

## **The Opening Question and its Importance**

Let me set the scene. We arrive at about 7.30 pm. Some others are already there and in the next 10 mins or so we have a gathering of about 10 people. There is tea, coffee and biscuits and we grab something and chat about the events of the day. By 8.00 pm we are all sitting down and ready to begin. Someone prays and the leader asks his first question.

Let's pause here and think a little.

What do you want to do with this opening/first/launching question? Soon we will be moving into serious matters about the Bible and how we are to live. So we are moving from superficial chatting to getting serious. A good opening question should fit in between the chatting bit and the getting serious bit.

Most people are able to chat but it is a different kettle of fish when there is silence except for one person speaking and everyone else listening. It's a different atmosphere and not everyone feels comfortable about being that one person speaking, at least not until they are warmed up. You could use an icebreaker to get people warmed up. Icebreakers tend to be trivial or silly and they can be fun but they don't go far along the way towards talking about serious matters. We can do better than having a trivial icebreaker to begin a Bible study.

The leader should know where he wants to take the group in the course of the study. A good opening question can start people on that journey. Ideally, a good opening question will be able to introduce the theme of the study.

A good opening question should be one where everyone can give an answer. If you have a question which has a correct answer then as soon as someone gives that answer then that's the end of it. No-one is going to give the same answer again. So the question needs to be one which doesn't have a right or wrong answer but everyone can answer differently according to their own experiences and feel comfortable about giving that answer - nothing too personal at the beginning.

Let's look at an example.

The study was on Romans chapter 13 which was about submission to authorities. Obedience was going to be one of the issues discussed and so the opening question was:

Which of these rules should we obey?

- (a) A woman must wear a hat at church.
- (b) Eat 3 meals a day.
- (c) Don't lie.
- (d) Go to church every week.
- (e) Don't work on Sundays.
- (f) Give away 10% of your income.
- (g) Pray every day.
- (h) Keep your promises.

(i) Love your neighbour as yourself.

The leader stated each rule and asked for a yes or no vote for each rule. Everyone was involved in voting but people also wanted to talk about each rule. Discussion was about the historical interest of the rule or the contentious nature of the rule or possible loopholes in the rule. So the question got everyone talking and warmed up and was relevant to the theme of law in the rest of the study.

Most of the people in this small group went to the same church which encouraged all the small groups to use the same booklet. The opening question in the booklet was "What do you think about when you hear the word 'authority'? How do you feel about it?" We didn't use this question because after a couple of answers the conversation would have died out and most people would not have said anything. On the plus side the question had some relevance to the study that followed.

If possible it is nice to have a closing question that both relates to the whole study and is somehow connected to the opening question. If you can do this then it gives the feeling that you have made some progress during the course of the study. We finished this study on Romans 13 with "How would you reply to the statement "God has appointed the minister to our church so we must do what he says"?" This question showed progress from the opening question about rules to a closing question about a rule maker. By this stage people had warmed up and were ready to confront a contentious issue which had relevance to their lives. It rounded off the study and gave people something to think about on the way home.

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