



## *EQUIPPING THE SAINTS*

# **LEADING BIBLE STUDY DISCUSSION IV**

NOTES

## **Introduction**

For the past three weeks we have been examining the art of leading Bible discussion. We have studied the importance of the Bible study group and the importance of questions in leading the discussion. We learned that Discovery, Understanding, Correlation, and Application are the four phases of discussion, and we examined ways to write stimulating questions for each phase.

In this chapter we will conclude our study of Bible discussion by dealing with:

- **The three stages of each discussion question**
- **Evaluating ourselves as leaders**
- **Evaluating our questions**
- **Evaluating the discussion group members**
- **Choosing an assistant**
- **Solutions to some common problems**

## **Three Stages of Each Discussion Question**

In the development and use of discussion questions there are three basic stages:

- **The Launching Stage**
- **The Guiding Stage**
- **The Summary Stage**

These three stages should be found in each of the four phases of the discussion (discovery, understanding, correlation, and application).

## Launching

When a ship is being launched, the anchor is pulled up and it is pushed out into the sea. This is exactly what the launching stage of each question does. It propels the group into the action of sharing their discoveries. The launching stage should be prepared in advance and written on the discussion outline.

### Example:

- What did you discover about \_\_\_\_\_?

Give the group time to think; don't be afraid of a little silence. The silence shows the group that you really do expect them to contribute and that you are only the chairperson—not the teacher. As they begin to share their thoughts and discoveries, accept their answers with real appreciation.

## Guiding

The second stage of the discussion question guides the group into total participation. Guiding questions don't have to be prepared in advance since they simply encourage other members to add their contributions to the discussion.

### Examples:

- What did someone else discover about this?
- Does someone else want to share what he found?
- Would someone else like to add to that?
- What do some of the rest of you think?

If someone in the group is especially shy or reluctant to share, you may personalize the guiding stage to him.

### Example:

- John, what can you contribute to the discoveries we are making here?

*(Don't say, "John would you like to add anything to this?" A shy person will usually say, "No," and then be quiet. Try to ask the guiding question in such a way that you force the person to at least make a complete statement.)*

By watching faces you will see who is ready to contribute to the discussion. As you lead, remain in the background but in control through your questions. After everyone or almost everyone has shared, you are ready to summarize.

## Summarizing

This is the last stage of the discussion question. You summarize by logically arranging the various points your group has contributed.

This will give you an opportunity to highlight the most significant conclusions. At the end of this stage you are ready to return to your discussion outline sheet and launch the next discussion question.

## Evaluating Ourselves as Leaders

Every person who leads a Bible discussion for the first time will feel inexperienced and somewhat apprehensive. Afterward, he may realize that everything did not go exactly the way he expected. If this happens to you, don't feel discouraged. It happens to everyone occasionally—even the most experienced leaders.

The important thing to remember is that with each study, the leader should seek to improve himself. This can only be done through prayerful and objective evaluation after each session. As the leader evaluates himself, he can determine whether or not his objectives were achieved and how he can learn from his experiences with the group.

### **Remember:**

Skill in Bible discussion comes with practice and experience. Learn from each experience you have—positive or negative.

If you have a Christian friend or pastor who is experienced in discussion leading, you may ask him to sit in on your group from time to time. His observations and comments on your leadership can be extremely helpful. However, during those sessions when there is no one to help you critique your leadership, the following checklist may prove helpful for your personal evaluation.

### **The Leader Evaluation List**

- Did all the members attend the discussion?
- Did you start and stop on time?
- Was it a discussion, conversation or a lecture?
- Did all the members participate adequately?
- Were you able to guide the discussion with your questions?
- Did your questions stimulate discussion?
- Did you launch, guide and summarize each section of the discussion?
- Did you get side-tracked or were you able to keep to the subject?

- Did anyone take over as the group leader or monopolize the discussion?
- Did you give adequate time to share written applications?
- Were the applications realistic, practical, and attainable?
- Did the discussion move along or drag?
- Did the discussion lead to further understanding of the discovered truths?
- Was there a good spirit within the group?

## Evaluate Our Questions

Good, stimulating questions are powerful tools to the discussion leader. Questions prod thinking; thinking leads to reasoning, and reasoning to understanding. As a result of understanding, convictions and conclusions are formed which can be life-changing to the individual.

The questions asked by the group leader are therefore vital and necessary for the direction and effectiveness of the discussion. Every leader should be aware of the importance of the questions he asks, and take the time necessary to prepare them well. Good questions which have been carefully prepared and tested will stimulate and deepen the discussion. Poor questions, however, may result in a dull discussion, a monologue by the leader or a digression (sometimes radical) away from the subject to be discussed.

Because discussion questions are so important a wise leader will take time to evaluate them carefully. The following checklist of five points can be helpful in such evaluation.

### To whom is the question directed?

• To oneself	Rhetorical
• To one member of the group	Direct
• To the one who asked the previous question	Reverse
• To someone, or to all, other than the previous questioner	Relay
• To the group as a whole	General

Avoid rhetorical questions; they usually kill discussion at once.

Be careful with direct and reverse questions; the person asked may have nothing relevant to say.

Normally, general and relay questions stimulate the group the most.

**What is the underlying purpose of the question?**

- To accumulate facts
- To define, to clarify, to compare, to contrast, to develop
- To bring the group back to the subject, to change direction
- To arrive at conclusions, to summarize findings
- To involve or to stimulate application

**What answer does the question expect or suggest?**

<b>Type of Question and Examples</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Value as a guiding question in leading discussion</b>
<p><b>Leading</b> Of course you all agree, don't you?</p> <p>Surely you don't think that, do you?</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>No</p>	<p>None—it neither stimulates thought nor discussion.</p> <p>None.</p>
<p><b>Limiting</b> What are the three great truths in this chapter?</p>	<p>What the group thinks you think</p>	<p>None—it is clear to all that you have an exact answer in mind. Instead of stimulating discussion, you have started a mind reading competition! It would be much better to leave out the "the three" to make it open.</p>

<b>Type of Question and Examples</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Value as a guiding question in leading discussion</b>
Do you agree with that?	Yes or No	Some—it insists on a decision. But it must be followed by an open or wide-open question if you want to stimulate further discussion.
<b>Open</b> Who is this all about? Where did this happen? When was this? Why was it? What was the outcome? How can anyone benefit?	People Places Times Reasons Results Conditions, etc.	Much—it stimulates discovery, understanding or application according to how you word the questions. The key words are: <i>who, what, where, when, why and how.</i>
<b>Wide Open</b> What do others think? What does anyone think about that? Does anyone else have anything to add to that?	Any relevant thoughts	Very Much—it stimulates maximum thought and discussion. It is best used after an open question has just been answered.

**How personally are the hearers involved by the question?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What should other people do about this?</li> </ul>	Not at all
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What should 20th Century man do about this?</li> </ul>	Very little
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What should unbelievers or Christians do about this?</li> </ul>	Only if the hearers are of the group named
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What should you do about this?</li> </ul>	All, except the questioner himself
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will we do about this? or</li> <li>• What shall we do about this?</li> </ul>	Fully committed

Notice how Jesus Christ helps His disciples to think objectively (without being personally involved) and then subjectively (being personally involved) about so important a matter as who He is (Mark 8:27-29).

- verse 27—“Who do men say that I am?”
- verse 29—“Who do you say that I am?”

**What degree of urgency does the question suggest?**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What could we have done about this?</li> </ul>	None
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What could we do about this? or</li> <li>• What can we do about this?</li> </ul>	Vague
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What shall we do about this?</li> <li>• What should we do about this?</li> </ul>	Urgent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What should we do about this as soon as possible? or</li> <li>• What should we do about this now?</li> </ul>	Most Urgent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What should we do about this whenever possible?</li> </ul>	Most Urgent & Recurring

**Evaluating the Discussion Group Members**

In the book, *Lead Out*, published by NavPress (The Navigators, Colorado Springs, Colorado), Dr. Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary is quoted as saying, “Each member of the group is faced with the right and the responsibility of being a mature participant. To accomplish this he must apply himself to the task of being an effective group member, constantly evaluating himself and his relationships with others.”

In the following amusing yet informative material adapted from *Lead Out*, Dr. Hendricks describes roles people play in a group situation. You will find it helpful in evaluating the members of your present discussion group, as well as in future groups.

## Characteristics of Immaturity

NOTES

<b>ONLOOKER</b>	Content to be a silent spectator. Nods, smiles and frowns. Other than this he is a passenger instead of a crew member.
<b>MONOPOLIZER</b>	Brother Chatty rambles roughshod over the rest of the conversation with his verbal dexterity. Tenaciously clings to his right to say what he thinks—sometimes without thinking.
<b>BELITTLER</b>	This is Mr. Gloom. He takes the dim view. Minimizes the contributions of others. Usually has three good reasons why “it will never work.”
<b>WISECRACKER</b>	Feels called to a ministry of humor. Mr. Cherrio spends his time and talent as the group playboy. Indifferent to the subject at hand, he is always ready, with the clever remark.
<b>MANIPULATOR</b>	Brother Ulterior knows the correct approach to the problem, obviously. He manipulates the proceedings so his plan will be adopted.
<b>HITCHHIKER</b>	Never had an original thought in his life. Unwilling to commit himself. Sits on the sidelines until the decision has jelled, then jumps on the bandwagon.
<b>PLEADER</b>	Chronically afflicted with obsessions. Always pleading for some cause or certain actions. Feels led to share this burden frequently. One-track mind.
<b>SULKER</b>	Born in the objective case and lives in the kickative mood. The group won't accept his worthy contribution so he sulks.

## Characteristics of Maturity

NOTES

<b>PROPOSER</b>	Initiates ideas and action. Keeps things moving.
<b>ENCOURAGER</b>	Brings others into the discussion. Encourages others to contribute. Emphasizes the value of their suggestions and comments. Stimulates others to greater activity by approval and recognition.
<b>CLARIFIER</b>	The one who has the facility to step in when confusion, chaos and conflict dominate. He defines the problem concisely. He points out the issues clearly.
<b>ANALYZER</b>	Examines the issues closely. Weighs the suggestions carefully. Never accepts anything without first "thinking it through."
<b>EXPLORER</b>	Always moving into new and different areas. Probing relentlessly. Never satisfied with the obvious or the traditional.
<b>MEDIATOR</b>	Facilitates agreement or harmony between members, especially those who are "making phrases" at each other. Seeks to find mediating solutions acceptable to all.
<b>SYNTHESIZER</b>	Is able to put the pieces together. Brings the different parts of the solution or plan together and synthesizes them.
<b>PROGRAMMER</b>	The one who is ready with the ways and means to put the proposal into effect. Adept at organization. Moves in the realm of action.

One way to use this material is to read this section to your discussion group and then have them react and respond to the various roles in the group. You may want them to do so privately.

## **Choosing an Assistant Group Leader**

If your discussion group is growing and approaching eight to ten members, you may find it necessary to begin training an assistant to take over half of the group. This way your skill can be multiplied and you will be able to accommodate more people in the group or groups. An assistant is also valuable in making sure that each of the group members is helped individually in counselling situations as they arise.

In choosing a potential assistant, begin to prayerfully observe the group. One of them may seem to be more spiritually and emotionally mature than the others, with a better grasp of the Scriptures. He will be faithful in attendance and have his study well prepared.

As God begins to single out that individual for you, you may approach him to inquire as to whether he would like to assist you in the group leadership. If he responds favorably, you can begin to pray together for the group members. After each session, ask your assistant to go through the checklists with you to discuss what happened and why. You will find that often he is better able to observe what is happening in the group because he is not involved in leading it. You may also want to go through these four sessions on Bible Discussion with him to allow him to learn the principles himself.

When your assistant is comfortable in helping you lead, you can allow him to take over certain sessions himself. Then you can evaluate him. If you must be gone for a session, you can ask him to take over. Then when you return, be sure to inquire as to how the study went and to discuss any areas he may have discovered that were weak in your absence.

Finally, as your group enlarges, he will be able to become an independent leader for half of the group and your outreach will be doubled.

It is tragic that many faithful Bible study members who have attended weekly group discussions for years have never been helped to lead their own groups. If they are transferred to another city or country where there is no discussion fellowship, they find themselves totally unable to even consider starting their own group.

It is a wise Bible discussion leader who will impart to his group members the basic skills of leading a group for themselves as they become mature.

## Solutions to Common Problems

### **How to control those who want to do all the talking**

This is difficult. Calling for contributions from others often helps—“What do others think?” Sometimes it is necessary to talk privately with the guilty one, to explain the necessity of group participation. Often you can only pray for the particular person.

### **How to get back on the track when the discussion begins to wander**

It is difficult to get back on the track when the discussion has wandered off on a tangent. Therefore try not to go off the track. If you find that you have wandered from the subject, you may find it necessary to suggest that although the discussion is interesting, it is not within the subject at hand. Tell the group that if there is extra time at the end of the hour, you can return to the other discussion. Then gently restate the original question and proceed. You may not find yourself very popular when you have to steer the group away from an interesting topic back to the study, so do it gently and politely.

### **What to do when group members become less committed to the Bible study**

If a certain individual or individuals become spasmodic in attendance or fail to have their homework done, you may find it necessary to review the objective and standards that the group set up when it first started. Reviewing the objectives and standards periodically renews vision and helps to motivate the members to commitment.

Absence from the group or failure to prepare may also indicate that an individual is having special personal needs or struggles which are putting him under unusual pressure. The sensitive and concerned leader will seek out the person for special “one to one” time and sharing.

Finally, the wise leader will realize that a drop-off in attendance and enthusiasm may point to a failure in his leadership. As mentioned earlier, if the study consistently ends late, individuals may be reluctant to attend at all for fear that the late discussion will conflict with other appointments. Draggy and unenthusiastic discussion may reveal hastily and poorly prepared launching questions. Whatever the symptom, look for the underlying cause. Don't give up, but seek to learn from these experiences and to serve those in your group.

### **What to do when someone gives a wrong answer**

Never contradict a person's answer completely. He may be totally unscriptural in his thinking, but he has shared a portion of himself and his inner person with the group. If he is contradicted outright, he may feel rejected and tend to withdraw altogether. To handle such a situation, re-direct the same question back to the group.

“That’s interesting. What do others think?”

“Can anyone think of some Scripture verses that can help us here?”

Others may be able to balance the answer by their sharing. When all have contributed who so desire, you can gently summarize the scriptural viewpoint and move on to the next question.

## **Conclusion**

Bible study discussion is one of the most effective tools in follow-up and disciple-making. Through these groups young Christians can learn to know, understand and apply God’s Word. The fellowship and encouragement offered by other Christians in the group also help to nurture the young believers.

To lead a discussion group effectively is one of the greatest assets a disciple-maker can possess. We therefore need to be conscious of its importance and constantly seek to improve our leadership skills. Aim to master the art of discussion-leading. It will take years of practice, but God can make you effective as you learn if you depend upon His wisdom and grace.

**NOTES**