

Questions: Icebreakers and Beyond

Steering your discussion the right way.

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Building Small Groups Online

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Let me describe a common scenario in many small groups. At the beginning of your discussion the leader may ask an icebreaker question like, "How was your week? Does anybody have anything to share with the group?" Or, perhaps the leader has a specific icebreaker question like: "Who was your favorite childhood friend?" or "What is the best trip you have ever taken?" Typically, the icebreaker question sets the tone for the group's discussion time. The remainder of the group time is typically devoted to Bible study, prayer, etc.

A true icebreaker question is an open-ended question that is used at the beginning of the group's discussion time. Not only is a good icebreaker open-ended, meaning it does not have a right or wrong answer, but the person answering the question will be the expert when it comes to the topic of the icebreaker question. Another critical characteristic of an icebreaker is that everyone should be encouraged to answer. It is not optional. The leader should answer first to model the type and length of response desired. Then, go around the circle; if someone wants to pass, let them, but remember the question should be safe enough so that anyone could feel comfortable answering.

The icebreaker question and resulting life-sharing time is critical because it helps the group "level the playing field" and warms people's hearts and minds to discuss God's truth. However, if we cannot make the connection between our life stories and God's truth, then we have lost some of the power that life in Christian community offers. If we talk about ourselves and talk about the Bible, but never make the connection between the two, then life transformation does not happen.

So the question is: How do we create a life changing intersection between sharing our own life experiences and studying God's Word? How can we steer those icebreaker questions and responses so they help people make the intersection between the truth about their lives and the truth about God?

What I do is intentionally select an icebreaker that connects with the biblical truth that we hope to talk about during our group meeting. Then during our Bible study, I will ask follow-up questions that connect the icebreaker (life story) to the truth of Scripture (Bible study) we are discussing.

Jesus was a master at using this technique in His teaching. He started with questions about common life and moved to questions about life transformation. Let's look at some examples:

Scripture Reference	Jesus' Icebreaker	Jesus' Follow-up Truth Questions
Matt. 20:21 (Jesus talking to James, John and their mother)	"What is it that you want to have most?" Modern paraphrase: What	"Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" Modern paraphrase: Do you

	goals do you have for your life?	really want what God wants? And, have you counted the cost?
Matt. 16:28 (Jesus talking to the twelve)	"Who do other people say the Son of Man is?" Modern paraphrase: What spiritually-related news headline has gotten your attention recently?	"Who do you say I am?" Modern paraphrase: Is the "word on the street" and the world influencing you more than God is influencing you? Who is Jesus becoming to you?
Mark 6:38 (Jesus talking to the 12 before feeding the 5000)	"How many loaves of bread do you have?" Modern paraphrase: Do you ever feel like there are things you should do but lack the resources to accomplish them?	"Do you believe I can feed my people?" Modern paraphrase: Is your faith grounded in the quantity of physical resources you have or in God's provision?
Luke 24:17 (Jesus talking with 2 followers along the road to Emmaus)	"What are you discussing together as you walk along?" Modern paraphrase: What difficult conversation have you had recently?	"Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" Modern paraphrase: Can you see how the life trials and problems you have described are opportunities for God to work out His glorious plan in your life?
Luke 10:26 (Jesus talking to a group of seekers)	"What is written in the Law?" Modern paraphrase: What absolute truth have you been convicted of recently?	"How do you read it?" Modern paraphrase: What is God telling you to do because of knowing this truth?

I have been in many groups where icebreakers were used to draw the intersection between truth and life. As a small group ministry director, I can tell you that in most groups where icebreaker questions are used in this way, Christ-centered life-change was happening far more consistently. Use them the way Jesus did and you will find the same.

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