

SESSION 2: Active Listening, Styles of Questions, and Theological Thinking

Session: Introduces active listening and the styles of questions that move reflection forward. Introduces theological thinking/reflection. Draws the distinction between doing theology and psychological analysis; introduces theological categories and Theological Reflection.

OUTLINE OF SCHEDULE:

10 min: Gathering Words and Processing Homework

10 min: Presentation & Pair Activity- Active Listening

25 min: Presentation & Triad Activity- Listening Skills & Styles of Questions

10 min: Presentation- Theological Thinking

15 min: Small Group Exercise- Bringing Embedded Theology to the Surface

05 min: Large Group Processing

10 min: Assignment and Closing Prayer

COPIES THAT NEED TO BE MADE:

GOD CALLING page to be cut into strips and placed in basket. You need strips for half of your group. Ten situations are on the page.

1 copy per participant

Gathering Words (1 pg)

Targeted and Broad Questions (1 pg)

Listening Skills & Styles of Questions/ Rules of Thumb (2 pgs or duplex)

Triad Story Exercise (1 pg)

How To Think Theologically (1 pg)

Bringing Embedded Theology To The Surface (1 pg)

Homework: Theological Autobiography (1 pg)

By the end of this session:

KNOWLEDGE

- Participants will be able to identify at least three Skills of active listening and three Rules of Thumb
- Participants will be able to describe the difference between Embedded and Deliberative Theology
- Participants will be able to define Theological Reflection

SKILL

- Participants will practice targeting and broadening questions in an active listening situation
- Participants will identify the uses of Skills and Rules in another's conversation

SESSION 2: INSTRUCTOR'S CONTENT

10 min: Gathering Words and Processing Homework

CONGREGATIONAL READING: Please Listen (Author Unknown published by Amanda Gier)

This reading reflects on very human needs, worries, and doubts. Some of your participants may be uneasy with the portrayal of God. Invite them to open their hearts to the experience of those that felt these issues deeply but in fear, felt the need to say them anonymously.

In reviewing Homework, make this point clear: Spiritual Mentors must be clear about their limits in dealing with mentees with mental illness. However, Spiritual Mentors should remember that even with mental illness, a person may have a very rich spiritual life and need "ordinary" listeners to help process some questions.

10 min: Presentation & Pair Activity- Active Listening

Have a chair at the front or center so you can demonstrate listening postures.

Basic content:

Last week in our Gathering Prayer we heard this quote from John Maxwell: Hearing is a function of the ear but listening well is a function of the will. In this program, you are preparing to have structured conversations with people. This involves listening well as well as guiding the process. For now we are doing simple exercises to remind ourselves of the power of the little things. In most cases, we know more than we can articulate and active listening draws out what is known but not yet "worded." It's important to note that listening well is active listening and it is a holy work that involves your body, mind, and spirit.

You know when somebody's not really invested in you even if they hear your words; you can see it in their body. *Demonstrate a sprawling, slouching posture with the chair turned away from the group and your head turned away.* In active listening you use your body to convey your interest and to invite the other to speak. *Ask a participant to demonstrate.* Think about the various ways that you can convey your interest and involvement in the conversation--eye contact, inclining your head, leaning in with your body. The one that you have to be careful with is facial expression--you want to show engagement, but you don't want to communicate your reaction too quickly since it's not your story and the emotion belongs to the storyteller.

Active listening also involves setting your mind on the task. Last week we did an exercise in which you kept track of the thoughts, feelings, and interests that interrupted your listening. In that case, the story wasn't really consequential. Imagine how devastating it could be to a storyteller if he was baring his soul and a word he used made you think of your grocery list and you started writing it! So you have to focus your attention as the conversation begins and stay with it. Last week you focused on one skill: Drawing more description and detail out of the storyteller. Tonight, we will work on more skills for staying in the moment. The eventual goal is to be adept with a specific method of Theological Reflection.

Finally, active listening involves your spirit. If your storyteller has a different religious system than you have, she may even use words that sound strange to you. To really receive another's story and truly understand it from the storyteller's view requires openness of heart and temporary suspension of judgment. One of the biggest dangers in doing this work is co-opting someone else's meaning. This happens with leading questions like, "You don't really believe that, right?" It also means you can't try to force someone into agreement with, "Don't you think xyz?" This happens all too easily. We sometimes imagine that we are offering an alternate view of the situation but really we have just disregarded the other person's account. The worst-case scenario with co-opting another person's meaning is that she learns she can't trust you to hold her story with reverence.

In this first exercise, you'll work in pairs. Your goal is to understand as fully as possible what the other person is telling you. So we are going to work on just relaying back what you hear and getting a full understanding of specifics and context. One person in each pair will draw a strip of paper out of the

basket and tell that story to the listener. The stories (in the basket) are all outrageous and Listeners will quickly be tempted to interject a reaction and co-opt the story! Don't do it! You only have 3 minutes to do this exercise.

These directions are on the handout:

Storyteller: Go all out with the story as if it were really important to you.

Listener: Keep doing two things:

- 1) Reflect back exactly what you heard. Be as blatant as, "I heard you say _____."
- 2) Ask questions that either target or broaden the conversation.

A targeted question is trying to get more detail or specifics.

A broad question is trying to get more context.

In both cases, the questions are only pursuing information you *need* to understand this better-- not to fulfill your curiosity.

25 min: Presentation & Triad Activity- Listening Skills & Styles of Questions

(8 min) Basic content:

Distribute the handouts, Listening Skills & Styles of Questions/ Rules of Thumb.

Discuss the skills that you think are most important to emphasize with your group.

If you have a large number of participants for whom this is brand new content, hit highlights of the entire list.

Be sure participants understand the distinctions of what Empathy does and doesn't do.

(17 min) Triad Story Exercise

Distribute the handout and make sure everyone is clear on the task.

Keep the groups working by calling time at 4 min, 5 min, 9 min, 10 min, 14 min, and 15 min

These directions are on the Handout:

Work in groups of three to tell/listen to personal stories.

Each group member will have the opportunity to take each role: Storyteller, Listener, Observer

- **Each Storyteller** should offer a real account from the past month though it doesn't need to be deeply personal or spiritually significant. It needs to be a real story so that the Listener can really attend to real emotions/reactions in the Storyteller.
- **Each story** should take 3-4 minutes. The Observer calls time at 4 minutes no matter what.
- **The Listener** is to deliberately use as many of the Listening Skills as possible to flesh out the story. The Listener should also employ as many of the Rules of Thumb as possible.
- **The Observer** is to make a check mark beside the skills as s/he sees and/or hears them being used. At the end of 4 minutes, the Observer reports how many skills/rules the Listener used. **The Observer** should also recount anything special that you saw in the Listener— including why some of the Skills might not have been necessary in this situation. (For example, the story may have been playful enough that the Listener wasn't going to have any emotional turmoil in listening to it and "owning personal stuff" may not have been an issue.) Your report should be made in 1 minute.
- **Give this page** to the Listener that you observed so they can keep your notes.

10 min: Presentation- Theological Thinking

Remind participants that this program is concerned with forming skills that can be used to talk across the boundaries of Traditions.

Basic content:

Now the work begins to get a little harder! We are going to add Theology to the mix. In religious communities, where we share a worldview and spiritual practices, we use Theology to explain both our worldview and practices. It is the mental way we organize and describe our understanding of Life, where we live (this planet,) and how we are related to Ultimacy.

Ultimacy has many names: God, Meaning, Spirit, Energy, Soul, Tao, Creation, Life, and more, depending on the religious community in which we live and practice. Everything else flows from our description of that which is Ultimate: Our values, our attitudes, our ethics, and our beliefs. Theology's expression may include religious and philosophical systems from the world's enduring Traditions or be deeply personal. Hence Theology is both:

- A *mental framework* that organizes and describes our understanding of Life,
- And *the work* of describing our relationship with Ultimacy,

Within a religious community, Theology functions as a language. It is distinct from our everyday language, because it has its own vocabulary, it has idiomatic expressions, and it bends common usage into new forms. This makes sense when you realize how big its task is (i.e. trying to organize our understanding of Life and describe Ultimacy.) So the Theology of a community is like a language. Good listening skills and some knowledge of key concepts in different schools of thought will help you recognize the theological terms and categories that you hear in a mentee's speech.

In *How To Think Theologically* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006, 2nd ed), Howard Stone and James Duke assert that Theology has two primary expressions:

Embedded Theology: The built-in attitudes, common language of witness and testimony, descriptions we pick up by being in the community and we use without thinking

Deliberative Theology: Our emerging understandings, the work of teaching, and direction/correction for a course of action either personally or communally, especially helpful when we are working with a difficult social or moral issue

Your role as a Spiritual Mentor is to help people be more deliberative or 'conscientious' in their Theology.

In uncovering Embedded Theology and in doing Deliberative Theology, you will use a process called Theological Reflection. Basically, it is a process for holding one's everyday life up to the mirror of one's own enduring principles to see how well they match. Stone and Duke say that Theological Reflection uses two common techniques that we've been practicing: Listening and Questioning.

Listening in Theological Reflection requires

Skill: Active waiting for new information

Attitude: Receptivity to surprise

Process & craft: Dialogue not discussion

Concentration

Questioning in Theological Reflection requires

Skill: Careful, thorough, deliberative

Attitude: Openness to surprise

Process & craft: Honesty about entering in to another's world

Concentration

We have been working on these "requirements" and now we're going to add another layer to our listening and questioning to do Theological Reflection. The categories on which you will focus are:

What does it mean to be human?

What is the nature of divinity or Ultimacy?

What spiritual concepts are essential in this system of thought?

What mental models organize the system?

What role does the community play?

15 min: Small Group Exercise- Bringing Embedded Theology to the Surface

These directions are provided on the handout:

Work in groups of 6. Begin by verbally summarizing one of the silly stories that a group member created in the 'God Calling' exercise. Remember the premise of the story was a fantasy—and you

spun a yarn from that. So it doesn't matter which story you use just that you do this quickly. That person will continue in the role of Storyteller.

Once you have a summary, let each other member of the group be a Listener working with one of these categories: Human, Divine, Spiritual Concepts, Mental Models, and Community.

Ask questions from your category. Do not be offended by the neutral terminology of the sample questions! Once you have some answers, you can be much more personal in how you phrase them. The point is to surface the understanding *the Storyteller* has about the nature of Reality that is hidden in his or her fictional story. You are deliberately asking questions to bring the Embedded Theology to the surface to examine it.

05 min: Large Group Processing

Check on how participants did with the exercise. Repeat and emphasize that this is core knowledge:

In uncovering Embedded Theology and in doing Deliberative Theology, you will use a process called Theological Reflection. Theological Reflection is a process for holding one's everyday life up to the mirror of one's own enduring principles to see how well they match.

10 min: Assignment and Closing Prayer

Distribute the Homework Handout. It is the preparation guide for the next two weeks. Each participant will have the opportunity to tell his/her theological autobiography based on this guide. As you can see, the categories are those that we began using in this session. Remember you are telling a Theological story so you will be talking about your framework for understanding Reality and how you came to it, not the stories or incidents from which you distilled your wisdom.

For the next two sessions, you will work in a group of six and stay together for both sessions. Three people will tell their stories in each session which means you will have 15 minutes to tell your story. Your group mates will listen to your whole story before asking anything. When they ask, it will be like today—each Listener will practice just one Listening Skill or Style of Question. Their response time will be about 10 minutes per Storyteller.

You are not expected to bare your soul or expose secrets. You may share with as much depth as you are comfortable. The point of this exercise is to tell enough and learn enough about your group mates to begin to form a mentoring community. In a mentoring community, you will know enough to say to a mentee, "I can help you with your questions in _____ this way. But you might also want to talk to _____ because s/he has a deeper appreciation of your theological position and spiritual practice."

Finally, it seems like 15 minutes is a long time, but the development of your framework will barely be touched so make sure you have meaningful notes on your preparation sheet and get in the most significant information!

Closing Words:

In her novel for youth entitled, *Just Listen*, Sarah Dessen says:

"There comes a time when the world gets quiet and the only thing left is your own heart. So you'd better learn the sound of it. Otherwise you'll never understand what it's saying."

Let us be still and listen for the love in our hearts before we leave.

Silence

We have been blessed to be together.

In this time we have played with words, practiced asking questions, listened to each other,
And opened our hearts to the work of listening well.

May we be deepened and broadened by this time.

As we go back into the world, may we carry the skills with us

And may we hear the thrumming of love in our own hearts.

GATHERING WORDS

CONGREGATIONAL READING: Please Listen (Author Unknown published by Amanda Gier)

This reading reflects on very human needs, worries, and doubts. If your experience is different, please open your heart to the experience of those that felt the need to say this anonymously.

MEN:

When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving me advice, you have not done what I asked.
When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way,
you are trampling on my feelings.

WOMEN:

*When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem,
you have failed me, strange as that may seem.*

ALL:

**Listen! All I ask is that you listen.
Don't talk or do---just hear me.**

WOMEN:

Advice is cheap; 20 cents will get you both Dear Abby and Billy Graham in the same newspaper.
And I can do for myself; I am not helpless.
Maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless.

MEN:

*When you do something for me that I can
and need to do for myself, you contribute to my fear and inadequacy.*

ALL:

**Listen! All I ask is that you listen.
Don't talk or do---just hear me.**

MEN:

But when you accept as a simple fact that I feel what I feel, no matter how irrational,
then I can stop trying to convince you and get about this business
of understanding what's behind this irrational feeling.

WOMEN:

*And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.
Irrational feelings make sense when we understand what's behind them.*

ALL:

**Listen! All I ask is that you listen.
Don't talk or do---just hear me.**

WOMEN:

Perhaps that's why prayer works, sometimes, for some people---because God is mute,
and he doesn't give advice or try to fix things.
God just listens and lets you work it out for yourself.

MEN:

*So please listen, and just hear me.
And if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn---and I will listen to you.*

ALL:

**Listen! All I ask is that you listen.
Don't talk or do---just hear me.**

TARGETED AND BROAD QUESTIONS

Storyteller: Go all out with the story as if it were really important to you.

Listener: Keep doing two things:

1) Reflect back exactly what you heard. Be as blatant as, "I heard you say_____."

2) Ask questions that either target or broaden the conversation.

A targeted question is trying to get more detail or specifics.

A broad question is trying to get more context.

In both cases, the questions are only pursuing information you need to understand this better-- not to fulfill your curiosity.

SAMPLES OF TARGETED AND BROAD QUESTIONS

Targeted: What did you say in reply?

Broad: How did you respond?

Allows for more than a spoken reply...

Targeted: What were you feeling?

Broad: What was going on in you?

You might have been doing more than feeling...

Targeted: What was the most significant thing that happened to you today?

Broad: Where do you want to start?

You may want to start with background...

USE THE DIFFERENCE TO KEEP A CONVERSATION MOVING IN THE DIRECTION THE MENTEE HAS SET

Targeted: Who could you ask for that answer?

If you need to help someone act soon...

Broad: How/ where else could you get information about this?

If you need to help someone get a bigger perspective on an issue...

Targeted: Tell me why you can't talk to him about that?

(Make sure your tone conveys this is a question not a challenge.)

Pursue information for better understanding...

Broad: What would be the best way to approach this with him?

Consider options and strategies...

GENERALLY SPEAKING:

Responses are generated by the Listener's questions.

So responses are about the Listener not the Storyteller.

Broader questions assure that less of the Listener is imposed on the story

because the Storyteller is making more of the decisions about the story line.

However, you should not be absent from the conversation!

Ask enough targeted questions to be clear on the mentee's understanding of the situation.

GOD CALLING

You have decided to join the circus and become a lion tamer because you believe God is calling you to take more risks in your life.

You are converting your gas hogging mini-van into a mini-house/lab so that you can go on the road as an environmental educator to teach others respect for creation.

You woke up this morning with the image of belay ropes in your head. You think it is a divine sign that you are to become a professional free-climber.

You are on your way to make reservations for a once-in-a lifetime Bermuda cruise when a black cat crosses in front of you in the driveway. Then another one crosses in front of you as you leave your neighborhood. Then another one crosses your path outside the travel agency. You can't shake an eerie feeling so you wait to make the reservations.

Your spouse has taken a vow of silence for a year.

After a rough day at work, you come home and do a Google Boolean Search for "Job I can do besides the one I have." The search leads you to "Job, book of." Should you give it all up and go to Maine for some serious whale-watching and discernment?

Your meditation teacher encouraged you to observe your dog's 'oneness with the moment' as a guide. Your family is worried because now you're sleeping in a t-shirt that says, "God is a palindrome" and reading "How to Meditate with Your Dog" rather than attending your class.

Your oldest child has decided to join a monastic community in Bhutan.

At a company picnic you see two potential suitors at different tables. Suddenly you come face to face with a squirrel with "the look" of your beloved, and deceased, Uncle Gus. It is obvious which of the suitors the squirrel prefers—and it wasn't the direction you were leaning!

You have been praying about a career change from Office Manager at a law practice. Every time you open the Scripture, it falls to a passage about food. You think perhaps it's a call to become a Sous-chef.

LISTENING SKILLS & STYLES OF QUESTIONS

REFLECTING BACK

What I heard you say was, " _____ "

RESTATING

Restating is a step up from reflecting back. Instead of repeating the exact words you heard, you rephrase it to check out the meaning *and* interpretation you are hearing. As always, you are confirming that you understand the *speaker's* meaning and interpretation. Even if you know the speaker, pretend that this conversation is all you have to go on. Then you will know you are listening to the details and context of *this situation* not the history you already have.

CLARIFYING

Clarifying is all about information. You are trying to get the facts! Targeted questions clarify details and broad questions clarify context. This is never about prying, nosiness, or fishing for more information than you should have to understand what is being said. Think of the conversation as a puzzle: Are there any pieces missing that you need? Clarifying questions should have a respectful tone to them so they aren't heard as a challenge.

SILENCE

Silence is an overlooked and underestimated skill! Most people know more than they can articulate and yet it is hard for us to be still long enough for someone to draw out what they want to put in words. Silence is the space for the whole conversation so it should also be obvious in the process. Allow a speaker time to be quiet--even if that means you have to slow down your questions or responses because the speaker is on the other end of the scale and is very extroverted or very emotive.

EMPATHIZING

Empathizing is about demonstrating you have heard and understood the emotional content. It may also involve helping the speaker recognize unstated emotional content. For example, if someone is laughing through clenched teeth, you may say, "Clenched teeth don't usually accompany laughing so I'm wondering if you're experiencing some mixed emotions?" (Of course, the speaker may just have a popcorn hull stuck, but that just turns your question into a Clarification; good job!) Emotion is tricky so remember these tips:

EMPATHIZING DOES: Validate that emotions have been recognized by the speaker and understood by the listener; invite the *speaker* to name emotion; invite the *speaker* to nuance and/or rate emotional content.

EMPATHIZING DOES NOT: Judge emotions as good or bad; convey the *listener's* feelings about what you've heard; provide content or insert feelings not in evidence. (i.e. Never say something like, "Wow that must have really hurt!" if that is *your* reaction to what happened.)

SUMMARIZING

Summarizing is usually a springboard to the next phase of a conversation. You are literally weighing everything you have in evidence so far. You may recount this directly: "Your words tell me _____. Your body posture conveys _____. Your tone and energy say _____. What I hear in all of this is _____." Or you may find a way to put it into one statement. Summarizing is delicate work because you are keeping track of the sense of the whole, but it is very affirming to a speaker for that very reason. When you summarize, and the speaker replies, "Yes, you've understood," you have created a fair bit of trust.

RULES OF THUMB

- **Take time** to formulate questions and responses.
- **Make your questions open-ended** if at all possible. If you need a "yes" or "no" on some issue, be sure you have a follow-up question ready so it doesn't die there. If you are tempted to ask an either-or question, change it to a multiple choice. For example, "You said you were practicing again. Does that mean you are chanting, or bowing, or meditating, or studying?" Or create a continuum of possibilities from related but unlikely things. For example, your speaker is dejected that a project didn't go as planned so you ask, "When you said it went badly, did you mean you personally failed to uphold the Gospel standard or did you mean that the Truth you were speaking was completely ignored?" Total failure on either end of that continuum probably doesn't match the speaker's intention but by expanding the scope of what "it went badly" can mean, the speaker can give more nuance to the description.
- **Direct questions** are often neglected because they feel like leading questions. The key to a good direct question is in the tone: No sarcasm, no rancor, no needling, no disdain. For example, say in an even tone, "When you say xyz, what does that mean to you?" Or, "I don't know anything about your community so tell me how it handles that?"
- **Choose words carefully.** It's important to be accurate in processing someone else's information. It's also important to choose words with the right potency.
- **Be gentle** when exposing contradictions or assumptions.
- **Own your "stuff"** when your internal story is so loud you can't tune it out. Do not spill your guts or change roles on your mentee; simply acknowledge, "Your story is connecting with parts of mine and I am going to answer things slowly so I don't confuse the two stories."
- **Do not co-opt answers.** DO NOT CO-OPT ANSWERS.

When we begin using the Theological Reflection Circle, we will add some skills for helping a speaker connect his/her personal story to their Tradition's Big Story.

TRIAD STORY EXERCISE
15 Minutes

Work in groups of three to tell/listen to personal stories.

Each group member will have the opportunity to take each role: Storyteller, Listener, Observer

- **Each Storyteller** should offer a real account from the past month though it doesn't need to be deeply personal or spiritually significant. It needs to be a real story so that the Listener can really attend to real emotions/reactions in the Storyteller.
- **Each story** should take 3-4 minutes. The Observer calls time at 4 minutes no matter what.
- **The Listener** is to deliberately use as many of the Listening Skills as possible to flesh out the story. The Listener should also employ as many of the Rules of Thumb as possible.
- **The Observer** is to make a check mark beside the skills as s/he sees and/or hears them being used. At the end of 4 minutes, the Observer reports how many skills/rules the Listener used. **The Observer** should also recount anything special that you saw in the Listener—including why some of the Skills might not have been necessary in this situation. (For example, the story may have been playful enough that the Listener wasn't going to have any emotional turmoil in listening to it and "owning personal stuff" may not have been an issue.) Your report should be made in 1 minute.
- **Give this page** to the Listener that you observed so they can keep your notes.

NAME OF LISTENER:			
SKILLS		RULES	
Reflecting Back		Take time	
Restating		Use open-ended questions	
Clarifying: Targeting		Use direct questions	
Clarifying: Broadening		Make careful word choices	
Silence		Be gentle	
Empathizing		Own your "stuff"	
Summarizing		Do not co-opt	
NOTES			

HOW TO THINK THEOLOGICALLY
Howard Stone and James Duke

Theology Has Two Primary Expressions
These Can Both Be Deepened

Embedded Theology

Built-in attitudes
Testimony/ Witness
Description

Deliberative Theology

Emerging understanding
Teaching
Direction/ Correction

Theological Reflection Uses Two Common Techniques
Both Ripen our Theological Understanding

Listening

Skill: Active waiting for new information
Attitude: Receptivity to surprise
Process & craft: Dialogue not discussion
Concentration

Questioning

Skill: Careful, thorough, deliberative
Attitude: Openness to surprise
Process & craft: Honesty about entering in
Concentration

CORE DEFINITION TO KNOW

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

A process for holding one's everyday life up
to the mirror of one's own enduring principles
to see how well they match.

THE ART OF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
Patricia O'Connell Killen & John de Beer

The goals of theological reflection:

- 1) To up-end untested certitude and self-assurance
- 2) To dialogue with "tradition" (in all/any forms) and come to insight, liberation or empowerment

What makes theological reflection different from psychological analysis:

- 1) Expands the concept and description of one's current experience
- 2) Determines the focus of reflection with concern for dialogue with "tradition"
- 3) Deliberately incorporates theological language and categories in the process
- 4) Respects the integrity of an individual's understanding and a tradition's Tradition

BRINGING EMBEDDED THEOLOGY TO THE SURFACE

15 minutes

Work in groups of 6. Begin by verbally summarizing one of the silly stories that a group member created in the 'God Calling' exercise. Remember the premise of the story was a fantasy—and you spun a yarn from that. So it doesn't matter which story you use just that you do this quickly. That person will continue in the role of Storyteller. (1 Storyteller, 5 Listeners)

Once you have a summary, let each other member of the group be a Listener working with one of these categories: Human, Divine, Spiritual Concepts, Mental Models, and Community.

Ask questions from your category. Do not be offended by the neutral terminology of the sample questions! Once you have some answers, you can be much more personal in how you phrase them. The point is to surface the understanding *the Storyteller* has about the nature of Reality that is hidden in his or her fictional story. You are deliberately asking questions to bring the Embedded Theology to the surface to examine it.

No conclusions are to be made today. This is an exercise in exposing what is embedded not resolving the situation.

HUMAN: What does it mean to be human?

How do you define "human" or humanity?

What are the essential characteristics of being human? How did your character reveal this?

DIVINE: What is the nature of divinity or Ultimacy?

Is divinity a Personal Being, an impersonal force, or a quality of creation?

How do you know this? How is it evident in your story?

SPIRITUAL CONCEPTS: What spiritual concepts are essential in your system of thought?

What must you do and how must you do it to support your understanding of Humanity and Divinity?

How do you describe the spiritual life?

MENTAL MODELS: What mental models organize your system?

Do you have any images or frameworks that you use to describe Reality?

How do you put the pieces of your understanding together?

COMMUNITY: What role does the community play in your spiritual/religious life?

How have you come to this understanding? Who helped you learn and refine it?

Are you accountable to anyone with your understanding or practice?

What role does religious authority play in your life?

HOMEWORK SESSION 2

Be prepared to share your understanding of these things at our next session.
A written report is not needed! This page is meant to be for notes.

How do you define human? What does it mean to be human?

**How do you understand divinity or Ultimate Reality?
Do you have a God/god/goddess image you use in reflecting on the meaning of life?**

What spiritual concepts do you think are essential?

**What mental models have you accepted and where did you get them?
How does your understanding of history influence your spirituality?**

**What is the role of community in religion?
What do you understand as religious authority?**

What religious concepts or spiritual practices have you tweaked in your personal practice?