



SHARING LEVELS GROUPWORDS

Sharing allows is an important part of the Small Group experience. But while the majority of Christians want the privilege of sharing, many find it very difficult to practice, especially on the deeper levels. Part of the problem is that our culture does not encourage open, honest sharing. It doesn't provide opportunities to learn, practice, and appreciate interpersonal experiences. In fact, our culture teaches us to "trust no one."

Sharing can take place on several different levels within the structure of a Small Group – before prayer, as a part of the group discussion, or during casual conversations.

Think about "Sharing" as four phases:

Phase One — General Information

This is the most casual form of sharing where I talk about common ideas about people, our church, or other well-known situations. It's important information, but it isn't directly related to me. Therefore, there is little or no personal risk.

Phase Two — Related Information

Sharing on this level is related to me and is usually based on firsthand involvement. My association with the situation may be casual or extensive and personal risk is only because of my association with the person or circumstance I'm talking about.

Phase Three — Factual Information

On this level I am sharing information about myself, but it's only "factual" information and not necessarily "sensitive" information. I can talk about activities, plans, or events, but I only share the facts about myself that I feel comfortable exposing.

Phase Four — Intimate Information

Finally I feel comfortable sharing inner feelings, behavior, emotions, and experiences that come from my heart of hearts. This is level where confession takes place. The personal and social risk is much higher here, and so I will only do this with people I can trust. The risk is greater, but so is the benefit.

Of course, the longer a group is together, the more they can progressively move through these stages. As the group leader, you can help your group to feel comfortable "sharing" on all four levels. Here are some ideas:

- **Set The Example** — For others to feel comfortable sharing, you must share first.
- **Be Patient** — Recall the proverb, "You have to go through shallow to get to deep"
- **Practice Acceptance** — When someone does open, step closer, don't back away.
- **Allow Differences** — Being at different levels of sharing, like a family, is very normal.
- **Don't Push** — Some are quiet by nature. Don't force them. Wait until they are ready.

It is a wonderful feeling and a great benefit to reach the fourth level of sharing. And while it takes time to get there, it's always worth the time. The intimacy of a small group and the opening of a person's heart are always worth our time, effort, and prayer.