

KMI 2012 - Bible Study Workshop
“How to Lead an Effective Bible Study Small Group Discussion”

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It is an amazing privilege to study and discuss God’s eternal, living, active, enduring Word. Are we approaching that privilege with a sense of awe and excitement?

*The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever.” (Isaiah 40:8)*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, (2 Timothy 3:16)

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. (1 Peter 1:23)

SMALL GROUP LEADER RESPONSIBILITIES AND TECHNIQUES

The group leader has three main responsibilities during the group Bible study discussion. The group leader will:

- Launch—Open the discussion of a section.
- Guide—Guide the discussion through the section.
- Transition—Move the discussion from one section to the next section.

1. Launch

The launch question opens the discussion for one section of the Bible study. The formula for preparing a launch question is easy to apply. It is:

“From your study what . . .
did you discover . . .
did you learn . . .
did you observe . . .
impressed you . . .
about _____?”
(Put in here the exact wording or a paraphrase of the section title.)

A launch question opens the discussion of a section. It gives the participants the green light to share their answer to any question in that section.

2. Guide

Skilled group leaders facilitate discussion. They are in control, but they do not dominate their group. They get people to think and talk by asking appropriate questions. From time to time they step in with questions or brief statements in order to keep the discussion on track and moving. When guiding a discussion you can say things like:

- ☒ “Thank you. Someone else?”
- ☒ “What are some other thoughts?”
- ☒ “Who else?”
- ☒ “Does someone have another insight?”
- ☒ “What does someone else think?”
- ☒ “Thank you . . . maybe one more.”

The more discussion experience the group members have, the less continuous involvement the group leader needs to provide. If the group is on the right road, the leader can continue to be a participant and let things go. When there is a fork in the road, the leader must step in and make it clear which direction the group will go, no matter how experienced they are.

3. Transition

To help a Bible study discussion flow smoothly, the group leader should move the group discussion from one section to the next by making a brief transition statement. For example, you might say something like: “Ok, we’ve covered this section, let’s move on to the next section on _____.” Then, go right into your launch question for the next section.

SEVERAL PRACTICAL DISCUSSION GUIDELINES

1. *Sit in a circle.* This is the best seating arrangement. Each person has eye contact with most of the people in the group. It creates an informal and warm atmosphere. The group leader is considered more a peer because he or she is not placed in a dominant physical location.

2. *Don’t dominate.* As the leader, you are both a facilitator and a participant in the group. As the facilitator you give direction and ask questions. As a participant you share your insights and study answers along with everyone else. Share humbly, not as an expert.

3. *Don’t be an authority.* Avoid becoming the authority figure in the group. You don’t want all the questions directed to you with the others thinking that you should be able to answer them. Direct questions back to the group. Say something like, “That is an interesting question. What thoughts do some of you have that might help us answer that question?” You might recruit a volunteer to take the question to the pastor or associate pastor. The answer could be shared by the volunteer the following week.

4. *Work together.* Your role as group leader is not a teaching responsibility, just as the students’ role is not to sit, listen, and take notes. You and the group members are working together to find answers and to clarify issues.

5. *Acknowledge answers.* Thank people when they participate. Thank them for reading a paragraph or answering a question. This is particularly important with those who tend to be quiet. An acknowledgment doesn't have to be verbal. Many times it can be a nod of the head or eye contact that communicates approval. As you apply this, others in the group will follow your example and begin to do it.

6. *Ask the group.* Usually you address your questions to the group, not to an individual. (An exception to this would be to ask a quiet person a specific question.) As you ask a question, let your eye contact sweep around the group. Don't let your eyes lock in on one person.

7. *Discuss application questions.* Be careful not to rush over these questions. Application questions need to be given a high priority. Occasionally an application question may be so important that you will ask everyone to share an answer. Always allow people to say, "I pass," when they have an answer that is too sensitive to share.

UNDERSTANDING QUESTIONS

An understanding question is a supplemental question asked about an answer already given to a Bible study question. It is one of the key tools for stimulating and guiding an engaging discussion.

The Purpose of Understanding Questions

The primary purpose of an understanding question is to help the participants in the group to understand more clearly and deeply a biblical truth being discussed. There are 4 key ways in which understanding questions help the group leader.

1. They help stimulate discussion.
2. They enable him to emphasize specific important truths.
3. They can clarify an issue which the group might misinterpret or misunderstand.
4. They help the group leader evaluate the needs, spiritual level, and degree of understanding of those in the group.

Guidelines for Using Understanding Questions

When you lead the discussion of a Bible study section, you may choose to use several understanding questions. Make this determination during your preparation time. You will probably use an understanding question for 25%-40% of the answers in the lesson. Understanding questions generate a variety of answers. Therefore, when you ask this type of question, you will expect several people from the group to share their answers. Some people may share more than once during the group's discussion of such a question. ***The key thing to remember about an understanding question is that it is asked about an answer that has been shared by someone in the group.***

PREPARING EFFECTIVE UNDERSTANDING QUESTIONS

In our workshop we will practice preparing understanding questions, using the Bible study questions answered at the beginning of our time. But first, let's look at the types of understanding questions.

Types of Understanding Questions

Below are **examples** of twelve types of understanding questions. Many of these examples obviously relate to various passages of Scripture, but serve as examples that can be applied to our 3 workshop Bible study questions/answers as well. Refer to these examples as you are preparing your own understanding questions.

1. Synonyms
 - a. What are some words or phrases that describe "abundant life"?
 - b. Can you think of another word for "grace"?
 - c. What is another way of saying "living sacrifice"?
2. Definitions
 - a. What are some implications of the word *truth*?
 - b. What is your concept of the word *Lord*?
 - c. What do you think the term *laborer* really means?
3. Differences
 - a. What is the difference between "praise" and "thanksgiving"?
 - b. What do you think is the difference between "fear" and "anxiety"?
 - c. What difference is there between "unity" and "uniformity"?
4. Similarities
 - a. What are some attributes of a physical child that might parallel those of a spiritual child?
 - b. How are "light" and "purity" alike?
 - c. In what ways is the written Word like a seed?
5. Opposites
 - a. What is the opposite of truth?
 - b. What are the opposite traits to these characteristics we have listed?
 - c. What words or phrases describe the opposite of "peace of mind"?
6. Relationships
 - a. How do you think patience is a part of claiming the promises of God?
 - b. How are "lordship" and "obedience" related?
 - c. What is the relationship between "pride" and "being teachable"?
7. Examples
 - a. What would be some examples of how the Holy Spirit helps someone understand the Bible?
 - b. What are some examples of two being better than one?
 - c. What are some biblical examples of impatience?
8. Why
 - a. Why do you think the word *race* is used in Hebrews 12:1?
 - b. Why do you think Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem?
 - c. Why do you think an attitude of thankfulness is important?
9. Explain
 - a. What is the meaning of that verse?

- b. How would you explain a Christian's spiritual immaturity if he is in an excellent church?
- 10. Extremes
 - a. Which of these attributes of God do you think most exalts Him?
 - b. Which of the six elements of *The Wheel* do you think is most important for you?
 - c. What kind of praying do you think takes the least effort?
- 11. Quantity/Quality
 - a. How many of our sins should we talk about with another Christian?
 - b. How long-range can our understanding of God's will be?
 - c. How important is the eyewitness element of the biblical record?
- 12. How
 - a. How do you think we sharpen one another as Christians?
 - b. How can we press toward the future and still live in the present?
 - c. How does this verse have practical application for your life?

Real World Application

TURNING PROBLEMS INTO OPPORTUNITIES

How to Control the Talkative

Calling for contributions from others often helps—"What do the rest of you think?" In very difficult situations you may have to take control of the discussion and call for a show of hands before anyone responds. Then you can call on the group members in turn. Sometimes it may be necessary to speak privately with the "talker," explaining how group participation is imperative. You may enlist him to draw in others. This may not only solve the problem of his dominating the discussion, it will also help him become more sensitive to other people.

How to Get Back on Track

A verbal recognition of the problem usually helps—"This is interesting. However, we have left our topic. Perhaps we could discuss this further after we finish our topic." Or you can present a thought-provoking question to draw the discussion back to the initial thought. At times, you can suggest tabling the question or idea until after the discussion when those who want to may return to it. Your attitude toward the tangent is most important.

How to Handle Wrong Answers

Don't tell a person he is wrong. You may want to ask the group the question you asked him. For example, "Okay, what do others think?" or "Does someone else have something to say about this?" You may want to restate the question or ask another question which would help clarify or stimulate further thought. Help others keep from becoming embarrassed because of a wrong answer.

How to Handle Silence

You don't have to feel uncomfortable during pauses in the study. People may need time to think about how to answer one of your questions. If there is too much silence it may be because you have not given them clear directions.

How to Handle Difficult Questions

Don't be afraid of saying, "I don't know." You can always find the answer later or have someone else research it. A member of the group may have a good answer. There is no merit in being considered a know-it-all. If you always have the answer, your discussion will turn into a lecture.

How to Cover the Passage or Chapter

Make a determined effort to cover all material you had planned to discuss. Continually getting bogged down in details and falling behind can have a very demoralizing effect on the group. Moving ahead gives a feeling of accomplishment and success. If you have trouble getting through the material, you may have tried to cover too much and may need to cut back.

How to Lead a Lethargic Group

Generally, the group will respond to the attitude of the leader. Pray for enthusiasm for yourself and the group. If you want them to be a little enthusiastic, you may have to be overly enthusiastic. The source of enthusiasm is a desire for the Lord Himself and for His Word. The leader, by example, will have to demonstrate these attitudes. You cannot expect excitement from the group if you are not excited yourself.

How to Handle Controversial Subjects

To smother honest questions and convictions is detrimental to the growth of the members and to the study. A Bible discussion marked only by the smile, the pious utterance, or the literary, well-verbalized prayer is unproductive. Even when a group is seriously looking for truth, you may be tempted to skirt the difficult issues and rely on superficial answers. The best way to handle controversial topics is to see what the Scriptures have to say and rest the verdict on the principles and commands of the Bible that apply to the situation. God's Word is the utmost authority.

MAXIMIZING THE IMPACT

How to Elicit Good Applications

Pray that God will speak through His Word so the members will realize it applies to them. The Holy Spirit will use passages to cause them to think about their lives. Be direct in your approach where the Word is direct. You can help people see the relevance of the Scriptures for themselves by asking them application questions such as, "What does this mean to you?" or "Is there anything you can do about this today?" Learn how to share your own applications with honesty and humility. If you are open, they will be open also.

How to Give Reinforcement

It's important for you to give approval or reinforcement to the group members as they respond. You can do this by acknowledging an answer with comments like "good," "that's right," or giving a positive nod of the head or a smile of approval.

How to Increase Listening Ability

Listening is not only being able to hear what people really say but also what they can't and won't say. This ability requires sensitivity, concentration, and attention to the other members of the group. Some members tend to think more about what they want to say than about what the others are saying. They often become preoccupied with their own thoughts. One way to end this lapse in listening is to

have each person in turn summarize what had been said by the previous person. Doing this requires the members to concentrate on every contribution to the discussion.

Keeping Morale High

Maintaining good standards in Bible study helps keep the morale high and results in an expectation of excitement and eagerness toward the Word. The leader will be encouraged if he or she focuses on “what is right” with the study. Students will be encouraged if the leader’s attitude is “catching them doing something right.” They will want to keep studying and sharing.

Find Your Man

While leading a small group, always be looking for that one man God would have you disciple further. When leading, ask yourself, “Who’s my man?” Or, put another way, “Who am I discipling?” There is a reason why God would have you teaching and leading the Bible study group you are leading. Be looking for and find that man that God would have you disciple and help become a disciple-makers as well.

Prepare Well, Pray Hard, Trust Him, Have Fun

*And David shepherded them with integrity of heart;
with skillful hands he led them.
(Psalm 78:72)*

Workshop Worksheet – Part 1: Three sample questions from a Bible Study section entitled, “Spiritual Warfare”

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12)

1. How is the Christian life described by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:12?

for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. (1 John 5:4-5)

2. What is the basis for victory over the world from 1 John 5:4-5?

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

3. According to Hebrews 2:14-15, what did Christ’s death on the cross mean for Satan?

Workshop Worksheet Part 2: Practicing with Understanding Questions

1. Understanding question for answer #1 –

2. Understanding question for answer #2 –

3. Understanding question for answer #3 –