

## Answering Questions

*JesusWORKS* is set-up to be as helpful as possible for the participants of the course. As such no questions should be asked although questions should always be welcomed.

Previous experience tells us that questions are often asked and more frequently as the course progresses.

So, what do you do when a question is asked?

These three steps may help:

### **Step 1 – Restate the Question.**

- To love and help the person asking the question, it is important you understand what they are asking. An easy way to do that is to simply restate the question in your own words e.g. *‘So you are asking ....’* or *‘Let me restate your question to make sure I understand....’*
- Doing this, gives you time to think about how you might approach an answer and it also checks that you are correctly hearing what is being asked.

### **Step 2 - Seek to understand what is driving the question.**

- Most questions will be motivated by one of three reasons:

#### **a. A Personal dilemma**

- That is, something that the person has experienced or feels – a ‘heart’ dilemma.
- Aristotle called this *Pathos* (Greek for ‘suffering’ or ‘experience’).
- Answering these kinds of questions involves caring for the person *emotionally*.
- The answer they need to hear should be pastorally sensitive, gracious and gentle.

#### **b. A Theological dilemma**

- That is, something that the person wants to know or understand – a ‘head’ dilemma.
- Aristotle called this *Logos* (Greek for ‘word’).
- Answering these kinds of questions involves helping the person *intellectually*.
- The answer they want to hear could quite easily be a right/wrong answer or could help to clarify something that has been said that does not seem to make reasonable sense.

### c. An Ethical dilemma

- That is, something that the person may need to change or adjust about the way they behave – a ‘hand’ dilemma.
  - Aristotle called this *Ethos* (Greek for ‘character’).
  - Answering these kinds of questions involves helping the person *apologetically*.
  - The answer they may or may not want to hear could challenge a particular behaviour or lifestyle choice. Answering these questions requires you to be credible, unbiased and clear even if not agreeable.
- Now here is the trick. Sometimes the question asked does not clearly indicate what is driving it. So, if you have not understood what is driving the question you will answer the question in a way that may not be as helpful.
  - For example, a person could ask ‘*Is God always loving?*’. To answer most helpfully it would be good to know what is driving the question.
    - It could be that the person has experienced something that makes them question whether God is loving (personal – pathos - heart).
    - It could be that the person is seeking to understand what the Bible says about love (theological – logos - head).
    - It could be that the person is fearful that God will not accept them because of some behaviour or sin that they are engaged in (ethics – ethos - hand).
  - Handle this best, by asking a follow-up question if needed. For example: ‘*Tell me why you ask that question?*’ or ‘*Do you ask that because...?*’
  - Make sure you understand what is driving the question – heart, head or hand. You are then in a good place to answer it most helpfully.

### Step 3 – Answer the Question

- Your job now is to attempt to answer the question by getting the person to the Bible.
- Your starting point in answering should aim to address what is driving the question – the heart, head or hand dilemma.
- Here you are on familiar territory! You have a heart, head and hand and you are a person who has been shaped by the gospel. So, aim to answer the question in a way that you would find most helpful.
- Key, however is that your answer moves the person to the Bible.
  - If the question is driven by a *personal* dilemma – then it would be helpful to hear how the Bible addresses your experience.
  - If the question is driven by a *theological* dilemma – then it would be helpful to look at the Bible to clarify or offer the answer. Usually the answer will be

## How to Answer Questions

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helped by the context of the passage – so read before and after and see if the answer becomes more obvious with the wider view.

- If the question is driven by an *ethical* dilemma – then it would be helpful to see in the Bible how it addresses particular behaviours. Often the New Testament Epistles (letters) will address the way a Christian should live – the ‘how’ in the later chapters follows the ‘why’ of the earlier chapters.
- With any question, you want to allow the gospel to shape your answer. For it is the gospel which addresses us *personally*, it is the gospel which transforms our *thinking*, and it is the gospel which called us to change our *behaviour*.

## Final Encouragements

- Remember that God is sovereign, Jesus is Lord, and the Spirit is there is intercede. Be confident that you are well supported in your efforts to offer the reasons for what you believe and know.
- Recognise that when a question is asked which seems challenging, your role is to be a witness to that which you know to be true and correct. If you don’t feel you have the knowledge to answer truthfully or correctly, then don’t answer. Instead say something like: ‘*Good question, I am not sure that I can helpfully answer that question right now, but I am happy to look at that and come back to you next time*’. You then have the time before you next meet to work it out.
- One of the great things about getting ‘difficult’ questions, is that you will be sharpened as much as the person asking the question will be helped. And over time, you will find that you will get better and more knowledgeable in the way you answer the question/s.
- At times, the questions asked may be totally off topic. In your wisdom as a Leader, you will need to decide if it is helpful to answer the question at that time or to defer the question to be addressed later. This is especially important if you are leading a group or if the question being asked is inappropriately personal.
- Finally, don’t win the argument yet lose the person. Your manner in answering questions is always more important than the answers that you offer. Not all answers will be agreeable to the questioner. It is okay if the person takes issue with *what* you say (content), it is preferable that they don’t take issue with *how* you say it (manner).

Have fun. Work hard. Be faithful. Pray lots.