

Troubleshooting Small Group Bible Studies

Common challenges and practical solutions for engaging group discussions

1 No One Is Talking

- Start with an icebreaker before the study begins — something easy that anyone can answer to help participants become comfortable speaking
- Have group members take turns reading the questions aloud — this low-pressure task can help spark initial engagement
- Give participants time to write their answers down before sharing — you can even go around the circle so everyone responds
- Call on people thoughtfully — use a kind and encouraging tone, and be mindful of who you're asking
- Be patient — as group members become familiar with each other and begin trusting the dynamic, they will open up more

2 One Person Is Dominating the Discussion

- Thank them for sharing, then invite someone new to answer — use a warm tone so they don't feel shut down
- Use "What else?" instead of just accepting their answer — if someone says they had the same response, ask them to put it in their own words
- If someone tends toward long-winded explanations, try: "In less than a minute, please share what you learned about..." — a time frame keeps things on track
- If quieter members are still struggling to speak, try the tips above — writing answers first really helps

3 Everyone Is Off-Topic

- Kindly but firmly redirect — say something like, "Let's talk more about that later, but right now let's focus on the study questions"
- For younger groups, sometimes staying quiet until the whole group is "ready" works — they'll sense they need to refocus
- Set expectations at the beginning — review the norms before each meeting so everyone knows what to expect
- If the off-topic discussion is spiritually centered, trust your discernment — pursue it in the moment or acknowledge its importance and commit to addressing it another time

4

Friends Are More Interested in Catching Up

- Engage distracted participants by calling on them to answer questions or have them read passages — a gentle expectation to participate often refocuses them
- Suggest they sit apart — but do this carefully and privately so no one feels embarrassed
- If you sense this will be an issue before the meeting starts, pull them aside and ask them to stay focused during study time
- For groups that change weekly, strategically place talkative friends in different groups or pair them with a strong leader
- For ongoing groups, have a private conversation — keep your tone kind and explain why you need their help staying engaged with the whole group

REFLECT & CONNECT

Which of these four challenges is most relevant to your group right now? What's one small change you could make this week? Remember, every group is different, and no two challenges look exactly the same. The fact that you're paying attention to how your group is doing is already a sign of a caring leader. Trust your instincts, stay flexible, and remember that God is working even in the messy, imperfect moments. You don't have to have it all figured out — you just have to keep showing up.