

STUDYING THE BIBLE WITH INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS

Many international students and immigrants come to the UK from countries where they have little or no opportunity to hear the Gospel or study the Bible for themselves. Many are intrigued to find out more about the Christian faith, and are eager to study the Bible with us. Here are some points to consider when doing this: *(these are aimed at studies in group settings but most are equally applicable for 1:1 study)*

Aims

- to have a **relaxed, open and friendly** discussion – not imposing our own views.
- to encourage a **desire to come back** the next time. This is so important as it takes time for international group members to grasp the Gospel.
- to lead people to see that **Jesus Christ requires a response** – not telling them, but helping them to see it for themselves. The challenge initially may simply be to find out more and only later to follow him. We want to help people to see that they can read this book themselves without having a theology degree!

Preparing your study

- **pray** for your own understanding; the Holy Spirit's leading; and group members' learning (*Heb 4:12-13*)
- think about **how many** sessions you're offering
- **choose your passage.** Introduce people to Jesus through the gospels. Which one? Luke, with its parables, can be good with Muslims; John suits the Chinese; Mark is good for guests with limited English. Parables, stories of encounters with Jesus and responses to the Gospel in Acts are all good to study.
- it can often be helpful to begin with Genesis; and give a Bible overview
- study the passage **thoroughly**. Use commentaries, Bible dictionaries to help.
- formulate **your questions**
- don't rely too heavily on somebody else's outlines. Think about who is coming and **tailor it for them**, allowing for their background knowledge or lack of it!

There are three main kinds of question:

Observation – getting guests to search the text

Interpretation – what does it mean?

Application – what response should I make?

It can be helpful to have a 'launching question', ie one which is immediately engaging with the passage but which elicits views about some of the issues that arise, eg "*What do you think is the most satisfying thing in the world?*" before studying John 4.

Decide on the key question – this will be a question relating to the main application you want to draw. Start with that and then work backwards, choosing other questions that will lead up to the key question.

Asking questions

- AVOID questions requiring one word answers. Open-ended questions are best.
- AVOID 'limiting questions' (those which suggest there's an answer you want!)
- be conversational
- don't be afraid of silences but be ready to move things on
- remember the aim is to be clear, relevant and to stimulate discussion

Running the study

- **preparations** – venue, seating, Bibles, refreshments
- **venue** – comfortable, maybe in the international friend's home (less threatening)
- **invitations** – specify how many weeks the studies will run for
- **Bibles** – if studying in a group, make sure they are all the same version and contain easy to understand English
- **introductions** – write down names of group members; explain what will happen ie format of study; how long it will take
- **prayer** – don't be ashamed to open in prayer... (eg *"It's our custom to ask God for his help when we study his Word"*)
- **context** – a 30-second introduction, providing context and background can be helpful in setting the scene. Introduce characters and locations.
- **read the passage** – getting the group to read out loud in turn is not a good idea with those whose first language is not English. Ask someone you know who reads well and ask them to read slowly – or read aloud yourself.
- **language/conceptual difficulties** – give the group member/friend time to re-read the passage and give them the opportunity to ask about words and concepts they do not understand
- **study the passage** – use your questions but be flexible. Have end point in sight. Try to keep it simple (don't discuss Greek tenses!). Keep to the text and get people to look for answers there, before looking at how to apply it. Don't have pages of notes – you don't want them to think you have to be an expert before you can read the Bible.
- **time limit** – it is best to keep the study shorter than longer. Aim to finish on time! End while people are still interested so they want to come back for more...
- **co-leaders** – if there are more than 3-4 guests in a group, a co-leader is helpful (though they should say little unless asked). This can be a good way to train others and useful if you have to split group. Always make sure there is the right balance of male/females in the group.

Important points

- **avoid jargon**, cross references, and assumptions that group members know more than they do
- **style** – everyone will develop their own style but good Bible study leaders are not preachers or lecturers. Aim to be more of a guide. Help them to discover for themselves
- **testimony** – don't dominate conversation, but be ready to share your own thoughts, questions and experiences. This can help others open up, and guests are always eager to hear of how the Gospel impacts people's lives.
- **expectations** – there is no need to cover the whole Gospel in one study. Take one step at a time. There may be a lot of barriers to overcome (their previous worldview/religion/experience/understanding of Christianity).
- **attitude** – humility. We can learn from them (no presuppositions). It's important to listen to them, and where possible, to find out where they're coming from. Learning about other world religions and cultures is important as it can give us 'keys' to help unlock the Gospel to them and show them how it applies in their culture.
- **friendship** – ongoing friendship is vital: it is not to be sacrificed for the sake of winning an argument
- **trust the Holy Spirit** – this is God's Word. He'll do His work.