



## *EQUIPPING THE SAINTS*

# **LEADING BIBLE STUDY DISCUSSION II**

NOTES

## **The Nature of the Discussion Group**

### **What a Bible Discussion IS NOT**

- **Not a “Mama-Bird” Lecture**

Many Bible Study groups are really only the study of the leader fed in lecture fashion to the other members of the group. In such groups no one is required to prepare the study except the leader and individual interest is totally dependent upon the skill and accuracy of the leader as speaker. This is not a true Bible discussion group because nothing is discussed, only absorbed.

- **Not a “Share-Our-Ignorance” Session**

In this type of Bible sharing, no one is required to prepare. A chapter is read together and then various members of the group share whatever thoughts or impressions come to their minds. In such groups there is often no leader at all, certainly no real objective and very little profit to anyone. Since no one has given any previous thought, research or prayer to the passage in consideration, the time is spent simply “sharing our ignorance.”

- **Not a “Series of Conversations”**

Sometimes members of a Bible Study group agree to do some preparation and come to the session with some individual discoveries. However, the actual discussion is dominated by the “experts” of the group or those who are overly opinionated or talkative. Instead of a total exchange of ideas with everyone participating, only a few members talk at all. The others retreat in shyness and never contribute. This type of study discourages growth and faithfulness in preparation by all the members because it becomes apparent that only the dominant personalities will control the session.

### **What a Bible Discussion IS**

A true Bible study discussion group aims for the involvement and participation of each group member. It requires that each person prepare his lesson in advance and come to class ready to share what he has discovered. In such a group each person’s contributions is considered to be valuable and the leader will seek to draw out the findings of all the individuals.

## The Nature of the Leader

The effective discussion leader will act as a chairman and guide, not as a teacher or authority, because he realizes that the authority is the Word of God and the teacher is the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are the sword of the Spirit. The leader's role is to guide the discussion, encouraging personal interaction according to each individual's need. This means the Bible will be the focus of attention, not the leader.

Remember that as the leader you do not have to be a walking encyclopedia with all the answers. *Leading means guiding the group in such a way that each member, including yourself, amplifies and clarifies the personal insights gained through personal study as he shares.* The key to leading is preparation. So even a young Christian can master the simple principles taught in this section on leading Bible study discussion.

A good discussion leader assists the people in the group to discover Biblical truths for themselves rather than simply giving them his answers. To do this he must learn to ask stimulating, clear questions which act as springboards to launch the discussion among the members. If the group has prepared a question-answer type study, the leader should not parrot the same question asked in the book (i.e., "What did someone get for number one?"). He must formulate new questions based upon the study, which will help the group to discover new truths and will carry them a step beyond their own personal study.

## Examining Discussion Questions

Questions are the heartbeat of any true discussion. They do a number of very useful things for both the group and the leader.

### The Importance of Questions

- *They prevent the leader from becoming a lecturer and make him a chairman or discussion leader.*
- *They force the group to think for themselves, rather than being told what to think.*
- *They help people to discover truths for themselves which aid in retention and conviction-building.*
- *They help people to evaluate what they know or understand. Often we think we know something until we are asked a question on the subject which we find ourselves at a loss to answer.*
- *They direct the flow of discussion and focus conversation on specific topics rather than allowing the discussion to drift and get off track.*

## Kinds of Questions

In Bible study discussion there are four basic kinds of questions which aid the discussion. It is interesting to note that these questions are in keeping with the four basic steps of the learning process:

- **Discovery**
- **Understanding**
- **Correlation**
- **Application**

If we follow this flow in leading the group, it will aid our understanding of the topic at hand.

### Discovery

As we study the Bible we are discovering truths in the text under consideration, which we may or may not have known before. The discovery really comes when we are dealing with truths we had not previously known, understood, correlated or applied.

### Understanding

Having discovered something leads us to the next step—determining what the discovery means. It is important that we accurately understand, as this is a building block for other truths.

### Correlation

Having understood a concept, the mind takes the next step of relating this information to what it already knows. It does this for two purposes:

- To increase understanding and develop new truth.
- *To locate the proper place to store the new information until it is needed.*

### Application

Relating the truth properly leads to the final step in learning: application or putting the new information into practice in daily life. At this point the information becomes more than mental and begins to affect behavior and lifestyle.

Since these four stages make up the normal flow of the learning process, the discussion is enhanced by following this natural pattern. We will therefore normally have four kinds of questions:

- **Discovery Questions**
- **Understanding Questions**
- **Correlation Questions**
- **Application Questions**

## **Discovery Questions**

The purpose of these questions in Bible discussion is to identify what the passage is saying. They are basically factual in nature and are the basis for all good discussion. In your discussion outline, you will need this kind of question to launch every major section of your outline.

Discovery questions will allow members to interact and share what they have discovered in the portion of text under consideration. It is often amazing to observe the way that different people in the group are able to see facts in the passage which others missed. Once the basic content of the passage is revealed, the group is ready to move to the next type of question.

## **Understanding Questions**

The purpose of this type of question is to discern what this passage means. Often a leader makes the mistake of sharing his own personal interpretation of various words or phrases in the text. It is not the leader's job to tell the group what the passage means, but to ask the kind of questions that will cause the answer to surface from the group members' responses.

A good leader will have done research into the meaning of a passage in order to guide the group in the right direction. It is important to realize that often there is more than one interpretation of a word or fact. We therefore must take care to determine the definition which the author had in mind when he wrote it. Tools which will aid the leader in this phase are a good Bible dictionary, a concordance and a Bible commentary.

Having discovered what the passage says and means, the discussion can move on to relate the new truth to what is already known through correlation questions.

## **Correlation Questions**

The purpose of these questions is to shed more light on the issue from other parts of the Word of God. Here we attempt to relate the passage we are studying to other passages and to see how various truths relate to each other. The Bible is its own best commentary on itself, and therefore understanding can be increased by seeing what light other passages can shed upon the text. The purpose of this phase is to ensure that meaning is not assigned to a text which the author did not intend and that the group's understanding of the passage is consistent with the rest of the Scripture.

## **Application Questions**

The purpose of these questions is to help group members determine how they should apply what they have learned to their own personal lives. No study is complete unless it is applied personally. The Bible was primarily given to change our lives and not to just make us more knowledgeable. Scripture bears this out.

*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

*(James 1:22)*

*I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.*

*(Psalms 119:59-60)*

The benefits of Bible study only come as we obey the voice of God and put His commands into practice in our *daily living*. Application questions should be a part of each major section of the Bible study and not just at the end.

## Writing Good Questions

A good question has three basic ingredients. It is:

- Clear
- Relevant
- Stimulating to the discussion

We need to keep the three ingredients in mind as we develop our discussion questions. The kind of question you ask determines the answer you will get. So you must design the question to give you the kind of answer you are looking for. By answering your own question you can determine whether or not it needs additional development or clarification.

- *Make sure your question is really only asking one question. Sometimes “and” or “but” can introduce a second question which leads to confusion.*
- *Make sure your question can be answered from the passage under consideration.*
- *Ask questions which are broad enough so that more than one person can speak to it.*
- *Ask summarizing questions which cover the content of several verses and allow more than one contribution from the group.*

## Discovery Questions

This type of question is used to discover what the passage says. Be careful in selecting your questions since they will determine the topic you discuss and the responses you will get from the group. It is best to ask general questions in order to stimulate discussion.

### Examples:

What did God do? (Limits the response.) What did you discover about God from his actions? (This can give a variety of members an oppor-

tunity to speak to the question. It also allows the participant to answer from several verses rather than just one.)

A good way to develop broad general questions is to take the chapter subpoints and turn them into questions.

### **Example:**

*God cares for You* (chapter subpoint): What did you discover about God's care for you in the lesson?

To evaluate each question, ask yourself if it is:

### **Clear?**

- Does it extract facts rather than feelings or opinions?
- *Will people know what you were asking so they can answer?*

### **Relevant?**

- Does it deal with the key issues?
- *Could it be answered by two or more truths in the text?*

### **Stimulating?**

- Will it stimulate discussion?
- *Can more than one person speak to the question?*

## **Understanding Questions**

These questions are used to discover what the passage means and should help the people to go beyond their original discovery of the facts and to learn what the author meant. You can best develop your questions by determining what words and phrases in the passage may not be clear or easily understood.

In a discussion, people will often ask, "What does this mean"? They themselves may be asking one of your understanding questions. Allow the other group members to answer if they can. If the question is relevant and if no one in the group knows the answer including you—suggest that everyone do some research on the question and that you deal with it next week.

Remember, no one knows the answer to every question, and as a discussion group leader you are not setting yourself up as an expert—just the chairman.

This kind of question should be included in the understanding phase.

### **Examples:**

"What is meant by the word \_\_\_\_\_?"

"What does it mean that \_\_\_\_\_?"

"What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?"

To evaluate each question ask yourself if it is:

### **Clear?**

- *Does the question clarify the issue?*
- *Does the question raise unnecessary problems?*

### **Relevant?**

- *Will the answer reveal what the author meant?*
- *Does the question focus on the key issue?*

### **Stimulating?**

- *Will the question help their personal understanding?*
- *Do the members have the knowledge to answer the question?*

## **Correlation Questions**

The purpose of these questions is to help members identify the relationship between certain truths and passages. We are seeking to highlight a truth in the passage under consideration and to relate it to what the rest of the Bible teaches about it. We are trying to draw this particular truth into the integrated whole of the Scriptures.

### **Examples:**

“How does this passage relate to \_\_\_\_\_?”

“Do you know any other passages that speak to this issue?”

“Where else is this word or expression found in the Scriptures?”

If most of the group members are unfamiliar with the Bible, the leader can help them to find pertinent cross references by asking the entire group to turn to another passage dealing with the same truth. The leader can ask someone to read the passage and can then ask the group:

“How do you feel that this passage relates to the passage in our study? What new light does it shed?”

Such structured correlation questions can help a group of young Christians to see how the Bible fits together and will stimulate their own personal search for related passages and cross references.

To evaluate each question, ask yourself if it is:

### **Clear?**

- *Does it ask how this passage is related to other Scriptures?*
- *Does the group have enough knowledge and maturity to know other related passages or do they need help?*

### **Relevant?**

- *Does it relate to the truths the group has discovered?*
- *Does it help people to see relationships that exist between passages and truths?*

**Stimulating?**

- *Does it help people draw from what they already know to answer the question?*
- *Does it stimulate the interest of the group to search for further related passages on their own later?*

**Application Questions**

The purpose of these questions is to encourage people to apply the truth of Scripture to their individual lives. God blesses the doers and not the hearers or knowers of His Word. This is where theology is turned into reality.

**Examples:**

- “How can we apply this truth to our daily living?”
- “How or why does God want his children to apply this truth?”
- “What application did you make to this passage?”

To evaluate each question, ask yourself if it is:

**Clear?**

- *Does it extract what should be done about this passage?*
- *Is the expected response clear enough to be acted upon?*

**Relevant?**

- *Is it practical and obtainable by the individual?*
- *Is it built on a solid understanding of the passage?*

**Stimulating?**

- *Will it encourage people to respond?*
- *Does it call for personal action now?*

**Summary**

Ask God to help you and to give you wisdom as you prepare your questions. Failure to ask questions, to listen to answers, or to help the group understand the content of their study may cool desire to learn more from the Scriptures. As you allow them to dig into the Word for themselves and share their discoveries with others, they will become excited and desire to continue.