
AFTER THE DIAGNOSIS...A GUIDE FOR LIVING

DISCUSSION GROUP FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

“After the Diagnosis...A Guide for Living” is intended for everyone on the journey of life who would like to deepen their spiritual awareness, live more fully and freely, and become more one with God and with one another. Certainly those dealing with a diagnosis and their loved ones or caregivers will benefit from being part of a discussion group. Doing so can validate their experience, dispel feelings of isolation and anxiety, and open lines of communication. In addition, anyone with a thirst for spiritual growth and a desire for practical tools to help deal with the complexities of life will also benefit during the “green times” of life. In both cases, careful reading of “After the Diagnosis...A Guide for Living” helps readers live and love more freely and fully, thus making the most of however many days they have ahead of them.

Your discussion group may meet informally in someone’s home with a number of acquaintances or more formally with the cooperation or sponsorship of your church, healthcare facility, or community center. Either way, the most successful discussion groups are grounded in a comfortable, predictable structure and guided by a thoughtful facilitator. This short guide is designed to provide the necessary structural guidelines and facilitating tips to shape a deeply connected, fruitful discussion group.

AN INFORMAL PERSONAL GROUP

Gather together family members and/or a few friends to move through the book on a mutually agreed upon timetable - perhaps weekly, biweekly, or monthly. The goal is to use your discussion to help internalize and integrate the insights in the book into your lives. This process will take time, so be patient with yourselves. Let the work be a labor of love for one another.

You can read one chapter at a time or a whole section. Decide, as a group, about the timeline that works best for everyone. The group should read the chapter or section on the same schedule - don’t rush ahead. As you read, be aware of what resonates with you (any word, phrase, image, symbol, or sentence) and underline it. You may not know why it resonated, and that’s okay. This might become clear as you continue to read, discuss, and process the material. Share the points that reverberate with the group and discuss what they might mean. There are no right or wrong responses. Listen well to one another, and if other’s insights or observations move you, share this with the group.

As you work your way through a chapter, pray the corresponding prayer found in “Prayers for the Journey” by Barbara Mariconda. Doing so in the morning and the evening will invite God into the process. (“Prayers for the Journey” is available on Amazon.) Be faithful to your commitment to one another and to the process. This process encourages intimacy, strengthens relationships, and lays the groundwork to become what we call “soul partners.”

A FORMAL AFFILIATED GROUP

Whether your group is based in a church community, hospital or medical facility, community center or library, the first step is to appoint a facilitator. Facilitating requires no particular experience – just a willingness to reach out to others and guide a discussion using the material provided. Some considerations for planning your discussion group:

- **Reserve a place for the group to meet:** It might be a parish center meeting room, local community center, or library. You might also choose to meet in the intimacy of someone's home. The ideal group size is between 8 and 15 members. Sixteen or more members may require that the group be broken into 2 smaller subgroups. Be sure the room you choose can easily accommodate your group and that chairs and or chairs and a table are available. Sitting around a table allows people to easily reference their books, take notes, and rest elbows on the table. If no table is available, consider providing clipboards.

- **Select a meeting time:** Before scheduling be sure to check other meetings that might be occurring on the same day. Also, pick a time that doesn't interfere with meals or run too late. Allow 1.5 – 2 hours for your weekly discussion group and stick to it!

- **How long should the discussion series be?** The book contains a lot of material that can be discussed in great depth. Given people's schedules, we suggest a once a week meeting for a month. Groups, or parts of groups can always extend the series independently at the conclusion of the initial four sessions. Individuals may gravitate toward a "soul partner" in the group who may continue to meet indefinitely.

- **Select a Facilitator.** Below is a description of facilitator tips. Before selecting a facilitator she/he should be clear on and comfortable with the responsibilities, listed below:

- **Get the word out!** Advertise in your church or organization bulletin or newsletter. Send an email blast, post flyers, request that leaders in your church or organization talk it up. Be sure to have people sign up in whatever way works for you – online, phone registration, sign-up genius, etc. Be sure to obtain both email and snail mail addresses and phone numbers. This is important so that you can set up the proper number of chairs and arrange for coffee, water, and/or other refreshments.

FACILITATOR GUIDELINES

- 1.) Set ground rules for members and be ready to gently remind or reinforce the ground rules:
 - Members must read the designated sections prior to the meeting.
 - Members must arrive on time, bring their book, journal, pen, paper, or laptop for note-taking.
 - Wear name tags.
 - When questions are posed, do not interrupt others' comments.
 - Do not monopolize the conversation – allow others equal time.
 - Conversations involving personal experiences are considered privileged and may not be shared outside the group.

- 2.) Begin each session with the corresponding prayer from “Prayers for the Journey.” This sets the tone and invites God into the experience.
 - 3.) You may approach each chapter as you would in Lectio Divina, asking participants to share what word, phrase, or image resonated with them. Then, use the discussion questions to inspire and guide ongoing conversation.
 - 4.) If a member interrupts another, gently pipe in, “Hold that thought. We’ll get back to it in just a moment.” Then ask the original speaker to continue.
 - 5.) If the group wanders off topic, steer them back to the question or topic at hand. Ex. “I’m not sure we thoroughly explored that question. Let’s circle back to that.”
 - 6.) If someone is monopolizing the conversation, jump in with a comment such as, “Good point...does anyone agree, or maybe see it differently?”
 - 7.) Gently encourage members who haven’t offered any input by engaging them directly: Ex. “Jim, any thoughts on that?” Be careful not to put anyone on the spot, however. It may take some participants more time to feel comfortable enough to share.
 - 8.) Close the meeting with a prayer and clear
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