bestcommentaries.com/>. Words of caution: commentaries should be used only after we've done our own Bible study. We learn so much more when we discover for ourselves what the Bible says. Commentaries can be useful for difficult passages or for learning context. Do not get lost in details or arguments sometimes addressed in commentaries. Ensure that any commentary you use is theologically sound. These websites are helpful to that end.

*The Ultimate Road Trip: A Guide to Leading Small Groups*. CruPress. This is a Campus Crusade for Christ and while a little cheesy in parts, a great resource for small group leaders.

*Growth Groups: A Training Course in How to Lead Small Groups* by Colin Marshall, Matthias Media.

*Side By Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love* by Edward T. Welch, Crossway. This very readable book provides practical guidance for loving others well.

*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, Zondervan. A guide on how to study the various genres found in the Bible.

*Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church* by Michael Lawrence, Crossway.