

Tough Questions Topics and Discovery Process

Many people have important questions about God and the Bible. Processing their questions thoughtfully may be crucial for overcoming spiritual sticking points. Authors Garry Poole and Judson Poling formulated the questions in their Tough Questions discussion series with the intent of gently guiding participants through a five-phase discovery process.

Below you will find all of the questions covered in six topical discussion guides from the Tough Questions series. On page two you will find a short summary of each phase in the Tough Questions Five-Phase Discovery Process: (1) Identify, (2) Clarify, (3) Explore, (4) Evaluate, (5) Decide.¹

TOUGH QUESTIONS SERIES TOPICS

HOW DOES ANYONE KNOW GOD EXISTS?

1. Is anybody out there?
2. How can anyone be sure God exists?
3. What is God really like?
4. How can rational people believe in miracles?
5. Does God care about what happens to us?
6. How can a person get to know God?

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES JESUS MAKE?

1. Who was Jesus?
2. How is Jesus different from other religious leaders?
3. Did Jesus really claim to be God?
4. Why focus on Jesus' death?
5. Isn't the resurrection of Jesus a myth?
6. What impact does Jesus make today?

HOW RELIABLE IS THE BIBLE?

1. Where did the Bible come from?
2. Isn't the Bible full of myths?
3. What about all those contradictions?
4. Hasn't the Bible changed over time?
5. Why should I trust the Bible?
6. Is the Bible really God's book?

HOW COULD GOD ALLOW SUFFERING AND EVIL?

1. Where did evil come from?
2. Why do innocent people suffer?
3. Why doesn't God do something?
4. Is the devil for real?
5. How could a loving God send people to hell?
6. Is there really a heaven?

DON'T ALL RELIGIONS LEAD TO GOD?

1. Don't all religions teach basically the same thing?
2. Isn't it enough to be sincere?
3. What's so different about Christianity?
4. Aren't Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses Christians, too?
5. Is Jesus really the only way to God?
6. What happens to people who've never heard of Jesus?

WHY BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

1. Why would anyone think I'm not a Christian?
2. What's the big deal about sin?
3. Why can't I make it on my own?
4. Why is Jesus so important?
5. Can someone like me really change?
6. How does someone actually become a Christian?

TOUGH QUESTIONS LEADER'S GUIDE

The *Tough Questions Leaders Guide* includes material pertaining to all six of the Tough Questions books listed here and provides helpful insights for facilitating meaningful discussions on each of the topics.

¹ Garry Poole, *Seeker Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 38-41.

TOUGH QUESTIONS FIVE-PHASE DISCOVERY PROCESS

When you are facilitating discussions of tough spiritual questions, it is helpful to understand the thought processes necessary for sorting out beliefs. The five-phase discovery process followed by Garry Poole and Judson Poling in their Tough Questions series is both non-threatening and effective to help people think through their spiritual questions and come to well-founded conclusions.

PHASE 1: IDENTIFY — WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE?

People are often saying what they believe for the first time in this phase.

PHASE 2: CLARIFY — WHY DO YOU BELIEVE IT?

In this phase, try to clarify what the person means. Most people have not thought much about why they believe something. As a facilitator, do not talk much during these phases; this is the opportunity for seekers to process what they believe and why.

PHASE 3: EXPLORE — HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT . . . ?

The group process becomes very important during this phase. This is where you explore the Bible and allow people to share their ideas. In the Tough Questions guides, these queries often happen around questions 5-7. They make you think!

The exploration phase is the heart of considering other options. At this time a person may trade his or her view for yours, but your view should be shared as an equal participant. Rely on God's Spirit and his Word to do the work.

PHASE 4: EVALUATE — HOW DO THESE VIEWS HOLD UP?

In this phase the group evaluates what you have just explored and individuals assess the validity of new discoveries. It is unrealistic to think people are going to change quickly. When any member, including the facilitator, does a lot of talking, people are robbed of their chance to build their belief system; we simply make them choose or reject our belief system. With that in mind, try to regulate the amount of time any one person speaks in the group, and help all of the participants express their thoughts.

PHASE 5: DECIDE — WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE NOW?

In this phase, participants are coming to new conclusions. Celebrate not only the big decisions and changes, but the smaller ones as well. Your group members are changing belief systems during each discussion.

A person can be simultaneously at different phases with different questions. For instance, a person may be in the evaluation phase about the question "How can anyone be sure God exists?" but may be in the identification phase about the question "How could God allow suffering and evil?" Understanding this will help you become more sensitive to your group members and will encourage you as you notice clear shifts in their thinking.