

The Strength in Silence

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We are afraid of silence, especially as small group leaders. If there is silence in the room, then that means no one is talking. And if no one is talking, then we are surely failing as facilitators. But I believe we are missing out on an effective tool if we completely eliminate silence from a group meeting. There is something powerful about creating intentional space in a group meeting. In fact, there are examples throughout the Bible where silence and solitude are commended:

“After the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was a voice, a soft whisper.” – 1 Kings 19:12

“a time to tear and a time to sew; a time to be silent and a time to speak” – Ecclesiastes 3:7

“My dear brothers and sisters, understand this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.” – James 1:19

“I wait quietly before God, for my victory comes from him.” – Psalms 62:1

So how do we plan for and best utilize the power of silence in our small groups? Here are three ways to take advantage of silence in your group.

1. Use silence to encourage group members to speak.

It seems like an oxymoron to use silence as a tool for participation, but it works. An effective facilitator should only be talking 30 percent of the time. Remember that you have read the questions ahead of time. It will take everyone else a few moments to process the material before they are ready to answer. It's uncomfortable to let a question sit there for a few beats, but if you can let the awkwardness go, that silence will eventually be broken by someone. You can miss a great conversation by speaking too quickly.

2. Use silence to allow a moment to sink in.

There will be moments during a Bible study where the group needs a few seconds to take in what was just read or said. Effective speakers use pauses in their speeches to make important points resonate. It's the same thing with a group discussion. Next time a powerful verse is read or someone makes a thought-provoking comment, pause a second or two before moving on. Those two seconds of silence will make the moment stickier.

3. Use silence to meditate on Scripture.

Before launching right into prayer time at the end of the discussion, take a few moments to allow the group to meditate on the Scripture from the Bible study. Ask someone read a key verse or two aloud and then be silent as you allow God's Word to prepare your hearts for prayer. This time doesn't have to be long—maybe two to three minutes—but fight the temptation to break in too soon. Meditation can help lead to application.