



Small Group Leadership:

Asking Discussion Questions

iFOLLOW

Working with Jesus

The iFollow Discipleship Series

About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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www.ifollowdiscipleship.org

Small Group Leadership: Asking Discussion Questions

This presentation is designed for people who desire to serve Jesus Christ and help lead others to Him.

Learning Objectives

1. The Great Questions of life
2. How a small group can help people to explore these questions
3. The definition of a good question
4. Is there such a thing as a bad question?
5. Can there be too much questioning? Is it dangerous?

Content Outline

1. The Great Life Questions of humanity and the Bible.
2. Some of the other questions within the Great Questions.
3. Blessings of small groups which can ask questions safely.
4. Why questions are so powerful.
5. What makes a good question good?
6. What are some kinds of questions that are not helpful?

Background Material for the Presenter

An essential task in leading a small group is to ask questions that get the group involved in discussion. People have been asking questions about themselves and the meaning of existence for millennia. No matter which philosopher one reads, which religion one studies, or even which brand of scientific thought one consults, life's Great Questions can be distilled to a handful: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? How do I get there?

The questions are mostly the same, but the answers are numerous as the philosophers, and range from the



sublime to the ridiculous. Consider this sampling, culled from the Wikipedia article entitled “Meaning of Life.”

“Man’s chief end is to **glorify God**, and enjoy him forever.” (The Westminster Shorter Catechism)

The meaning of life is to **end suffering** through detaching oneself from cravings and conceptual attachments. (Early Buddhism)

The meaning of life is in **attaining the highest form of knowledge**. (Platonism)

Humankind began in the state of nature, then found meaning for existence through **labor and property**. We can use social contracts to create an environment that supports those efforts. (Classical liberalism)

People determine human purpose, without supernatural influence. “Humanism affirms our ability, and responsibility, to lead ethical lives of **personal fulfillment** that aspire to the greater good of humanity,” using “enlightened self-interest” to find the “common good.” *The Humanist Manifesto III*, published 2003. (Humanism)

“The purpose of life is to end,” so we should move that purpose along. (The Matrix Revolutions)

As Christians, we believe that the Bible is the clearest exposition of the purpose of the Creator, though it is not the only way God has spoken. The Bible itself teaches that God has spoken “at many times and in various ways.” (Hebrews 1:1; NIV) The most complete revelation of God’s Word was through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. That story is only found in its fullness in the Bible. Believing this changes our entire world view. It means that we seek our answers to life’s questions within that Word.

The Bible begins and ends with the first three of the existential questions at the beginning of this unit. Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?

Genesis declares with authority, I am a child of God, made male or female in the image of a Creator who is somehow We instead of I. I belong to the family of God. I am here because this Creator wanted me.

Revelation states with equal authority that this same Creator plans only one final destination for humanity, but that we may choose whether we want to go there or not. Those who do not wish to live in a Universe created and guided by Love in its purest form may choose, instead, to cease to exist.

These are deceptively simple concepts. Generations of godly people, both before and after Christ, have stated God’s answers (or their own versions of God’s answers) as dogmatic, arbitrary proclamations, shutting down further exploration, sometimes

asserting questions to be sinful doubts or even blasphemies. **God said it, I believe it, that settles it.** True and only part of the full truth.

Small group leaders, and indeed, Christians in general, must remain aware of two things. First, for some people, coming to believe that there even *is* a personal God, let alone that this God cares enough about them as individuals to invest their lives with meaning, is the work of a lifetime all by itself. To merely assert the above statements, simple though they may seem to a believer, will not be likely to open doors for them or invite them into authentic dialogue, in which they may feel safe enough to air their questions and doubts.

Second, the most upright of believers still have their questions! It's one thing to believe in God and that the Purpose of Life is to love and follow Him. It's another thing entirely to figure out what the purpose of **my** life is, and **how** God wants me to follow. Questions, even doubts, are not only acceptable, they are desirable. God gave us our questing minds, and is not pleased when we set them in an imaginary mold of righteousness and let them turn into concrete. He invites, "Come now, and let us reason together." (Isaiah 1:18) He hears out all Job's pain, anger, and fear, and honors him by answering in person! (See last five chapters of Job.) Jesus may chide Thomas for not believing without seeing, but He also makes sure Thomas **can** put his finger in the scars, and what's important, He does that first. (John 20:26-29)

In fact, the rest of the Scriptures in between the beginning and the end (of the beginning) are overflowing with ordinary people asking and re-asking these questions, and more.

Who am I? Child of God, yes. But not like any other of His children. So, who am I? Whom does God mean me to be?

Why am I here? Because God made me, yes. But **why** am I here? What purpose does God dream for me? And why am I **here**? What am I meant to do, be, and learn, here in this place?

Where am I going? Wherever God leads me, to be sure, and eventually to live eternally with Him. But what are the twists and turns in the path between? Which way do I go in **this crossroads**?

In fact, the rest of the Bible is largely about the fourth Great Question: **How do I get there?** And therein lies complexity upon complexity, well mixed with perplexity and even ambiguity. Within this one question lie a host of smaller, more detailed questions.



Other Questions of the Bible

The first question in the Bible that is stated as such, with its own question mark, is found in Genesis 3:1. It cracked the door open to the possibility of ruin for all God's good plans. The question was posed by that crafty serpent, the devil, and its gist was, "Is God trustworthy?" Eve and Adam's answer, "No, maybe not," opened the door wide and ruin rushed in.

Is God trustworthy? Every single human has multiple chances to seek an answer to that question, on a daily basis. Every good Christian goes to church and says, and sings, and prays, "Yes, God is imminently trustworthy! I trust God with every fiber of my being!"

Blessed the small group who can be honest enough to say, "Sometimes I'm afraid of God. Sometimes I fear He'll be angry with me because I.... Sometimes I think He isn't trustworthy, because of.... **Is God really trustworthy? Really?**"

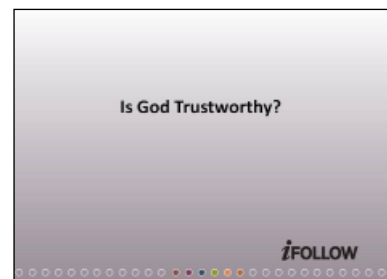
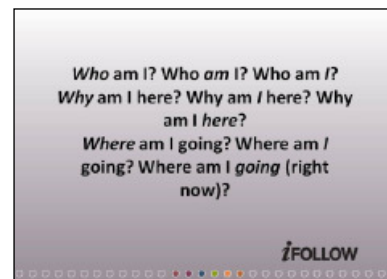
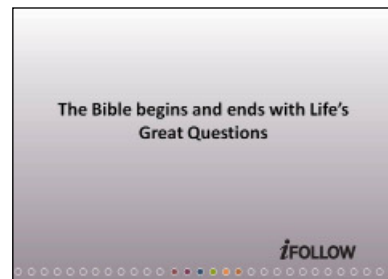
Just as in the old myth of Pandora's box, though, when humans opened the door to doubt, hope came through the door, too.

God knew the second that sin entered His garden. What did He do next? Did He turn away? Did He punish or rebuke? Did He destroy the earth, or at least the people? No, **God came anyway**. He came into the garden as usual, to walk and talk with His children. And He asked the next question: "Where are you?"

Where are you? Where are we? Where am I? This has to be one of the very hardest questions to answer honestly, even when we aren't trying to deceive ourselves and deny some painful truth, and let's face it - most of the time we are.

Judith N. Bunyi, author of a small booklet called *Leading Small Groups*, gives it as her opinion that:

"Accurately describing current reality—the way things are—may be the most important function of leadership. ... [I]t is critical for church leaders—and clergy—to spend time together discussing the ministry of the whole congregation. The conversation needs to include attentiveness to God's guidance and everything that describes a congregation 'as we are, here and now.' Because God is always doing a new thing, this job is continuous. When we pay attention



to change, we provide a base of integrity and strength from which to move into the future. Faith in Jesus Christ and a spiritual centering in God offers the strongest foundation to move people fearlessly through the massive changes of the twenty-first century.” (Bunyi, p. 4)

One pastor keeps a sticky note on his computer screen, with three questions on it: Where am I? Where do I want to go? What can I do that will take me in that direction? He doesn’t mean these questions in the sense of the Great Questions; he means where am I **right now**? Where do I want to go **next**?

Our answer is all too likely to be the same one Adam honestly gave: “I am hiding.” Why? See last question. Our lives are forever circling this way. Is God trustworthy? Even though my husband just left me? Even though I just learned I have cancer? We go through a harrowing time and decide that, yes, God is trustworthy and we can choose to trust. Ten days or ten minutes later, God comes knocking. “Where are you?” And we have to admit it yet again. Hiding.



Blessed the small group where we can say so. Out loud. Where we can ask each other, “Where are you?” in voices of love and reassurance. Where we can wail, letting our anguish show, “But why am I **here**?” Where we can even say, “I don’t know! But I know God loves you. And so do I.”

This question, “Why am I here?” can have several different slants. In the Great Question sense, people are asking, “Why do we exist? Is there a God? How did we get here?” In the heat of a trauma, it can mean, “Why did this happen to me?” Some ask, “Why me?” Others ask, “Why not me?” Each shows a piece of the questioner’s world view. But either is also an honest question. We may find more help in digging under the questions, trying to find and name the feelings that are causing the questioning, than in answers, especially pat ones. It is rarely comforting to be told in the face of crisis or loss, “It was God’s will.” Remember, God let Job wail all his questions—the painful ones, the hurt ones, the angry ones, even the ultimate, “Why was I ever born?” Job spent all of what we have as Chapter 3 on that one!

Another slant we may give the question, “Why am I here?” has to do with our lifework. In other words, “What am I here to accomplish?” And it’s a rare person who has one main answer to that, even in vocation. The vast majority of humans wear dozens of hats over the course of their lives, and at any time in any small group, at least one person will be struggling with “What am I supposed to do **now**?” Or even, “And how am I supposed to accomplish that while also doing this and this and this?”

This question may first arise in the life of the group when it is quite new, and

attempting to determine the purpose of the group as a whole. Is it to be a Bible study group? A group to study some other book or books? A sharing group? A prayer group? All of the above? It is essential that no group find its answer in some other group's answer. We can all help each other ask all the questions. But the answers will vary from group to group, and from person to person, and even more bewilderingly, from time to time in the life of the person or group.



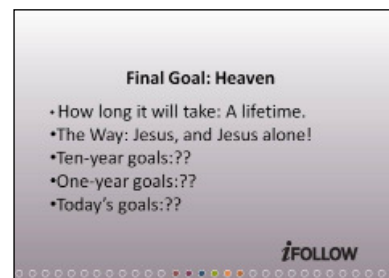
All of these questions have a bearing on the fourth Great Question: How do I get there? Every moment in the life of a believer, ideally, leads toward heaven, but life is such a muddle most of the time that it may feel we're going in exactly the opposite direction, even if we are honestly doing the very best we know to follow the will of God. We could look at it as the ultimate long range plan.

Final Goal: Heaven. How long it will take: A lifetime. The Way: Jesus, and Jesus alone! So far, we're all together.

However, beneath that, we could have ten-year goals, and those will differ drastically from one person to another. And when we come down to five-year goals, one-year goals, monthly goals, weekly goals, and daily goals, we're down to finger-print individuality. The small group may have a stated mission such as "To provide a mother's day off weekly in our community," or "To meet together to pray for our church for one hour weekly," or "To read through and discuss the entire *Great Controversy*," but another mission must be to support each member in figuring out his or her daily path, even if it's just "to get through the next half hour without losing it entirely."

"How do I get there?" includes a clear examination of what one is doing, and whether that is moving toward, or away from, the goal.

As a group with the intention of providing a mother's day off, is effort going toward finding a place, a time, caregivers, researching and meeting local regulations, advertising? Or is effort being wasted just talking about it? Or about each other. . .



As a person trying to make it through the hour without "losing it," is effort going toward choosing cheerful topics to think on? Is the attention on the needs of others in the group? Is prayer focused on what is wanted, peace, rather than on what isn't, anger or fear or sorrow? Or, was the original goal unrealistic? A vital question unlikely to be asked by the person in question, but by someone else with clear sight.

Is this person, in fact, in a place where he or she **needs** to let go and “lose it;” to cry, perhaps, to ask some hard questions? Blessed the small group where such honest expression could be encouraged and comforted.

Discussion Questions

The key tool for guiding discussion in a small group is by asking questions rather than making statements. This is particularly true when there are nonbelievers or unchurched people in the group who may not yet agree with the authority in Scripture, furthermore the authority of Adventist heritage, church teachings, etc. In the traditional Sabbath school study, much the the discussion revolves around statements that the teacher makes—propositional truths—and questions that simply unpack these truths or Scripture passages. This approach will not work as well in small group ministries, unless they simply duplicate the traditional function of the Sabbath School class.

Guiding a fruitful discussion with questions that get people thinking and sharing is a leadership method that can be learned. Practice is really the only way to hone this skill. Here are four key “secrets” to this skill.

1. Ask open-ended questions!—Avoid questions that can be answered yes or no, including true or false and multiple-choice questions. For example, “Is Jesus the sheep or the shepherd in this parable?” Avoid questions that do not require group members to think or face hard choices, but simply have predictable answers. For example, “Why did Jesus die on the cross?” Ask questions that require people to share some actual thoughts and feelings of their own. For example, “Which of the challenges the author mentioned has been the most difficult one for you in this past year? What are some ways that you have done well in overcoming that challenge?”

2. Ask follow-up questions!—Listen to the answers that individuals give and shape your next question based on what you hear. Encourage the people in the group dig deeper, not just give “surface” responses by asking follow-up questions. For example, What makes you say that? How do you feel about that? How do you think that would have affected you if you had been living in the time of Jesus? How would you explain your answer to a non-Christian friend or neighbor? Try to get at the reality underneath the things people say.

3. Start a debate!—Don’t be afraid to get some back-and-forth going over key points in the discussion. If everyone agrees with everything that is said, the group discussions are boring for many people and the discussion is pointless. The reason to have a group discussion is to get different perspectives and wrestle with things! Here are some examples of how to get a debate going by acting as “devil’s advocate.” Do you really agree with what the author is saying in that chapter? Why or why not?

Why did God design it to work that way? Why not just do ----- instead? What would you say to someone who disagrees with that? Why do we really have to do it like that? Why can't we just go (some other route) instead?

4. Make sure the rubber hits the road!—By the end of a small group discussion, you need to make sure that most people in the group apply what they discussed to our current lives—otherwise you just leave group a little smarter, rather than with changed lives! Whatever the topic for a group session, make sure to end with some application questions. For example, So what in the world does that have to do with our lives today? How can you change your perspective from today on regarding that issue? What one thing can you do differently in this next week to start living that out? Some groups will add some accountability to that last question, recording what members share, and asking them to report back the next week.

Good Questions

Asking the right kind of questions can be one of the most powerful tools in both personal growth and small group relationships. The questioning techniques ancient masters used with their disciples are so famous that today we call teaching by asking, the “Socratic method.”

Jesus also tended to ask His followers questions designed to make them think. And think again. One of the questions He asked is another of those Great Life Questions. The story is found in Matthew 16:13-23.

“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’

“And they said, ‘Some {say} John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.’

“He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’”

One preacher made a compelling argument that for all practical intents and purposes, in each individual life, **Jesus is no more and no less than that person thinks Him to be.** Think of it! The All-Powerful Son of the Living God (Peter’s inspired answer) cannot even be Messiah to one who will not allow Him to be!



In a sense, that is the question Jesus was asking of every person He met, from the priests in the temple when He was twelve, to Caiaphas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod, even the two thieves crucified beside Him.

He’s still asking. Do we stop too soon? Do we say easily, “Oh, yes, He’s God, He’s

the Way, the Life, the Truth,” and neglect to ask ourselves the same question on a deeper level? Who is Jesus to me, right here, right now, in **this** mundane, or critical, or irritating, or frightening situation?

Why are questions so powerful?

Life coach Jane Herman gives this thought-provoking answer:

“Why Questions Work So Well—Most of us are naturally inclined to answer questions that are posed to us. If they are honest and sensitive inquires we usually feel little resistance to answering them. We tend to respond to questions in a much more positive way than to pointed advice, requests, or demands.

“If you are like me you have a natural aversion to someone telling you what to do! When someone tells us to do something we can just feel the resistance building - Why should I? Who says I have to? Who are you to tell me what to do? The funny thing is, we tend to use this “telling” rather than “asking” approach even when we are dealing with ourselves. We drive ourselves like horses - “You should go here. You should do this.” We become simultaneously the demanding jockey and the resistant racehorse.

“Rather than telling yourself what to do, sometimes you can achieve a much more effortless and compelling result by simply asking yourself the right questions and listening deeply to your own answers.” (witi.com)

“Honest and sensitive inquiries.” “The right questions.” Are there “right” and “wrong” ways to question, then? We’ve all heard the dictum, “There is no such thing as a stupid question.” This proverb reflects the fact that God made us to be seekers, and the main way we learn, maybe the only way, is by asking questions. The first sentences toddlers put together seem to be questions, and for the next few years they come ever faster (and ever more unanswerable!) One of the things we learn as we grow through a life of faith is that God apparently delights in making all of life a treasure hunt for us. It seems we learn things better, or make them a stronger part of ourselves, if we have hunted them down through rigorous effort, rather than simply being told “the answers.”

Edward deBono, in his book, *Teaching Thinking*, says, “Too often there is a God-like attitude in education. If we could only increase knowledge then we could throw out doubt, indecision, and problems. We pile on the knowledge. Knowledge is easy to teach and knowledge is there. ... Education teaches knowledge because there is nothing else to teach. But knowledge is no more a substitute for thinking than



thinking is a substitute for knowledge. In most practical situations of life knowledge is never going to be complete, so thinking is going to be needed.”

How many of our churches or small groups try to work this way, pile on the knowledge? Throw out doubt, indecision, and problems? One could take issue with his description of this method as “God-like.” It is precisely opposite to the way God works. No doubt what deBono has in mind is that this attitude toward education puts the teacher on a pedestal as the “all-knowing” one, and encourages the singularly silly human propensity to deify the self.

Actually, it is just this kind of thinking that brought about the odd idea that there might be a stupid question. When someone says timidly, “This is probably a dumb thing to ask, but ...” what is really being said is, “I think I should already know this.

Somewhere in my past, someone probably told me the answer already, but I didn’t learn it, or I forgot it.” The questioner isn’t asking if the question is stupid. He’s asking if **he’s** stupid. And the answer is No.

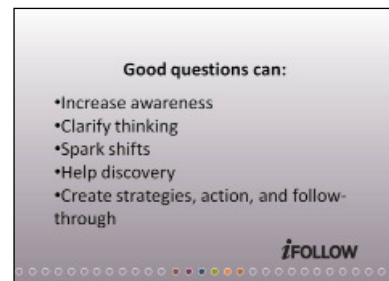
But from the point of view of a group leader who is seeking to help group members dig deeply into their questions, with the goal of knowing themselves, each other, and God better, there are questions that are more helpful and effective than others.

The coach mentioned above, Jane Herman, has high goals for her questions. She wants them to help her clients: (1) Increase their awareness and clarify their thinking; (2) Shine the light of consciousness on previously unquestioned beliefs, assumptions, and points of view that have unnecessarily closed down their thinking and limited their possibilities; (3) Spark spontaneous shifts to new more empowering points of view; (4) Help them discover what they really want to bring into, or let go of, in their lives; (5) Create powerful strategies and plans for going after and getting what they want; (6) Get into action, and follow through; (7) Capture, claim, and leverage lessons from their own personal experiences. (witi.com)

Those, indeed, are some powerful questions. What kinds of questions could lead to this sort of self-discovery? Herman continues with a list of possibilities. Here are just three:

A question to ask when you want something but aren’t sure exactly what it is.

Sometimes you have a vague idea that you want something different in your life. Something is “not right”; you’re feeling uneasy or dissatisfied but aren’t sure exactly why. You try to choose the best word you can to describe what is bothering you, but aren’t sure exactly what it means. “I’m bored!” you say. Or, “I’m scared.” Or “I’m dissatisfied.” You want to get un-bored (or unafraid, or satisfied) but you are not sure



how to make it happen. Try asking yourself the following question: “What would look significantly different in my life if I was not bored/afraid/dissatisfied?” Sometimes your answer to this question can shed some light on what it is you are really seeking and start you on a path moving toward it.

A question to help you recognize and capture opportunities. Many of us are natural “problem solvers” and so we have a tendency to focus on the challenge or trouble we see in a situation as opposed to the possibilities it might offer. Here is a question you can ask yourself to shift your thinking and energy from the negative to the positive aspects of any given situation: “Assuming your life is perfect right now, what opportunities are available to you?”

A question to help you mine the gold from your life experiences. We all have positive and negative experiences every day. Often we let them pass on by without giving them much conscious thought. To really help you catch the lessons and inspiration from your experiences, try asking yourself the following question on a regular basis: “What happened here that I want to capture and claim?” (*ibid.*)

Any of these questions would be good ones for a group to ask of the group life, as well. The last could be something asked at the end of every meeting.

Another website, swerve.lifechurch.tv, has a set of ten questions for church leaders to ask, which could be adapted for small groups, and for personal experience, as well:

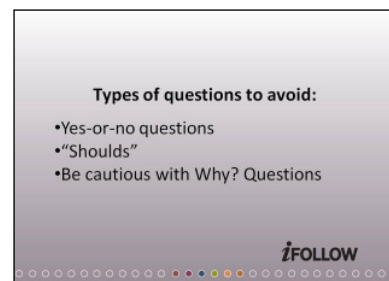
1. What are we doing that we should stop doing?
2. What are we not doing that we should start doing?
3. Who is doing something we need to learn from?
4. What are we doing that has gotten stale?
5. What area of ministry is under-resourced?
6. Where have we experienced inappropriate spending drift?
7. Who is going to help cut expenses and when will it be done?
8. Are we avoiding any problem issues?
9. What are our blind spots? What ministries are struggling?
10. What changes are we making to them in the next 30 days? What do we have to celebrate?

Bad Questions

So, what kinds of questions are not helpful, sensitive, and honest? Are there questions which not only don't add to the sense of discovery in the heart and in the group, but shut it down and make it unsafe to ask any more? And if so, how can one recognize questions that are not helpful? In a very real sense, the group will have to search this out for themselves, along with their other questions. It might be helpful to end sessions by asking questions about the questions: (1) Did they help? (2) How did people feel in response to them? (3) Was there resistance, and if so, can the group figure out why?

There are, however, some types of questions group leaders should avoid. Here are some partial guidelines, with the reasoning behind them.

Yes-or-No questions—A question that can be answered with yes or no is, by definition, a question to which the “Right Answer” is already known (supposedly). If the group leader thinks she knows it and merely wants to elicit it, that's not a question, it's a test, and the leader has become a schoolmaster. Yet we do this so frequently that we often don't question it. There may be boredom and/or resistance in the group, and no one may recognize why. And if someone gives a “Wrong Answer” (especially if he insists on it), argument may follow, with bad feelings, chaos, and perhaps even partial or complete group breakdown.



Questions with the “Right Answer” strongly hinted at within the body of the question—Questions which begin with something like “What response **should** we have to ...?” are also questions with expected “Right Answers,” and as such, not honest questions. Disguising this kind of question as “What is your response to ...?” can be unmasked by noticing whether the leader openly accepts any answer, or keeps probing or nudging until he gets the one he wanted. A leader who asks what someone's response is must be ready to accept that person's answer with love. (By the way, if he isn't, the one being questioned will know it, and not give the honest answer, anyway.)

Finally, to return one more time to personal coach Jane Hermon:

“‘Why?’ questions can be a little tricky. We often use ‘Why?’ questions when we want to punish someone else or beat ourselves up: ‘Why did you do that?’ ‘Why did you think that?’ ‘Why?’ questions appear to call into question our thinking or our judgment. For this reason we often feel resistant to ‘Why?’ questions. Often times you are better off asking yourself ‘What?’ questions (e.g., ‘What is stopping me?’ or ‘What is getting in my way?’ or ‘What resources do I need to proceed?’) or even ‘Who?’ or ‘How?’ questions. Unless you can truly ask yourself a ‘Why?’ question without

reproach, simply reframe the question in a different context (e.g., What? Who? How?).”

Is Questioning Dangerous?

Can there be too much questioning? Is it dangerous to our faith? Where is the line between asking honest, deep, direct questions, and doubting God? Ultimately, this, too, will have to be decided by the individual, and the group.

The Bible shows both sides of this discussion. We have several places in Scripture which say not to “test God.” Moses says it to the Israelites in Deut. 6:16, and Jesus quotes that to Satan in the wilderness, recorded in Matt. 4:7 and Luke 4:12. Isaiah 45:9 says, “Woe to {the one} who quarrels with his Maker: An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, What are you doing?”

On the other hand, we have God’s direct invitation to “reason” with Him, in Isaiah 1:18, and even to “test” or “prove” Him in regard to tithes, in Malachi 3:10. We have Gideon saying apologetically, “Please, may I test again?” (Judges 6:39) and Abraham haggling with God over how many righteous souls it would take to save Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:18-33). We even have Moses, several prophets, and lots of Psalms wrestling openly with God, not to mention the quintessential story of one man’s struggle with the Creator, Jacob at Jabbok, in Genesis 31:21-32. “You,” God says to Jacob, “have striven with God and with men and have prevailed.” In the verses after this, for the first time in his life, Jacob calls God “**my** God,” that is, “the God of Israel,” rather than “the God of my fathers.”



It seems to center on attitude. In Matt. 22:35 and Luke 11:53; 20:40, it is clear that those who are questioning Jesus are asking hostile, testing questions. They want to prove Him wrong. In this, they show their relation to “their father, the devil,” who said snidely, “**If** You are the Son of God.”

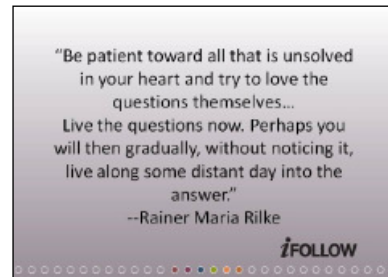
When we ask our questions, we seek to be honest, open, and willing to learn. However, honesty and authenticity compel us to admit, as well, to the times when we do feel hostile or angry or doubtful of God’s provision and trustworthiness. The solution to these times is not to deny them and pretend they don’t happen, but to bring them to the light, in the presence of God and our trusted friends, to say, “Lord, I believe, please help my unbelief!”

And it behooves the trusted friends doing the listening to be loving and nonjudgmental, to listen, and ask more questions, and love unconditionally, and trust

the Spirit Who lives and breathes at the center of our group to bring light and life and peace. In the meantime, we can. . .

*"Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart
and try to love the questions themselves...
Live the questions now.
Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it,
live along some distant day into the answer."*

-- Rainer Maria Rilke



Handout in this Package

1. The Great Life Questions worksheet



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& Presenter
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Additional Resources

Bunyi, Judith N. (2000). *Leading Small Groups*. Nashville: Cokesbury.

deBono, Edward (1976). *Teaching Thinking*. London: Billing and Sons, Ltd.

Groeschel, Craig (2008). "The Power of Questions." www.swerve.lifechurch.tv/2008/09/02/the-power-of-questions

Nash, Roland H (1999). *Life's Ultimate Questions, An Introduction to Philosophy*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Polich, Laurie (2002). *Small Group Qs*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties.

Poole, Garry (2003). *Seeker Small Groups: Engage Spiritual Seekers in Life-Changing Discussion*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Powell, Terry (2008). *Now That's a Good Question: How to Lead Quality Bible Discussions*. Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company.

Websites

Women In Technology International is a large, secular website designed to support women working technology industries. It includes a page for Life Coach, speaker, and writer Jane Herman. Her questions are very thought-provoking. This section is at: www.witi.com/growth/2004/questions.php

A public school board in Canada has on its web site a number of teaching tools for its faculty. This includes "Bloom's Taxonomy of Model Questions and Key Words," an interesting chart of words and phrases to help one formulate many different types of questions, for different purposes, with different results: www.cbv.ns.ca/sstudies/links/learn/1414.html

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the Four Great Life Questions resonates most with you right now?
2. Why are questions good things? Why are we so often uncomfortable with them?
3. Is it possible for faith to hinder good questioning? Why or why not?
4. Share a time when someone did or did not help you in your questioning. What was helpful? What was not?
5. What are some practical ways we can encourage questions in our homes, groups, Sabbath schools, and churches?

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**Small Group
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Group Activities

Activity 1

Purpose: To practice asking good questions when faced with a difficult situation.

Preparation: You will need room for small groups to work in relative privacy.

Assignment: Divide participants into small groups of three or four. In each small group, ask a volunteer to bring up a difficult situation he/she is facing or has faced. It could be a personal situation, or a group problem the person has faced. The others in the small group will help the person ask questions such as, What was the intended goal? Was this the real goal? How did the actions and words help or defeat the goal? What other words or actions might be tried in a situation like this?

Time: Allow a few minutes for getting into groups, and a few for someone to bring up a problem. This may take a bit of extra “small talk” time unless the group already feel comfortable with each other. Allow 15 minutes for problem-solving questioning, and some time at the end, if desired, for sharing with the larger group.

Debrief: In this case, it is up to the presenter’s best judgment whether the groups should share with the larger group, or not. They may have found all the support they need in the small groups, and depending on how personal they got, they may not wish to share more openly.

Activity 2

Purpose: To spend some time grappling with some of Life’s Great Questions.

Preparation: Put the following on the board or flipchart, using underlining or different colors or larger letters to make the different emphases clear.

Who am I? Who **am** I? Who am **I**?

Why am I here? Why am **I** here? Why am I **here**?

Where am I going? Where am **I** going? Where am I **going** (right now)?

Assignment: Divide attendees into small groups and let them spend fifteen minutes or so grappling with these Great Questions. How does the emphasis change the question? How would they answer them individually, without resorting to simplistic answers that are as true for any other human as for this one person?

Time: Allow 15 to 20 minutes for group discussion and 15 more for sharing with the larger group.

Personal or Group Activity

This could be given as “homework.” Ask participants to choose a Biblical character who faced a difficult situation. It needs to be someone about whom the Bible has some detail, such as one of the patriarchs or their wives, one of the kings or queens of Israel, a major prophet, a disciple, Paul, etc. Have the person or group list all the questions the person asked about the situation, either in actual words in the story, or implied by the story. Which questions helped the person find a resolution? Which did not? Why? Or did they all help in some way?

Job is a case all his own. If the group would like to study Job’s story more closely, find the chapters that tell what Job was thinking, as opposed to those which tell what his friends were thinking, and have each person or group take just one chapter, finding all the questions, deciding which were helpful, etc. In all of these, allow and encourage diversity of opinion. There might be some good to the group in also examining why different ones in the class think differently.

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Handout 1

The Great Life Questions

Each of us, as a Christian, usually agrees on the basic answers to the Great Life Questions. But as we narrow down and define our own life's daily meaning, under God, there will be large differences. Spend some time in prayer and fill out the following chart. Then talk over your answers with a trusted confidant. Word to the wise: Use pencil!

Final Goal: Heaven.

How long it will take: A lifetime.

The Way: Jesus, and Jesus alone!

But what does this mean to *me* specifically?

What are the ways that I incorporate Jesus' Way into my daily life?

Are there some other ways I could do this?

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Ten-year goals:

One-year goals:

One-month goals:

One-week goals:

Today's goals:

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