

Ground Rules for Facilitation and Sharing

We aspire to provide a space where each of us can experience the power of an encounter with grace believing that it is God's grace alone that can save us (Eph. 2:8-9). We believe this happens through honest discussion and confession about what is true in our souls (1 John 1:8-10). When that happens we encounter grace in two ways:

1. I experience your honest sharing as a sort of sacrament of grace – you are only able to be honest in your confession because you are taking hold of grace, believing that you stand on grace. Your faith in God's grace invites me to live by grace myself and, in this encounter with your honesty, I encounter God.
2. Secondly, you experience grace in your honest sharing as you are met with a grace-filled, non-judgmental response. We aren't saying there isn't truth or right or wrong, or that we get to make up truth to be whatever we want. But it is the Spirit's goal to convict, and He does it better than we ever could. And we believe it is ultimately by an encounter with grace through the Spirit that we are saved and healed – not by a member of our group pointing out what is wrong with us or giving us advice.

Rules for Group Engagement:

The above can only happen, though, when we are comfortable sharing openly. The goal of these rules is to provide the structure for maintaining a safe space in the group so that we can each hear from God and encounter his grace.

1. **Believe in the teaching power of the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit teaches, comforts, and convicts. We are often tempted to play the role of junior Holy Spirit and attempt to save others with our insights, personal stories, or sage advice. Rather, we want to help the person who is sharing to hear from and respond to the Holy Spirit.
2. **Practice contemplative listening.** No matter how tempting it may be, do not attempt to respond to someone's sharing with fixing, saving, advice-giving, or any sort of commentary including "I know exactly how you feel" or "when that happens to me, I do this." When we give advice, try to fix, or save we rarely, if ever, succeed. Instead, practice contemplative listening. When you listen to the person who is sharing, listen with ears of the Spirit. Listen for places where you see God at work. Listen for God's movement in the stories, the passion, the facial expressions of the person who is sharing.
3. **Ask honest and open questions.** Then after listening, let your contemplative listening flow into questions that seek out where the Spirit is working. Asking honest and open questions helps "hear people into speech." Asking someone: "have you thought about seeing a therapist?" is not an honest and open question. It's a piece of advice in disguise. Honest and open questions similarly are not questions that we already have an answer for. If you have a preconceived notion for how this person "ought to" answer your question, it isn't an honest and open question. Honest and open questions help the person explore places of truth in their soul and hear from God.

4. **Share honestly.** When it's your turn to share, share honestly. Share from a place of truth, from the core of who you are. This means we avoid sharing content-oriented stories where we list the things we did or are doing. We don't just talk about prayer requests. We don't share about our sick aunt. When we share we talk about who we are and we share what is true about who we are. Our sharing is a pursuit of what is true in us. It's a working out of our salvation (Phil. 2:12). We may need to share about our sick aunt to provide the context for the deeper truth we want to share about our fear of death or our struggle to love our aunt because of the painful things she said to us in the past. In the end, the goal of our sharing is to share what is true about our soul and discern what God is doing in us. We share it because the group helps us with this difficult process of listening.

5. **Practice confidentiality.** Everything that is shared in group is confidential. This is essential if the group is going to maintain safety. Only in the context of confidentiality is a group safe enough for honest sharing -- the kind of sharing that allows the soul to emerge.