

3. The video suggested two other ways to field questions:



4. Walt suggested another principle in regards to asking questions. Explain it.

5. Read John 3:1-9. Now make up a question to launch the discussion of the passage. What observations did Nicodemus make about Jesus? What spiritual matter was confusing to Nicodemus? Why do you think Jesus insists one must be born again before he can see God's kingdom?

Going Deeper

Answering Questions

Acceptance

When a non-Christian begins to study the Bible with you, one of his biggest unspoken questions will be, "To what degree can I express what I really think about this person? How will he react if I express my true doubts and questions?" The person will first send out some rather safe trial questions. How you react to these questions will affect the quality of communication from then on.



If you respond with dogmatism or defensiveness (both signs of insecurity), the unbeliever will quickly understand the rules of the game and proceed accordingly. He will either play by your rules or disappear, but if you show an attitude that **encourages doubts and questions to surface**, you will be much more effective. He will get a chance to voice questions he has never had a chance to raise before. It almost doesn't matter whether you have a clue how to answer the question, as long as you respond with acceptance.

Discernment

There are two kinds of questions: honest and dishonest. Dishonest questions intend to trap or embarrass the answerer or to protect or justify the asker. Honest ones are for real learning.

Jesus answered questions according to their intent. When the lawyer asked Him, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus knew it was a test, an attack, and He deflected it with another question. When the lawyer proceeded with a self-defense question, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied with a story. But Jesus had all the time in the world for people with honest questions like his disciples.

It's often hard to tell the motive behind a question, but a good test is to ask *yourself* (not the questioner), "What difference will it make if I answer this question? Will this person accept my answer and build on it? Is this question really a statement of rejection?"

If the person asked the question simply to push you away or trap you, then you are wasting your time answering it, but often an unbeliever will start with trap and defense questions to see what you will do. So even when you discern that the question is not meant to be answered, you should still respond accordingly.



If a question is honest, the person is usually willing to wait for an answer. He won't mind if you say, "That's a good question, but I don't know how to answer it at the moment. Let me study it this week, and I'll show you what I find out next time we get together." A person who wants to trap you will usually want an answer right away, but since that answer won't make any difference anyway, it doesn't matter if you don't know the answer.

Writing Down Questions

Questions that arise from the Bible discussion are usually honest and should be treated as they come up. Since nobody has all the answers, inevitably some questions will arise that you can't answer. That won't bother the other person if it doesn't bother you. To say, "I don't know, but I'll try to find out," will build, rather than undermine, credibility. Write down those questions and come back with answers when you have them.

Questions **unrelated** to the text require a closer look. If they are diversions to gain space, then give the person that space and let the Holy Spirit, not you, nail him.

An easy way to deflect defensive questions is to say, “Now that’s an important question and we’ll get to it. Let me write it down.” Have the person repeat it so you can record it. This communicates that you are taking the person seriously. As you begin your next session, be sure you place that piece of paper on the table. This says, “I’ve not forgotten your question. We’ll get to it, and if you have more questions, they’re welcome, too.”

Taking Questions in Sequence

The other reason for writing down questions is that sometimes they can’t be answered out of sequence. (For example, how can you discuss the justice of a God whose existence is in doubt?) Frequently, the question “Who is Jesus?” needs to be answered before answers to other questions make sense. Explain this to your friend, and keep the list of questions handy to show you haven’t forgotten them.

Of course, sometimes a particular question is really blocking someone’s progress toward Christ. In that case, you need to give answer to clear the road. Even an incomplete one may do the job.

Sticking to the Bible

When studying with people who don’t believe the Bible, it’s crucial to consistently use nothing but the Bible. Your position is, “You don’t accept the Bible’s authority? That’s understandable, but we’re not here to discuss my opinions. We’re here to let you judge the Bible for yourself. So when you ask a question, I’ll try to restrict myself to showing you what the Bible says about it.” Any other position undermines the Bible’s authority, but this position lets the Bible function as the supernatural resource that it is.

For Further Reading

Jim Petersen, *Living Proof*, chapters 21 and appendix A.