

Lesson 13: Studying the Bible Together (Part 2)

Introduction In the last lesson we took a look at how important it is for us to carefully study a Bible passage that we want to discuss in the CARE group. In the process we took a look at the three steps of inductive Bible study. Please list the three steps and give a short description of each.

After we have studied a Bible passage with the aid of these three steps, we look for good questions to help the participants find the answers for themselves in the Bible. In this lesson we want to focus on how we can ask stimulation questions that lead into a deep, personal biblical discussion.

What good questions don't look like We need good questions, which metaphorically speaking "start the discussion motor", so that we can have a lively discussion about a biblical topic. But first let's look at some questions that don't lead to a stimulating biblical discussion:

- Closed Questions: These types of questions elicit only one short answer.
- Suggestive questions: These types of questions try to influence others, it pushes them in a certain direction towards a particular answer (e.g., "Doesn't God still answer prayer today?")
- Exam questions: This type of question is like the questions testing your knowledge in school (e.g., "Who was the prophet in Judah when Hezekiah was king?")
- Complex questions: These questions contain more than one question (e.g., "Why did Jesus ask His disciples what the people thought about Him and how would you have answered this question?")
- Complicated questions: These questions contain complicated theological terms, which most of the guests aren't acquainted with and/or are targeted at difficult theological topics (e.g., "Why isn't the doctrine of double predestination compatible with God's character?")

All of these kinds of questions do not lead to deep thinking and candid discussion about the Bible. Some questions are lecturing, patronizing, and too simple; others are too demanding, especially for our guests.

Finding good questions

We need good questions for a vibrant and deep discussion about God's Word. Before you read any further think about what makes up good questions.

Good questions are characterized by the following traits:

- They challenge a person to think and encourage them to actively participate in the discussion.
- They connect the message of the Bible text with everyday life.
- They lead to multiple answers, which come from the personal experiences of the members.

What possibilities do we have to ask questions that lead to a good discussion?

- First ask questions about the content (observation questions) and meaning (interpretation questions) of the Bible text in order to investigate the message of the text. Give attention to details. The answers to these kind of questions tend to be a bit shorter. Nevertheless, they are important in order to have a solid biblical foundation for the application questions.
- The application questions use up most of the time because they lead to a deeper exchange of ideas. They link the biblical topic to the personal life of the members. They can focus on what we have already experienced in relation to a certain topic (past) or on how we want to implement a certain biblical principle (future). It is important to have more than one application question at the end of a Bible discussion. Be sure to ask them throughout the whole Bible study.
- It is wise to make a short introduction to the question, which explains the context of the Bible verse, gives background information, and leads to the essence of the question. Sometimes the introduction can be a summary of the content of the text (e.g., when the question would be too easy) and then directly lead to interpretation and application questions.
- Ask about experiences and insights (e.g., "How do you handle it when believers experience suffering too?")
- Ask the members for their personal opinion (e.g. "In your opinion do young people have a harder time now than young people a hundred years ago? Why?")
- Ask for advice (e.g. "What would you advise a person who says they can't pray?")

Questions for Matthew 5:13 The questions on content (C), meaning (M), and application (A) for Matthew 5:13 could look like this:

- In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addressed what his followers should be doing. What does Jesus compare it to? (C)
- What does the comparison with salt mean? (M)
- If we want to understand the comparison with salt, we need to understand how salt was used at the time of Jesus. What do you know about that? (M)
- When you think about this comparison what does it tell you about a Christians' work/responsibility? (A)
- Jesus said that salt should be thrown away when it loses its saltiness. What does this mean to us? (A)
- In order for salt to fulfill its purpose it has to be different from the soup that it is to season. In addition, it can't remain in the shaker or container. It needs to be in the soup. Let's personally apply this truth to our own lives. (A)
- On one hand, we need a clear identity, which differentiates us from our environment. And on the other hand, it is important to mix with people who are different from us, but without becoming "worldly". How can we find balance in our lives? (A)

Leading a discussion Good questions are crucial for a successful Bible discussion. But the way a discussion is led is also of great importance. Below, you will find a list of practical tips that can help you lead a Bible discussion in a skillful manner.

- First of all, it is important to understand that personal spiritual preparation is more important than gathering good questions. When we come together to study God's Word, the Holy Ghost works in our midst. In reality He is the discussion leader and wants to use you to explain God's Word. It is extremely important for us to be filled with the Holy Spirit! Ask God to give you the right words through the Holy Spirit and to work on the hearts of all the members.
- Start each Bible discussion with a short prayer. Thank God that He will speak through His Word and ask Him to help you to understand His message.
- You need a clear goal for the Bible discussion, preferably written down on a piece of paper. This goal is the recurrent theme for the discussion and helps you to have a clear train of thoughts. At the end, the members should be able to easily summarize what they have learned.
- Keep an eye on your recurrent theme or common thread. If the discussion wanders in a different direction, then bring it back by repeating the question or by transitioning to the next question. It is also helpful to the discussion leader if the core team also knows the recurrent theme and helps to keep the discussion on track by going back to the original question.
- Clearly explain the context of the Bible passage. Refer again to the comments on the first step of studying the Bible in the last lesson.
- You need a good starting question at the beginning of the discussion. These questions should have a connection to everyday experiences that everyone

can identify with and lead to the topic of the evening. Here are a few examples of good starting questions:

- There are a lot of things in life that we can be thankful for. Can you name a few things that you are thankful for?
 - What effect does thankfulness have on our lives?
 - Imagine that you have worked and worked on something, but in the end it doesn't turn out the way you intended. How do you feel in a moment like this?
- It is essential to open your Bibles together! Each person should take turns reading. Thus you are including everyone, even those who usually have little to say.
 - It is helpful if you all read from the same translation of the Bible. We recommend the New Revised Standard Version or the New King James Version. It is worthwhile to get enough copies for everyone in the study group.
 - Be flexible with your questions. Sometimes members answer your questions before you even ask them. Or through the discussion a situation develops in which you ask questions that you hadn't even planned on asking.
 - Listen to others to really understand what they are saying. Listening is a skill that we must develop. We shouldn't be listening in order to come up with a response. Rather, we should be listening to really understand because if we understand what is being said or expressed we are more likely to respond correctly. As a result, our discussions will be better.
 - Give the members your undivided attention. When they answer your question, actively listen. Keep eye contact and by no means should you be looking at your notes while they are talking. In your thoughts don't go on to the next question as long as they aren't done with the present one.
 - Part of active listening is also reacting to what the members have answered. When appropriate you can ask a clarification question or give a short summary of their answer and kindly thank them for it. Showing appreciation for their contribution is very important.
 - Summarize the central thoughts that you have talked about before you move on to the next point.
 - It is important that the core team takes an active part in the discussion by sharing their personal experiences and testifying how Jesus has enriched their lives.
 - Be careful that the discussion doesn't deteriorate into an argument ("Who's right?").
 - Speak with enthusiasm and conviction about the biblical message. The members need to see that you really believe what you are saying.
 - Be personal and share experiences from your life. Speak about your personal challenges. This openness will encourage others to be open as well.
 - Use good illustrations and examples to illustrate spiritual truths.

- Beware of talking too much! You have an advantage because you have thoroughly prepared yourself for this topic. Remember that it is your goal for the members to gain this understanding by themselves.
- Encourage the members to study their Bibles. For example, you can give a Bible passage for the next meeting and request them to read it ahead of time. It is wise if you give them a piece of paper with the Bible text on it so they can take notes and keep it in their Bibles.
- At the end you need a good closing question that gets to the heart of the main point and calls for a decision. For example you can ask:
 - What thoughts really appealed to you today?
 - What part of today's discussion has increased your personal faith?
 - What personal decision do you want to make today regarding what we just learned?

Challenges during Bible Discussions

Even with the best preparation there can be challenging situations. Let's look at a few examples:

- A guest expresses an opinion, which is completely unbiblical.
 - This isn't dramatic! We are happy that a guest is here, even if they still see things differently than we do.
 - You could possibly say: "I understand what you mean. I'm sure we can take the time sometime to see what the Bible says about this topic." Give a relaxed smile and continue on with the discussion.
- A guest asks questions.
 - That is wonderful! After all, it means that they are really thinking.
 - When the guests ask questions sometimes you don't immediately understand what they really mean. Often it is important to ask for clarification to be sure that you aren't mistaken. "Could you rephrase your question?" or "Could you explain your question in more detail?" Only then will you be able to see what was really behind the question.
 - If you can answer a question quickly, do so and then continue with your topic. Often the question can be thrown out to the group: "What do you think about this?"
 - If someone has a question about a fundamental belief, which it is better to answer privately anyway, then it is a good idea to give the person three Bible texts on the subject. Ask them to read the texts and see if they can find an answer themselves. In a personal conversation you can then ask if they have found an answer. Such situations can often lead to personal Bible studies.
- Someone talks too much and doesn't let anyone else get a word in edgewise.
 - One possibility is to wait for the person to finish answering a question and then ask: "What do the rest of you think about this question?" and then look at them expectantly.

- Sometimes it might be necessary to talk with the person privately and explain to them how important it is that the others have a turn to speak as well.
- After you ask a question, silence follows because no one wants to answer.
 - It might be because they are still thinking, because you asked a good question. Then you should endure the silence and resist the temptation to give the answer yourself.
 - But the silence could also mean that the members didn't understand your question. Repeat the question using different words. Sometimes they even need further clarification before they understand your question.

Challenge

1. Continue to pray for the people on your prayer list and keep your eyes open for opportunities to bless them and give them spiritual encouragement.
2. Pray together for the friends on your joint prayer list, who you would like to invite to your CARE group.
3. Plan a supper together for these friends that you want to invite to the study group.



Bible Study

Please study **2 Timothy 3:14-17** 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)

