

Know the Gospel: Discussion skills

What skills do you think it takes to facilitate a discussion about a passage of the Bible? There are probably a solid dozen you could list out without much reflection. That's because a lot of the skills you use when leading a discussion are things called soft skills, or people skills, which are scores of tiny little skills like not talking too loudly, using body language effectively, monitoring the tone of a room, relating to different people differently, etc. There's really a lot going on when people talk in a group setting. In addition to those soft skills we could list out skills that are unique to studying the Bible, like knowing how to cross-reference texts, proper exegesis of a passage, what to do when someone misinterprets the Bible, etc.

Thankfully, you're a person, so God has already given you people skills. You use them every day, both consciously and subconsciously, and those skills are far more powerful and trained than you're maybe even aware of. Leading a community group discussion gives you a chance to employ those skills in ways that lead people to God's word. Similarly, as a follower of Christ, God has already given you everything you need for life and godliness in his word. (2 Peter 1:3) Bringing others to God's word starts with you going to it yourself. God equips us to help others value him through his word when we take time ourselves to value God through his word.

Out of the dozens of skills we could focus on as community group leaders, here are five that I think are worth highlighting:

1. **Prepare.**

Preparing for your group discussion involves a prayerful heart and a preparatory mind. Before you meet, pray that the Lord would use your time together to the benefit of his people and to the advancement of his Kingdom, that simple things like circling up in a living room would have an eternal impact. Prepare by understanding the passage and thinking through the discussion questions. Read over the passage a couple of times before meeting, trying to gain a firm grasp of what the passage is saying, looking out for hard-to-understand concepts or phrases that people might get hung up on, and thinking through the implications the passage has on our lives. Take a look over the discussion questions that are provided each week, and consider how they would



work with the people in your group. Edit, reword, or add to the questions in order to help the discussion fit your people best.

2. **Lead people to the word.**

The goal of community groups isn't to come and listen to the leader's thoughts, ideas, and insights on life. The goal is go to God's word together, hear from it, and be changed. It's the leader's job to make sure that's what the group does.

3. **Ask good questions.**

Asking a good question is harder than it seems. A paragraph long explanation before asking a question will make people wonder where the question was. A question with big, Christian-y words could ostracize folks who don't have much background in the church. A yes or no question doesn't give any room for thoughtful discourse. Your group will learn over time how to handle the flow of conversation, but good questions early on in a group's life will teach your people how to go about a Bible study discussion. As your group ages, good questions will keep folks engaged and challenged, rather than serving up t-ball level answers. We'll go into more detail about questions and using the discussion guides effectively during Session 2: Know the Gospel.

4. **Exercise humility (and be quiet).**

The goal of community groups isn't for the leader to teach. That's a sermon. Those happen on Sundays. We gather in groups to go to God's word, and leaders help take people there through discussion by prioritizing the ideas, stories, and responses of group members. Being a CG leader doesn't make what you have to say more important than what others have to say. That doesn't mean you shouldn't ever contribute to the conversation with your own responses; doing this can help group members know that you're seeking to learn from the text just like they are. That also doesn't mean you shouldn't speak up when people make off comments. Taking all of that into account, one aspect of good leadership is prioritizing others over yourself, particularly by being quick to listen and slow to speak. (James 1:19)



5. Facilitate discussion.

“Facilitate” is a good catchall bucket for many of those soft skills we mentioned earlier. This includes everything that it takes to hold a thoughtful discussion as a group, like what to do when one person talks too much, how to draw out a quiet person, and how to wade into difficult topics. We can talk about theoretical situations like those, but most of the time you employ these skills on a case-by-case basis and you develop these skills through experience. Generally speaking, it’s best to lead your group in being extra gracious towards one another, to help people feel welcome and heard (even when they say weird things), and to think before you speak.

A Normal Group Meeting

Different groups run their gatherings differently. Some meet early afternoon on the weekends because they have kids, others meet on weekdays after work. Some groups eat dinner together every week, others don’t. However you structure your gathering, here are the important points:

1. **Gather everyone together** – Food works great for this, either a meal or just snacks/dessert, but that’s impractical for some groups. Anything that helps put people at ease, hangout, and talk to one another before discussion will get your gathering off on the right foot.
2. **Discuss scripture** – The goal here isn’t to check a box and “complete” discussion, but to meaningfully deal with scripture and talk about what it means for one’s life.
3. **Pray together** – Again, don’t make this a box to check. Look through the book of Acts and you’ll see believers praying together as if God himself was with them. That’s the goal.
4. **Leave space to hangout more afterwards** – This is especially helpful for folks who have questions or comments they weren’t comfortable mentioning during discussion.

Community group gatherings typically last anywhere from 1.5–3 hours, depending on the group. You’ll notice the above schedule allows for hangout time before and after discussion. This is crucial in helping your group get to know one another and feel comfortable sharing with each other. Like we’ll talk about in Sessions 4 and 5, the more time you spend growing closer in your friendships, the richer your discussion will become.

