

Facilitating a Group

The short guide to read before you lead any group through these courses.



Someone has nominated *you* to lead a bunch of sessions and a room full of people. Before you plan the first meeting, one question decides almost everything else about how you lead: what is a facilitator actually *for*? The answer most of us default to is “the person who knows the material.” That answer will make you a worse leader of this particular course, because it puts you in the wrong posture from the first night — if your job is to know, every question you can’t answer becomes a small failure, and every silence becomes a gap you feel obligated to fill. Here is the claim this guide makes instead: your job is not to supply the content. Your job is to draw out what the content has already begun in the people in front of you.

Drawing out, not pouring in

A facilitator is a host, not a lecturer. Scripture has a picture for this, and it isn’t a picture of a teacher at a podium — it’s a picture of someone lowering a bucket.

“Counsel in a person’s heart is like deep water, but an understanding person draws it out.”

Proverbs 20:5, NET

WORD STUDY

***dalah* · דָּלַח · H1802 · “draws it out”**

A primitive Hebrew root meaning to let a bucket down into a well and haul it back up. Its literal use appears in Exodus 2:16–19, where Moses draws water for Reuel's daughters; figuratively it extends to deliverance, as in Psalm 30:1, where God draws a person up out of a pit. The picture carries the whole argument: a well already holds water. The one who draws doesn't manufacture it or improve it — he supplies rope, patience, and the willingness to lower something empty into a place he can't see the bottom of. Proverbs 20:5 doesn't say the wise person *has* counsel and dispenses it. It says the counsel is already down there, in the other person, and that the skill worth having is retrieval, not supply. You are not the water. You are the bucket and the rope.

This distinction changes what you prepare, what counts as a good meeting, and what you do in the first three seconds of silence. A lecturer prepares answers. A facilitator prepares questions, then gets out of the way of them — the way a retired sea captain named Foy accidentally built the most durable discipleship structure in English-speaking Protestantism. In 1742, Foy proposed that a Methodist society in Bristol divide into small companies of about a dozen to collect a weekly penny toward a debt. It was a bookkeeping arrangement. But the collectors had to visit their twelve every week, and in visiting them they discovered things — struggles, drift, quiet catastrophes nobody had mentioned on Sunday. Within months, the class meeting had become the spine of the entire Methodist movement: a weekly gathering of roughly twelve, led by an ordinary layperson, organized around a single question rather than a lesson — *how is it with your soul?* Its power was never in the leader's knowledge. It was in the question, asked weekly, to the same twelve faces, by someone who kept showing up.

The shape of a meeting

Each session is built to be read alone and discussed together, in that order. A ninety-minute meeting has room for five things:

1. **Opening prayer, spoken aloud** — the session's own opening prayer, read together. Two minutes. Don't skip it because it feels perfunctory; it's what tells the room what kind of hour this is.
2. **Consider This** — participants wrote an answer before reading. Ask two or three people to read theirs. Five to ten minutes.
3. **The argument** — not a re-teach. Pick the two or three places the session actually turned, and ask about those. Thirty-five to forty-five minutes.
4. **The Experience** — every session has one. This is the part that gets cut when you run long, and it's the part that changes people. Fifteen to twenty-five minutes.
5. **The closing prayer and the week ahead** — name the six-day practice out loud before anyone leaves. Five minutes.

Six to twelve people is the working range. Below six, one absence guts the room. Above twelve, the quiet people stop speaking and never start again. Two cadences work for a multi-session course: weekly, straight through, or every other week. Weekly keeps momentum and is the better default for a group that’s already meeting regularly. Every other week roughly doubles the calendar time a course takes, but for a busy or scattered group it’s often the difference between finishing and fizzling out by week four. Either way, say the cadence out loud in the first meeting so nobody’s guessing how long this is going to take.

Cadence	Pace	Best for
Weekly	One session a week	An existing, committed group
Every other week	One session every two weeks	Busy or scattered groups

Leading the conversation

Most of what makes a discussion good is subtraction. Paul gave the Corinthian church one criterion for what happens when believers gather, and it isn’t accuracy, order, or depth.

“What should you do then, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each one has a song, has a lesson, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all these things be done for the strengthening of the church.”

1 Corinthians 14:26, NET

WORD STUDY

***oikodomē* · οἰκοδομή · G3619 · “strengthening”**

A compound of *oikos* (house) and a root meaning to build. Concretely, an actual structure; figuratively, the act of building — construction in progress. Older English translations render it “edification,” which has drifted toward meaning something mildly improving. The Greek is heavier and more physical: masonry going up, course by course, on a structure that didn’t exist before. Paul is regulating a gathering that had genuine spiritual gifts operating in it and was still going badly, and his test isn’t whether what happens is real, true, or impressive — it’s whether the person next to you is further along at the end of the hour than at the start. That rules out several things a facilitator can be tempted by: winning an argument, displaying study, letting the most articulate person set the ceiling.

Four practices carry most of the weight. **Let the silence sit** — ask a real question and count to ten before you say anything else; silence is almost never the room being stuck, it’s the room thinking. **Manage the**

talkers by structure, not confrontation — “let’s hear from someone who hasn’t spoken yet,” or two minutes in pairs before anyone addresses the room. **Make the strongest form of a disagreement get stated before anyone answers it** — when someone pushes back on the material, your first move is to help them say it *better*, not to answer it. **Leave open what the session leaves open** — several sessions carry a “where this stays unresolved” note, and those are load-bearing. If you resolve it in the room to relieve the tension, you’ve taught your group that faith requires tidy answers, and the first hard thing that happens to them will test that lesson to destruction.

“Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters! Let every person be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.”

James 1:19, NET

The encounter sessions

Most sessions ask people to think. Several ask people to *do* something — pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, forgive, renounce, ask for healing — and those need more from you than the others. Three things change for those meetings: protect the time, since the experience is the point of the session, not its tail; use pairs or trios rather than the whole room, since nobody should be asked to pray something out loud to eleven people; and say out loud, before you start, that nothing may happen for some people, and that this isn’t a verdict on them.

When something heavier surfaces

In the freedom-focused sessions especially, people sometimes disclose abuse, trauma, addiction, or a mental health crisis — often for the first time, often not to you specifically but to whoever is in the room when the sentence finally comes out.

Your job in that moment is small and specific: receive it without flinching, don’t make it the group’s project, and follow up privately within twenty-four hours. Don’t ask for details in front of the group, and don’t diagnose it or attach a spiritual cause to it. Then help them toward real help — you are not a therapist, a physician, or a pastor unless you actually are one. Know before your first meeting who you’d refer someone to: a counselor, your church’s pastoral staff, a crisis line in your area. Nothing in this course is a reason for anyone to stop taking prescribed medication or to leave treatment — if someone concludes otherwise, say so plainly and immediately.

“Brothers and sisters, if a person is discovered in some sin, you who are spiritual restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness. Pay close attention to yourselves, so that you are not tempted too. Carry one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

Galatians 6:1–2, NET

Two questions every facilitator asks

What if I don't know the answer? You'll be asked something you can't answer, probably in the first month, and the fear of that moment is the main reason capable people decline to lead. Three sentences resolve nearly every instance of it: *I don't know. Let me find out. I'll bring it back next week.* Then actually bring it back. A group learns more about how to hold Christian faith from watching you do that once than from twenty answers delivered smoothly. What you owe them is preparation — read the session twice, do the six-day practice yourself a week ahead — not omniscience.

What if the group lands somewhere else? Sooner or later a session will state a position and someone in your group will land differently — on the gifts, on healing, on the end of the story. The sessions are written with a stated position and a fair hearing for the alternative, and several mark explicitly where the question stays open; that's on purpose. So the answer isn't to suppress the disagreement or relitigate the session. It's to make the group do what the book does — state the other view at its strongest, name what Scripture actually settles and what it leaves standing, and move on with the difference intact.

Before your first meeting

1. Read Session 1 twice — once as a participant, once for where the argument turns.
2. Do Session 1's six-day practice yourself, a full week ahead of the group.
3. Decide the cadence — straight through, by movement, or fortnightly — and say it out loud on night one.
4. Write down two names: who you'd refer someone to for counseling, and who you'd call for pastoral backup.
5. Agree three ground rules in the first meeting: what's said here stays here; nobody has to speak; nobody gets fixed in front of everyone.
6. Ask two people to pray for you specifically, weekly, for the duration.

KINGDOM PRINCIPLE

A facilitator lowers the bucket. God supplies the water.

A facilitator's prayer

Father, I am not the source of anything these people need. Make me useful anyway. Give me the patience to wait through a silence, the restraint to hold my answer, and the courage to say

I don't know. Keep me from measuring this by how the room felt tonight. Build them, in the weeks I can see and the ones I can't. In Jesus' name, amen.