



Facilitating an Atmosphere of Biblical Community

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God has given us the gift of biblical community. Here are a few ways that leaders can foster an atmosphere that invites members to build relationships and share openly.

1. Playing praise and worship music softly in the background during the arrival and welcome time can break up the awkward silence that often typifies the first week's meeting. Since not everyone is an animal lover, contain your pets so guests will feel at ease. It's also helpful to be prepared to facilitate informal conversation among the women. Be equipped with questions about the women's lives (e.g. family, work, school, how long they have been at the church, etc.) if the women do not naturally begin talking with one another. This can be an opportunity for the women to indirectly see how much they have in common with one another.
2. Awkward silence can often arise during the initial study sessions when women are called upon to share. As a teacher/facilitator who longs for the women to open up, a few seconds of silence can seem like a lifetime. Don't be afraid of awkward silence and don't feel the need to jump in with answers or information to fill the silence in the first five to ten seconds! Many women need time to process what they will say and need to know that it is okay to take a few moments and think. As you feel comfortable waiting on them (ask the Lord for this), then they will feel comfortable speaking up eventually. You might even encourage the women not to feel the need to give a perfectly sculpted answer, but just to share their hearts or understanding in their own words.
3. It can be difficult to encourage certain women who are shy to share in the discussion while also encouraging more confident and talkative women to hold back and leave room for others to speak. The women can benefit from a gentle and loving encouragement at the beginning of the first few sessions (and other times if needed) to humbly hold back if they are more talkative and to be courageous in sharing if they are more reticent. Also, a facilitator can encourage more hesitant women to share by offering one last opportunity to speak before moving on to another topic.
4. One way you can foster greater closeness between the women is by "linking" them during the conversation. In other words, as one woman shares about a particular struggle or victory in the Christian life, you can follow up by asking other women if they can relate and invite them to share. Also, as a woman shares about her struggles, it can be very effective to invite others to speak scriptural truth into her life and pray over her during the study time. By doing this you are fostering the opportunity for the women to care for one another.
5. One of the most difficult times in facilitating a group is found when a woman shares a conviction or encouragement that is unbiblical. At this point it is important to lovingly and straightforwardly correct this point in the group setting for the sake of everyone understanding the truth. Ask questions like, "Let's pause and consider, what does the Bible say about ____?" By doing so, you can guide the group to biblical truth.

6. If you find yourself in a place of believing that something being shared is untrue but are uncertain of how to respond with biblical truth at that moment, it's prudent to redirect the conversation to another topic as quickly as possible, seek counsel from a church leader soon after the session, go to the woman and seek to guide her in the truth, and then bring the correction to the group soon afterward. This should always be done with love for the woman sharing and for the stated purpose of us all growing in the truth.
7. Having contact with the women outside of the study can be an additional practice that fosters closeness in the group. You can ask the women to choose one woman from their prayer groups to contact during the week and ask how she is doing. This practice can help the women more quickly return to ease in sharing with one another when they come back the next week.
8. If it's feasible, try to plan at least one fun fellowship gathering during the study.

Through implementing these suggestions, you can build strong relationships within your group and provide a safe bridge to help your members feel comfortable sharing openly and honestly.



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