



Tough Questions

by Doug Franck

Editor's Note: This new department is created to be an outreach training tool you can copy and use in a small group, ministry team meeting or individually.

Has someone ever asked you a difficult question about Christianity, but you were unable to answer effectively? How should we answer seekers' tough questions about Jesus, God's existence, other religions, science and the Bible, the afterlife or suffering?

In 1 Peter 3:15, the apostle encourages us to respond to seekers "always being ready to make a defense (the Greek says "to make a case") to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." Before you consider *what* you'll say to someone, consider *how* you will say it.

That begins with active listening—hearing what someone is actually asking or saying. Often, our tendency is to define the seeker's error, dismiss it and then argue our points.

But listening is 90% of personal outreach. When we get the opportunity to address the spiritual questions someone has, our attitude and approach mean everything.

Where are you right now? Circle a number from 1–5 beside each of the skills listed below (5 meaning you have a humble attitude when dealing with someone's tough questions; 1 meaning you feel you need to sharpen your skills).

- Asking good questions that aren't adversarial. 1 2 3 4 5
 - Resisting the temptation to jump in and "fix" the other person. 1 2 3 4 5
 - Keeping a non-defensive posture in the face of hot button issues. 1 2 3 4 5
 - Grappling with the issue instead of the person. 1 2 3 4 5
 - Demonstrating that you understand the other person by listening and clarifying his or her position on the issues. 1 2 3 4 5
 - Finding common ground and things you can agree on. 1 2 3 4 5
- How did you do? Share with someone around you the areas you need to improve.

How will you get there?

- Read Prov. 18:10. What does Scripture say about our listening skills?
 - List and share three spiritual issues that you think seekers are struggling with.
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- Roleplay. Turn to the person next to you and take turns being the seeker asking a question and the Christian who's listening and dialoging.

This week

- **Exercise** your listening muscle by using reflective language ("So, what I hear you saying is ..."), indicating you've heard and understood what your spouse, kids or co-workers said.
- **Ask** a seeker friend a wondering question, such as "If you could ask God any question and you knew He'd honestly answer you, what would you ask Him? Why that question?"

At the beginning of your next small group meeting, share your experiences. What happened when you actively listened? How did your seeking friend respond when you "wondered" with them? What surprised you? What was the most challenging part? Where did the conversation lead?

GOING DEEPER

Permission Evangelism
by Michael L. Simpson (Cook)

Who Is My Enemy?
by Rich Nathan (Zondervan)

I'm Glad You Asked
by Ken Boa and Larry Moody
(Victor Books)

Tough Questions, Seeker Group Series
by Garry Poole and Judson Poling
(Zondervan)

Listening for Heaven's Sake Training Workshop (equippingministries.org)

Doug Franck has been involved in evangelism and training ministry for more than 26 years and is currently the director of ministry development for Equipping Ministries International (equippingministries.org).