
THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD QUESTIONS

We love a great discussion, and we suspect you do, too — even if you're not used to having it during a small-group session.

And as with any great discussion, you're not always sure where it's headed. That's the wonder of it. But lack of direction can be a bad thing, too. So let's talk about how to make your discussion time as meaningful as possible.

Good questions should make you think about what you believe, why you believe it, and how your life can be different *because* you believe it. Therefore, ask questions that are:

- *surprising* — Move past biblical facts and into seeing God's Word in a way you never have before. If your questions don't accomplish that, they're not what they could be.
- *specific* — General biblical truths are good, and sometimes necessary to reiterate. Getting at what the Bible really says about the topic you're studying, and how it applies to us now, is even more important. Which brings us to...
- *personal* — Don't just understand what God's saying, but understand what God's saying to *you*. Ask the hard questions. That painful thing you're feeling when that happens? It's called growth. But the good news is: You and your group are in this together. And as you bring the real issues out, God will grow all of you, together. Transparency breeds transparency, and growth breeds more growth.

One more thing: In order to make questions surprising, personal, and specific, make sure they're open-ended. Nothing kills a discussion faster than a yes-or-no or fill-in-the-blank question. Open-ended questions demand more than a quick nod — they demand that you respond to what God's trying to teach you. And when you do, great discussions happen.

Not every great question is in the lesson. In fact, it's likely that the most important questions you'll address are the ones your group comes up with as they dig in. Here are some suggestions for dealing with them:

- Be prepared. If you've taken the time to digest the lesson beforehand, you'll have your own responses to share, and you'll be ready to ask others about theirs.
- If people give rote "Sunday school" answers, push them beyond those answers to get at what they really mean. This could be as simple as asking, "Could you explain that a

little more?” or just saying, “Say more.” Even if they stumble a bit as they think it through, continue to encourage them to articulate what they’re thinking. Chances are, someone else is thinking the same thing.

- Sometimes you’ll get answers that you (and probably others in the group) know aren’t biblically accurate. Be careful how you respond. You don’t want to misrepresent God’s truth, but you don’t want to misrepresent God’s love, either. Acknowledge everyone’s answers, so they realize that every response is important. Say something like “Thank you” or “That’s an interesting observation.” If necessary, address the comment right then and there, otherwise look for an opportunity to discuss it with that person after your meeting time.
- Restate what you think you’re hearing. Say something like “If I’m understanding correctly, you’re saying...” As you help people work through their own thoughts, you’ll help them discover contradictions or even deeper understandings in their beliefs they might not have even been aware of.
- You can also open up the discussion by saying something like “Who has something to add to what _____ is saying?” This keeps discussion going and prevents one participant from dominating the discussion.
- Try not to have the first or last word on every question (or even most of them). Give everyone the opportunity to participate. At the same time, don’t put anyone on the spot. Remind everyone that they can don’t have to answer any questions they’re not comfortable answering.

You want your group or class to be a safe place where people feel free to share their thoughts and struggles. Many people aren’t used to this, so the tone you set will make the difference between a rich conversation and people keeping their real walks with Jesus, faith issues and questions “off the table.”

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