

How to Ask Better Questions

By [Drew Dixon](#)

Do the people in your small group stare blankly at you when you ask a question? Do they share their experiences openly and honestly, or do they give you the answers they think you want? Do the members of your group tend to leave your meetings feeling encouraged or disheartened?

If your small group discussions are not as lively, engaging, or fruitful as you would like them to be, perhaps this is because you are asking the wrong discussion questions. One of the keys of any good small group bible study is thought-provoking questions that challenge people to process the teaching of God's Word and how it applies to their lives. So here are three shifts that might need to take place in the way you ask questions in your small group:

1. Follow up “what do you think” questions with “look to the text” questions.

This may seem obvious, but I talk to too many church leaders who stress that their groups should focus on application rather than theology or on Christian living over the particulars of doctrine. It seems that many church leaders fear that the reason there is division in the church today is because people have studied the Bible too closely. Don't fear losing the members of your small group by asking them to look to Scripture for the answers to your questions.

The danger of too many “what do you think” questions is this: the way you challenge the members of your small group to read their Bibles in your group meetings will greatly influence the way they read and interpret the Bible on their own. While it can be helpful to gauge your group on what they believe and think about God, it's important that we constantly acknowledge that God's Word is inspired ([2 Tim. 3:16-17](#)) and powerful ([Heb. 4:13](#)). Our thoughts are not. We must acknowledge that “the heart is more deceitful than anything else” ([Jer. 17:9](#)). This is why it's important to study the Bible with other believers in a small group setting—when we do so, we can lovingly help each other acknowledge the ways in which we have been trying to interpret the Bible to suit our own passions ([2 Tim. 4:3](#)).

So always follow up “what do you think” questions with “what does the text say” questions. In so doing, you will train your group members to elevate the truth of God's Word over their own opinions.

2. Stop asking “Who?” and “What?” and start asking “How?” and “Why?”

Everyone knows the answers to “who” and “what” questions already. Who do I need to trust? *God*. Who died for my sins? *Jesus*. Who do I need to share the gospel with? *Everyone you see every second of every day*. What should I do? *Pray and read the Bible*.

We all know that we need to trust God and that we should joyfully share the gospel, but most of us struggle to do these things. In other words, most people in your group need to be challenged to get to the root of *why* they've been struggling to trust God. So be more specific: “How do our

struggles to trust God manifest themselves?” “Why do you think it is so difficult for us to trust God in the midst of difficulty?”

Older brother types love to answer “who” and “what” questions—getting them right makes them feel good about themselves. Jesus, however, warned against washing the outside of the cup while the inside festers with bitterness ([Matt. 23:25-26](#)). More than simply asking people what the Bible says, we need to ask them to think deeply about what it means and how it applies directly to their present situations and struggles.

3. Stop asking behavioral questions and start asking heart questions.

If you’ve spent much time in church, you’ve lost count of the number of times you’ve been asked who you need to share the gospel with or what you could do this week to prioritize your quiet time. While Scriptures certainly calls us to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness ([1 Tim. 4:7](#)), sometimes our small group meeting can become so focused on what we are supposed to do as followers of Christ that we neglect the more difficult and more important matter of the heart.

Jesus said, “Nothing going into a man from the outside can defile him. [...] What comes out of a person—that defiles him. For from within, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts” ([Mark 7:18-21](#)). Jesus demands a righteousness that surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees ([Matt. 5:21](#)), and thankfully, He has granted us such righteousness through His death and resurrection ([2 Cor. 5:17](#); [Phil. 3:8-9](#)) by which He has changed and continues to change our sinful hearts.

Your small group members don’t need you to tell them what they are doing wrong; chances are they already know that. They need you to help them dig deeper in order to get to the root of their struggles so that they might take steps of faith to trust Christ to transform their hearts. (**Editor's note: You need to help them figure out HOW** to make practical and real changes that last, and to be motivated to do it and stick with it.)

Asking too many questions that focus on what we should and shouldn’t do as believers runs the risk of creating a group full of Pharisees rather than disciples. Remember that the heart is deceitful above all else, but remember also that through Jesus, God has given us hearts to know Him ([Jer. 24:7](#)). Help the members of your small group know Christ more fully by challenging them to look to the text and to answer questions about how and why it speaks directly to them so that they might get to the root of the sin in their hearts and delight more deeply in the God who created them for Himself.

Drew Dixon is Discipleship Strategist for LifeWay Christian Resources and the Editor-in-Chief of [GameChurch.com](#). He also writes for WORLD Magazine, Paste Magazine, Christ and Pop Culture, and Think Christian.