

# Leaders Guide for Bible Discussion

12 lessons

Making Bible study fun — The imagination method

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# **Bible Discussion (mainly for non-believers)- Imagination Method**

## **1. Advantages of Bible discussion**

### **1) Jesus will be the Teacher. (Mat.23: 8-11)**

It is called a discussion group, yet we often see that those who have much knowledge of the Bible are teaching the rest of a group. In such a case, a certain person becomes a teacher. However, each member should be able to learn from the very Teacher, Jesus, in a discussion group. So anyone can join this kind of group.

If a Christian can't learn anything from non-believers in discussions, he/she might have a problem in his/her attitude. We should be able to learn from others when we soften our own hearts and do not stick to our own way of thinking. A learning attitude is a key to good discussions.

### **2) It will become a place of fellowship. (1John 1:3)**

Bible discussion group is a place for fellowship. In the process of reading the Bible and answering questions by using their imagination, each person is facing Jesus unconsciously. Each will gain something, and what they gain will differ.

When we are listening to what each member says, we come to know what he/she is thinking or in what situation he/she is now. If we can get to know each other well, we might be able to help each other. Also, of course, we can gain new insights into the Word by listening to other members' opinions. We can contribute to the group by expressing our opinions in a humble manner.

## **2. Reasons why most Japanese (or other) people are not good at discussions**

### **1) No foundation for discussions**

We usually can express our opinions on what we know well, or what we are thinking about daily, but it is not easy to share our own ideas on other things. When you read the Bible for the first time, it is not easy to express your opinion on that.

### **2) Not used to discussions**

Most Japanese people are not used to discussions since they are little-used in the Japanese education system. The typical form is a question and answer method. In this method, whether the answer is "right" or not is highly valued. Under that pressure, people become reluctant to express their opinions, not desiring to be embarrassed by making a mistake.

Likewise, they will not respond to questions whose answers are obvious. This doesn't mean that they don't have any opinions, nor they don't want to talk. Actually, they do want to talk but struggle with the above inhibitions.

## **3. Some clues to facilitating discussions**

### **1) What helps to understand**

### **a. Power of Imagination**

It is said that Japanese people have difficulty understanding the Bible since they don't have any Scriptural background. For example, either they have no concepts of God, sin, and Christ, or they have only vague concepts. It is true that the Japanese have difficulty understanding the Bible, considering that factor.

However, there are books in the New Testament that are not too difficult to understand. They are the Gospels. We can use our imagination. Even without any background, we can understand Jesus' parables and what he did. Though we live in a different time (about 2000 years' difference) and a different culture (Japanese and Jewish culture), the power of imagination helps us to understand what the Bible is telling us. Let's imagine the scene and feeling of the characters. If we try to imagine it as though we were there, it should be easier to understand the passage.

### **b. Power of thinking**

By trying to answer the questions prepared, or by asking our own questions and then grappling with those, we will be naturally linking the passage to our real life.

## **2) What helps in expressing opinions**

### **a. The idea that there is no single "right" answer**

First, we confirm that there is no single "right" answer to everything, so we can share freely. By hearing different opinions, our understanding will be widened and deepened, so the discussion leader or any other member is not supposed to say, "That is wrong," to what was shared. Of course, the discussion leader should not make a comment every time. Rather, the leader should facilitate others sharing their opinions freely.

### **b. The device that the difference of knowledge will not be a big issue**

Some people know much about the Bible and others know little. This is not important, so we try to arrange that the difference in knowledge will not hinder our discussions. For that sake, you may print the meaning of unfamiliar words, like *Pharisees*, beforehand. Then all members can recognize that they stand at the same starting line. Christians should know the principle beforehand that they are not supposed to quote cross-references. When non-believers know that there are people who know the Bible well, that would not encourage them to share their opinions freely. But you can share your personal experiences freely. That will help people to relate the Bible passages to their lives.

### **c. A comfortable atmosphere where it is easy to speak out**

When there are many members, we should divide into small groups. We have found out that it worked really well to divide into pairs when we have new members who are not familiar with the Bible.

In pairs, we are almost forced to talk, since there are only two members there. Also, we don't need to worry about what others might think of our opinion. It is also a good idea to get together later and share what each pair discussed. In that

case, each member can share their own opinion, or each pair can share their opinion as their conclusion. As members become used to discussions, small groups consisting of 4 to 6 people would be a comfortable size.

#### **4. Practice of Bible discussions**

##### **1) Partnering (That doesn't mean you can't do it without any partners.)**

When we have a few core people, we can complement each other, since each has a different gift. We need to practice this, seeking God's help. If we have a weekly Bible discussion, key people can get together for simple planning and prayer weekly and if it is monthly, key people can meet monthly.

##### **2) Preparation for the discussion**

It is very helpful to have questions prepared in the first stage. We can use questions that others have made. Later you may want to make your own questions. As to how to make questions, please refer to another paper. We might print the questions beforehand and pass them out in the discussion time, or a discussion leader can just share questions in the discussion time.

##### **3) Rotation of discussion leaders**

When we have a Bible discussion in someone's home, somebody other than the host should be the discussion leader, since the host is busy serving. As people become used to the discussion, each member can rotate as a leader.

I would recommend using the Living Bible translation. For Japanese who are not familiar with the Bible, Living translation is the most understandable one at this point, I think. We can have several extra Living Bibles or we can use a computer or a smartphone.

## How to lead these Bible Discussions

There is not a decided way to do this. It would be best to lead the discussion creatively according to the needs of the group. For your consideration, I will give one example of how to lead a discussion.

1. If this is the first time to do this type of Bible discussion, it will be good to pass around the copies of "**Reading the Word Together-Imagination Method.**" Another way is that the leader can just read it, instead of passing it out. Either way, the leader can share the idea that there is not just one answer and that each person can learn from the others. Especially emphasize the importance of imagination.
2. Pass around the Bible discussion sheets and read the passage in turns. Take a few minutes so that each person can read it again and think about it.
3. Proceeding through each question, have members share their discoveries. Since an understanding of the Bible is many-sided, welcome various opinions. We will be tested to see whether our mind is pliable or not.
4. The last questions are usually ones to get straight to the point or ones to encourage members to apply to their lives. From hearing the answers to the last questions, each member may understand what other members are taking from the Bible.

### For your information

- 1-2 hours in total would be appropriate.
- When there is a person who has never read the Bible before in a group, it might be good to pair up the group. After sharing by pairs, it might be good to have a sharing time of what each pair talked about. In this way, all members can know what others had shared. If the person who has never read the Bible before is not reluctant to share his/her opinions, you may just go ahead to have a discussion in a small group, instead of dividing by twos.
- When you have more than 5 members, each member will not be able to enough time to share. So it might be wise to divide the group.
- When members become used to doing Bible discussions, it is often good to take turns to lead the discussion.
- Not only the ideas on Bible discussion but also some ideas on how to lead a discussion are written in "**Leaders Guide for Reading the Word Together-Imagination Method**" for your reference.

## Leaders Guide for Reading the Word Together-Imagination Method

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

**READING TOGETHER makes it easier.**

**READING TOGETHER makes it fun.**

**READING TOGETHER brings a new discovery.**

In order to make it happen, we need some wisdom.

### 1. Mindset for these discussions

#### 1) **Make an arrangement so that members would not feel the difference in the quantity of knowledge is a big issue.**

- a. Do not mention other passage (cross-references). Try to talk on the passage.
- b. Do not take the time to explain the background of the passage. If it is helpful for members to understand the background, write down it and give copies to them. (When it is difficult to give them copies, someone can read it.)
- c. Pay attention that a person who knows the Bible well would not take most of the time.

#### 2) **Have an attitude to learn from each other. It is not a style that someone teaches and others are taught.**

It is not bad to have confidence in what you know, have learned, or think. But realize there are limits to what you can understand, and that revelation and understanding of the Word allow for some margin or range. These attitudes help you to be teachable and be a better listener. Welcome questions, yet if they are too in details or too much side trucked, handle them wisely.

### 2. How to lead discussions.

- 1) **Pass the members two materials ("Reading the Word together" and "Some Information about the Bible") according to their need at the first meeting.** They can read them later or you can read together there.
- 2) **Proceeding through each question, have members share their discoveries.** You may prepare copies of discussion questions or a discussion leader can lead the discussion using the questions.
- 3) **Sometimes it is good to pair up the group.** After sharing by pairs, it might be good to have a sharing time of what each pair talked about, especially if there is a person who is not used to discussions or who has never read Bible before in a group.
- 4) **When members become used to these discussions, you may just read the passage and discuss from the passage.** You may read the passage and take a little time to think about the words or sentences, which left an impression on each member.
- 5) **When members become used to these discussions, they will know how to lead it, so you may take turns leading the discussion.**
- 6) **We can read the passage and discuss it, but it is also very helpful for us to have an attitude of letting the Bible speak to us personally.**