

QUESTIONS: INFLUENCING BY ASKING

The work of making disciples for Jesus Christ is the great mission Jesus has given all His disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). It should be considered a great privilege for any disciple to take part in fulfilling this mission. While there is a lot of information to communicate to help others follow Jesus, it is sometimes best to slow down and ask questions. In fact, questions can be used to accomplish many different objectives in the disciple-making process and were commonly employed by Jesus in His interactions with others. Consider, therefore, some Scriptures that help you appreciate the use of questions in your disciple-making efforts.

LUKE 24:13-27

After all the events surrounding Jesus's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, people were amazed and curious about Jesus's empty tomb. On this occasion, Jesus found these two men who were discussing and arguing about the events that had taken place. Notice, though, that Jesus engaged them by using questions. He asked them what they were arguing about and used a question to get them to express what was on their minds. As He did, they expressed uncertainty about what had transpired. Furthermore, He asked them (apparently a rhetorical question) about the need for the Messiah to suffer and used it as a springboard to interpret the Scriptures for them concerning Himself. Similarly, asking questions can be a good way for you to begin engaging someone and expose ways you might be able to help (Acts 8:30-35). You can ask questions about their understanding of things, current events, the Bible, and a whole host of topics to expose areas of doubt, ignorance, and questions. Then you can use the Scriptures to fill those voids when they present themselves.

MATTHEW 13:51-52

As Jesus used parables (earthly stories with spiritual applications) to teach about the mysteries of God's kingdom, some would understand the spiritual applications and others would not (Matthew 13:10-17, 34-35). Jesus's disciples had previously asked Jesus to explain a parable (Matthew 13:36). Now, Jesus

asked them if they had understood all the things He had taught. Notice that Jesus was not just interested in people hearing the words He taught. Instead, He wanted His followers to truly understand. So it should be whenever you lead others to Christ. You may find yourself trying to explain concepts others have never considered before and things that challenge their thinking, experiences, opinions, traditions, etc. It will be important for you to ask them whether they understand what you have tried to communicate and openly invite their questions and feedback. It can be helpful to ask pointed questions to test their understanding of the issues, even if they say they understand.

MARK 10:46-52

This blind beggar had a tremendous opportunity to be healed by Jesus. However, before He healed the man, Jesus asked the man a question. Jesus certainly already knew what this man wanted. However, it gave the man an opportunity to express faith directly to Jesus. The blind man responded by showing he believed Jesus could fully restore his sight. Sometimes it is useful to ask questions of the people you are leading to the Lord to ask them what they want, and what they think Jesus can and will do for them in various circumstances. Sometimes it may expose a flaw in their expectations. It may expose a lack of true desire in their hearts. Or, it may reveal a deep desire for the truth of God's word and faith in Jesus. Still, it can be helpful for them to express these things rather than you acting in assumption or telling them what Jesus wants to do for their lives (e.g., regarding their salvation, marriage, holiness, service, etc.).

LUKE 10:25-37

Jesus used a question to begin answering a question with this man (who was an expert in the Law). Rather than just answering the question about salvation, Jesus asked this man for his understanding of what the Law required. Then, after teaching the parable, Jesus asked an application question that should have forced the man to be honest with himself about the requirement of God's Law. Sometimes it can be helpful to answer questions with questions, especially to find out what someone already knows and learn what areas may need to be addressed. Then, asking application questions can often be more effective than directly stating the application. For, when you state the application, the other person may sometimes make you the enemy and disagree with you. But, when you ask an application question, it forces that person to

wrestle with the truth and discover it for himself/herself.

MATTHEW 21:23-27

During the days immediately preceding Jesus's crucifixion, the Jewish leaders wanted to find a reason to accuse and kill Jesus. Here, they asked Jesus about the source of His authority. It is likely they would have accused Him of some evil (e.g., blasphemy) regardless of how He answered. So, He asked them a question about the authority John had – whether it was from Heaven or humans. In this, Jesus put them in the situation of either being honest and accepting John's ministry as being from God (which pointed to Jesus as the Messiah) or rejecting John and finding disfavor with the people. Similarly, questions can be helpful when trying to get people to be honest with themselves in difficult situations. Through these questions, then, the issue becomes about their willingness to believe and obey the truth rather than about what they think of you and what you say.

LUKE 5:17-26

Jesus saw the faith of this paralyzed man who went to great lengths to get to Jesus. Jesus, being God on earth, forgave the man's sins. When this resulted in questions and accusations of blasphemy, Jesus then asked them a question that should have caused them to challenge their assumptions and conclusions. Would it be easier for Him to tell the man his sins are forgiven or to get up and walk? His point was obvious: Only God can do both! Similarly, asking questions can challenge people's beliefs and assumptions today. Through questions, people can be encouraged to stretch their minds beyond what they previously thought and consider things they have never considered because they have to answer the questions for themselves.

CONCLUSION

Asking questions is a great tool to influence people. Learning from Jesus (who asked many additional questions besides the ones we've considered) in His use of questions is a valuable resource in making disciples. While there is plenty of value in giving instructions to others, questions cause people to wrestle with things for themselves. In doing so, they can be challenged in their honesty. They can be challenged in their beliefs and assumptions. They can be challenged in their obedience. However, the challenge from questions takes the focus off the one asking the question and puts the focus on the issue and truth itself!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What do you learn about Jesus in His use of questions?

How can questions help you engage another person?

How can questions help you learn what someone else understands?

How can questions help you learn what people want and about their expectations?

How can it be helpful to answer questions with questions?

How can questions help people apply a teaching?

How can questions help people to be honest with themselves?

How can questions help challenge beliefs and assumptions?

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