

# Facilitator Notes

1. **Focus on Experience:** Our purpose is to get people to speak from their heart and connect their experience to God's word. Some initial questions might be needed to build a focus but the leading of people to share their personal experience, strength, and hope is the end we want to get to. This differs from a "topic study" in some other small group settings.
2. **Attempting to Include Everyone:** a) A format that calls individuals by names and includes those who indicate they wish to speak often works best. b) An "open" format where anyone is encouraged to speak up will usually get your most enthusiastic speakers and some efforts will need to be made to intentionally include those who are slower or more reluctant to speak. c) If a person is entering the discussion several times it is important to divert away from them and still affirm their desire to share: "We haven't heard from \_\_\_\_\_ yet. Let's get to as many as we can and then we'll come back and gather up additional thoughts we have." or some similar comment that moves on to another speaker but still names the fact that the person will have an opportunity to contribute again if there's time.
3. **One Main Focus:** Have one question or main focus point that you come back to several times that brings home the issues. You might rephrase it a bit but it should basically be coming back to the same idea. Many questions can be confusing for people and also limits what some of the more hesitant sharers have to say. They are working up the courage to speak on the previous question and suddenly the topic has moved on.
4. **Building Trust and Transparency:** It's often helpful to speak briefly of one's own experience. The level of transparency of the facilitator is often a helpful tool to make the environment safe for others to deepen their reflection. Share your own learning, fears, struggles, and explore those kinds of things so others can relate to the journey. This is different from the "traditional" role of facilitator because this is a support group and we are all members seeking recovery together.
5. **Questions that help bring out experience include:** This principle (and then name what we are studying\_ ... What do we do with it? How do we do it? What do you think about this? What have you seen? What do you experience? Do you find this difficult or easy? What obstacles are you overcoming. (How, Why, Describe, What's it like for you .... are key framing questions)
6. **First timers** -- I will often give them a chance to speak with the disclaimer "It's your first time. You are welcome to listen or share."
7. **Broad Focus:** Keep the focus wide so people can find a way to attach whatever they want to share with what is being asked. As whatever question and include something that broadens it with , "or something that has come up for you that relates to what we've just read, or your experience of this topic"
8. **Reluctant Speakers:** For those who are reluctant to share, some options might be: a) would you like to share or just listen tonight? (state the goal of sharing and give the back door of just listening) Can I come back to you? You can pass if you like but feel free to share as well. B) Give a "prior warning" by slipping their name in along with inviting someone else to share (so they have time of one speaker to gather their thoughts) "I'll ask Robert to share and then we'll go to Mary, if she likes"; c) At a point in the discussion, if I know there are reluctant speakers ahead I will make a comment that reminds all of us that when I call on people they are free to pass or share.

9. **Wandering Speakers:** When speakers go on well beyond a reasonable time or are somewhere well off topic some options to consider using include: a) begin to make audible responses to their comments; b) When they pause slide a "thanks". If they look like they are continuing on even after that, give them a sentence or two to close it off and then jump in and take the conversation back c) don't give the "reflective pause" time to make it seem like you are waiting for more from them. If you sense a need to move on from one speaker, just gently make a comment or two to make a transition rather than letting the "reflective pause" do it.
10. **Staying Focused:** State, restate, and summarize the focus at several points throughout the evening. A) Name what you heard from the speaker that addresses the "issue" either as a "lesson for us to hang onto" or as a challenge many of us often face". B) state the name of the next speaker and then ask the same gathering question again so we are all reminded of the focus. We need to keep validating the experience shared by everyone in the room and still keep the focus in our hearts so we are moving towards learning rather than wandering.
11. **Levels of Questions** (from easiest to most challenging)
- **Knowledge** -- Who? What? When?, Something that can be answered "Yes/No", or with facts as listed on the sheet
  - **Comprehension** -- What does this say to you? What does this mean to you?
  - **Analysis** -- Why? How? What do you think? What helps it? What hinders it?
  - **Application** -- How do you? What does it mean to you? What does this say to you? What do you make of this? How do you deal with this in your daily life?
  - **Synthesis** -- What do we do with this? How do we bring these two realities together? What's God inviting us to? How might we look at this in another way? What changes might this be asking of us?
12. **"Off-the-Wall or Inappropriate Sharing":** When someone makes an "off the wall" comment, what can we do with it? a) Name the question they did answer, b) name the Biblical truth that connects to what they were sharing. I often use something like, "And isn't it wonderful that we get to grow in our experience of .... " c) Once in a while I've needed to say something like, "As Christians we believe that ..." or something similar that brings things back to the fact that for this particular group we want to keep our discussion to exploring things that related to our experience with Jesus Christ. D) Most of the time it is appropriate to simply move on to the next person or ask a question that rephrases the focus we are wanting to discuss." We want to invite people to consider what is being discussed, to have freedom to have their own experience and opinions but still maintain the framework within which we are working.
13. **Legitimate "off the topic" questions** often will arise. They can be dealt with by a) giving a short answer or b) an offer to talk later or c) a comment that values the topic but keeps it for another time, "That's a really important issues. We should plan a discussion on that for another time but for tonight we want to talk about ..."