

Taming Tangents

In geometry, a tangent is a line that touches a curve or another surface at only one point. In conversation, a tangent is digressing suddenly from one course of action or thought and turning to another. It's crucial to the health of your group that everyone recognize tangents for what they are and help each other keep to the course that you set out on!

TYPES OF TANGENTS

1. **Cheap Psychiatry:** When someone in your group wants to talk in depth about a difficulty he or she is facing, the result is often lots of well-meaning advice. The person gets several answers to the problem, but it doesn't take long for the group to lose interest. The Word of God is healing to people. Don't let tangents distract you from it. The facilitator resource "Handling Small Group Crises" has some very helpful suggestions.
2. **Tunnel Vision:** Sometimes people in our groups look for a certain doctrine or position they are fond of and talk about it at length.
3. **Scatterbrained Thoughts:** When a person hasn't read the chapter ahead of time, it's easy to get off base and take the group along.
4. **"Expert" Explanations:** Someone tries to impress the group and expounds at great length about his expertise.
5. **Miscellaneous Tangents:** There are multitudes of ways to get off track!

WHY NOT INDULGE IN TANGENTS?

1. They waste time. You'll never finish what you set out to do together.
2. You don't have the information in front of you to deal with the topic.
3. They become boring to others.

DEALING WITH TANGENTS

1. Write the question down in the back of the study guide and see if it's answered later in the study. (This is most helpful if it will be dealt with later in the study.)
2. Suggest that those who are interested in this topic stay after to discuss it. This allows those who are interested to discuss it and frees those who are not interested to leave. The group can then finish their normal discussion within the allotted time, which is gratifying to the ones who have prepared for the discussion. People get frustrated when a group spends too much time on tangents.
3. Ask the person who brought up the question to do some research and then briefly report back the next time you meet.