

TAKE OFF THE MASK GROUPWORDS

Forming and asking good discussion questions is critical for Small Group health. Being “small” provides a great opportunity for true discussion. The Small Group is not the place to lecture or simply share what you have learned from your study, but to lead the group members into discovering God’s truth for themselves. After all, Jesus didn’t say to the Twelve, “*Sit down, get out a sheet of paper, you’re going to need this in about three years.*” Instead, he said, “*Follow me.*” And he led them through a time of searching, exploring, asking, and learning.

With this in mind, how can we evaluate our questions? What are the basic types of questions?

Questions of Observation ...

These questions begin with words like: “*Who*” “*What*” “*Describe*” “*Find*” and “*List.*” They help us get the facts before we move on to interpretation. In fact, it often takes several observation questions to collect the basic facts. The questions should be simple, but not so simple that they insult intelligence. Sometimes it’s helpful to combine questions. For example: “*When did Nicodemus come to see Jesus and why did he choose that time?*”

Questions of Interpretation ...

These questions begin with phrases like: “*What does it mean*” “*Why*” “*How*” and “*Explain.*” They are aimed at constantly bringing the group members back to the text. We are not bringing predetermined ideas to scripture, but allowing scripture to speak to us.

Question of Application ...

Now we are ready to ask: “*What does it mean to me here and now?*” “*What must I do?*” “*What changes should I make first?*” “*How will this affect my relationships?*” These are the questions that are often never asked. They are the most difficult to formulate, but they are the link between the scripture and our daily living. They move from simple (facts and observations) to more complex (interpretation and application). Facts are important but moving on to practical application is what will make a difference in the lives of your group members.

Here are some tests to apply to your questions:

1. Is it a “yes” or “no” question? Avoid this type — they do not promote discussion.
2. Does it have a clear answer from the text or does it lead to speculation?
3. Does it stimulate thought?
4. Does it advance the discussion, or does it lead to a new tangential issue?
5. Do the questions build on each other, one leading to the next?

A good question is a key to unlock meaning. It is a tool to dig into a passage of scripture. My dad was my first Small Group teacher and he used to say that a good question was the most difficult part of preparing for the Small Group. Difficult ... but worth the time and effort.

Because of a Cross,
Bob Chisholm