

# LEARNING THROUGH DISCUSSION

## Formats for Discussion

Here are some suggested discussion formats for use following the showing of an episode of "HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?"

### 1. REACTORS PANEL

Four or five panel members begin a discussion with a 2 or 3 minute comment on any aspect of the film. The moderator opens the discussion to the audience or refers back to the panel to pick up one of the other's comments.

### 2. EXPERTS PANEL

This could be made up of three or four or more people who are well versed in a particular area. For example you might have a historian, a theologian, a Bible scholar and an educator or an artist. The panel would discuss the film among themselves first, then get the audience into the discussion. As leader you'll need to make sure this doesn't turn into a question and answer session (See section, "The Art of Discussion.")

### 3. ONE-MAN DISCUSSION LEADER

You don't need a panel. One person can serve as a moderator for the exchange of ideas from the floor. Again, however, he should remember that he doesn't have to answer questions and probably shouldn't be caught passing as an expert. He's a facilitator and expeditor. His job is to keep the flow of ideas going back and forth.

### 4. SMALL GROUPS

If the audience is not too large and the auditorium lends itself to it, you could break into small groups for discussion. The advantage of this obviously is that more people can be involved and that, after all, is the goal.

If possible, have leaders chosen and prepared for each small group. If not, you should at least have discussion questions ready to announce from the floor for all groups and let each group choose a leader. Stress, however, that the leaders don't have to be more knowledgeable than everyone else in the group. They simply have to be leaders and keep the discussion going.

## The Art of Discussion

It's easy to write down "discussion to follow film". It's another matter to ensure that this time in the program comes off successfully. Many well-intentioned discussions have lapsed into awkward silences or into one-person soapbox orations where very little learning takes place.

Discussion is one of the best learning tools available and can maximise the use of the film series. The audience has soaked up information for thirty minutes during the film and needs to stretch their minds to try to integrate this material with their own knowledge and experience.

A discussion of "HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?" can benefit a viewer in several ways:

1. It gets him to review the film, to turn over the content in his mind, to think about it and analyze it.
2. In a discussion, he begins to apply the content to his own world. Is it consistent with what he has learned? What does it mean for him?
3. When he verbalizes what he has seen and heard, he appropriates and retains more of it than he has in the semi-passive state of watching the film.

It's important to remember that the purpose of the discussion is not to add information. In a discussion you draw conclusions, inferences, lessons, etc., from what you have already seen and heard. That's why it isn't necessary to have a panel of experts. You do need people who can help the group weigh and sift the ideas already presented, but not necessarily to add to what Dr. Schaeffer has already presented.

A planned discussion can easily turn into nothing more than a question and answer session and you can see the difference. A question and answer time will only prolong the type of learning experience which has gone on during the film itself, but will not get the listener to put his own mind in gear. He simply absorbs more data.

Film generally communicates strongly on an emotional level, and film discussions, therefore, tend to center on "feelings". This series of films, however, by its very nature, communicates more on a head or rational level. It conveys a lot of information, and discussions therefore will center more on what we "think" about the content rather than what we "feel" about the people and events.

## **The Discussion Leader**

No matter what type of format you choose, you'll need a leader and he'll need some skills to ensure a stimulating and profitable discussion. Here are some pointers for discussion leaders:

1. Have a few good questions ready to begin or to use when there is a lull in the discussion. These might be easy questions asking for an opinion. The idea is to prime the pump and get the ideas flowing.
2. Don't let one person monopolize the discussion with long speeches. You might even have to interrupt someone who won't stop with a polite, "thank you, our time is limited."
3. Select people you know in the group to whom you can direct questions or solicit an opinion, but warn them ahead of time if necessary.
4. Keep the discussion moving to different topics. Again, the purpose is not to say everything that can be said on one topic, but to help the audience think about and assimilate the ideas in the film.

## **A Trap To Avoid**

It will be natural for the audience to look to you as the pastor or leader for answers. The content of "HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE" is intellectually stimulating and invariably brings forth questions on a wide variety of topics--history, theology, philosophy, sociology, etc. Very few people have the wealth of knowledge to answer all of these questions, and, of course, they shouldn't try.

The point here is that you need not be caught in the position where you're expected to know all the answers. There is a difference between a leader and an expert. In this case, Dr. Schaeffer is the expert and you are the leader, the expeditor.

Make that clear to the group as you begin. If you have an area of expertise, e.g., Bible study or theology, you may shine as the discussion centers in that area and limit your comments in other areas.

The point is simply that, unless you're careful, the audience can expect you to be a local version of Dr. Schaeffer. You can avoid that trap by explaining your position at the beginning.