

ASKING QUESTIONS LIKE THE MASTER TEACHER

Eight types of questions Jesus used to produce change.

by Dave Arch

"Do you not yet understand?"

—Jesus (Matthew 8:21)

Whether in a public gathering, a confrontation with his enemies, or a private conversation with his closest friends, Jesus consistently used questions to produce change and growth. In the eighth chapter of the Book of Mark, he used eight types of questions.

1. Answering with Questions (Mark 8:5)

Rather than merely answering a question (and thereby stunting the question's teaching potential), Jesus would often answer a participant's question with a question of his own.

In Mark 8, when his followers asked Jesus how he planned to feed a crowd of 4,000 people, he responded with a question: "How many loaves do you have?" That question kept his followers involved.

It takes confidence and wisdom to ask involving questions. Asking a question as simple as "What do the rest of you think?" can keep people engaged and searching for truth. When we answer every question, we rob the questioner of the satisfaction found in personal discovery.

2. Gathering Data (Mark 8:5, 19-21)

Jesus eventually asked some personal questions in this chapter. However, he began with and interspersed throughout the dialogue questions of a more factual nature. "How many loaves do you have?" involved his followers on a non-threatening level.

Using these types of questions helps maintain group involvement while gently moving toward the more personal application questions. A factual question such as "How many years have you worked in your current job?" doesn't require much personal disclosure but still reveals insights about the person.

3. Making Statements (Mark 8:12)

Jesus skillfully asked rhetorical questions to emphasize a point in a powerful but non-combative manner. "Why does this generation seek for a sign?" communicates much better than "You stubborn group of unbelieving people!" Such diplomacy is a beneficial teaching skill.

4. Communicating Passion (Mark 8:17-18)

When rhetorical questions are linked together, they can transport tremendous passion. In Mark 8:17-18, Jesus asked his followers: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?"

As Jesus joined questions together without giving pause for an answer, his listeners were rendered thoughtfully speechless.

This technique can be used effectively in discussion groups to powerfully reinforce a point.

5. Correcting (Mark 8:21)

When we need to correct someone, phrasing it as a question can allow the person to make the necessary changes without defensiveness or losing face. Instead of saying, "You are so stupid—you never understand anything," Jesus asked, "Do you not yet understand?" This question made the point while maintaining the involvement of his participants.

6. Seeking Feedback (Mark 8:23)

While healing a man of blindness, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" We can ask the same kind of question throughout any teaching process. A question such as "Do you understand what we're studying?" can reveal the level of comprehension and keep people on track.

7. Encouraging Personal Application (Mark 8:27-29)

Toward the conclusion of Mark 8, Jesus used two increasingly personal questions to lead his followers into content application.

He began with a more general question—"Who do people say I am?" (Mark 8:27)—before leading into the directly personal question—"Who do you say I am?" (Mark 8:29).

When we want to move our group to application, a good approach is to ask, "What are some ways we could...?" before transitioning to "What are some ways you could...?"

8. Soul Searching (Mark 8:36-37)

Mark 8:36-37: "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"

These types of questions reach to the heart of an issue and have no comfortable reply. One example of such a question might be: "How can a church survive if it isn't in touch with the needs of the congregation?" Closing with this type of question or writing it at the bottom of a handout can make a strong impact.