

Summarizing

The purpose of summarizing at the end of a group discussion before moving into more focused discussion of application is to tie together and clarify the central elements of the passage and discussion. Through the summary, the leader is able to emphasize a particular point that he or she believes the Spirit is pressing. This is the spot in teaching where the leader gets to preach and persuade rather than just facilitate discussion. It should be given with passion and confidence.

During preparation, write a succinct, punchy statement that captures the tension or drama of the passage. The summary should highlight what is remarkable about God or life with God. A good summary captures the picture and feel of a passage. It is a short paragraph, not a slogan or a sentence of truth in a propositional form. The truth of the passage is captured through the drama of the text and what that text reveals about Jesus or the life of faith.

You should have thought through the main points of a summary statement ahead of time, but be ready to change or nuance it according to the way the Spirit has led the group to experience the text together. Once the group has had its experience in the text together, nuance your summary to tie together the group's experience, using their words and images. The summary must be a fair distillation of the group discussion or it will violate the premises of group.

This skill requires a deep dependence on the Holy Spirit before and during the study. You need to have prepared the study thoroughly so that you are comfortable with the text and come summarize the drama or movement of the text concisely. Then, while facilitating the group's experience in the Word, be listening to the Spirit and the members of the group to discern the way that the Spirit is leading the group to experience the main teaching(s) of the passage. Your summary needs to tie together both the main teaching(s) of and the way that the group has experienced and defined the teaching(s).

A summary of Mark 4:35-41 (Jesus calms the storm) could look as follows:

After a full day of teaching, Jesus asks the disciples to row across the lake. A huge storm hit and the disciples were sent into the first crisis of the passage, "Are we gonna die?!" To make matters worse, Jesus sleeps through the emergency. After waking him, he commands the wind and the sea to be still and they obey him! Jesus' handling of the situation sends them into the second crisis of the passage, "Who then is this?!" Jesus is more than they expected. He isn't just a teacher, he is the creator of the whole universe. Like the disciples, following Jesus will lead us into situations which press to the surface the true state of our understanding of him. Jesus will take us into crisis in order to reveal more of himself to us.