

Lesson 12: Studying the Bible Together (Part 1)

Introduction Next to fellowship, studying the Bible is the central part of a CARE group. Remember: People most easily make a decision for Jesus when they experience fellowship with believers AND study the Bible. This also applies today: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17) Opening the Bible together and experiencing how God speaks through His living Word is one of the most beautiful and important experiences a CARE group have. After eating and singing together we open the Bible together so that God can speak to us.

The Basics In order for us to experience our friends getting to know Jesus better through Bible study, growing in faith, and applying things in their daily lives, we need to follow these basic principles:

- The Bible study should build a bridge between the biblical message and our lives. This means that our discussion really has to be based on the Bible in order to find out what God has to say about a certain topic. A Bible text shouldn't only serve as a hook to hang our own personal discussion on. Bible study has to have something to do with practical life. No person will ever be won by theoretical discussions on doctrinal questions.
- In a CARE group we only study the Bible and no other books, not even books from Ellen G. White. Her literature is very valuable and a great help in preparing a lesson, but in the CARE group the Bible alone should be used as the basis for study. The impression could easily be given that the books of Ellen White are more important to us than the Bible.
- We treat the Bible as the Word of God, which we completely trust. We study it with the expectancy that God will speak through His Word to our lives.
- We study the Bible according to the principle that the Bible interprets itself. We will have questions that can't be answered by the verses that we read in one meeting. But they can be answered later on by reading other verses.
- The lessons are adjusted to the needs of the guests. They should answer questions that people have while searching for God and encourage them to personally study the Bible. Thus the lessons should be kept simple, relevant, and interesting. The lessons should be chosen in a way that new guests can join at any time.
- The lesson should be Christ centered – salvation and a relationship with Jesus should be the focal point. We shouldn't present a legalistic platform, where correct behavior is stressed more than a relationship to Jesus.
- The Bible discussion should be an exchange of thoughts about a Bible text and not a monologue held by the leader. It isn't the job of the leader to answer all the questions. Rather, he/she should lead the guests toward an understanding of the passage that they themselves discover.
- The discussion and the lesson have to be held in such a way that guests will feel comfortable even if they don't know much about the Bible.
- Bible stories work very well (e.g., stories from the gospels or from Acts, parables of Jesus, or other biblical biographies.) On one hand, these are very suitable for guests because they are easy to understand and generally you only have to open the Bible in one place. On the other hand, they are so deep that people with greater biblical knowledge can learn something new from them.

- Although it isn't our first priority to prove our Adventist beliefs in the Bible study, we also shouldn't try to hide them. For example, when a parable or story mentions Jesus' second coming, the resurrection, the Sabbath, or the divinity of Jesus, we can naturally speak about these truths. Thus we can awaken their interest and can then go into detail on the subject in a personal Bible study.

Study the Bible yourself!

The most important preparation for leading a Bible study in a CARE group is to personally study the Bible passage prayerfully and thoroughly. The Word must speak to us before we can share it powerfully with others! Lessons that have been prepared by experienced study group leaders can be a valuable resource. But good material should never tempt us to go to a study group without sufficient preparation.

It is important that we study in-depth the Bible passage . That means taking the time to find out what the texts are really saying instead of reading into it our own wishful thinking. This kind of Bible study is like digging for gold because we have to dig deep to find it. As we already learned in lesson 4 of module 2 (How to Study the Bible) there are 3 steps necessary for in depth Bible study:

1. Observing what the text really says (content).
2. Interpreting correctly what the text says (meaning).
3. Personally applying what was learned (application).

Let's look at these three steps a little closer:

First Step: Observe what the text says (content)

Our goal is to answer the following question: What is the text really saying? When we just read through a text quickly, we often only comprehend a fraction of what is really there. To start with it is important to understand the context of a statement. The following questions help us determine the context:

- Who wrote the text? What do we know about this person?
- Who was the author writing to? What do we know about the addressees?
- Who is the text talking about?
- What is the historical and cultural background? Bible commentaries and Bible encyclopedias are helpful here.
- What type of literature is this passage? (law, history, poetry, letter, prophecy)
- What is the immediate context of the Bible text? What is the whole chapter talking about? What is the main concern of the letter or book?

The Five Ws and one H are helpful in observing the content:

- **Who?** Who is speaking or writing? Who does it have to do with? Who is mentioned? Who is being spoken to?
- **What?** What is the keynote? What is said or done?
- **When?** When did it take place or will it take place?
- **Where?** Where was this done or where will it be done?
- **Why?** Why will something be done?
- **How?** How does something happen?

It is often the small observations that help us correctly understand a Bible verse.

That's why this step is an essential prerequisite to drawing correct conclusions.

Second Step: Interpreting the Text (meaning)

After we have thoroughly observed the content of a text then we go a step further by asking: What does this text mean?

In the process the following principles are important:

- Ask God to give you the correct understanding! If we want to understand a text the way God meant it, then we have to ask HIM for guidance, because only the Holy Spirit can lead us in all truth. (John 16:13)
- Check your attitude! Are you only looking for Bible verses that support your opinion or do you go to the Bible in an unbiased manner with the goal of honestly finding out what God has to say?
- Be prepared to do the will of God! Jesus said: "If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on My own *authority*." (John 7:17)
- As we have already seen, a text must always be studied in its context. The strangest theories arise when Bible texts are taken out of their context.
- Read the text through multiple times in different translations. Use accurate translations like the New Revised Standard Version or the New King James Version. There are also Bibles online that offer you the opportunity to compare different verses in different translations, including both Hebrew and Greek. A great free tool is e-sword. (www.e-sword.net)
- Always explain difficult passages in the light of clear texts! For every topic there are very clear statements, but there are also statements which are difficult to understand. An important principle is to first get clarity in the simple and clear passages, and then with the aid of these verses explain the meaning of the difficult passages.
- Pay attention to the difference between a rule and a principle. A principle is universally valid – it is therefore independent from cultural background (e.g. the Ten Commandments.) A rule is dependent on the culture and situation. Paul's instruction that women should be silent in church is an example of this. He gave this instruction for a certain situation, but he didn't set up a universal principle for all times and circumstances.

Third Step: Personally applying what was learned (application)

The first two steps are essential in order to make correct decisions for our lives. Whoever skips these steps will end up on the wrong track. Many people have made decisions in life because they supposedly understood something in the Bible, but upon closer investigation it is apparent that is not what was meant. On the other hand, some people follow steps one and two, but forget the third step (i.e., they don't apply God's Word in their personal life.) Thus God's Word remains theory and doesn't have any changing power.

In order to understand what God wants to tell us personally and how we can apply what we have read, the following questions are helpful:

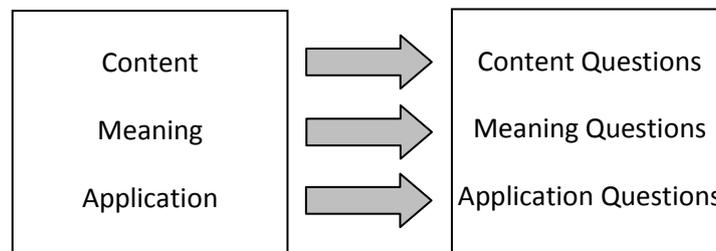
- Is there an example I can follow?
- Is there a commandment that I should obey?

- Is there a prohibition, which would protect me from something?
- Does God want to warn me about something?
- Is there something to confess?
- May I thank God for something?
- Do I want to ask God for something?
- Is there a promise that I can claim?
- Does God want me to do something?
- Does God want me to give something up?

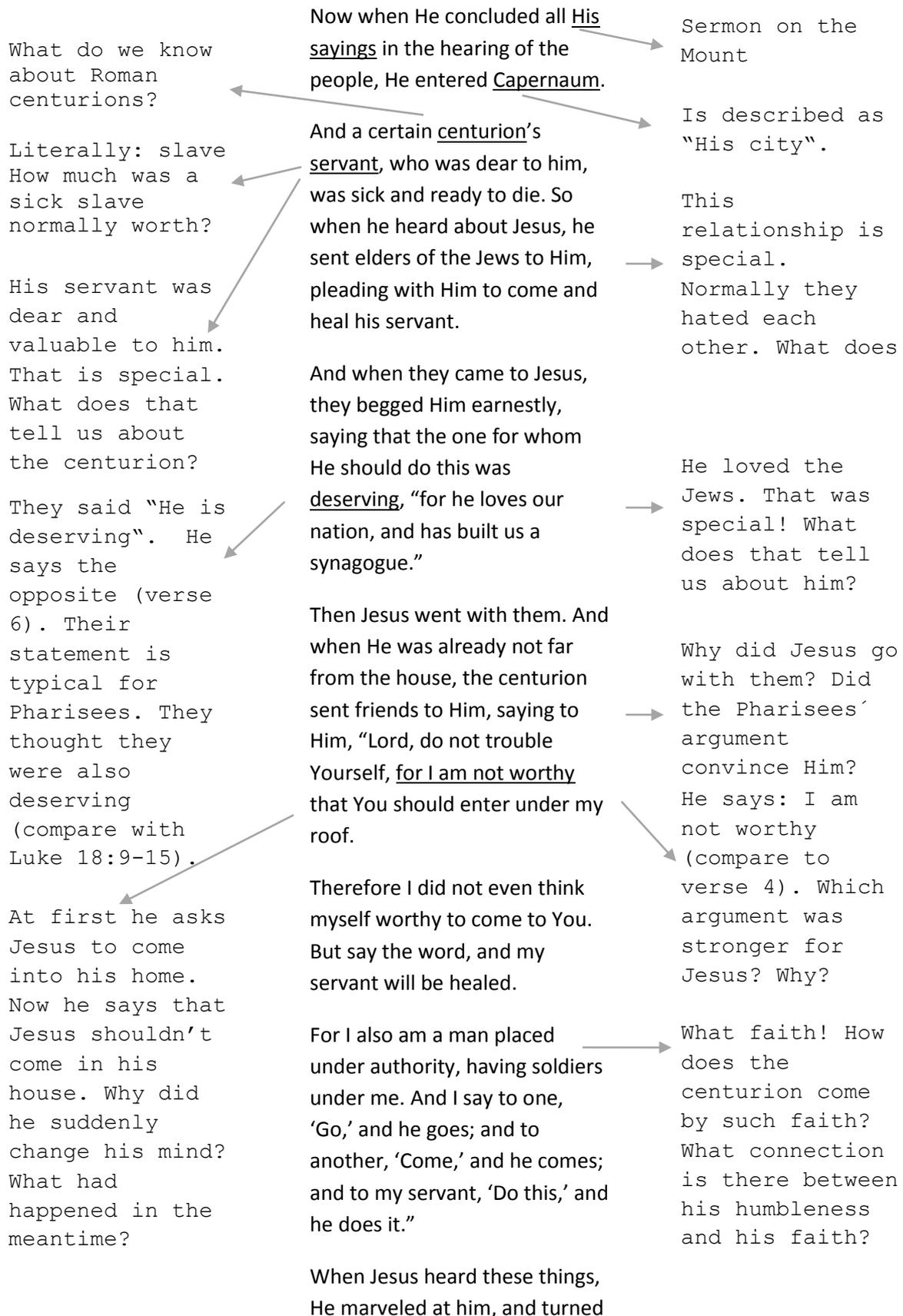
We believe that God wants to speak to everyone personally through His Word. Therefore it is important that we have the openness to apply Bible texts personally.

Finding the Right Questions

Now that we have studied for ourselves the content, meaning and application of a Bible passage, we can try in the next step to find good questions so that people in the CARE group will discover as far as possible these things for themselves. In the process we will look for content, meaning, and application questions.



In order to study a Bible passage thoroughly, it is helpful to print out the Bible verses in the middle of a sheet of paper and make notes around it on any observations or questions. The idea is to really take time studying the Bible passage and find as many questions as possible about content, meaning, and application. By asking these questions we can discover things we haven't seen before, and come up with new questions to ask. The text will really come alive. Afterwards you can choose questions for the discussion from these ideas. Let's look at an example from the story of the centurion from Capernaum (Luke 7:1-10).



Why did Jesus marvel?	←	When Jesus heard these things, He marveled at him, and turned around and said to the crowd that followed Him, "I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"	→	These are powerful words! A gentile has more faith than all the Israelites. What did these words sound like in the ears of the Jews?
Maybe the centurion was with his servant at the moment he was healed.	←	And those who were sent, returning to the house, found the servant well who had been sick.		



Jesus Heals a Centurion's Servant (Luke 7:1-10)

(I: Content Questions, B: Meaning Questions: A: Application Questions)

Starting Question

- Imagine that you present a very important concern to God in prayer and He answers: "Name me one good reason why I should answer your prayer!" What reasons could you give? (A)

Let's read Luke 7:1-10!

Verses 1-2

- After the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus went to Capernaum, a city by the Sea of Galilee also called "His city", because Jesus spent quite a lot of time there. A Roman centurion lived there. What view do you have of a Roman centurion? (B)
- What was special about this centurion? (I)

The centurion loved his servant. Normally sick slaves held no value for the Romans. In addition, the centurion loved the Jews and had built a synagogue for them.

Verses 3-5

- Why did the centurion ask the Jews to go to Jesus for him? (B)
- What argument did they use to try to convince Jesus that He should help the centurion? (I)
- What do you think about this argument? (A)

This argument correlated with their thinking that good works you can earn God's help.

Verses 6-8

- Nevertheless, Jesus set off to fulfill the centurion's request. But as He nears the house, the centurion requests Him not to come to his home after all, even though he had requested it earlier (see verse 3). How did this change come about? (B)

The nearer Jesus came, the more unworthy the centurion felt.

- An important question: Was the fact that the centurion felt more and more unworthy proof that Jesus was distancing himself or coming nearer to him? (B)

Evidently he felt unworthy, because Jesus was coming nearer.

- Let's apply this to ourselves! We also experience moments when we are acutely aware of our sins and we feel unworthy before God. Is this feeling a sign that Jesus is far away or very close to us? (A)

We can only recognize our guilt through the Holy Spirit. This awareness shows that God is working on our hearts.

- The Pharisees threw the argument "He is worthy." on the scales. The centurion said the opposite: "I am not worthy." Which argument carried more weight for Jesus? Why? (B)

- What is the most important argument we can give so that God will hear our prayers? (A)

The greatest argument is our helplessness, which makes His grace a necessity. Daniel also prayed this way: "For we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies." (Daniel 9:18)

Verses 9-10

- How did these words probably sound in the ears of the Jews? (B)
- What probably made the faith of the centurion so extraordinary in the eyes' of Jesus? (B)

Closing Question

- What can you learn today for your personal faith? (A)

For your preparation read "The Desire of Ages", chapter 32.

Challenge

1. Starting with this lesson, the Bible study at the end of each lesson will also include finding good questions about content, meaning, and application.
2. Continue to pray for the people on your prayer list and keep your eyes open for opportunities to bless them and give them spiritual impulses.
3. Pray together for the friends on your joint prayer list, who you would like to invite to your CARE group.
4. Discuss where you can hold a CARE group.



Bible Study

Please study **John 8:30-36** carefully and take notes on the content, meaning, and life applications of these verses. Be sure to write down good questions for each.

What does the Bible say?
(content, meaning, application)

How can I ask questions about this?
(Questions on content, meaning, and application)

