



Bible

Discussion

12 lessons (2)

Making Bible Study Fun — Imagination Method

Bible Discussion

12 lessons (2)

Making Bible Study Fun — The Imagination Method

Noriaki Sugimoto (The Navigators, Japan)

Table of Contents

Reading The Bible Together-The Imagination Method	3
Some Information about the Bible.....	4
Bible Discussion 1-1 When you can't forgive Matthew 18:21-35.....	5
Bible Discussion 1-2 How do we live? Matthew 25:14-30.....	6
Bible Discussion 1-3 When we face the storms of life Matthew 7:24-29.....	7
Bible Discussion 1-4 Money doesn't satisfy Matthew 19:16-22.....	8
Bible Discussion 2-1 Still not giving up Mark 5:25-34.....	9
Bible Discussion 2-2 The last bet Mark 1:40-45.....	10
Bible Discussion 2-3 What should we seek for? Mark 10:32-45.....	11
Bible Discussion 2-4 Betrayer's heart John 13:2,21-30.....	12
Bible Discussion 3-1 Fallen but getting up again Matt 26:31-35,69-75....	13
Bible Discussion 3-2 When anyone would be despair Luke23:32-47.....	14
Bible Discussion 3-3 Not missing the sign of hope John 20:1-18.....	15
Bible Discussion 3-4 Unbelievable things can happen John 19-20-19.....	16

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 Word of God.

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

When you can't forgive (Matthew 18:21-35)

Jesus spoke often about how to live a life that leads to happiness. In this passage, Jesus talked about something that is of critical importance for us but is not easy-- forgiveness.

1. Peter came to Jesus and asked, "How many times shall I forgive?" What do you imagine he was thinking about? Do you suppose there was some situation that prompted him to ask this question?
2. Jesus did not simply answer Peter's question, but He answered it with a parable. In the parable, a king canceled the 10,000 talent debt of one of his servants. What do you learn about the king from what he did?
3. The servant whose huge debt was canceled by the king then tries to collect a meager 100 denarii from his fellow servant and is not willing to cancel the debt. Why do you think people act this way? What aspect of the human heart does this show?
4. After telling this parable, Jesus talked about people who don't forgive from the heart. What do you think happens to people when they are like this? Has there been a time when you suffered as a result of not forgiving someone? How can you (could you) take a step toward a resolution?

[Note]

Parable: Usually there is one theme in a parable. Therefore, if we stick to the details, we may miss what Jesus wanted to say.

Forgiveness: "If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." (Luke 17:4)

Ten thousand talents: One talent is 6,000 denarii and one denarius was one day's wage for a laborer at this time. So if one day's wage is 10,000 yen, then 10,000 talents would be 600 billion yen by today's standard (10,000 × 6,000 × 10,000).

Bible Discussion 1-2

How do we live? (Matthew 25:14-30)

In the Gospel of Matthew, there are many parables that describe the “kingdom of God” (what would happen and what it will be like when God rules as King). This passage about the parable of the talents is one of these.

1. In this parable, rather than receiving the same amount of money, each servant is given a different amount of money. If you had been one of these servants, what do you suppose you would have thought about the money you received? (Even one talent was a lot of money.)
2. Why do you imagine the master entrusted his fortune to his servants when he went away?
3. What would you have done if you were entrusted with the talents, as these servants were? Use your imagination.
4. When you compare the two servants, given the five talents and the two talents, with the one who was given one talent, there were differences in their actions. What do you think caused the difference?
5. What do you think Jesus wanted to teach through this parable?

[Note]

1 talent: One talent was 6,000 denarii and one denarius approximately one day’s wages for a laborer. If one day’s wage is 10,000 yen, that makes one talent the equivalent of about 60,000,000 yen. “Talent” was originally a currency unit but came to mean “ability” or “capability”.

Faithful: This original word can be understood as “can be trusted” in a passive voice. Or it can be understood, “can trust” in an active voice.

Bible Discussion 1-3

When we face the storms of life (Matthew 7:24-29)

When you look at the life of Jesus, you see that the things He did were amazing. But you also see that when He taught, He did so with great confidence.

1. Suppose someone recommends something to you; for example, a health routine or a way to build a good human relationship. Are you the type of person who quickly adopts what is recommended? If not, what process do you go through when you decide to adopt something new?

2. This passage is a parable using the example of people who are building houses. There are two people. One built his house on the rock and the other built his house on sand. While one wonders if there really are people who would build a house on sand, if there are, where do you suppose the difference between these two types of people comes from?

3. In our lives, there are times when rain falls and the wind blows. There are storms and there are floods. When you hear the words "storms of life", what comes to your mind? Have you ever encountered the storms of life?

4. At times like these, what supports you? Jesus says that our foundation becomes important. Why can we say that those who listen to and obey His words are ones who laid their foundation on the rock? What difference do you imagine it will make to listen and practice His words rather than to listen to His words only?

5. Why do you think Jesus spoke with such confidence? Where do you think His confidence comes from?

Bible Discussion 1-4

Money doesn't satisfy (Matthew 19:16-22)

Many people came to Jesus seeking something. Most of them came to be healed. But in this passage, we see a young man coming to Jesus seeking "eternal life."

1. What kind of life do you imagine this young man was living (v.20, v.22)? What do you think made him go to Jesus?
2. Looking at this young man's answer to Jesus' question (v.17), Jesus seems to be emphasizing the difference between "what is good" and "who is good". What do you think Jesus is telling him?
3. Being asked "Which ones?" Jesus listed some of the commandments that are mentioned about human relationships in the Decalogue. And He added the commandment (which is not written in Ten Commandments) "Love our neighbor as yourself" as a summary of these commandments. What do you think He wanted to communicate?
4. "All these I have kept," this young man said. "What do I still lack?" We can see that he is a serious man. But Jesus' answer is one this young man never imagined. "If you want to be perfect..." (v.21). What do you think Jesus wanted to get across to him?
5. Hearing Jesus' answer, this young man went away sad. We don't know how he lived his life after that, but how do you imagine he lived? He seems to have some misunderstanding at this point, and Jesus tried to correct his way of thinking. What do you think his misunderstanding was?

[Note]

Eternal life: The word translated "eternal" can be misleading. This word doesn't mean only a length of time, but it also means a different quality. If we think in this way, it might be helpful to understand: the kind of life we want to live forever, or the life which is worth living forever. For example, there is a person you might know, who was living a bad life, but something had happened and he/she was changed radically. Then we say, "He/she is a different person." That can be an illustration of eternal life.

The Decalogue: You may have seen the movie "The Ten Commandments". The Ten Commandments that were given to Moses by God at Mt. Sinai were the basis of the commandments that were given to the Jews. (Exo.20:1-17)

Bible Discussion 2-1

Still not giving up (Mark 5:25-34)

A synagogue ruler named Jairus came to Jesus and pleaded with him, "My daughter is dying. Please come and put your hand on her." So Jesus hurried away with him. A large crowd followed along. On the way, Jesus met a woman who was suffering from an illness characterized by on-going bleeding.

1. A woman who had been suffering for twelve years with a bleeding illness appears. How old do you imagine she was? With what thoughts and feelings do you think she had been living as she came to Jesus?
2. What do you suppose she thought when she heard about Jesus? She would have been viewed as "unclean" because of her illness and probably refrained from going out, so when she slipped into the crowd and went right up to Jesus, what frame of mind do you think she was in?
3. When the woman touched Jesus' robe, she sensed that she had been healed. Then, when Jesus looked to see who had touched Him, she was terrified. What do you think was going through her mind?
4. Jesus could have just gone on, but instead, he found the woman who had been healed. Not only that, but He turned and spoke to her (v.34). What do you suppose it meant to this woman that Jesus did not just move on?
5. Before coming to Him, the woman had known about Jesus to some extent, but what deeper understanding of Him do you think she gained through this experience?

[Note]

A woman with constant bleeding: We don't know specifically what kind of sickness this was, but based on the description, we can guess that it was probably some kind of female illness. The illness itself was bad enough, but according to the teachings of the Old Testament (Leviticus 15:19-30), she would have been viewed as religiously "unclean". This meant that she would have had to avoid physical contact with people and been removed from general society. One can imagine that this further increased the suffering she was already going through.

Bible Discussion 2-2

The last bet (Mark 1:40-45)

1 In Jesus' day, people with leprosy (which in some Bible translations is translated as "serious skin disease" or *tzara'at*) were segregated, but they could go out.

1. How do you think that the man with leprosy had learned about Jesus?
2. People with leprosy were avoided. We don't know how far this man walked, just that he made his way to Jesus. And, it seems to have been at a time when Jesus didn't have people around Him. How do you suppose this man was able to reach Jesus? Based on your answer to that, what can you discern about what this man might have been feeling?
3. The man said to Jesus, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Why do you think he had so much confidence?
4. Jesus could have healed this man without touching him, but He healed him by touching him. How do you think this man felt based just on that act?
5. Jesus told the man not to tell anyone else. Would there have been some drawback to people knowing what had happened? At that time, Israel was under the rule of the Roman Empire, and the people of Israel were waiting for the Messiah (Savior) to liberate them. When people heard the story of the miracle Jesus did, what do you think they might have expected?

[Note]

Leprosy: It appears that the word includes various types of skin diseases. Since it is difficult to identify the exact meaning of the word, some Bible translations have just used the Hebrew word "*tzara'at*". In Japan, the longstanding policy to quarantine people with leprosy became a problem. And according to the Old Testament, lepers in Judea were also segregated (Leviticus 13:46). When a priest declared someone "unclean" in Jewish society, it had religious implications. In Jewish society, it was also the priest who declared when someone was healed of leprosy (Leviticus 14:1-9). Once a priest had officially observed that someone was healed, that person could return to society.

Bible Discussion 2-3

What should we seek for? (Mark 10:32-45)

The journey of Jesus with His disciples was nearing its end. One could sense that the burden Jesus carried was weighing heavily on Him now that the crucifixion was just around the corner, but His disciples did not fully grasp what was happening.

1. Jesus was leading the way, (verse 32). What would you imagine His mental state was like at this point? Do you suppose that he usually walked ahead of His disciples? What was there about this time that would have astonished the disciples?
2. James and John came to Jesus for a favor, which was unusual. Why do you think that they asked for *this* favor, at *this* time? And why was it James and John? (Compare Mark 1:19-20 and Matthew 20:20-21.)
3. Jesus did not completely deny their request. Why do you think that He didn't?
4. Jesus said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them" (verse 42). What do you think motivates the type of ruler who "lords things over people"? On the other hand, what motivates the person who truly serves?
Leading by controlling and leading through serving produce different results. With respect to human relationships, what do you think are the results of each type of leadership?
5. What do you personally get out of (benefit from) this Bible passage?

[Note]

Being baptized, drinking the cup: The "baptism" which Jesus is going to receive and the "cup" from which He was to drink were both symbolic expression of the sufferings Jesus would face. The disciples did not really understand His meaning.

Bible Discussion 2-4

Betrayer's heart (John 13:2,21-30)

This passage is the setting for what is often called "The Last Supper". At this time, Jesus makes it known that one of His disciples is going to betray Him. While it isn't completely clear why Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus, let's take a look at what the Bible says about it.

1. Verse 2 says, "The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus." What mental state do you imagine Judas was in at this point? Consider that he was treasurer for the group with Jesus (John 12:6), was trusted, and we can assume was pretty intelligent. (See also Matthew 26:14-15.)
2. When Jesus said to His disciples "one of you is going to betray me", what do you imagine was going on in Jesus' mind? What about the disciples?
3. The disciples wanted to find out who Jesus was talking about. But, rather than ask Him directly, one of them went about it in a somewhat roundabout way. Jesus' answer was not straightforward either. Since Jesus knew who was going to betray Him, why do you think He didn't name him?
4. Verse 27 says, "As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him." What do you think this means?
5. When Jesus was handed over to the Roman governor Pilate, Judas was filled with regret and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priest and elders. Then he hung himself (Matthew 27:3-5). Do you think that Judas acted on a misperception? If so, what was it?

[Note]

Thirty silver coins: It is said that thirty silver coins were worth three or four months of income. Say, our monthly income is two hundred thousand yen. Then thirty silver coins are worth six to eight hundred thousand yen. It was about the price of a slave as recorded in the Old Testament (Zechariah 11:12; Exodus 21:32).

Bible Discussion 3-1

Fallen but getting up again (Matthew 6:31-35,69-75)

After saying that Judas would betray Him, Jesus then goes on to tell about what Peter (and the other disciples) would do.

1. Peter replies, "I will never fall away," and Jesus says, "This very night before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." Then Peter replies with great determination, "Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you." And all the other disciples said the same thing. Please imagine what's going on in Peter's (the disciples') mind.
2. What do you suppose Jesus was thinking when He told Peter (the disciples) these things?
3. Knowing the weakness of the disciples (and of humans in general), Jesus warned them that they would fail Him. What difference would it have made to Peter whether Jesus knew his failure ahead of time or not?
4. When Peter did deny knowing Jesus three times, Jesus turned and looked straight at him. And the Bible says Peter "wept bitterly" (Luke 22:60-62). What kind of look do you think was in Jesus' eyes when He looked at Peter? Try to imagine Peter's heart at this point.
5. When you stumble along the way in your life, who or what will support you?

[Note]

"I will strike the shepherd ..." (v. 31) This is a quotation from the Old Testament book of Zechariah (Zechariah 13:7). It is not a word-for-word quote but quotes the meaning of the passage. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered ..."

Bible Discussion 3-2

When anyone would be in despair (Luke 23:32-47)

Finally, Jesus was nailed to the cross. Jews did not have the authority to execute criminals, so they had to appeal to the Roman governor to have someone executed. Actually, it was Roman soldiers who executed Jesus.

1. When Jesus was taken to the place called "the Skull" to be crucified, what do you imagine He was thinking about?
2. Crucifixion was agonizing, and the worst form of punishment available at this time. Around Jesus, Jewish leaders were inciting derision and the crowd was mocking Him. In the midst of His suffering, Jesus called out, "Father, forgive them because they don't know what they are doing." What do you think was on His heart at that moment?
3. There were two criminals crucified with Jesus. One was on His right and another was on His left. The two men had contrasting attitudes toward Jesus. One of the men said, "... this man has done nothing wrong." How do you think this man came to such an understanding?
4. Jesus said to the man "Today you will be with Me in paradise." Why do you think that Jesus could speak with such confidence? (He does not seem like either a criminal who is being crucified or a resentful man who is being wrongly executed.)
5. Jesus' final words also were not what one would expect. "Father, into your hands I commit My spirit." What do you think Jesus was thinking when He spoke these words?
If you had been there, watching, what would you have thought?

[Note]

Skull: The Gospel of Mark says that they brought Jesus to Golgotha, (translated "the place of the Skull"). Whether the name came from the fact that it was an execution site or because it was shaped like a skull is uncertain.

Paradise: Rather than thinking of this as a specific place, it is probably better to think of it as the condition of being "with God" in the same way that one would be "with friends".

Bible Discussion 3-3

Not missing the sign of hope (John 20:1-18)

The disciples were not expecting Jesus' death, so their hopes were crushed when He died. They felt despair because they had thought that this was the Messiah, the one who would save Israel. But what actually occurred was something far beyond their expectations.

1. It is possible that in their disappointment, the disciples didn't even think about going to Jesus' tomb. But a woman called Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark. The tomb was sealed with a large rock, which was impossible for a woman to remove. What do you suppose she might have been thinking about when she went to the tomb? (It is possible that a difference in the way men and women think shows up here. What do you think?)
2. Mary Magdalene was amazed, and ran to Peter and another disciple (whom the Bible says John) and reported what had happened. The two disciples ran to the tomb. When they got there, it was just as Mary had said— Jesus' body was not in the tomb. Verse 8 says, "He (John) saw and believed." What did he believe?
3. The two disciples went back to where they were staying, and Mary was left alone. While Mary was crying, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there but didn't realize that it was Jesus. She had a brief conversation with Him but still didn't realize who it was. How do you think it was possible that she didn't know who it was?
4. When He called her name, she knew that it was Jesus. She hadn't understood who it was up to this point. Why did she understand now?
5. Mary went to where the disciples were and told them that she had seen Jesus and what He had said to her. What do you think the disciples thought when they heard that? If you were there, what would you have thought?

[Note]

Mary Magdalene: In order to distinguish her from other Marys, Magdalene (from her hometown, Magdala) was added after her name. Luke 8:2 says that Jesus cast seven demons out of her. Her life must have been totally new after this, and she became a follower of Jesus.

Tomb: This is different from a Japanese grave, and is more like a cave hollowed out of the rock. The entrance was blocked by a large stone.

Bible Discussion 3-4

Unbelievable things can happen (John 20:19-29)

The first person to meet the resurrected Jesus was a woman. We don't know if the disciples readily accepted her news when they heard it, but any doubts the disciples might have had were removed when Jesus Himself appeared to them.

1. The disciples had locked themselves in a room because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. So how would you describe the disciples' emotional condition at this point?

2. Suddenly, Jesus appeared to the disciples and said, "Peace be with you!", and He showed them his hands and side. If you had been there as one of the disciples, what would you have thought? The passage says that the disciples were overjoyed when they saw Jesus. In your own words, describe what you imagine their mental condition to have been at this point.

3. One of the twelve disciples, a man named Thomas, was not there when Jesus appeared. Even though other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord," Thomas said, "What are you talking about?" And he insisted, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." What do you think about his attitude?

4. Eight days later, the disciples were again locked in their room, and Jesus appeared to them the same way He had before. Do you think that the disciples expected Jesus to appear? Both times, Jesus appeared even though the door was locked. How do you think He was able to do that?

5. This time, Thomas was there, too. Jesus invited Thomas to touch Him, but Thomas didn't. Why do you think that Thomas didn't touch Jesus?

6. What do you think Jesus wanted Thomas to understand?

12 Lessons for Beginners (2)

I developed this Bible Discussion first in Japanese for Japanese people. Then I asked my friends to help me to translate into English.

For more information, please contact Noriaki Sugimoto (in Japan).

sugimoto.noriaki@gmail.com