

Making Bible Study Fun — Imagination Method

Bible Discussion

12 lessons

Making Bible Study Fun — The Imagination Method

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Reading the Bible Together — The Imagination Method

Some say reading the Bible can be difficult. However, we CAN make it fun, so that anyone can freely learn from the Bible.

READING TOGETHER makes it easier.

READING TOGETHER makes it fun.

READING TOGETHER brings a new discovery.

1. USE YOUR IMAGINATION

The Bible was written in a different time and culture, which can make it difficult to understand. However, we can gain a better understanding if we try to imagine the scene or the feelings of the characters.

2. Neither "TEACHING" nor "BEING TAUGHT," but learning from EACH OTHER.

It is not bad to have confidence in what you know, have learned, or think, but it is important to realize that there are limits to what we understand. Our understanding of the Word, therefore, allows for some margin or range of individual interpretation, so let's do our best to listen to the opinion of others. Remember, there is no single "right" answer to everything. You can learn a lot from others, and if you have questions, please don't hesitate to ask them.

3. FOCUS ON CHRIST

The main character and theme of the Bible is Jesus Christ, so it helps you to better understand the Word if your focus is on knowing Him through the Bible.

The Bible speaks to us through the life of Jesus, but it speaks differently from person to person. We might ask, "What is this passage saying to me?" It is very helpful for us to have an attitude of listening to the Bible in order to make it meaningful in our lives.



Some Information about the Bible

When you read the Bible, which has been the best-selling book in the world, it is helpful to know some background information about it.

1. How it was completed

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew, and the New Testament was written in Greek. There is the word “Testament” in both, and that means “covenant”. The theme in both Testaments is Christ (the Savior). In the Old Testament, the emphasis is on waiting for Christ, and in the New Testament, the emphasis is on the arrival of Christ.

Different scholars say different things about exactly when they were written, but the Old Testament was probably completed around 400 BC, and the New Testament was completed by the end of the first century. After various incidents, The Bible came to be in its present form — a compilation of 66 books (39 books in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament).

2. Composition

There are 4 types of literature in the Old Testament (the Law, history, poetry, and prophecy), and there are also 4 types in the New Testament (the Gospels, history, epistles, and prophecy).

We can identify about 40 authors, who were kings, farmers, poets, fishermen, politicians, scholars, warriors, doctors, and so on. This wide variety of people wrote in different times, yet there is one theme in all their books, as though there is one editor.

This “mystery” is explained in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right” (NLT). That’s why The Bible is called “The Word of God.”

3. Approach

Some people can’t believe the miracles in the Bible, and won’t even try to understand. It is too bad that they are stumbled by miracles. It would be more constructive to try to draw what we can from what the Bible is saying. You may have your conclusion about miracles after reading the Bible. As the Bible is not a natural science textbook, it would be more useful for us to have the attitude of “What is it saying to me?” in order to grasp the meaning rather than dwell on details.

4. Chapters

There were no chapter divisions in the Bible at first. Probably it was harder to read, so chapters and verses were added. For example, now we say John chapter 5, verse 2. Then other people will know which sentence we are looking at.

Bible Discussion 1-1 Luke 12:13-21

In this passage, Jesus warns about greed, and he also talks about life. The way in which we live our lives has to do with how we view our lives. Let's discuss this passage, referring to the questions.

1. One man from the crowd talked to Jesus. In what situation do you imagine he is in?

How many people do you imagine were gathering there? Do you think that there is anybody the man knows in that crowd?

2. Why do you think he brought up his problem in front of other people? What did he expect?

3. Jesus told us to guard against every kind of greed. What do you think is wrong with greed?

What can you gain by being greedy? What do you lose by being greedy?

4. There seems to be something that the rich man in Jesus' story can't see. God said to the rich man, "You fool!" In what sense is the man fool?

5. What do you think real wealth or riches are? (When do you feel content or fulfilled as a person?) What do you think are the key components to finding real riches?



Bible Discussion 1-2 Luke 10:25-37

1. An expert in religious law in this passage knows the laws of the Old Testament well. What do you think he wanted to do to Jesus?
2. Since the priest and the Levite (a Temple assistant) in this story are experts of religion, they should have known the commandment to love your neighbor. Why didn't they help a half-dead man?
3. Let's think about what the Samaritan did to help this injured man. Can you think of any reason why a Samaritan, whom Jews despised, appears in this story?
4. What do you imagine the expert in religious law, whom Jesus told, "Yes, now go and do the same," actually did?
5. What was Jesus trying to communicate through this story?



[Note]

The Law: Commandments that God gave to the Jews through Moses. It consists of the Ten Commandments, which are the foundation of the Law, and various rules to guide their daily life.

Experts of religious law: They studied the commandments of the Old Testament and interpreted them.

Levites: Descendants of Levi, who is a son of Jacob. They were assigned to manage the Temple.

Samaritans: The northern kingdom Israel was occupied by Assyria in the 7th century BC. Assyria took a policy of mixing races to weaken the power of an occupied country so that they could rule it easily. They moved a part of the people from the occupied country to other countries and brought different ethnic groups to live in the occupied country. Samaria, in the former northern kingdom, was not an exception, and people came to no longer pure Jews. After a while, the Samaritans came to believe only the first five book of the Old Testament, which were written by Moses. They also had their own temple on Mt Gerizim, instead of the temple in Jerusalem. Therefore, there was animosity between Jews and Samaritans. They were like cats and dogs.

1 denarius: According to Matthew 20:2, it was a day laborer's daily wage. One Japanese Bible translation says it was equal to 6,600 yen.

Bible Discussion 1-3 Luke 18:9-14

Jesus told a story to some who had become proud people who thought of themselves as righteous people and looked down on everyone else. The Pharisees, who appear in this story, were elite in religious society. On the other hand, tax collectors were rich with ill-gotten wealth, and people hated them and kept them at a distance.

1. It says that two men went up to the Temple to pray. With what kind of attitude do you imagine the Pharisee went up? Was the attitude shown in his walking?
How about the tax collector?
2. The Pharisee gives thanks to God, but to what does he really give thanks? What do you think his main concern was?
3. Is there any problem that this Pharisee doesn't notice? If so, what is it? Why doesn't he notice the problem?
4. What did the tax collector know about himself?
5. What was Jesus trying to communicate?

[Note]

Tax collectors: They were Jews appointed officially by the Roman Empire to collect taxes, but it is said that many of them were subcontractors. Many of them collected taxes higher than usual, using their position as a tax collector to line their pockets. For example, if they were to collect 1,000 yen as a tax from one person, they collected 2,000 yen. Then they paid 1,000 yen to the prime contractor and kept the other 1,000 yen for themselves. As might be expected, they were despised by their fellow Jews.

The Pharisees: A group of religious people, who thought that God's grace would be poured out only on those who kept the Law (rules) strictly. They had various kinds of jobs. They fell into thinking much of the outward form and put deeds ahead of heart attitudes and motives. At first, they tried to keep the Law, but gradually they became bound up in traditions and forms.

In a religious society, they were conscious of their elitist status, and they were proud of their religious "purity," being "separated" from "defiled people" who didn't keep the Law. (It is said that the name "Pharisee" came from a Hebrew word that means "to separate.")

Bible Discussion 1-4

Luke 15:1,2,11-32

1. How old do you imagine the younger son was? What do you observe about him? Why do you think he wanted to leave home?
2. The father gave the younger son's his share of the property in response to his request. When the father did it, what kind of feelings do you imagine the father had? Why didn't he reject the son's request?
3. After the younger son spent all his money, what did he realize?
4. What do you understand about the elder son in this story? He said that he served his father and had never disobeyed his orders. He seems to be obedient outwardly, but what thoughts do you think he had in his heart?
5. Fathers in those days bore themselves with great dignity, but the father in this story was a little different. What do you think about how the father dealt with the younger son who came back home? How did the son feel toward his father?
6. What did Jesus want to tell people through this parable?



[Note]

Property inheritance: In those days, as in ancient Japanese society, the eldest son received a larger portion than his siblings. Now in Japan, it is possible to give your assets to your children while you are alive, but in those days in Israel, it didn't usually happen that the father gave a son's share to him, while the father was still alive.

The best clothes, ring: They are tokens of honor, showing that one was accepted as a son. Slaves didn't wear sandals, so putting sandals on his feet showed that he was not a slave.

Pigs: For Jews, they are dirty, defiled animals.

Bible Discussion 2-1 John 4:1-18

1. A Samaritan woman came to draw water. Usually, women didn't come to draw water at noontime because it was so hot. But this woman came about noontime. Why do you think she came at this time? How do you imagine she was feeling?
2. Jesus said to this woman, "Please give me a drink." In those days, it was very unusual for a rabbi to speak to a woman. Judging from what he did, what do you notice about Jesus?
3. Jesus said, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon be thirsty again." And he continued, "But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again." When the focus of the conversation became "thirst" or "water", he suddenly told her, "Go and get your husband." Why do you think Jesus said something that was not related directly to water? Did he try to help her to realize something?
4. "The living water" (v.10) that, Jesus mentions here, sounds like it satisfies people's thirst. What do you think "living water" might be? It might be helpful to think about what will satisfy people's thirst in their hearts.

[Note]

The social position of women: Israel was a male-dominated society. For example, when the writer of the New Testament wrote, that there were about 5,000 people, they were referring to the number of men (women and children were not counted). It was unheard of that a Jewish rabbi (teacher) would talk to a woman on the street, let alone that he would talk to a Samaritan woman.

Bible Discussion 2-2 John 9:1-12

1. This blind man was begging on the street. What kind of road do you imagine he was on? (width, traffic, etc.)
2. The disciples asked a question to Jesus about this blind man. If the blind man heard the question, how do you think he felt?
3. If he heard Jesus' answer (even though he couldn't understand the meaning fully), how do you think he felt?
4. What do you think his response was when Jesus put some mud on his eyes?
5. Why did he obey what Jesus told him to do? It is said that it was more than 500 meters to the Pool of Siloam. What do you imagine was going on in his heart while he was walking?
If you were the blind man, would you act in the same way?

Bible Discussion 2-3 John 8:1-11

1. As the leaders of the Jews, the Pharisees put the woman, who had been caught in the act of adultery, in front of the crowd. And they said to Jesus, "The law of Moses teaches that a woman like this should be stoned to death! What do you say?" They sound like they are asking for the right judgment, but what was their true intention?
2. Jesus continued to write something on the ground. What do you think he was doing?
3. Jesus said to those who kept on asking him about the woman, "All right. Go ahead and throw stones at her. But let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone." What do you think about what he said? What is he trying to tell the Pharisees?
4. Jesus said to the woman, "I am not going to accuse you either. You may go now, but don't sin anymore." What do you think his words meant to her?
5. What are big differences between Jesus and the Pharisees? (For example, a way of thinking, perspective, etc.)



Bible Discussion 2-4 John 3:1-10

Because the Pharisees were keeping God's commands strictly, they took pride in following God in a religious society. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a leader among Jews. So he had the knowledge, as well as a position of honor and prestige. Yet, he visited Jesus.

1. One night Nicodemus visited Jesus. What time do you imagine he visited Jesus? Why did he visit Jesus at night? Why do you think he visited Jesus?
2. Nicodemus talked to Jesus first. Then Jesus answered, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again" (v.3). Why did he answer in a way that Nicodemus would never have expected?
3. When you hear "born again," what kind of image do you have? Nicodemus wondered if Jesus was talking about being born again from his mother's womb.
4. Why do you think that people need to be born again to enter the kingdom of God?



Bible Discussion 3-1 Luke 10:38-42

1. Martha welcomed Jesus and his companions into her home. Why do you think she welcomed them?
2. Martha and Mary have very different characters. What differences do you notice in them?
3. Martha's feelings seem to change as time passes. How do they change? Why do you think they changed?
4. In her irritation, Martha complained to Jesus. Why do you think she went to Him?
5. Jesus responded to Martha's complaint. What did he really want her to understand?



Bible Discussion 3-2 Luke 5:27-32

1. Picture the dinner scene at Levi's house. What atmosphere do you suppose the banquet had?
2. There were many tax collectors and other disreputable people there. They were enjoying dinner with Jesus, and Jesus was enjoying dinner with them. Why do you think they were able to enjoy the meal together?
3. The Pharisees and religious scholars criticized Jesus. What, to their way of thinking, was wrong with what Jesus was doing? How do you think they developed their way of thinking?
4. Jesus said, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do." What do you think he wanted to say?

[Note]

Sinners (disreputable characters): In Judea, the Pharisees were at the forefront of implementing the Old Testament Law. Therefore, they came to despise those who were not trying to keep the Law. "Sinner" sounds like "criminal" in Japanese, but it doesn't necessarily mean so. In Jewish religious society, such "sinners" were alienated from the mainstream.

Bible Discussion 3-3 Luke 19:1-8

1. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector and quite rich. The name "Zacchaeus" means "pure person." Why do you imagine he became a tax collector?
2. Zacchaeus wanted to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So, he made his way up a sycamore-fig tree to see him. Try to imagine him in this situation. Why do you think he wanted to see Jesus so badly?
3. Jesus looked up at Zacchaeus in the tree and called him by name. How do you suppose Jesus knew his name? And why do you think He said, "I must be a guest in your home today?"
4. Why do you think Zacchaeus was so happy when he heard what Jesus had to say?
5. It seems that there was a big change in Zacchaeus' heart. What do you think brought about the change?

[Note]

Jericho: When Jesus was asked by the religious teacher, "Who is my neighbor?" in Luke 10, Jesus told a parable in which the town of Jericho mentioned. The story took place on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. Also, in Matthew 20, it tells of two blind men (probably beggars) who were sitting along the road going out from Jericho who cried out for Jesus. Taking these things into account, it seems that many people would be using the road. It is said that there was a toll gate in Jericho, and tax collectors would have been able to collect a lot of money



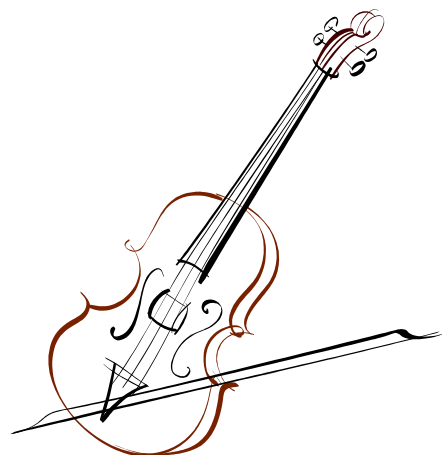
Bible Discussion 3-3 Reference material:

THE TOUCH OF THE MASTER'S HAND (By Myra Brooks Welch)

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But held it up with a smile.
"What am I bidden, good folks," he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"
"A dollar, a dollar," then, "Two!" "Only two?
Tow dollars, and who'll make it three?"
"Three dollars, once; three dollars twice;
Going for three..." but no,
From the room far back, a grey-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then, wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening the loose strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet
As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said "What am I bid for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.
"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
Three thousand once; three thousand twice;
And going, and gone!" said he.
The people cheered, but some of them cried,
"We do not quite understand.
What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply:
"The touch of the master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
Much like the old violin.
A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine;
A game--and he travels on.
He's "going" once, and "going" twice,
He's "going" and "almost gone."
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought
By the touch of the Master's hand.

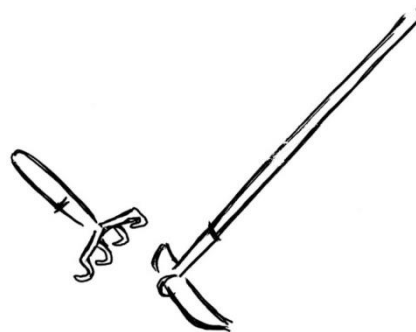


Bible Discussion 3-4

Luke 8:1-15

Jesus told a parable about sowing seed — one that was easily understood by His audience. What is the relationship between the hearing of the parable and the bearing fruit?

1. Sometimes we can listen to people without really hearing what they are saying. Have you ever had such an experience? Tell about one such time.
2. This passage talks about bearing fruit. Have you ever thought about people's lives "bearing fruit"? What kind of fruit do you want to bear?
3. Although God Himself is teaching, the people listening still don't necessarily bear fruit in their lives. There seems to be something that hinders growth. What problems are there with three of the soils in the story?
4. We listen with a good and genuine heart; we try to abide by what we hear and to persevere in it. This all seems very important. What connection does it have to bearing fruit?



[Note]

Sowing seed: Nowadays, the sowing of seeds is pretty much mechanized and very different from the methods used in Judea in Jesus' time. Then, sowing was very simple and was basically done by hand. Some people may have used animals.

You couldn't easily tell which type of soil was which, and so, at planting time, the seed was scattered all over.

12 Lessons for Beginners

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