

More Questions, Less Answers

Jesus changed my perspective on my role as a small-group leader.

Heather Zempel

Henri Nouwen said, "We have to keep looking for the spiritual questions if we want spiritual answers." I used to think that my job as a small-group leader was to gather and dispense information. I thought small-group leadership was about controlling the message and making sure everyone knew the right answers to questions. The longer I plow the ground of spiritual growth, however, the more I'm convinced that discipleship boils down to the questions we ask more than the answers we give.

I'd love to know the percentage of Scripture devoted to Jesus' questions vs. Jesus' teaching. I bet the percentage looks a lot different from the amount of time the typical pastor engages in both of those activities. Consider the following:

- Who do you say that I am?
- Do you believe I can do this?
- Why are you afraid?
- What is your name?
- What concern is it of yours?
- Do you love me?

He asked questions that are confusing, disturbing, realigning, and transforming. The questions Jesus asked transformed the lives of the people he was talking with.

Discipleship is often seen as giving people spiritual answers. It's downloading information. It's teaching. But is it possible that discipleship has less to do with cramming in and more to do with drawing out? In the four gospels, Jesus asked 307 questions—and he only answered 3 of the 183 questions that were asked of him.

The more I lead small groups and disciple people, the less I consider my job to be a dispenser of information. Rather, I view it as being a question asker. I'm beginning to use questions as the primary vehicle for disciple-making. They presuppose relationship, build trust, and invite us to explore deeper places of the mind and heart.

This isn't a new approach. Jewish rabbinical training was built on the exchange of questions. John Wesley's classes of the Methodist movement used a list of questions to give structure to their small-group meetings.

Here are some of the questions I like to ask in groups:

- Where do you see God most at work in your life?
- What is something you are excited about in your life right now?

- What is a big challenge you're facing right now?
- What fruit of the Spirit is most abundant in your life? What fruit of the Spirit is least abundant in your life?
- What is stopping you from doing what you know God has called you to do?

My hope is that asking great questions will move discipleship outside the classroom context and into our everyday conversations. And small-group leader, you're the perfect person to ask these questions of your group members.

—Heather Zempel is the Discipleship Pastor of National Community Church in Washington, D.C. and author of *Community Is Messy*; copyright 2009 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Do you see your role as more answer-giver or question-asker? Why?
2. How might asking great questions help people learn for themselves? How might this method leave more of an impact?
3. What are some questions that you could use with your group this week to help group members discover God's truth for themselves?