

Session 2 How to Lead Spiritual Conversations, Best Practices and the Discussion Guide

- Review-
 - the mission- the great commission and small group evangelism and discipleship, making disciples who make disciples
 - the message- what is “the gospel”, from OT to NT- telling what the Lord has done, propositional, narrative and relational approaches to sharing it,
 - how to share your story and living into your next chapter- spiritual gifts

- How to lead spiritual conversations
- Before the conversation- some preliminary understandings...
 - A loving and accepting attitude
 - Understanding the priority of relationship
 - Understanding everyone’s story is unique, at different places in the journey
 - See handout on the parable of the sower
 - Understanding a desired environment is one of welcome, respect, friendliness, enthusiasm, trust, caring, acceptance, humor, informality, sensitivity and patience

- Before the conversation- some preliminary activities
 - Be familiar with the sermon of the week
 - Be familiar with the sermon based discussion guide-
 - Send out a mid-week email to invite/remind all the people who have attended small group before or call “audibles”
 - you can also include the pdf file attachment in case they would like to know the questions in advance
 - Work with the host home to be ready for small group with adequate seating available in a circular arrangement so that people can see the faces of everyone else in the group from their seat
 - no need for snacks but having water available is ok
 - Arrive 5-10 minutes early just to be ready to greet people as they enter

- The Conversation- Spirit-led steering through listening, sharing and asking questions
 - Let the discussion guide be the agenda
 - **Getting started question-** allows a brief introductory/catching up time that gets people on topic in their thinking
 - **Review the sermon-** the essence of the sermon is remembered and discussed and clarified. Each week, the group members may likely have heard two different sermons from different pastors using the same Bible text and sermon title, depending on which service they attended (8:15, 9:30 or 10:55). If there is only one or two people who heard a particular sermon in the group, try to be sensitive to them and draw out their participation in various ways.
 - Ask for open feedback on the sermon they did hear
 - Encourage responses to questions which reference particular verses on the page
 - **Personalize the message-** this section goes beyond remembering the sermon, but reflecting on it in as it pertains to them personally. What could this mean to them, for them etc... This section allows for more flexibility in terms of life sharing. Try to manage the time so that there is sufficient time to talk through these personal reflection points in how people may “take the message home” in their hearts.
 - **Apply the message-** this section now goes beyond the reflection of the personal meaning of the message and goes into the realm of the practical. How will the message make an impact this week, on their decisions, relationships, ways they spend their time, their money, what they will give their thoughts to during the week etc...
 - **Witness and prayer-** because God is good and the gospel is good news that is meant to be shared with the world, we live in an awareness that God wants us to share with others who He is, and who He is personally to us.
 - Some have called this a “great commission lifestyle” where we are being transparent and open about our Christian faith, and trusting the Holy Spirit to grant opportunities to share our faith in appropriate ways, times and places “in all gentleness and respect,” motivated by the love of God and His command to love our neighbor as ourself. Part of loving others means being available to them, praying for them.
 - Evangelism is “one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread” (D.T. Niles).
 - The time of sharing prayer requests can be for the practical or spiritual needs of people whom they know, or it may be for themselves as well. This is an opportunity to

show care for group members who may have shared needs or concerns earlier in the evening with the group, by praying for them at the end of the meeting and during the week as well. You may wish to have someone write down the requests so that they may be recalled in prayer at the end.

➤ Practical Tips for Conversation leaders

- Take an active role in steering evenly balanced participation across the group members that is fairly on topic and spiritually edifying to the group.
 - The leader's role occasionally involves personal sharing, but the primary role is not a teacher or participant but a facilitator of quality spiritual conversation and leader of caring for the spiritual needs of group members. Think of a balloon in the center of the circle, we want multiple people helping to keep the conversation (balloon) from being so still that it hits the floor.
 - In early parts of the meeting, be especially welcoming to new members and express desire to have broad based participation from group members. Over time, group members will understand this as a group goal and will help you pursue it. To prevent 1-2 people from monopolizing the group talk time here is one approach to take- try summarizing what they said and invite other members to add to the discussion or share their opinions.
 - Draw out quiet members if you can, but no one should be forced to share in discussion. It depends on the relationships present if nudging or encouraging participation from a particular person is a welcome gesture. If some are afraid they will say something wrong, as the leader, try to set a tone of openness to considering ideas. Look for the nonverbal cues that the person is thinking about saying something. You could say "you look as though you would like to add something..."
- Set appropriate boundaries for sharing, especially with new people present
 - Try to model in the sharing time friendly and encouraging and reflective comments that stay connected to the topic at hand. There is a measure of personal sharing and

vulnerability that is good and appropriate for a small group have. It can be what makes a group members feel close to one another through not just superficial sharing. But, there can be oversharing that later embarrasses people. Know that new people who visit will not have a feel for boundaries of personal sharing initially.

- If someone begins to overshare on a personal issue that might best be discussed in a smaller setting or with a pastor or counselor try to offer them an “out” in some way. This early intervention can help the person get the help they need, and prevent the group from unnecessarily focusing on one person in a group therapy sort of way. For some, they may not know how to filter their experience using more general wording such as “I have some personal issues I am working through in this area and would appreciate your prayers.”
- Knowing when to refer- when someone is dealing with more serious struggles, know you can refer to the pastors of the church and we have a licensed professional counselor who meets in our building and can receive new clients. If finances are an issue for the person, the church can help with some initial sessions with the counselor.
- If disagreements occur- treat it as a natural thing which is ok as long as we continue to treat each other with respect, and not in loud or antagonizing or sarcastic ways. Healthy discussions come from seeing all sides of an issue or topic, learning opportunities. Underlying respect issue is key. Don’t give up responsibility for direction of the conversation though, keep it going in a productive direction. Sometimes summarizing or highlighting the differing viewpoints can help bring validation to their points of view, and then bring it to a transition point which then you can move on from. You can also mention that they may want to talk further about the topic after the group meeting is over. Keep bringing it back to the topic at hand if you have to. Always demonstrate care and acceptance of both persons with conflicting views.
- Watch out for political discussions- this is a dangerous topic of conversation as there are likely people of different political perspectives within the group that can quickly cause deterioration of the closeness and spiritual purpose of the group. We want “gelling” and not “yelling.” Try to redirect away from political parties or political leaders, and speak to societal issues instead, or redirect to a step closer to the bible verse or topic at hand, or the next topic/question to be addressed. Try to do so in a non-anxious, nonthreatening way though.

- Begin and end on time
 - Don't call on people to pray at the end if they don't volunteer. It could cause others to be fearful that they may be called upon next week, and they don't come back!
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- What is the goal of small group meetings?
 - Nurture one another in our relationships with God and with one another
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- What is the commitment of the leader and participants?
 - to grow in relationship with God through understanding God's word and prayer
 - to support one another through conversation and prayer
 - to accept each other in Christian love even when we disagree
 - to be willing to try to apply our learning in our lives during the week through our words, actions and attitudes as God provides opportunity
 - to try to come attend meetings as best you can on a semester basis (mid Sept-early Dec, and mid Jan-early May)
 - to be nice to the home host and small group leader!
 - For the leader only- willingness to pray out loud at the end of the meeting if no one volunteers to do so
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- More possible tools for the toolbox of conversational faith sharing
 - The parable of the sower (from earlier) and
 - The 3 circles conversation guide
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- What to do if....