

Leading Your Group in Discussing a Member's Sin

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- I. Introduction: Our sinful condition as redeemed human beings requires repentance as a way of life. Fellowship is an essential means of grace for this process when we deal with those sins “which cling so closely” (Heb. 12:1). James teaches the value of confession of sin to one another accompanied by prayer for one another (James 5:16-18). Leading a group in helping a member overcome a particular sin requires wisdom-skill for knowing how to have a discussion that protects confidentiality, provides wise counsel, avoids foolish counsel, and, in the end, edifies every member for the group. What follows are some guidelines in leading a group in discussing particular sins of group members.

- II. Establish Your Goals
 - a. The goal of a group discussion is application of Scripture to life for each member.
 - b. A care group meeting is not to become a regular group counseling session for one member.
 - c. Our goal is to help and encourage all members to move forward in their battle with sin. Focusing on one member should not only help that member, but provide a model for the entire group.
 - d. Your responsibility as a leader
 - i. To help the group: lead people to grace, point them in the right direction, and provide a context for accountability.
 - ii. You are not responsible for a person's change, only lead him to change.
 - e. Be patient: rich and effective discussions like this take time to develop in a group.

- III. Establish Passport Between Group Members
 - a. Define: “Passport” gains the trust and confidence of group members so that they will be willing to divulge non-public aspects of their lives to the group.
 - b. A group earns passport when they can answer three questions:
 1. Can I trust you?
 2. Do you really care about me?
 3. Can you really help me?

¹ The definition in II.A.1. and these three points are taken from the training manual, “Christian Conciliation Procedures: by Ken Sande (Billings, MT: Peacemaker Ministries, 1998). His definition applies to mediating conflict between two people, but the idea applies to our small groups as well.

- c. Establish and enforce standards for discussion
 - i. Establish confidentiality-not “swearing to secrecy,” but, “I will only share this with another person because it will help you and only with your knowledge.”
 - ii. Invite corrections. Preferably, the member should ask for input and not be satisfied with “dumping.” You may have to move him along by asking permission for the group to give encouragement and instruction.
 - iii. Distinguish commands of Scripture from counsel.
 - iv. Set parameters of appropriate disclosure
 - 1. Slander and gossip are never appropriate. If a sin is relational and discussion puts another person in a bad light, the scope of confession should be narrowed or the other person’s identity hidden from the group.
 - 2. Sexual sin should not be discussed in a mixed group except in the most general terms.
 - v. Avoid coercion. No one should be pressured to confess. If someone is hesitant, urge him to involve someone else whom he trusts.

IV. Involve the Group

- a. Encourage testimonies of success: “Who else has wrestled with this or a similar sin? What helped you?”
 - i. Especially look for how people encountered God through the Word, prayer and fellowship with an awareness of the Spirit’s empowering.
 - ii. Avoid testimonies which carry an inappropriate tone of authority.
 - 1. “My temptation is the same as yours.”
 - 2. “My approach to change is the only way.”
 - 3. Folk wisdom is not Bible wisdom.
- b. Know when to end discussion:
 - i. In some circumstances giving counsel is not appropriate, either due to lack of wisdom in the group members or because of the time required to gather sufficient data which would allow for informed advice.
 - ii. Be willing to devote significant time to someone (especially as a model for the whole group), but avoid this on a regular basis.
- c. Be prepared to correct or redirect bad advice.

V. Define Sin According to Biblical Realities

- a. Look for biblical language to replace worldly language that defines sin or responsibility incorrectly.
- b. Distinguish sinful actions, which can be established by fact, and sinful motives, which can be hard to discern.

- i. Speak with the authority of Scripture regarding clearly sinful words and deeds.
 - ii. Be hesitant to define motives unless the person sees it clearly. Leave him with questions-questions that are genuine and not rhetorical.

- VI. Help Move the Discussion from Confession to Repentance.
 - a. See “The Path of Repentance”
 - b. Distinguish preferences from principles from commands.

- VII. Encourage Follow Up
 - a. Private counsel
 - b. Reporting back to group
 - c. Private accountability-not necessarily to you, but t a mature group member or members.
 - d. Accountability is first the responsibility of the sinner.

- VIII. Give Hope
 - a. Begin and end with God’s love and power revealed and offered through the gospel. Romans 8:32
 - b. Help people to see where God is already at work in them-even giving the ability to see they have a problem.
 - c. Remind them that God is more committed to our help than we are.
 - d. Remind people that they are helpless to change in their won effort, but the Holy Spirit is helping them and empowering them to access grace.
 - e. Remind people that God will not allow his people to be overwhelmed by a sin (1 Corinthians 10:13).
 - f. If we commit to his glory, our way along the path of repentance will lead to our good.

- IX. Pray as a Group
 - a. Encourage the group to read passages of Scripture that give help and encouragement.
 - b. Encourage prophecy.
 - i. Remember prophecy’s purpose: “for their up-building and encouragement and consolation” (1 Corinthians 14:3).
 - ii. Directive messages must be open to evaluation and should only confirm the faith of the recipient. They are best when supported by Scripture.
 - c. Encourage the group to pray-especially from appropriate Scripture.