

Writing Good Questions for Communal Discovery Bible Study

A leader's questions have a profound affect on the quality of a group Bible study. It takes work and practice to write good questions. There are four types of questions:

1. Questions that help the group to envision the scene.
2. Questions that capture the tension or point of intrigue in a text.
3. Questions that link the studiers' lives to the text.
4. Questions that tie portions of the discussion together.

All four types are important in a group study and should be used in combination throughout the group discussion. To write good questions, teachers needs to immerse themselves in the text long enough to see the scene brilliantly, feel the tension of the text, and have their own curiosity aroused. Then they can write a variety of questions (10-15) to use with the group, though not all of their questions will be used.

Good Bible study questions have the following characteristics:

- open-ended: promote discussion, have multiple answers
- real questions, answer is not totally obvious
- gets the studiers to look back into the text
- highlight relationships
- use the language of the group and the text
- help studiers to identify with emotion in the text or link their own experience to the text
- short and concise
- startling or unexpected
- variety of type and breadth

Examples of good and not-so-good questions using Mark 4:35-41 (Jesus calms the storm):

1. Questions that help the group to envision the scene.
Good question: *What would it be like to be one of the fishermen that evening in the boat?*
Not-so-good question: *Who is there?*
2. Questions that capture the tension or point of intrigue in a text.
Good question: *What is Jesus' attitude towards the disciples when he wakes up?*
Not-so-good question: *What do you think of the disciples' lack of faith when they wake Jesus up?*
3. Questions that link the studiers' lives to the text.
Good question: *Describe a time you were physically or emotionally overwhelmed.*
Not-so-good question: *When is the last time you were on a boat?*
4. Questions that tie portions of the discussion together.
Good question: *In this passage, the disciples voice two different questions (line 7 & 11). Let's compare them.*
Not-so-good question: *How does the sea change over the course of this passage?*

The difference between inductive and Socratic questions:

Webster's defines the Socratic method as "a method of teaching or discussion, as used by Socrates, in which one asks a series of easily answered questions that inevitably lead the answerer to a logical conclusion foreseen by the questioner." I believe that we have often confused inductive with Socratic. The leader asks questions that lead a group to verbalize an

insight or make a point that the teacher wants to make. These questions are leading and generally have one answer. They do not promote discovery or discussion.

In contrast, inductive questions facilitate discovery of the meaning and power of the text by helping the group process what they are seeing in the text and put it together in a meaningful way. Truly inductive questions guide the group to discuss a particular section of the text, rather than being means by which a leader gets the group to verbalize a phrase or insight that the leader has in mind.

When we say we are going to have an inductive Bible study, but our question asking is more Socratic, members of the study may feel manipulated. We have said that this is a study where the group interprets the passage together rather than the teacher explaining the passage, but by the nature of the teacher's questions, it is clear that the teacher has something very specific in mind that they are driving at.

E.g. Mark 4:35-41 Jesus calms the storm:

- Inductive question: What are the disciples' motives in waking Jesus up? How do they perceive Jesus at that point in the storm?
- Socratic question: What do the disciples call Jesus when they wake him up? What does that say about the state of their faith?

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