

Responding to Difficult Cultural Topics

As we relate with people who believe differently, strong opinions about difficult cultural topics will arise. How should we handle those opinions in group settings and in 1-on-1 conversations?

Q Place is a ministry focusing on the essentials of the gospel message. We encourage Christians to relate with group participants the same way no matter their beliefs or lifestyle: Love them, pray for them, listen to their stories without judgment, let the Holy Spirit transform us all as we delve into the Bible. God changes us all over time using the Holy Spirit and his Word. Our Group Guidelines and the 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations help Christians navigate those topics.

Here are a few specific group facilitator questions and some ideas for responding that may help you when you encounter a challenging topic in a conversation.

QUESTION: How should I respond when someone asks me a question like “Do I have to give up certain behaviors to become a Christian?”

IN A 1-ON-1 CONVERSATION

1. Practice the 9 Arts of Spiritual Conversations (noticing, praying, listening, asking questions...)
2. Gently ask questions that help you understand what is behind the question. “Why are you asking this question? What are your thoughts?” Listen and understand his or her story.
3. When you are talking with a Q Place group participant, you can ask, “What have you seen so far related to this question in our group discussions?”
4. Ask them what they understand it means to become a Christian. They may be recognizing sin in their lives but haven’t yet understood the purpose of Jesus’ death, to pay for their sin when they put their trust in him.
5. These kinds of comments may be helpful:
 - It’s great that you are asking this question about something that matters so much to you. Anyone coming to faith must be honest about what Jesus asks of him or her. He will give the power and the strength to do what he wants you to do as you grow in your walk with him.
 - When we come to Jesus, he’s the one who will transform us. The Holy Spirit gives us power to change after we come to Jesus. As you walk along with him, God will reveal how he wants you to live. The big questions are, “Do you want to put your faith in Jesus? What are you going to do with him?”

IN A Q PLACE GROUP

1. Keep your group a safe place for differing opinions. Use the Group Guidelines and practice the 9 Arts, asking questions, praying, listening, noticing, loving, etc.
2. Affirm the questions asked. Listen without judgment to comments made.
3. Suggest to the group, “What if we write this question down? As we continue through our study, we can watch for anything that relates to this question.”
4. If a tangent about a particular cultural topic arises in the group, don’t let it occupy too much time, suggesting that whoever wants to can discuss it after you have finished with what the group has set out to do.

QUESTION:

How should I handle it when strong political or cultural opinions are being shared in our group?

1. If the comment or disagreement doesn't relate to the discussion at hand, restate the purpose of the group (Guideline #1) and say, "Let's get back to today's discussion topic," or, "What does the passage say about this?" or "I'm conscious of our time. Let's move on."
2. If the comment is related to the discussion (for example, flowing from an application question) but the comment is sparking disagreement, then pause the group, saying something like this: "Let's pause here for a second. Many people hold strongly different opinions about this topic, and that's one reason that Guidelines #7 and 8 are so important for our group to succeed."
3. Be ready to apologize if you have mishandled a situation.
4. Encourage the group to be honest about what the Bible is saying about the topic if it's covered in the section you are discussing. "We don't have to agree with it or like it, but let's at least try to see what it's saying on this topic." Agree to disagree, if needed, and then move on. (Always be courteous and kind, whether in private conversations or in the group.)

GROUP GUIDELINES

GUIDELINES

1. The purpose of this group is to discuss questions about life, God, and the Bible.
2. The role of initiators is to facilitate a healthy small group process.
3. This group is not for experts. It's for new discoveries. If you think you are an expert, resist the urge to let the rest of us know. Listen and ask questions so that everyone can discover answers for themselves.
4. The format is informal discussion, not lecture.
5. If at all possible, read and think through the content and questions ahead of time. Share your ideas honestly and openly.
6. In each session a different person may ask the questions in order to encourage group ownership and dynamic discussions.
7. Maintain confidentiality, courtesy, and respect toward others, even if they don't agree with your position. Do not judge others and avoid side conversations.
8. Do not attempt to resolve all differences. Simply acknowledge the conflicting opinions and move on.
9. Begin and end on time.
10. Review the discussion guidelines whenever there's a new person in the group.

DISCUSSION TIPS

1. **Stick to the topic or passage under discussion** in order to build a common frame of reference. Refer to other material only if your group has studied it together or if it is mentioned in the discussion questions.
2. **Avoid tangents.** Many ideas will surface during the discussion. If the subject is not covered in the material, do not let it occupy too much time. Discuss side topics later.
3. **When discussing the Bible, let it speak for itself.** Avoid quoting other books, religious leaders, notes in the Bible, or online sources. Try to discover the facts, meaning, and application of the passage together while avoiding religious jargon.

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