



Heart-Mining

200 Questions to Encourage Meaningful Conversation

Heart-Mining Questions

*The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water,
but a man of understanding will draw it out.*

— Proverbs 20:5

Imagine you're meeting a new friend for lunch. Once you get past the small talk, what questions are you going to ask so you can get to know her better?

Or you're on the phone with an old friend. You've heard through mutual friends that he is not doing well but no one seems to know why. Are you going to try to find out what the problem is? How are you going to bring it up? What are you going to ask?

Or you've just met your new neighbors and you get a sense that they are interested in spiritual things. What are you going to ask them to hopefully move future conversations toward the gospel?

Here's a scenario you might be familiar with. You're leading a new small group from your church and you're preparing for the first gathering. You really want to build a community of honesty and trust. How are you going to do that? What questions are you going to ask, especially in the first few meetings, to get beneath the surface?

One more. A young man or young lady approaches you and asks if you would be willing to mentor them. You agree to meet with them to discuss it further. What questions are you going to ask in that meeting to help determine whether you're the right fit for their needs?

Questions. So many questions. Some are fun to ask and answer, bringing out memories and mutual interests that lead to friendship. Some are awkward and make us cringe. Some are on point and some go wide of the mark. And some are so intrusive that they crash the relationship at takeoff.

Even if we can't exactly explain what makes a "good" question, we sure know one when we hear it.

In the book, *Imitating Jesus: Love, Friendship, and Disciple-Making*, Lewie Clark uses the term "heart-mining" to describe quality questions and how they function in the disciple making process. He writes, "There's a great deal going on in the heart of your disciple – memories, dreams, regrets, fears, hopes, questions, and much more . . . [But] small talk will never get the job done." He goes on to say that until we get to the level of *heart-mining*, we're "flying blind, not really sure what the issues are or where God is already at work."¹

¹ Lewie Clark with Tim Grissom, *Imitating Jesus: Love, Friendship, and Disciple-Making* (WestBow Press, 2012), 81-82.

Adam S. McHugh says it like this: “When we listen to people, we are embracing them as whole, not fractions, even if they offer only a small part of themselves to us. That small part is attached to big parts, big memories, big stories, big feelings, big losses and big dreams. To listen to is an act of construction: we help people find integration of their various parts. It is an invitation to other people to settle in, be themselves and speak freely.”²

We all know that the ability to ask the right question at the right time in the right way is a useful skill when it comes to building strong friendships. Questions are crucial to communication and vital to deepening our understanding of one another.

With that in mind, here are 200 heart-mining questions taken from *Imitating Jesus*. Use these questions to get to know the people God has placed in your life to love and lead.

Ask well. Listen well.

Suggestions for using these questions in various settings can be found on page 11 of this document.

² McHugh, Adam S., *The Listening Life* (InterVarsity Press, 2015), 139 (Kindle Edition).

200 Heart-Mining Questions

1. Have you noticed a pattern of God's movement in your life?
2. What might God be saying to you through the questions you have about him and about life?
3. What might God want you to hear through the events of your life?
4. Describe your prayer life and experience.
5. Who are the people who've had the greatest positive impact on you?
6. What characteristics do you most admire in people?
7. Are there any areas of your life that you want to hide from God?
8. What would you be willing to die for?
9. What have been the happiest moments of your life?
10. What is changing in you as you listen to God?
11. What about your life makes you feel trapped?
12. Who is the number one advisor in your life? Why?
13. What day of your life would you most like to relive? Why?
14. I am most like my mom in that I ____.
15. I am most like my dad in that I ____.
16. What would you choose if you had three wishes?
17. What is the nicest thing that anyone has ever said about you?
18. Where do you go or what do you do when life gets too heavy for you? Why?
19. I suspect that behind my back people say that I'm ____ because ____.
20. In what areas of your life would you like to have greater peace?
21. What are you passionate about?
22. What do you fear about the future?

23. Picture the first time you will stand before God. What do you want him to say about your life?
24. What would you really like to do and be?
25. What do you feel are your greatest strengths?
26. How do you want to be remembered?
27. What would you do if you had unlimited resources?
28. What is the one thing you could do that would have the greatest positive impact on yourself? On others?
29. Describe your uniqueness.
30. What energizes you and gets you excited?
31. What drains you of energy?
32. What are your abilities, skills, and talents?
33. Describe your present lifestyle.
34. Describe the lifestyle you'd like to have.
35. In what ways are you contributing to the common good?
36. When do you feel good about yourself and about life in general?
37. What are you doing when you feel God is working through you?
38. What makes you feel guilty?
39. What discourages you?
40. What necessary disciplines do you have (mental, emotional, spiritual, physical)?
41. What necessary disciplines do you lack (mental, emotional, spiritual, physical)?
42. How do you spend your discretionary time?
43. What recurring mistakes do you make that are becoming habits?
44. What is your genuine, sustained passion?
45. Describe your most pleasant memories. Your most painful.
46. What are your sources of motivation and inspiration?

47. What are your hobbies and most enjoyable forms of recreation?
48. What do you regret not having done in your past?
49. What spiritual disciplines have you found helpful?
50. Are you content with the person you are becoming?
51. Are you waiting to do something special in your life? Explain your answer.
52. Are you presently facing a difficulty? How is this difficulty and the way you are handling it shaping your life?
53. Do you have hopes of simplifying your life? How?
54. Is success in some areas of your life costing you too much in other areas? Explain.
55. Have you defined your non-negotiables (convictions you must live by no matter what)? What are they?
56. What image do you want to project about yourself? Is that image real? If not, in what ways is it not real?
57. Are you able to see the essence of situations and issues, or do you often get hung up on the peripherals?
58. Are you generous with your money, time, and possessions?
59. Are you able to respect yourself? Why, or why not?
60. Are you convinced that God loves you? Do you really believe it?
61. How do you react to change and transition?
62. Are you holding any grudges? Explain your answer.
63. Are you generally an optimist, a pessimist, or a realist?
64. What makes you feel secure?
65. In what areas of life do you often relapse?
66. Are you able to give and receive love easily? If not, what do you think hinders you?
67. Do you care what others think of you? Why, or why not?
68. What kind of power do you enjoy and utilize?
69. Have you generally accepted the person that you are?

70. Do you generally motivate people, or do you manipulate them?
71. Do you often play the role of God by attempting to punish yourself or others?
72. Are you able to discern and differentiate between spirituality and superstition?
73. What recurring temptations do you face?
74. List the five most important things that experience has taught you.
75. Are you able to help others develop and mature? In what ways do you help them?
76. Do other people ask for your advice? In what areas do they seek your advice?
77. What percent of your potential do you think you are using? Explain your answer.
78. Do you view the Bible as merely a guideline or as an authority?
79. Describe your personal relationship with Christ.
80. What words would friends and family members use to describe you?
81. How do you select friends?
82. Do you live more by a sense of responsibility or more by feeling?
83. Do you exercise financial discipline? Explain.
84. What habit(s) would you like to break?
85. What habit(s) would you like to make?
86. Is procrastination a problem for you? How so?
87. In what ways are you a role model for your children or for those under your care and influence?
88. What word(s) do you wish described you?
89. What specific progress have you made in the past year?
90. What actions are you taking based on faith?
91. What question(s) would you like to ask God?
92. In what ways would you like to change your attitude?
93. What changes would you make if you could live your life over thus far?
94. Name the one change that you would most like to make in your life.

95. What compliment do you most often receive?
96. What criticism do you most often receive?
97. What irritates you?
98. What situations make you feel insecure?
99. What experiences from your past still affect you the most?
100. Have you come to grips with death? Explain your answer.
101. How do you define love?
102. What is your greatest accomplishment in life thus far?
103. What do you do to promote harmony in your family and in your immediate circle of friends?
104. What do you look for in a role model?
105. How do you keep your mind active?
106. What intimidates you?
107. How do you generally respond to criticism?
108. Describe your three most enjoyable memories.
109. What effect does eternity have on your decision-making and planning?
110. List the three individuals who have influenced you the most.
111. Describe a time when you showed courage.
112. In what ways is life challenging for you right now?
113. When do you feel most alive?
114. How is God using you presently?
115. What is the greatest ongoing challenge in your life?
116. How well do you manage the ups and downs of life? What do you do to manage them?
117. What effect does faith have on your life?
118. Do your family members and friends know that you love them? How do they know?
119. What happens when you pray or meditate on Scripture?

120. What area of your life does God seem to be dealing with, or want to deal with, right now?
121. Are you missing anything in life that is important to you?
122. What does your name mean? Why were you given that name?
123. What was the best gift you received as a child?
124. What do you hope to contribute to the world?
125. What do you hope to be doing in ten years? Twenty?
126. What do you want to be remembered for?
127. What opportunities do you see unfolding for you?
128. What do others often ask you to do?
129. How do you define "accomplishment"?
130. What subjects interest you repeatedly?
131. Who do you enjoy spending time with?
132. Who and what commands your attention?
133. How do you escape boredom?
134. What concepts do you understand most clearly?
135. What keeps you from being what you want to be?
136. What things turn you off emotionally and spiritually?
137. How do you discern truth from error or falsehood?
138. What can you concentrate on at length?
139. What destructive weakness do you have? What are you doing to try fighting or overcoming it?
140. Do you have a basic philosophy of life? If so, describe it.
141. Describe some of the things you are currently doing to grow and mature.
142. What are your fantasies and how are they affecting or conflicting with reality?
143. Is your best impression made quickly or over a longer period of time?

144. How many long-term friendships have you maintained? What have you done to maintain them?
145. What triggers positive self-talk in you? Negative self-talk?
146. What interests would you like to develop?
147. Do you often waste time? What do you do when you are wasting time?
148. In what areas of life are you most disciplined? Why are these disciplines important to you?
149. How do you mesh the secular with the sacred in your life?
150. In what ways are you prejudiced?
151. What prejudices have you overcome?
152. Do you have an obsession that takes precedence over reason? Explain your answer.
153. What were you worried about a year ago?
154. Do you have a healthy sense of humor?
155. What is the most daring thing you've ever done?
156. What are you doing to encourage others?
157. Do others see you as you see yourself?
158. Do you seem to generate conflict often?
159. Do you have enemies? Who are they?
160. How do you generally handle confrontation—comfortably and in a timely manner, or by delaying it and letting the pressure build?
161. When do you want to be your own authority?
162. When do you feel free?
163. Do you feel that you have sufficient time for yourself? What do you do with that time?
164. Who are the authorities in your life and in what areas?
165. Do you know how to benefit from bad and hurtful experiences? Explain your answer.
166. Do you believe in heaven and hell? How does your belief affect your life and relationships?

167. What shortcuts are you tempted to take in life, and what are you hoping to avoid by these shortcuts?
168. How do you like for approval to be communicated to you?
169. In what ways are you and your spouse united as one? What are the major areas of recurring disagreement or conflict?
170. Are you more prone to remember the positive experiences of your life or the negative ones? Why do you think you do this?
171. Do you quickly accept responsibility for your mistakes, or do you often try to push the blame on someone else?
172. Do you demand theological closure to all issues, or are you able to live with some ambiguity?
173. Are you more of a critic or more of a coach?
174. If you were to die soon, what would be your legacy – what would you be remembered for? What do you want your legacy to be?
175. Describe your relationship with your parents or the people who raised you.
176. How do you decide who to spend time with?
177. How do you demonstrate gratitude?
178. What are your priorities, and how do you determine them?
179. What progress are you planning to make this year?
180. What do you do to be liked?
181. If needed, what could you do to reduce your standard of living?
182. What plans are you making for retirement years?
183. How do you control anger?
184. Describe a recent special experience that you enjoyed.
185. What problems has your ego caused for you and for others?
186. What do you feel makes life worthwhile?
187. What changes would you like to help make in your culture?
188. Describe the big life lessons you learned from your parents or those who raised you.

189. Have your grandparents been a significant part of your life? If so, what have you learned from them?
190. What can you do to improve your communication skills?
191. Do you ever attempt to justify lying and deception? Explain your answer.
192. Do you feel that you sometimes try to stifle emotions more than you should? Under what circumstances do you stifle them, and what is the result?
193. Do you enjoy what you are doing vocationally? If not, what changes would you like to make?
194. What have you done to try to improve your personality?
195. In what ways are you most influenced through peer pressure?
196. Do you have meaningful conversations? What makes conversations meaningful to you?
197. What traits have you inherited?
198. Have you ever had a change of heart or opinion on a major issue? Explain your answer.
199. What makes you thankful to be alive?
200. How do you know that God loves you?



Suggestions for Using *Heart-Mining* Questions

Some of these questions are on the “let’s get acquainted” level while others dive beneath the surface where fears and dreams hang out. The intent behind them all is to try to engage another person in a way that makes him or her feel heard and cared for. This is all about heart-mining, not information-gathering. Even so, there is a great need for sensitivity and discernment, for not going too far too fast or too deep too soon in these personal interactions.

Given those cautions, here are a few ideas and suggestions for using these questions.

1. Be mindful of not only *what* questions you ask, but *how many* you ask, especially in one sitting. Conversation can be quite draining for some people, so proceed with sensitivity.
2. You probably noticed that some questions overlap with others and are likely to elicit similar responses. People communicate differently, and what is clear to one person might be confusing

to another. If one question doesn't get the response you're hoping for, you may want to ask a different question.

3. If someone chooses to tell you something from deep within their heart, treat it as a sacred trust. Honor them by listening well and by guarding their confidence.

4. Be creative in how you set these questions up to initiate meaningful conversations. For example, in group settings you could:

- Ask each person to choose a number between 1 and 200 (or within a smaller range if you want to focus on certain questions). Read the corresponding question and wait for their answer.
- Pass the questions around and take turns asking and answering them.
- Target your questions by selecting them in advance. Perhaps base your question(s) on what you already know about the person, or what particular area of their life you hope to learn more about.
- Give each person two or three questions to choose from and wait for them to answer the one they choose.
- Make sure you aren't always the "asker." You need to answer some questions, too.
- Be ready to ask a follow up question, if appropriate, such as, "Would you tell me more about that?" Be sensitive to whether the person is willing to keep talking or if you need to pick the conversation up at a later time.

"Listening is an act of servanthood . . .

If we wish to imitate Jesus and become servants, we must learn how to listen."

— Adam S. McHugh in *The Listening Life*