

Breaking the Deep Ice By Eli Bernard

Icebreakers come in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes it comes in the form of "the life of the party," whose spontaneity and humor get everyone laughing together, easing the way into conversation and relationship. Sometimes the icebreaker is a crisis so moving that everyone is willing to jump in and discuss solutions. Sometimes they are questions or activities in which people are motivated to discuss their opinions or experiences.

However, some ice is thicker than others—and you are leading to not only break the surface "get 'em talking" ice in your small group, but the deeper, harder, more spiritual "ice." If you can get your group discussing something they'll discover even more deeply later on—something of much greater impact—you could help break the ice on serious spiritual and emotional issues in peoples lives.

Here's a few ideas on how to get your icebreakers past the surface:

1. Make them parabolic.

That's "parabolic" as in "parable." Jesus used everyday objects, experiences and relationships to illustrate spiritual truths. Likewise, icebreakers that draw on the "everyday-ness" of group members' lives ensure participation.

These come in basically two types:

a. Gizmos: Sometimes, Jesus had his disciples discover truth among sheep, fish, corn—the stuff of everyday life. They would touch and examine, only to see something spiritual they'd never realized before.

b. "Grey-mos": More often, Jesus told his followers to "look," "remember," "think." Because our minds—our "grey matter"—are so powerful, we can "see" things not in front of us, "feel" what has already happened, and "sense" what might really be going on. Jesus often took advantage of these "mental gizmos" to help people discover truth.

2. Make them non-threatening.

Icebreakers should draw out conversation about things most people are always willing to talk about—kids, trips, "favorites," school, jobs, hobbies. Non-threatening questions are general rather than specific, open rather than closed.

Notice how the "threat level" changes as you read through the following questions. Also note how the questions move from general to specific:

What are some issues that Christians face that positively or negatively affect church growth?

What are some issues facing Christians in (your state) that positively or negatively affect church growth?

What are some issues facing Christians in (your town) that positively or negatively affect church growth?

What are some issues facing Christians in this church that positively or negatively affect church growth?

What are some issues YOU face that affects your role in your church's growth?

The fact of the matter is, if you ask the first question, the answers you'll get will likely be the same answers you'd have gotten by asking the last question—but because the pressure is removed, group members are more willing to share it.

People will normally respond out of what they know best and feel most strongly about—and that's usually something that's already directly affecting (or has affected) them.

3. Make them purposeful.

Your icebreaker will serve the discovery process best when it: a) generates discussion, b) illustrates the main idea of the lesson, and c) exposes personal beliefs and values. Icebreakers can be a back door to discovering some huge truths about Jesus.

Articles of DISCOVERY

Let's say your lesson deals with the purpose of the Church. If the desire is to facilitate change, then one icebreaker approach could be: "What do you enjoy about our church?"

You could use a gizmo to introduce the question: Give everyone a brick and ask them to describe those "bricks" that have "built up" their own church experience. Or use a "grey-mo": "Think back to the church you loved best. What things does our church have in common with that church?"

It's OK if your initial responses turn out to be me-centered. What will make this a deep icebreaker is the lesson that follows.

Once people have opened themselves up, it's time to get them to open their Bibles to see what God

says on the subject. For example, lead the group in a discussion of what Paul "enjoyed" about his "church experience" in Acts 16:16-40. Then ask, "What are the differences or similarities between our 'enjoyment list' and Paul's?"

This is where life change can happen. Once you've openly discussed what you believe with a close group of people, you're more able to respond with them openly when disagreement or cognitive dissonance occurs. At that point, don't focus on the disagreement; focus on the change.

"What could we do—personally and as a church—to make our list more like Paul's?"