

Leading by Question

A Socratic leader's card for discipleship triads, dyads, and mentors

Jesus taught the crowd by parable, "but privately to his own disciples he explained everything" (Mark 4:33-34). The crowd got a monologue. The small room got questions. When you meet with two or three, you are in the small room. (*The Essential Call*, Ch. 8)

Six Habits

1. **Prepare questions, not points.** Arrive with six to eight written questions instead of three observations. It takes the same study and produces an entirely different hour.
2. **Ask before you tell.** Nearly anything you plan to say can become a question that lets the other person say it first. If he gets there, he owns it. If he can't, you just learned something a lecture would have hidden.
3. **Let the silence work.** Ask, then wait. Do not rescue the room. The discomfort is the work happening.
4. **Don't answer your own question, and don't accept a quotation as an answer.** A memorized phrase shows recall, not understanding.
5. **Always land it on obedience.** Close with "What does this require of you before we meet again?" Open the next meeting with "What happened when you tried?"
6. **Expect it to feel worse.** Both of you will find a halting conversation less satisfying than a polished talk. The struggle is not the method failing. It is the method.

Three Kinds of Questions

Kind	Asks	Sample
Observation	What does the text say?	"Who is speaking, and to whom? What words repeat?"
Interpretation	What does it mean?	"Why do you think he included that? What would the first hearers have understood?"
Application	What does it require of me?	"Where does this press on your week? What will you do about it?"

Follow-Up Toolbox

- "Where do you see that in the text?"
- "Say that in your own words."
- "What would change if that weren't true?"
- "How would you explain that to a coworker who has never read the Bible?"
- "What is the author ruling out here?"
- "Is that what you believe, or what you've been told to say?"
- "What does this require of you before we meet again?"

Turning Statements into Questions

Instead of saying...	Ask...
"Our justification is not by works."	"What is Paul ruling out in Ephesians 2:9, and why does he bother?"
"Discipleship costs everything."	"In Luke 14:28-32, what does the builder do before he lays a stone? What would that look like for you this month?"
"Fruit is the evidence, not the cause."	"In John 15:5, which comes first, abiding or fruit? What happens to a Christian life when we reverse them?"
"Jesus taught by asking questions."	"In Luke 10:25-37, who actually says the key truths out loud, Jesus or the lawyer? Why might that matter?"
"Disciples multiply."	"Count the generations in 2 Timothy 2:2. Which one are you? Who is next?"

Questions to Avoid

- **Yes/no questions** that end the conversation ("Is God faithful?").
- **Leading questions** with an obvious answer ("Isn't it true that...?").
- **Guess-what-I'm-thinking questions** that turn the text into a quiz about the leader's notes.
- **Answering your own question** after three seconds of quiet.

Guardrails

- **Dialogue with a destination.** Luke pairs Paul's reasoning (*dialegomai*) with persuading (*peithō*) (Acts 18:4; 19:8). We are not pooling opinions. We are walking a person, question by question, to what the text already says.
- **Socrates' method, not his metaphysic.** Questions do not pull saving truth out of a person (1 Corinthians 2:14). They drive him into the Scripture where the truth stands, and expose what he actually believes.
- **Gentleness.** The goal is a man restored and built up, not cornered (Galatians 6:1).

Before You Meet: Prep Checklist

- ☐ Read the passage three times, once aloud.
- ☐ Name the single main truth in one sentence.
- ☐ Write 2 observation, 3 interpretation, and 2 application questions.
- ☐ Mark where you expect confusion, and write a follow-up for it.
- ☐ Write the closing obedience question.
- ☐ Pray for each person by name.