

Small Group Leadership Insights

Effective Discussion Questions

Discussion questions are the secret weapon of small groups. Good questions:

1. Draw people into considering, wrestling with and applying the topic and themes you are teaching.
2. Develop meaningful relationship that allow people to connect, be known, and get to know others.
3. Encourage self-discovery which empowers much more ownership than being told what's true.
4. Bring out new insights that one teacher wouldn't think up by themselves.
5. Help everyone understand and see that each person is an important part of the group.

Good Discussion Questions:

1. **Are open-ended.** Factual recall questions do not promote discussion. They often feel a little insulting as well. For example, instead of asking "Who built the ark?", ask "What difficulties do you think Noah faced while building the ark?" Factual recall questions are great for school to check to see if students did their homework. They're not so great for a Bible study where **people have insecurities** about their own Bible mastery and knowledge.

2. **Typically spark 5 to 10 minutes of discussion.** A good facilitator will **follow up initial answers with clarifying questions** to draw out deeper meaning and insights. For example, follow up answers with questions like, “Why do think that’s the case?” or “How does that work in your life?” take answers to the next level.

3. **Usually don’t have right or wrong answers.** Good discussion questions may reveal much about a person’s outlook or theology. A good question should **reveal what’s going on inside more than direct or correct it.** Answers that reveal incorrect theology provide opportunities for future teaching and topics.

4. **Follow a natural progression.** Here are the typical types of questions and a normal progression for how they flow together:
 - A. **Ice breakers and intros.** Use these questions to help your small group member **engage the topic and to “warm up” to the discussion.** They can be interesting, thought-provoking, or even a bit silly. Good intro questions are relatable to everyone, often key into personal experience, and can be answered by just about anyone. For example, “Have you ever been given a horrible word of advice? What happened?” Typically, one intro question does the trick.

B. Connections and Comprehension. Use these questions to start digging into the Biblical account, the chapter, or the topic. These questions **help people understand what's really happening**. For example, "Read 1 Samuel 11:1-5. Why do you think the author begins the account by mentioning that spring is the time when kings go off to war?" or "What mistakes can you see David making in these five verses?" "Why is each one a mistake?" Typically, three to five connection questions help build a great understanding. More complex passages may need more connection questions. Make sure your questions move from focusing on the simplest to the most-complex connections.

C. Analysis and Synthesis These questions help your group **open up to broader concepts, bigger connections, or dive down to deeper truths**. These questions ask group members to make comparisons and find contrasts to other passages or events, provide examples, consider forces or motives behind the events, and think of the why behind the ideas. For example, "Compare David's attitude in this passage with Jesus' command in Matthew 16:34" or "What would you tell David if you had a chance to talk with him that morning?" Typically, just a couple of these well-placed questions can lead to a deep dive into God's Word.

D. Evaluation and Personal Application Every Bible study should lead to some form of the "How then shall we live?" question. **These questions help group members see how the problem or the truth presented plays out in their own**

lives. They should help your group members think about what God is asking of them or what they want to do differently. For example, “When do you find that your own judgment can be clouded or even wrong?” or “What guidelines do you have or do you need to keep yourself clear of failing like David did?” Typically, one or two solid personal application questions leave people with plenty to think and pray on.