



STYLES OF SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

GROUPWORDS

Leading a Small Group discussion is very different from preaching a sermon or teaching a class because the purpose is not simply to disseminate information. If that were the case we could be much more effective by simply emailing all our group members each week. Instead, our purpose, as Group Leaders, is to facilitate the life of the group – friendship, conversation, trust, acceptance and more. This is why groups work best when they are small and when they provide an atmosphere that invites sharing and discussion.

One skill indispensable in a Small Group, but not in a sermon or a classroom, is the skill of asking questions. Questions can assist, heal, hinder or even kill the progress of a Small Group.

Think about the following styles of questions:

THE “CLOSED OR LEADING” QUESTION ...

This question has only one obvious answer. This is why it’s called a “leading” question. It subtly suggests that the leader expects the “correct answer” and therefore it does not stimulate discussion. In fact, the group members may be afraid of giving the “wrong answer” and so discussion dies altogether. It becomes clear to the group that the leader has an exact answer in mind. And so, instead of discussion being stimulated, is it limited.

THE “LOADED” QUESTION ...

Loaded questions include either loaded words (words designed to create conflict among the group members), or they may be loaded with too many issues. And so, rather than build a climate of trust and safety these questions create unnecessary confusion, conflict and misunderstanding. This is opposite of what you want in your group.

THE “OPEN” QUESTION ...

These questions invite response, they can have a variety of answers and they allow group members to explore causes, reasons, possibilities, results, etc., without feeling judged. They often begin with “What” or “How” as they encourage the group to consider a wide range of possibilities and personal opinions. This not only deepens the acceptance and trust of those in the group, it also promotes the learning process.

THE “RESPONSE” QUESTION ...

A response question draws the group into discussion, after one member has expressed an opinion. It is often used following an “Open” question. For example: “*You heard what Bob said about following God. What do the rest of you think?*” This encourages group members to listen to and value the thoughts of others and also to them to think for themselves.

As you ask questions, remember that your role is not to simply dole out the “answers.” Your job is to facilitate discussion and help people **discover** answers. Always allow God room to lead the discussion in a direction you had not planned. And don't be afraid of silence. Allow your group members to think through their answers as they prepare to speak. If you or another group member consistently (perhaps impatiently) answer every question, your quieter group members will probably remain quiet. Silence can be productive.