

# Tips for Facilitating a Group Discussion

Practical advice for working toward life-change, not spectacular meetings

Carter Moss

or many small-group leaders, one of the more intimidating things we do is facilitating a group discussion. Very few of us feel like we'll have all the right answers, or that we can handle whatever curve balls will be thrown our way (and there will be some!). To make matters worse, it's even challenging to gauge whether we're doing a good job or not.

But here's the good news: that's not what facilitating a group discussion is really about. We don't have to have all of the right answers. We don't have to lead the perfect discussion every time. We don't even have to get through all of the material in each meeting!

When we're facilitating in our small group, our main goal is to create discussion. We want to challenge people to think about the topic at hand, and to create a safe environment for people to share their thoughts—to help everyone feel valued about the input they've offered.

That's all we've got to do. Thankfully, there are some established practices and principles that can help us accomplish those goals.

## *Asking Good Questions*

One of the most important skills in small-group facilitation is not having all of the right answers, but asking the right questions. Here are a few secrets to good question-asking:

- **Ask open-ended questions.** Avoid the yes/no, true/false, multiple-choice questions—"Is Jesus the sheep or the shepherd in this parable?" Similarly, avoid questions that let people off the hook with a simple Sunday-school answer—"Why did Jesus die on the cross?" You want to ask questions that require people to share some actual thoughts and feelings.
- **Ask follow-up questions.** Many people default to staying pretty surface-level with their answers to your questions, so get in the habit of not letting them off the hook. Ask more questions that follow up on their response. Here are some examples of good follow-up questions for the short/simple answers that people often give:
  - What makes you say that?
  - How do you feel about that?
  - How do you think that would've affected you if you had been living in the time of Jesus?
  - How would you explain your answer to a non-Christian friend or neighbor?