

PREPARING & LEADING SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDIES

STEP 1: PERSONAL STUDY

You, as the leader, need to personally study the material/passage just like the members of your group. Don't bypass this step, especially if you've not led a discussion on the material/passage before.

STEP 2: THEME

Upon completion of your study, it's time to synthesize your findings. This is simply a process by which you take all the facts and conclusions from your study and draw them into **one** concise statement. This statement should clearly communicate the main thought of the material/passage. This is your theme for the study. (Example: Suppose the topic is the "Lordship of Christ". The theme might be: "Because Jesus is Lord of ALL, we should allow Him to rule every part of our lives.")

STEP 3: OBJECTIVE

After coming up with the theme, you now are ready to focus on your group members. Obviously, one of the purposes of the group discussion is to affect the lives of the group. Your desire is that they leave the discussion motivated to live differently. State your objective in terms of what you desire the discussion to accomplish in the lives of the participants. Let's refer back to our previous example of "the Lordship of Christ." Your objective might be for the group to desire to make Jesus Lord and name several ways to accomplish that.

STEP 4: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Now comes the most difficult part. The key to any good discussion is quality questions. The difficulty lies in coming up with the type of questions, which stimulate discussion.

The first thing to remember is that the aim of the questions is to **lead** or **guide** the participants to your predetermined objective. Sure, you could walk into the group, have them read some verses, and then tell them right out what they should get out of the study and how their lives should be changed. However, when that's over, about all you've accomplished is to shove **your** convictions down their throat after which they probably won't possess those convictions on their own. Therefore, if you can **lead** your group members by your questions to **discover** the truth **on their own**, they are more likely to believe it and develop a conviction about it. When the meeting is over, hopefully your series of questions has stimulated a discussion, which has accomplished your predetermined objective.

With that in mind, let's now discuss the questions themselves. There are three types of questions to use. All three should be incorporated in any discussion.

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The reason for this is that they all build upon one another. Here are the three types of questions: **discovery, understanding, and application.**

Discovery. You will want to begin your discussion with this type. Specifically defined, they are broad, open-ended, thought-provoking, information gathering questions. The answers to these should be broad in their scope. (There is no room for "yes/no" questions.) Also, the direction of these questions doesn't have to directly focus on the predetermined objective. They simply gather information which is somewhat secondary to the theme of the topic/passage. (Example: Using the topic "the Lordship of Christ", here is an example of a discovery question for that topic" Let's name some synonyms for the word 'Lord?'" A person would not even have had to do the preparation of the study to give good answers on that one. Here's another: "From the verses you have studied, what things is Jesus the Lord of already?")

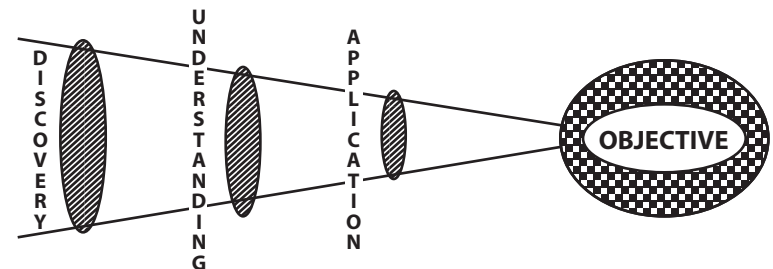
Understanding. This is a more narrowly focused question. You are now moving closer toward your predetermined objective by narrowing down the scope of the answer. This type of question brings relevance to the facts gathered by the discovery question. To use our previous example, here's a good understanding question: "With all these synonyms in mind, what implications would it have on your life if you were to truly make Jesus the Lord of your life? Here's another: "Now let's consider this: why would you want to make Jesus the Lord of your life?"

Application. These are the most direct questions since they are your last stage of questioning. They should challenge the group members to make all the previous findings a reality in their lives. The answers here should be very practical and measurable. These should be something you can ask about the next day to see if they are actually doing them.

In summary, your three stages of questioning (discovery, understanding, and application) should lead the group to your predetermined objective without you having to tell them out right. Remember, when they come to the conclusions themselves, they are much more likely to develop a personal conviction about it. The diagram illustrates how the three stages of questioning become more narrowly focused as you go as they head toward your predetermined objective.

PHASES

Now, there is one last thing to incorporate into your questions. We will call it your phases of questioning. During each stage of questions there needs to be three phases: **launch, guide and summarize.** This is very simple. Here is how each phase works.



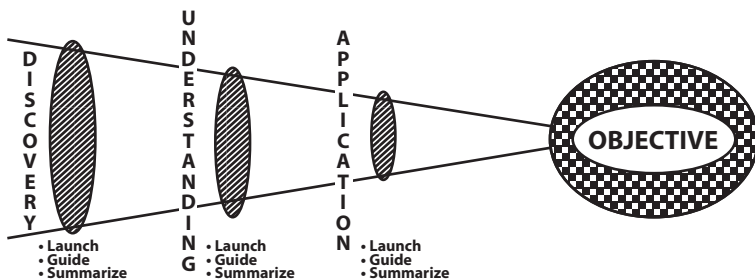
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Launch. Here you simply are launching out the question and presenting it to the group. Make it conversational and not mechanical - i.e. don't read the question. Let it flow very naturally from the conversation. When you launch it, let it sit with them and don't ramble on trying to explain what you mean. If it's well worded, you don't need to explain. **Don't be afraid of silence.** That goes for any point in the meeting.

Guide. After launching the question and members of the group begin to respond, you will need to guide them. Be sure they are **staying on track** with the discussion. If things get off track, then gently bring them back. Also, be sure everyone is participating. You may have to direct some of your questions to a particular person if they don't seem to be very outspoken. Others, if they are very outspoken, may have to be encouraged to help by allowing everyone a chance to join in. During this phase, it's good to ask part of the group to comment on the answers others are giving. This creates dialogue within the group and makes it more of a discussion than a teaching session with you as the teacher. Be ready to explain or expound on certain points as you feel it is necessary. Learn to key off their answers with spontaneous or follow up questions off the top of your head. Many times it will be necessary to do this in order to discuss the issue thoroughly to make sure they have grasped the content well. Remember to be a "people's leader". Always make good eye contact with **all** of the group. In addition, be very affirming in your responses so as to make all members feel significant. Lastly, make sure in this phase that the question at hand is fully dealt with, and you are satisfied that they are grasping whatever you are wanting them to understand.

Summarize. This last phase is very obvious. You simply want to summarize the conclusions of the group. This keeps them reminded of what they are learning and it helps them make good clear connection with the next stage of questioning (either understanding or application). One thing to note here is that you would be wise to always keep paper and pen with you and to record all answers given during the meeting. This will aid you in summarizing, plus you can actually name the person who gave certain answers. This will make your group members feel much more significant.

The diagram shows how the phases fit into each stage of questioning:



You may be wondering how many questions you should be using at each stage. It is a good idea to limit the number of discussion questions to one or two per stage (discussion, understanding, and application). Therefore, you would never have more than six questions per meeting. There's nothing sacred about this, but it is a good guideline.