

THE ART OF FACILITATING

You're not going to teach! If you have visions of yourself preparing piercing insights into Scripture and holding your group spellbound as you expound on your knowledge and touch them with applications to their lives – forget it.

Forget any ideas that you have gathered from the hundreds of Sunday school classes or pastor-led worship services to which you've been subjected. That institutional setting, with one person expounding their version of the truth to rows of truth-absorbers, is a model, acceptable in the past, but no longer relevant to the needs of your friends and neighbors.

The 21st century world is crying out for hightouch, interactive, relevant experiences hitched to immediate answers to questions.

To do that, you can't teach. You must facilitate.

Imagine this. A group of people is sitting around a living room, discussing a passage of Scripture. One describes a moment when that passage gave her insight into how to handle a difficult situation.

Another grows excited. That's exactly the problem she's facing! She listens carefully to the description, the insight, and the way the other member experienced resolution. "That's it!" she thinks. "Hope for my situation!" She feels like the Holy Spirit spoke directly to her need through the life experience of the other group member.

And that's exactly what happened.

Now, imagine that kind of experience happening throughout the evening.

Got the picture?

Good! Your job is to help make that kind of thing happen. As the group facilitator, you create an atmosphere that allows the Holy Spirit to work through the group members ministering to one another and learning from each other.

You see, it's not important that you teach. It is important that the group members learn. And they'll learn best when the Holy Spirit speaks to their needs through one another.

You help that happen. You're a Holy Spirit facilitator.

So, exactly what is your job?

Simple: to make yourself unnecessary.

You'll know you've been successful when the group gets so good at interacting at deeper levels, and including every group member, they can do it without you.

Develop a clear picture in your mind of what your mature group would look like.

Group members would share Scripture and challenge each other to think deeply and to act on it. There would be an atmosphere of love and acceptance, no one person would dominate the discussion, and everyone would be involved. People would share deep issues and concerns and report on what God is doing in their lives.

In short, the group would be a conduit for the Holy Spirit working through each individual's life to stimulate each other to grow. It would be an arena for the practice of the biblical "one anothers."

Think of two goals

To create a place where individuals grow spiritually through interaction with the Holy Spirit and one another. To create a group that stimulates that growth without your intervention. Do you have a clear picture in your mind? Good. Your job is to make that happen.

OK, it's not quite that simple...

There will be a number of challenges on the journey. Let's identify three distinct segments of that journey.

The beginning phase is characterized by a sense of timidity. Group members are often tentative and guarded, noticeably waiting to

take their cues from the group leader, and sharing in superficial ways. Ask for prayer requests and someone will ask for prayers for Aunt Bertha's cold. This is the most challenging phase of your work. The early events in the life of the group will cast a pattern for the future. You'll need to establish the atmosphere as you draw people out.

Phase two occurs when the group has become comfortable with one another, people are sharing their thoughts, and some patterns have developed. Mary only responds to these kinds of questions, John is always the first person to speak, etc.

It's easy to remain at this level. Your challenge here is to prod the group to deeper levels of communication and new patterns of interaction. Some groups never make it beyond this level.

In phase three, the group becomes more concerned for one another, members share more deeply-held needs and joys, and the Holy Spirit uses individuals to reveal power in the Scripture. The interaction is intense, comforting, relevant, and unpredictable. Comfortable patterns of interaction fall by the wayside. And the group does it without you.

If the group is going to attain your vision for them, they will proceed in an uneven, zigzag fashion through these phases. Your job is somewhat different at each phase. But in all cases, you prod and direct them through to the next level.

The Simple Church Model is that of an intimate setting where the participants are feel free to share, support and grow together as a group. It becomes quickly self-evident that it's God's Church and the Holy Spirit leads the group. "Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God" Romans 8:14