

## How to Cultivate Great Discussions

**1. MAKE THIS A DISCUSSION, NOT A LECTURE.** Resist the temptation to do all the talking and to answer your own questions. Don't be afraid of a few moments of silence while people formulate their answers. And don't feel like you need to have all the answers. There is nothing wrong with simply responding, "I don't know the answer to that, but I'll see if I can find answer this week."

**2. ENCOURAGE EVERYONE TO PARTICIPATE.** Don't let one person dominate, but also don't pressure quieter members to speak during the first couple of sessions. Depending on the topic of your study, it may be more difficult for some people to open up and be honest. Be patient. Ask good follow up questions and be sensitive to delicate issues.

**3. AFFIRM PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION AND INPUT.** If an answer is clearly wrong, ask, "What led you to that conclusion?" or ask what the rest of the group thinks. If a disagreement arises, don't be too quick to shut it down! The discussion can draw out important perspectives and if you can't resolve it there, offer to research if further and return to the issue next week. However, if someone goes on the offensive and engages in personal attack of another person, you will need to step in as the leader. In the midst of spirited discussion, we must also remember that people are fragile and there is no place for disrespect.

**4. DETOUR WHEN NECESSARY.** If an important question is raised that is not in the study guide, take some time to discuss it. Also, if someone shares something personal and emotional, take time for them. Stop and pray for them right then and there. Allow the Holy Spirit room to maneuver, and follow His prompting when the discussion changes direction.

**5. SUBGROUP.** One of the principles of small group life is "when numbers go up, sharing goes down." So, if you have a large group, sometimes you may want to split up into groups of 4-6 for the discussion time. This is a great way to give everyone, even the quieter members, a chance to say something. Choose someone in the group to guide each of the smaller groups through the discussion. This involves others in the group and provides an opportunity for training new leaders.

**6. PRAYER.** Be sensitive to the fact that some people in your group may be uncomfortable praying out loud. As a general rule, don't call on people to pray unless you have asked them ahead of time or have heard them pray in public. But this can also be a time to help people build their confidence to pray in a group. Consider having prayer times that ask people to just say a word or sentence of thanks to God.

**7. LIVE IT OUT.** These simple suggestions above will help everyone in your group apply the lesson. Be sure to leave adequate time to talk about these practical applications of the lesson. Most of the weekly assignments involve setting aside specific time to apply, read or memorize something based on what they learned. Encourage those in your group to make application a priority and check in with them to see if people are following through. Then occasionally, ask those in your group if they want to share anything from their discussion that week.