

ALONGSIDER BRIEFINGS

Building disciplemaking cultures by Bill Mowry

Volume 7

Ask Good Questions

Cultures are built with questions. Have you ever noticed how God consistently engages his creation through questions? “Where are you Adam?” “Have you considered my servant Job?” “Whom shall I send?” In the garden, the first recorded conversation God has with Adam and Eve is with a question (Genesis 3:9).

Jesus understood the power of a good question. Our Lord exasperated his followers and critics by refusing to give packaged answers to their challenges or inquiries. He often responded with a penetrating question (Luke 14:3-6). The gospels record over three-hundred questions asked by Jesus. Author Jan Johnson writes that by asking questions, Jesus was training his followers “to understand that life with the Holy One was interactive.”

So why did Jesus ask so many questions? After all, he knew what was in the heart of men (Luke 9:47). Question-asking was not for his benefit. It would appear that questions were for the benefit of the hearer — you and me! What happens when we ask a question? First, asking questions build relationships. Questions help me get to know another person.

A second outcome of a good question is that it provokes thinking on the part of the hearer. Questions cause me to ponder, reflect, consider, and analyze. In other words, they get me thinking. I believe Jesus asked questions to build relationships and to get people thinking. These two goals are essential to a disciplemaking culture.

Today’s churches and ministries are not at a loss for good programs, books, or study guides to disciple others. With all of these great resources, we can forget a fundamental of disciplemaking — asking good questions. What would our ministries look like if all we had were a Bible, a relationship, and some good questions? A well-placed question is like a hand grenade — exploding in someone’s heart and life with new insights and obedience.

Questions build a culture where discoveries are made and truth is owned by many and not the few. Questions build cultures where learning and change happens. Questions birth the joy of discovery in the Scriptures.

SUGGESTED READING

How to Ask Great Questions
by Karen Lee-Thorp

Teaching as Jesus Taught
by Roy Zuck

Creative Bible Teaching
by Lawrence Richards

The Serendipity Bible
by Lyman Coleman

Two principles guide how I use questions in my alongsider ministry. First, I try not to tell people what they can discover on their own. Instead of explaining a Bible passage, I ask questions about the passage. This models how to meditate on the Bible; we're teaching people how to fish rather than giving them a fish. Asking questions leads to personal discovery which creates personal ownership.

A second principle is to move people beyond the "what" and the "how." "What" questions help people to observe. "How" questions encourage application. These questions are important ones to ask but let's try some higher level questions.

Higher level questions encourage people to analyze, interpret, feel, and imagine. A variety of questions engages the total person and adds a creative zest to a discipleship time. Take a test drive with the following higher level questions. Feel free to fill in the blank with a topic and use the question with someone else.

- How would you compare/contrast _____ and _____?
- Why do you think the author feels this truth is so important?
- If you could debate the author about _____, how would you do it?
- How do you feel about _____?
- Imagine _____ being an integral part of your life. What would be different?

I don't leave good questions to chance. I write them down on index cards, in the margins of my Bible, or in a study guide before meeting with people or leading a small group. Disciplemakers ask good questions in discipling others. Questions build a culture. What new question can you ask someone in your family, at work, or in a church setting this week?

You can order *The Ways of the Alongsider* at navpress.com.

You can contact Bill Mowry at www.alongsider.com. Check out other discipling resources and alongsider training on his website.

The Navigators Church Discipleship Ministry has a proven process for creating intentional discipling cultures. You can find out more by visiting navigatorchurchministries.org.

