

QUESTIONING

DON'T WORRY ABOUT DIFFICULT QUESTIONS



Hesitant about leading an enquirers group, as in *Discovering*? Afraid you'll be asked a question you can't answer, or your answer might be disputed or rejected? The animation suggests that there is no need to worry. You don't have to answer people's questions.

FOR EXAMPLE...

If it is a factual question, you can invite the group to Google the information. If it's a question of opinion, you can respond, 'From what you know about Jesus so far, what do you think he would say?'

If someone says, 'But I don't know anything about Jesus. This is my first meeting,' you could reply: 'Most people think Jesus is a great spiritual teacher. So what do you think a spiritual teacher would say?'

You'll be introducing people to the greatest spiritual habit of all - connecting their thinking and actions to Christ.

What if it is a really difficult question, such as why God allows suffering, and people say they don't know what Jesus would say? Then encourage the

group to be comfortable with 'Don't know.' Not knowing is alright! As time goes on, members may get flashes of insight, even if this side of eternity they never find the complete answer.

Not knowing reminds us of our human limitations. And being humble about our humanity is a good Christian practice!

EXPLAIN

If you are going to adopt this approach to people's questions, be transparent. Explain what you are doing and why. Otherwise, some may feel frustrated. They may think, 'I have got an important question and the leader is not answering it!'

You could say, 'One of my Christian beliefs is that the leader does not have all the answers. That's why it is a discussion group. Everyone has something to contribute. I'll share my thoughts too, but as one of the group. God can speak through anyone.'

If it is appropriate, you could explain that many groups in the church's history have been led astray by their leaders. The best safeguard against abuse and error is to allow other voices to question and challenge the leader.

In the discussion, Christians in the group may be tempted to correct 'wrong' answers. They should resist! People may not feel confident in exploring Christ. To be told they have got it wrong may stop the group feeling safe and put them off.

BE POSITIVE

Remember: we are not saved by right answers. For nearly 2,000 years the church got the wrong answer about slavery. Does that mean that all these Christians will not be in heaven?!

So don't focus on what you think people may have got wrong. Concentrate on what you do agree with. Be positive about whatever resonates with you. Home in on what is helpful and affirm it. That way you'll encourage people and build them up (Romans 12.8).

Trust the Holy Spirit to work through the Bible and the insights of the group. As people spend time exploring stories about Jesus and the stories he told, gradually they will get a more rounded view of him. In time their contributions to the discussion will reflect this fuller picture.

Keep drawing people out. Don't close them down by your enthusiasm to share what you know. Cambridge University psychologist Sara Savage once



said, 'The experience of being listened to is so close to the experience of being loved as to be indistinguishable.'

LISTEN AND LEARN

So be like Jo in the video. Make it a priority to listen to others rather than correct them. You may be amazed by what they teach you.

Be patient (Galatians 5.22). Allow the Spirit to bring people to maturity. When they are ready and if they want, explore Deepening to see how you can help them grow further.

Remember: leadership includes helping other people to see what you can see. As former Church of England archbishop Rowan Williams once said, that does rather presume you get out of the way first. So be alongside people as they explore Christ. Don't be in front and obscure the view!

