

Leading a Small Group Discussion

1. Prepare

Work through the materials and think yourself into your group meeting.

2. Pray

Pray before your group meeting.

3. Don't talk too much

Your job is to get people thinking and talking and keep the discussion moving from member to member rather than talking to the members.

4. Be A Good Listener

So simple yet so hard to do. Don't just listen to what people are saying – actively listen. The best leaders listen with their eyes and ears.

4. Don't Answer Your Own Questions

The whole purpose of asking the question is to create an environment where group members feel safe to share. It's not about getting the right answer. When people are silent with some of these questions, embrace the silence: this might be where the introverts are thinking and the Holy Spirit is speaking!

5. Encourage Responses

If no one really speaks you could say something like, "Paul, you look like you were going to say something..."

6. Ask Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions help group members to say more than a simple yes or no. Use 'what?' or 'how?' questions to get people to open up.

7. Try To Involve Everyone

Your group might be too big if everyone isn't able to speak their thoughts. Groups of over eight members will have difficulty doing this. In those cases, it might be best to divide the group into smaller groups for some of the time.

8. Keep the Main Thing, the Main Thing!

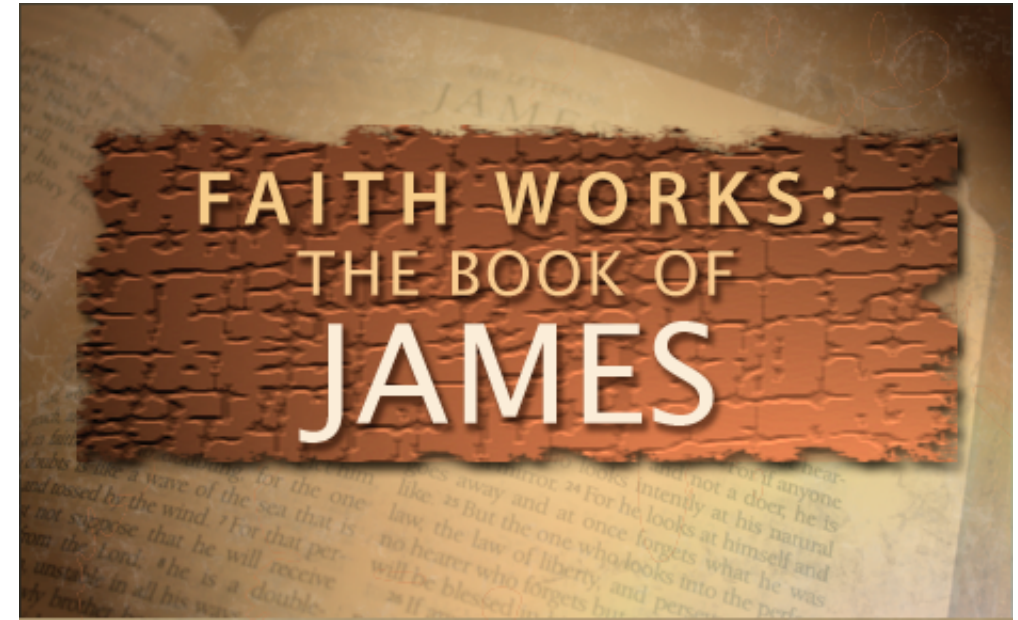
Remember, the focus is not on getting through the material and you may not cover all the questions. If the discussion is fruitful then allow group members the time they need to discuss, process, and grow with the information.

9. Manage the Time

Keep an eye on the clock. Don't let things get bogged down in interesting but irrelevant discussion. Bring things back on track and take the initiative to move things on when it feels right.

10. Leave time for application.

Make sure people have time to think about the difference that this discussion will have in their daily 'frontline' lives.



10. Prayer in Everything (James 5:13-20)

WAY IN

What is your first reaction to life's ups and downs? Do you think that the answers that the group gives would be the same if we were to do a vox pop in Thornbury?

Read James 5:13-20

Key Text: James 4:13

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

DISCUSS

1. On what occasions in this passage does James encourage his readers to pray/praise? Which of those would you find the most easy and which the most difficult situations to turn to prayer? Why? You could also read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Ephesians 6:18; and Philippians 4:6 to expand the ideas.
2. 'It is often helpful to praise before we make requests.' Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Why are praise and prayer both important?

3. The instructions about praying for the sick in verses 14 & 15 often raise questions for people. Have you ever asked the elders to come and anoint you with oil and pray for you? Was it helpful? If so, in what ways? If no one in the group has done so, consider whether there would be a time when you would do so and why. Why might it be beneficial?
4. The first part of verse 15 seems to imply that sick people prayed for in this way will be healed, but that isn't always our experience. Read other similar promises in Matthew 18:19; Matthew 21:22; and John 14:13, as well as Paul's experience in 2 Corinthians 12:7-9. How do you understand these verses? What are the dangers of quoting these verses to people who are ill? How do you understand the phrase 'the prayer offered in faith'? You might find the commentary section of these notes helpful.
5. Verses 15 and 16 speak of a link between sickness and sin, and the importance of confession. Do you think that sickness and sin are linked or is this just an ancient belief? What might be the danger of making that link when speaking to someone who is

sick? Jewish teaching speaks of wholeness rather than healing as they see body, mind and spirit as interrelated. Do you find this helpful? Why or why not?

6. Verse 19 & 20 deal with how we should respond to people who have walked away from 'the truth'. What do you think is meant by 'the truth'? What does James tell us is our responsibility to these people and why? What might stop you from doing this? If you thought someone was in this situation, how would you go about following James' instructions?

WAY OUT

Prayer is never an easy subject, so pray together about any aspects of this study that anyone in the group is struggling with, remembering that prayer is always communication with our loving heavenly Father. Pray too for those you know who have wandered from 'the truth' and consider whether God is asking you to speak to them this week.

Commentary Notes: James 5:15

This [v15] is the standard and customary way in which the Bible makes its promises concerning prayer.... How do we understand these unqualified assurances concerning answers to prayer? We know from the Word of God and from confirmatory evidence in our own lives that these promises are expressed as great affirmations, first to assure us of the generosity of God who will withhold from us nothing that is good and, secondly, to assure us of the liberty of asking given to us, whereby there is nothing we cannot ask of God. But the one thing these promises do not imply is that God allows us to be stubborn in His presence and insistent on what we think is right. Indeed if it were the case that whatever we ask, God was pledged to give, then we would soon cease to pray, because we would not have sufficient confidence in our own wisdom to ask God for anything. It would impose an intolerable burden on frail human wisdom if by His prayer-promises God was pledged to give whatever we ask, when we ask it, in exactly the terms we ask. How could we bear the burden?

The Tests of Faith – J A Motyer