

ENGAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR OPEN SHARING TIMES

1. Before you arrive, prayerfully prepare yourself to share *and* to learn from others. Anticipate the Lord using them to minister to you, and you to them.
2. Use the Bible as your primary source and authority when you speak or evaluate what someone else shares. As valuable as they are, your thoughts and opinions are not always God's.
"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
3. Don't worry about "doing a good job" or being polished. Just try to stay focused on *loving* others in Jesus' name. As Paul instructs: "Do all things for the edification of the body." Your spiritual gifts are more likely to get expressed in God's way if you concentrate on caring about people and seek to build them up.
4. Listen to what others share as though the Spirit of God may be speaking (and seeking to *bless* you) through them. But don't "swallow whole" everything you hear; take responsibility to evaluate the spiritual value and accuracy of what they say.
**"Do not stifle the Holy Spirit or scoff at prophecies; test everything that is said."
(1 Thessalonians 5:19-20)**
5. Don't just sit there: *respond* to what people share. Acknowledge and *appreciate* them. If it's appropriate, offer some feedback, add an idea or ask a clarifying question.
6. Use periods of silence to pray and "listen" for the Holy Spirit's leading or guidance. Resist the urge to rush in and fill the gaps.
7. When you sense the Spirit may be prompting you to share, do so when an opportunity presents itself. Just make sure the person who was sharing before you is completely finished. Raise your hand or tactfully *ask* them if you're not sure.
8. Be *personal* and share from your *heart*. We love the real *you*.
9. Be *brief* when you share. Restrict your comments to a few sentences at a time so you're not monopolizing or dominating, and so others feel free to contribute. Just because you think something doesn't mean you have to *say* it all – at least not right *then*. When you're offering a prepared "gift," try and keep it to seven or eight minutes, maximum. If you're going to need longer, ask the group *before* you begin and make sure it's okay.
10. Encourage *others* to participate who tend to be more hesitant or thoughtful. Draw them out.
"Those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we (should) treat with special honor..." (1 Corinthians 12:22-23)
11. Decision-making should usually include everyone who will be affected by the outcome. All proposals and opinions should be respectfully considered, then a vote taken. The issue is not resolved until a consensus is reached that everyone can support (even though a small minority might still hold a dissenting position).
12. If you disagree with someone, do so in a gracious, humble way and sincerely seek to reach agreement with them.
"Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)
13. Take the initiative to kindly *say something* if someone (or the group) seriously strays from one of these guidelines.