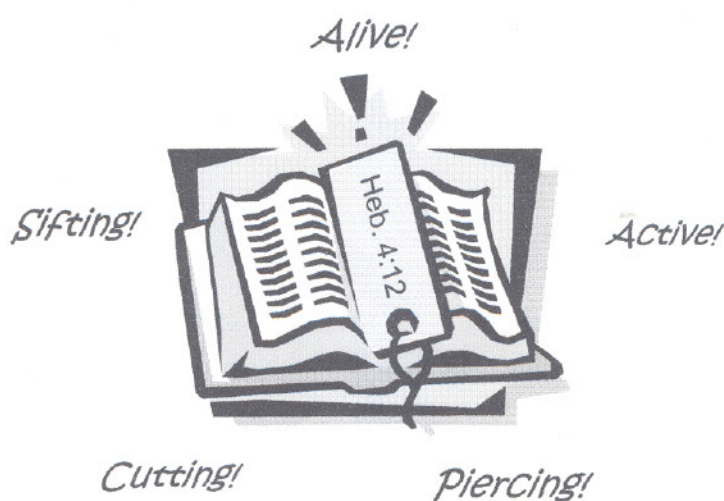


Creative Ideas

for

Lively Bible Studies



Brought to you by:

fes
Fellowship of Evangelical Students

Creative Ideas for Lively Bible Studies

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Biblical quotations are from the NIV unless otherwise indicated.

1 Calling Out Your Creativity

Help! I'm a Bible study leader!

"Our Bible study started out with eight. Now we're down to three. What can I do?" People often start to lead groups with enthusiasm, because they have experienced "great Bible studies". After a while they begin to dry up as leaders.

There are various reasons why people drop out of a Bible study group.

- *It's not what they were expecting.*
- *Subjects were irrelevant or repetitious.*
- *Time and location were not convenient.*

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

A Basic Problem

Behind these symptoms is often the lack of creative thinking—the fear/inability to think outside traditional lines. Effective leaders are those who dare to think and act outside traditional boxes that imprison people.

In small groups Think of an effective leader you've observed or followed--apart from Jesus. In what ways did he/she think and act outside traditional boxes? What were the results?

A. You're More Creative Than You Think

Definition Creativity is the ability to produce something new or fresh that is potentially useful to mankind.

Do you tell yourself that you're not Creative? If so, you're condemning yourself to mediocrity! *How should God's Message below challenge you?*

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over the whole earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (*Genesis 1:26*)

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. (*Ecclesiastes 9:10a*)

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (*Colossians 3:17*)

Jesus said, "The greatest commandment is this: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." (*Mark 12:29-30*)

Now tell God how his message challenges you.

Creator and Father of us all, forgive me when I have put down your handiwork in me. Here's how your Word personally challenges me. _____

Our delegated Creativity

God alone is original. But he delegates creativity to us. Creativity is doing our best to meet a challenge with whatever resources we have—seen and unseen. In any achievement remember that we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us.

The essence of Creativity is the ability to imitate in a useful way. In this workbook we have collected some workable ideas that we have been using in leading groups and in teaching the Bible. None is entirely "original". Some are adaptations. Some are outright imitations of what others have effectively used; e.g. p. 24. Add your ideas!

Test your creative thinking.

In four groups brainstorm on all possible uses for each of these common objects: a brick, a wire clothes hanger, a rubber ball, a wooden ruler. An appointed reporter lists ideas. After 10 minutes reassemble for a report from each group.

Note: In brainstorming all make suggestions freely and quickly. No comments or criticisms allowed.

How did you get your ideas? You were thinking creatively when you used

- **analogy** - "This brick is like a pillow."
- **association** - "This hanger makes me think of mobiles."
- **shift of emphasis** - "A ball is not just for playing. It can save from drowning."
- **contrast** - "You can use this ruler for spanking a naughty child."
"You can use it for a pat of encouragement."
- **progression** - "Take it a step further. Give this ruler as a reward."

Observe how you can/should use creative thinking in a Bible study. E.g., in *John 3:1-2*, "Why do you think Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night?"

- **analogy** "This sounds like those underground churches in China."
- **association** "Night, darkness are usually associated with secrecy. Nicodemus wanted to keep it a secret because he feared what the Pharisees would think."
- **contrast** "I don't think Nicodemus cared what his colleagues would think. I think he was so fascinated with Jesus that he just wanted time with him."
- **shift of emphasis** "Yeah, and night was the only time for a private talk when both he and Jesus were finished working for the day."
- **progression** "As it turned out, Nicodemus had basic questions that led to a pretty deep discussion with Jesus. They must have stayed up all night!"

Try it! Apply creative thinking to *John 3:10-12*. Jesus here seems to be putting down Nicodemus. But what might be his reasons for talking like this?

B. Characteristics of a Creative Person

Below are characteristics found in creative people in the past and present--writers, leaders, architects, scientists, artists, teachers, social workers, castaways, etc. Find out how creative you are by giving a value of 1 to 3 to each characteristic. Afterwards total your score.

1 = not very; 2 = normal; 3 = very

	Not very	Normal	Very
curious			
original			
imaginative			
independent			
observant			
analytical			
self-confident			
fluent			
complex			
courageous			
non-conforming			
perceptive			
flexible			
disciplined			
adventurous			
open			
dissatisfied			
elaborative			
capable of risking failure			
sensitive			
intuitive			
energetic			
persistent			
honest			
impulsive			
socially bold			
humorous			
self-critical			
Sub-Totals:			

Grand total:

If you scored between 64-84, you don't need this class.
If you scored between 36-63, we can help you to be more creative.
If you scored between 28-35, we can't help you much.

C. Four Steps in the Creative Process

You don't need Thai to recognize what these pictures illustrate about the four steps in the creative process. *What is happening at each stage?*

ทำงานสร้างสรรค์ได้อย่างไร?



(1.) การเตรียมตัว

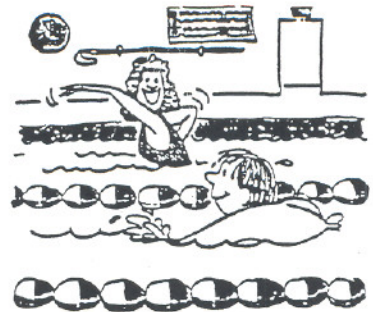
(จินตนาการ)

คิดถึงความเป็นไปได้ทั้งหมด

(2.) บ่มฟัก

(สงบอยู่ภายใน)

ให้ความคิดของคุณเพาะตัว



(3.) ทำให้ชัดเจน

(รวบรวม)

อะฮ้า! นี่แหละ

(4.) ผลิตผล

(นำมาปรับใช้ และปรับปรุง)

ทำสิ่งที่คุณคิดออกมา



2 Basic Bible Study

Kiha is a general contractor. He became a Christian in his university days, but no one taught him to study the Bible. Two years ago he joined a group studying Luke's Gospel inductively. He became increasingly excited with each succeeding week. "I can read and understand the Bible! It's like reading the newspapers."

He did not learn to study the Bible in formal ways. He simply participated with the others as the leader guided them to observe the text, think fairly about the writer's meaning, and reflect on its application. He is now leading one Bible study in his home, and another one at the home of his father, who had been totally indifferent.

A. The Inductive Approach

The inductive method is like detective work. In a homicide case the detectives 1) collect all facts and clues, 2) test all possible theories and motives while constantly referring to evidence before they can 3) validly conclude who the murderer is.

We prefer the term inductive approach to inductive method. A strict inductivist uses tools of history and grammar, logic/reasoning, literary laws. He is suspicious of any approaches that to him are subjective. But in both cases we follow these basic steps.

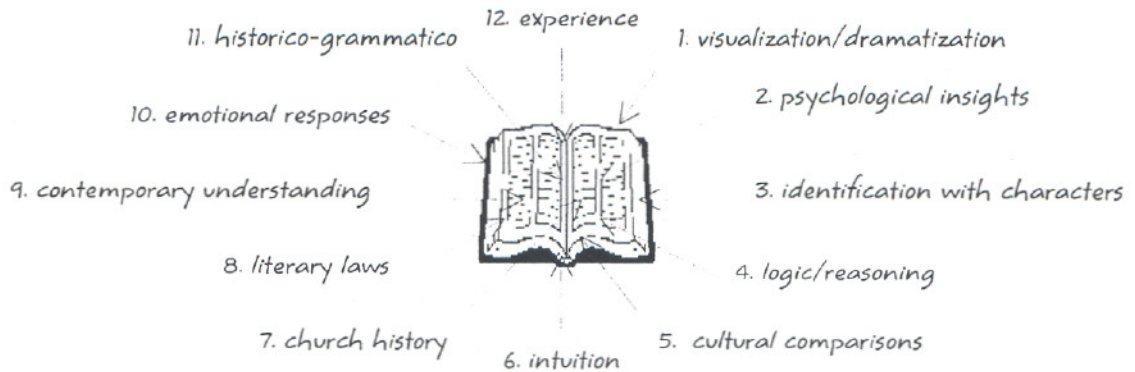
- O** Observe the open and hidden facts in the biblical text.
- I** Interpret those facts from the writer's point of view.
- R** Reflect on his message and its relevance for us today.
- A** Apply the lessons to life in practical ways.

B. Windows and Doors into the Bible

An expanded inductive approach

Imagine the Bible as a mansion with many windows through which you may peer into its rooms and many doors through which you may enter for exploring these rooms. No one opening is the best for everybody. The present culture of mass media and postmodern values has forced us to recognize many other valid openings to God's Word. Serious students use as many doors and windows as possible for their personal enrichment and for effectiveness as God's servants.

Examine the diagram below with 12 possible windows and doors into the Bible. Which of these have you already been using? Draw arrows from your windows and doors to the Bible.



Try it!

Read *Matthew 15:21-28*. *Context:* Jesus has just had a hot controversy with his critics (15:1-20). He and his disciples are now in a foreign country.

Examine the facts and questions below. *Which door(s) or window(s) does each question suggest that you use?* Use the numbering in the diagram on page 8. (You need not answer the questions now, but you could later use this as a Bible study.)

- 4 a. Jesus has retreated geographically from his sworn enemies after their controversy. *Was he acting cowardly or reasonably? Explain.*
- 3 b. You're one of the (Jewish) disciples who have just watched Jesus in that controversy.
4, 5 Now you're in foreign territory, and a pagan mother bugs Jesus. *How justified do you feel in telling Jesus to get rid of her?*
- ___ c. *In today's everyday language, how would you describe the woman's state of mind?*
- ___ d. When Jesus responds to the woman, he seems in turn to be indifferent (v. 23), exclusivistic (v. 24) and finally insulting (v. 26). But at the end his commendation of her remarkable faith shows something else. *So, what possibly were his real thoughts and feelings during their interaction?*
- ___ e. *Have you ever kept bugging God with a request like the woman's? What happened?*
- ___ f. Role play Jesus and the woman in her pursuit of healing for her daughter. (A reader can read the passage dramatically, while two people act out the parts of Jesus and the woman.)
- ___ g. Apart from the disciples' sharp dismissal of the woman in verse 23, nothing else is said about them. But, of course, they have been watching the interaction. Review the whole event from their point of view. *How do you think their emotions may have evolved from verse 21 to verse 28?*
- ___ h **On a congregational level:** History shows that the Gospel has spread only when Christians got out of their comfort zone and reached out to other ethnic groups. Compare Jesus' attitude and action toward "foreigners" to your church's attitude and action to "foreigners". *How does your church need to change in this area?*
- ___ i. **On a personal level:** *Are you also facing a tough problem in your family? In what ways does the woman's persistence with Jesus encourage you also to keep asking for help?*

Identification: Your Ultimate Door

In her best-selling book on evangelism, *Out of the Salt Shaker*, Becky Pippert tells us about Lois, whom she had befriended at Stanford University. Lois accepted her invitation to join a Bible study on campus with this warning, “Okay, I’ll come. But the Bible won’t have anything relevant to say to me.”

Just before the Bible study Becky learned that Lois was living off campus with her boyfriend, Phil. To her surprise Phil came with Lois to the Bible study. Becky had prepared to lead the study on the woman at the well in John 4. Becky continues.

I suddenly remembered the passage dealt with a woman who had sexual problems. I feared Lois would think I had planned this just for her. With a step of faith, I frantically tried to think of (what to do as everyone was reading a verse around the circle). Then Lois read (her) portion: “Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, “I have no husband”...for the man you’re living with is not your husband.’” It was her first experience in reading Scripture and her eyes grew as big as saucers....

“I must say, this is a bit more relevant than I had expected,” she commented. And as she saw with what sensitivity and perception Jesus interacted with the lonely woman, Lois’ face showed how moved she was.

The next day things got more and more exciting as Lois and Becky talked again—and Lois became a Christian, moved out from Phil’s room, and Phil got furious but eventually also came to trust Jesus! They had identified with the Samaritan woman.

How to enter the identification door

- *Recognize* that the human problems described in the Bible are just like our problems.
- *Acknowledge* that we are just like the people described in the Bible—good and bad, sinners with the potential for eternal good.
- *Believe* God’s promises and *accept* his solutions to our problems.

Try it! Reread *Luke 5:1-11*. As you reflect on the disciples’ encounter with Jesus, ask these questions. (They are parallel to the points immediately above).

1. Identify the disciples’ problems. *What is true to life? How are their problems like our human problems?*
2. Simon Peter had met Jesus sometime before (*John 1:40-42*). Watch how he now reacts and interacts with Jesus. *What is naturally human about him? What is he apparently struggling with? How is Simon Peter like you and me?*

C. The Text and What We Say About the Text

Test Your Grasp of OIRA

To observe and interpret the Bible we must be able to distinguish between what the text itself says and means and what people say about the text.

a. textual fact	what the Bible actually says
b. general knowledge	what is known from other sources
c. implication	what is inferred (not directly stated; a hidden fact)
d. opinion	what is suggested as a possible view
e. visualization	what can be pictured in one's mind
f. interpretation	what the author meant as his message
g. identification	what people can relate to
h. application	what is considered relevant and practical for us today
i. speculation	what is theorized with little or no textual basis.
j. spiritualizing	what is turned from concrete reality to fancy symbolism

Try it! Read *Luke 5:12-16*. Match each statement below with a description above.

- b 1. In biblical times lepers were assigned to live outside the community near tombs for the dead, cut off from family and all other normal life.
- ___ 2. Though the man was humble, he was also very confident that Jesus would cleanse him.
- ___ 3. Jesus really wanted to heal the man, but did not want to risk catching leprosy, so he only pretended to touch him.
- ___ 4. If I were the man, I would have been shocked that Jesus would even come near me.
- ___ 5. A leper's problem is not just external, but deeply internal—loneliness, low self-esteem, hopelessness, intense feelings of rejection.
- ___ 6. Imagine the shocking drama of Jesus' reaching out his hand and touching this man covered with leprous sores with pus and dried blood!
- ___ 7. Mark is telling us the leper represents us. His sores are our sins. Mark is saying Jesus' healing touch is his death on the cross for our sins.
- ___ 8. Maybe Jesus was using reverse psychology when he told the cleansed man not to talk about his healing. He really wanted the man to broadcast the news so that he could help more people.
- ___ 9. The Old Testament has many sensible health rules for the community.
- ___ 10. If God has done something great for us, we should tell others about it for his glory.
- ___ 11. Though the man disobeyed Jesus' firm instruction, I also would have done just what he did!
- ___ 12. I wonder if Jesus was annoyed with the man for disobeying his instruction and causing inconvenience for his ministry.
- ___ 13. Many people today come to God just for physical healing, but they don't want their lifestyle changed. Our churches must keep a balance between physical and life-changing ministries.
- ___ 14. With this event Luke shows us that the compassionate Jesus practiced another kind of balance—the balance between ministry to people and time be alone with God in prayer.
- ___ 15. The main point of this story is that we are all spiritual lepers and only Jesus can cleanse our sins.
- ___ 16. Our churches tend to be middle-class. We have to clean up our attitudes to social rejects.
- ___ 17. I need to find a regular time and "lonely place" to be with God and know him and his will better.

3 Lively Bible Studies

Now we are ready to examine and practice various methods of lively Bible studies. Method is a good word—how we accomplish a task. Unfortunately some people think, “If I just had the right method, I’d get the results I want.” But a method is a tool, not a silver bullet. *A method is as good as the person who learns to use it.*

The Swedish Method

This method really comes from Sweden. The YMCA developed it in the 1870’s as the Västerås Method, after the town where it started. You will see that it’s a variation of OIRA. It guides you to--

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1) know what to look for: | something about God ↑ |
| | something about man/human nature ↓ |
| 2) interact with the text: | something that puzzles you ? |
| | something that is new/fresh to you i |
| 3) find applications: | something to obey → |

On the margin of your Bible mark your discoveries and interactions by using the symbols above. Or follow the pattern on page 14.

Demonstration and practice – Matthew 5:43-48

Context In Matthew 5:21-48 Jesus challenges the traditional understanding of God’s laws. He gives six startling examples of what God really intended. Legalistic teachers focused on outward acts. Jesus stressed the heart attitude to God and others. *The aim of God’s laws is to free us from our sinful human nature so we can be like God.* Our study text of Matthew 5:43-48 is Jesus’ sixth and last example.

Look for *open* and *hidden facts* about God and man/human nature. *Open facts* are what you readily see in the text. *Hidden facts* are those below the surface.

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Look for *open* and *hidden facts* about God and man/human nature. *Open facts* are what you readily see in the text. *Hidden facts* are those below the surface.

↑ Something about God (Father, Son, Spirit)

v. 43 *Jesus shows authority and challenges common misinterpretation of OT laws.*

v. 44 *He is radical, commanding his disciples to love their enemies!*

v. 45a _____

v. 45b _____

v. 48 _____

↓ Something about man (human nature)

vv. 43-44 *We naturally love our neighbors and hate our enemies.*

vv. 46-47 _____

vv. 44, 48 _____

? Something not understood

v. 43 *Jesus' meaning of neighbor?*

i Something enlightening

v. 44 *Praying for one's enemies is the first step in loving them.*

v. 45 *How universal is God's love in blessing his enemies with basic needs!*

v. 48 *Jesus assumes his disciples can be perfect.*

Note: In Greek perfect means mature, acting your age; having reached one's goal.

→ Something to obey

v. 44 *I will work harder at loving _____. I will begin by praying for him/her and looking for something kind to do for him/her.*

Try it! Use the Swedish Method on Jonah 1.

↑ Something about God

↓ Something about man (human nature)

? Something I don't understand

! Something enlightening

→ Something to obey

Small groups Share your discoveries. Begin with questions that people have about the text. The group works together to answer the questions. Help each other stick to the text. Be sure you have time for "Something to obey". End with prayer.

2. Talk Back Live

You and I are spiritually rich because we have inherited Israel's Psalms. The Psalms are a unique art form, yet intensely personal and universally appealing. Here man talks heart to heart with God. (Elsewhere in the Bible God speaks to man.) Here the psalmists share with us the powerful--and often painful--lessons they learned from life. The psalms express every basic human experience, every human emotion.

When you read a psalm thoughtfully, you're listening to God. When you interact with each thought and/or word, you have started to talk back live with God! This dialogue with God becomes clearer when write it down.

Try it! Read *Psalm 42* below. The responses come from one believer. They initially are simple, spontaneous responses to the text—impersonal, almost superficial. But note how they gradually become thoughtful and personal. They show a growing awareness of God's presence. Now you talk back live with the rest of the psalm.

Psalm 42 (NRSV)

For the director of music.
A *maskil* of the Sons of Korah



No deers in Hawaii! As the deer pants for streams of water,
but what a picture! so I long for you, O God.

Can't say I know this kind of intense desire for God. 2 I thirst for God, the living God.

When can I come and stand before him?

Where? Isn't God everywhere?

3 Day and night, I have only tears for food,

Exaggerated?

I'm beginning

to get it. His enemies are more real to him than God at this point.

while my enemies continually taunt me, saying,

"Where is this God of yours?"

That's what I hear unsympathetic people say. Lord, show yourself to them, maybe they're seekers.

He's really feeling pain.

4 My heart is breaking

as I remember how it used to be:

Good memories

help, but I don't want to live in the past.

I walked among the crowds of worshipers,

leading a great procession to the house of God,

Lord, I don't want to be a priest, but I do want to lead others to you.

Aha! He sounds like a priest. Sounds like the temple in Jerusalem.

singing for joy and giving thanks—

it was the sound of a great celebration!

Celebrations are noisy. Will God's wedding celebration be noisy?

Good idea - to learn to talk myself and hear what I'm saying.

5 Why am I discouraged?

Why so sad?

I will put my hope in God!

I will praise him again—

What a contrast! How come? Yes, this is our human situation—lots of ups and downs.

Good idea - praise God when I'm discouraged!

Bottom line = to affirm that God is mine, and I am his.

My Savior and my God!

6 Now I am deeply discouraged.

But I will remember your kindness—

from Mount Hermon, the source of the Jordan,

from the land of Mount Mizar.

7 I hear the tumult of the raging seas

as your waves and surging tides sweep over me.

8 Through each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me,

and through each night I sing his songs,

praying to God who gives me life.

9 "O God, my rock," I cry,

"Why have you forsaken me?

Why must I wander in darkness,

oppressed by my enemies?"

10 Their taunts pierce me like a fatal wound.

They scoff, "Where is this God of yours?"

11 Why am I discouraged?

Why so sad?

I will put my hope in God!

I will praise him again—

my Savior and my God!

3. Comparing Versions of the Bible

The availability of many versions of the Bible should challenge us. They range from *strict literal translations* (for studying each word; e.g., *NASB*); to *dynamic equivalence* (literal where possible and “thought-for-thought” when necessary; e.g., *NIV*); to *paraphrase* (helpful to those new to the Bible; e.g., *The Message*).

Try it! Compare these versions of *I Corinthians 5:1*. What is new or fresh to you? What is now clearer? What is God pointing out for you to do?

NASB It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, an immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife.

NIV It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans. A man has his father’s wife.

TEV Now, it is actually being said that there is sexual immorality among you so terrible that not even the heathen would be guilty of it; for I am told that a man is living with his stepmother!

NLT I can hardly believe the report about the sexual immorality going on among you, something so evil that not even the pagans do it. I am told you have a man in your church who is living in sin with his father’s wife.

The Message I also received a report of scandalous sex within your church family, a kind that wouldn’t be tolerated even outside the church: One of your men is sleeping with his stepmother.

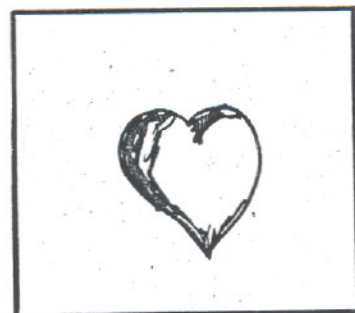
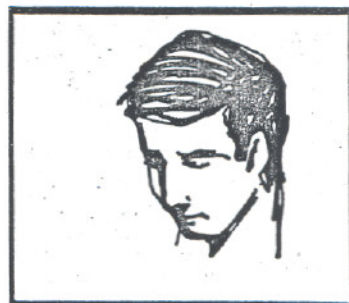
Note NASB: *New American Standard Bible*; NIV: *New International Version*; TEV: *Today’s English Version*; NLT: *New Living Translation*; *The Message* by E. Petersen.

4. Head - Heart - Hands

Highly motivated groups with well-prepared leaders have found this challenging method very fruitful. It leads to deeper personal studies. Watch the time for each section. (Adapted from *Methods of Bible Study*, Church of Scotland.)

Try it! Read *Numbers 13:26-33*. *Context:* Moses, God's great deliverer leader, has led his people out of Egyptian slavery and through 40 years of their rebellion and wandering in the wilderness. They now are on the border of God's promised land, and he has sent 12 spies on a reconnaissance of the land and its inhabitants.

1. In the **HEAD** session the leader helps people get into the passage with a *brief* introduction. It may be the immediate context, as in the above paragraph. (If you are introducing a mini letter like *Philemon*, a few quick sentences about the writer, his readers and purpose for writing helps.)* Then he leads the group in some *initial* observation of the facts in the text. E.g., *What's the difference between the reports of the majority group and the minority group?* (15 min.)
2. For the **HEART** session divide into mini groups. Appoint a leader, who in turn appoints a reporter. All read the passage silently, seeking to discover the heart of the passage--the main point of the writer. (10 min.) People then share their "hearts". *Insist that no one retells the story, only its heart.* Leader guides the group to consolidate their contributions. Reporter prepares summary. (15 min.)
3. Reassemble for the **HANDS** session to deal with action. Group reporters give two-minute summaries. The leader listens to pick up strong points of application for group discussion. *In the light of this study, What should our hands do?* (15 min.)



*You can get introductory facts from a good study Bible, Bible handbook, dictionary or commentary—e.g., NIV Study Bible, Life Application Bible (NIV, NKJ, NLT, NRSV), *Serendipity Bible (Revised & Expanded)*; *Eerdman/Lion's Bible Handbook*, *Halley's Bible Handbook*.

5. Honest to God

A friend complained that the book of *James* made him uncomfortable. "It's not because it's hard to understand, but because it's too easy to understand. I don't struggle to get the meaning. I struggle to obey it." Does this sound familiar?

Final chapters of New Testament letters and *Proverbs* are like *James*—full of clear instructions. Here's a way to help Christians be honest in hearing and obeying God. This method also encourages newcomers to participate.

Each has a copy of the passage with space for writing. The leader briefly introduces and reads it aloud. Then all read it privately. 1) Cross out ideas you don't agree with or not obeying. 2) Circle any part you have honest doubts about and mark with a question. 3) Underline what you're doing relatively well in. 4) Mark with a wavy line any verse you're struggling to obey. 5) Write down your comments. 6) After 15 or so minutes, ask volunteers to share their responses with the group.

Try it! Observe a young Christian's example with *Romans 12:9-11* (NLT). Then carry on with verses 12-16. (10 min.) Members then share and mutually help.

⁹Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what
My friends is [?] wrong. Stand on the side of good. ¹⁰Love each other with genuine
and I don't affection, and ~~take delight in honoring each other.~~ ¹¹Never be lazy in your
agree on work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically.
what's wrong
what's right

¹²Be glad for all God is planning for you. Be patient in trouble, and always be prayerful. ¹³When God's children are in need, be the one to help them out. And get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner, or, if they need lodging for the night.

¹⁴If people persecute you because you are a Christian, don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵When others are happy, be happy with them. If they are sad, share their sorrow. ¹⁶Live in harmony with each other. Don't try to act important, but enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

6. Choose Your Face

Authentic Bible study recognizes that we respond emotionally to truth we face in the text, even if it's feeling indifferent or bored. If we're interacting with God's Word we could/should be feeling awed, assured, angry, hopeful, fearful, provoked, puzzled, etc. "Choose Your Face" helps us to better understand ourselves by checking how we are responding emotionally to the Scriptures--and what to do about it.

Try it! Let's use *I Peter 2:18-25*. Peter is writing to young Christians living in hostile regions where both the government and unbelievers are persecuting them. First, read this text carefully for meaning.* (Substitute "employee" for "slave"). Then go back and check your feeling/response to what you read.

Which face expresses your response to each truth? Why? Below that face/emotional reaction write the verse reference and personal comments.

1. Ho-hum...same old stuff



2. This makes me feel sad.



3. Wow! This is great!



4. Need to think about this



5. Well, I don't know



6. How interesting!



7. Makes me feel guilty.



8. How puzzling...



9. This scares me.



10. I'm better than that.



*In the Roman world slaves (and wives—3:1-7) had difficult positions, especially if they were Christians. Slaves were often treated very unjustly, and wives often had harsh unbelieving husbands. Peter instructs them in how to behave as Christians and to inspire them with Jesus' example of unjust suffering for our salvation.

7. Real News. Real Fast.

You're a journalist from *Jerusalem Times*, whose motto is "Real News. Real Fast." You learned at Ezra's School of Journalism how to "get it first and get it right". Now your editor has sent you north to Capernaum to check out a new itinerant preacher making waves.

Try it! The group leader briefly introduces *Mark 1:21-28*.^{*} All examine the passage privately, preparing them to give factual answers to the reporter. (10 min.)

The reporter knows how to ask good journalistic questions—*Who? Where? When? What? How? Why? So?* He writes furiously in his notebook—or uses a tape recorder. Below are suggested questions for *Mark 1:21-28*, but he should add spontaneous follow-up questions, e.g., those in parenthesis here.

1. What happened in the synagogue? (Has anything like this happened before?)
2. Jesus of Nazareth? Who is he? What did he do that caused all this excitement? (How old is he? Who is his father? What's his profession?)
3. You say he's different from your teachers of the law? In what way? (What else?)
4. What method did he use to cast out the demon from the man? Different from your teachers?
5. Where was the ruler of the synagogue in all this commotion?
6. Will the new rabbi go back to his hometown or stay in Capernaum? (Has he started to call disciples to follow him?)
7. If this Jesus is starting to challenge your regular Bible teachers, what might be the eventual impact on the community?
8. So, he cast out evil spirits from people. What difference then do you think he could make in their lives in the long run?

You can see that this is an imaginative group study. This learning experience is sharpened when 1) the journalist shows he's very curious and becomes excited as people vigorously talk, and when 2) people in their excitement talk several at a time, correct or modify one another's statements, and the journalist has to slow them down and keep them objective. Let it be as spontaneous as possible, yet factual.

^{*}E.g., this event takes place at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He has just called his first four followers (1:16-20), and this is the first action of their new master they observe. Mark is beginning 1) to demonstrate Jesus' unique authority, and 2) to prepare his readers for the fierce opposition that will increase from both the established authority (v. 22) and Satan (vv. 23-24).

8. Mimes and His Story

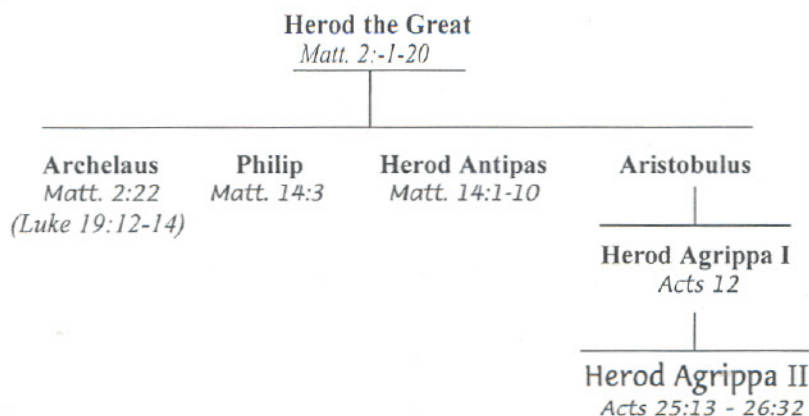
How can we make biblical history alive and relevant? By being convinced that biblical history is *His Story*. In this way we may see where the human race has come from, how it's doing and where it's going.

Mimes are wordless dramas that can make His Story realistic and relevant. In our example, however, a narrator dramatically reads the story while people act it out by facial expressions and body language. Narrator and actors practice for coordination.

Try it! Here in Acts 12:1-17 only one actor is needed. *Context:* The church is now about 15 years old. Its fast, powerful growth upsets Jews and Romans. Both step up persecution against the Christians, especially their leaders.

The mime takes place with narrator and actor. Reflective discussion follows.

1. This king was the third of four Herods who tried successively (but not successfully) to destroy Christianity. His grandfather, Herod the Great, tried to kill the baby Jesus. His uncle beheaded John the Baptizer. Fifteen years after the events in Acts 12 his son is judge at Paul the Apostle's trial. (Write this chart on the board.)



How do influential people today try to get rid of Christianity? Why do they try?

2. Examine how God works out his sovereign purposes through different ways and people—Peter, the church, the angel and even a servant girl whose part is rather humorous (vv. 13-15). *Whose part do you especially appreciate? Why?*

3. Think of the 19 terrorists in America on September 11. *How does your commitment to Jesus Christ and his church compare to their commitment to Osama bin Laden and the Muslim faith?*

9. ...And Those Boring Genealogies?

Here's a way you can make Jesus' genealogy exciting for kids—and adults.

Try it! While one person reads *Matthew 1:1-16*, someone holds up cue cards to the group, who respond as each card indicates-- "Applause", "Boo", "Cheer", "Hiss", "Moan" and "Huh?" ("Huh?" is used after names of people unknown even to Bible scholars or who did little or nothing important.) Rehearse the cue cards with the group. This helps get people in the spirit. They should listen to the reader, and not read the text themselves.

Matthew One "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ (*applause, cheers*), the son of David (*applause, cheers*), the son of Abraham (*cheer*): Abraham was the father of Isaac (*applause*), the father of Jacob who stole his brother's birthright (*boo*), and Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers who sold Joseph into slavery (*hiss*). And Judah was the father of Perez and, and Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers who sold Joseph into slavery (*hiss*). And Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (*huh?*) by Tamar (*huh?*), and Perez was the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminidab (*huh?*), and Amminidab the father of Nahshon the father of Salmon who was the father of Boaz by Rahab, the prostitute (*boo*) and Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth (*cheers and applause*); and Obed was the father of Jesse the father of David the King (*cheers*). And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah whom he had murdered (*hiss*); and Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, who was a good king but abandoned God's way for several years (*boo*), and Rehoboam was the father of Abijah who had fourteen wives (*cheers and boos*), and Abijah was the father of Asa, a good king but who did not walk in the way of the Lord at the end of his life and so died of gangrene of the feet (*moan*), and Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat who was a fine king ruling wisely most of the time (*applause*). Jehoshaphat was the father of Joram who was the father of Uzziah whose pride brought his fall (*boo*); but Uzziah was the father of Jotham, a very good king in every way (*cheer*), who was the father of Ahaz, a very bad king in every way (*hiss*). And Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah who cleansed the temple and the kingdom (*cheers and applause*). Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh who ruled for fifty-five years (*applause*), but who was evil for most of that time (*boos*). He was the father of Josiah who did right in the eyes of the Lord (*cheer*); and Josiah was the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the deportation of Babylon (*huh?*). And after the deportation to Babylon, Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel who was the father of Zerubbabel, a governor of the people and chosen by God (*applause*). And Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud (*huh?*), and Abiud was the father of Eliakim (*huh?*), who was the father of Azor (*huh?*), who was the father of Zadok (*huh?*) who was the father of Akim (*huh?*), who was the father of Eliud (*huh?*), the father of Eleazar (*huh?*), the father of Matthan (*huh?*), the father of Jacob (*huh?*), the father of Joseph (*applause*), who was the husband of Mary (*cheers*), of whom was born Jesus who we call Christ (*applause and cheers*)."

Discussion Among Jesus' ancestors, what kinds of people did you recognize? Yes, prostitutes, murders and polygamists filled Jesus' family tree. How does this make you feel? Yes, despite such an ancestry, Jesus turned out great. That gives us hope. How could this also help us think straight when we're tempted to blame our parents for the way we are? We are all responsible to God for who we are now. (From *Teaching the Bible Creatively* by Bill McNabb & Steven Mabry (Zondervan & Youth Specialties), pp. 43-44)

4 Mini Ideas for More Participation

A. Ice-breakers: Self-descriptive Activities for Building Community

If your group is a newly formed one, you may need intentional socializing. One of the following can help warm up the group.

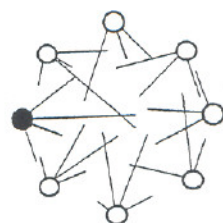
1. What part of a car could describe you, and why?
2. Who was your favorite teacher in grade school and why?
3. Which of Baskins & Robbins' 69 kinds of ice cream best depicts you?
4. What kind of fruit would best describe who you are?
5. If you could add an extra member to your body, which would it be and why?
6. At age nine, what was your favorite part of your home, and why?
7. What kind of ball best describes you, and why?
8. What kind of musical instrument describes how you communicate or relate to other people? In what way?
9. What vacation spot describes the way you relax, and why?
10. What kind of color describes you when you wake up in the morning? Why?
11. What is your favorite food, and what is your non-favorite food?
12. What most easily embarrasses you, and how do you avoid such situations?
13. What is your "pet peeve" (that which annoys you), and how do you deal with it?
14. What kind of road sign best describes your exterior, and why?
15. At age 13, what did you want to do or be when you grew up?
16. If someone were to write your biography, what would the title be? (Do not use your name in the title.)
17. If you could be a great artist, what picture would you paint, and why?
18. What is the best thing your parents ever did for you?
19. If you could ask for a special talent, what would it be? How would you use it?
20. What was your earliest ambition?

B. Stirring the Study Pot

People need concrete and varied ways to search the text and think more about an important idea. Here are some suggestions to stimulate members.

1. Brainstorm Fast, free-for-all imaginative suggestions to encourage maximum possibilities on a question. No criticisms or comments are allowed. If it's a major question, write people's contributions on a board. This usually stimulates more ideas.

Try it! Read Mark 1:14-20. *If you were Jesus recruiting disciples, what character traits would you look for?*



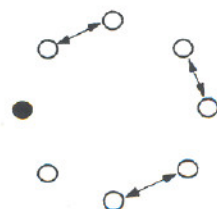
2. Circular Response Each in turn gives their view on a provoking question. Allow for "passing" so no one feels pressured. No comments are allowed until all have had a chance to speak. The leader, picking up suggestions, then starts the discussion.

Try it! Read Mark 1:21-28. *People quickly sensed Jesus' authority (v. 22). In what ways can you tell whether or not a Bible teacher or preacher speaks with authority?*



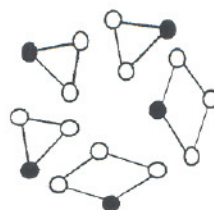
3. Neighbor Nudging Two neighbors "gently push" each other's thinking on a question for a few minutes. All are included without moving. Then the leader asks for reports from each pair, summarizes and continues the discussion.

Try it! Read Mark 1:23-26. *Why do you think Jesus strictly forbids the demons to publicize who he is?*



4. Jigsaw puzzle This is useful in big groups. Each sub-group discusses one of several parts of a major point for 10 to 15 minutes. Reporters summarize their group's main ideas in re-assembly. The leader then consolidates the main ideas and moves the discussion to practical application.

Try it! Read Mark 1:29-31, 32-34, 40-45. The writer here records three healing events in Jesus' early ministry. Each of three sub-groups takes one event and discusses: *What is unusual about Jesus in this particular healing?*



C. Read the Bible with Feeling!

Some people read the Bible in public as though they were reciting the *U.S. Federal Code for Taxes*. The Bible is very dramatic, far more moving and riveting than any Spielberg movie could ever be.

Practice reading the Bible aloud.

Get into the passage by visualizing the scene as suggested on pages 3-4. Identify with the characters. Give it all the understanding and feeling you can. Vary your tone, your volume, your pace. Practice it aloud several times. Tape your reading, so you can hear yourself, and improve.

Use variety in reading the Bible in a group.

1. **Everyone reading a verse around the circle** is common practice. It is not the best way, for it chops up the meaning, and individuals get nervous about their turn and don't listen. But in newly-formed groups it gets quiet people to participate.
2. **Two or three selected people read**, especially if the passage is long. Ask them before the study begins. Divide the passage according to thought units (paragraphs).
3. **An experienced reader does the entire passage**. This has the advantage of following the text smoothly with meaning. One person can change his voice and tone for different parts. (See second paragraph on reading aloud.)
4. **Several people take parts in stories with dramatic dialogue**. The biblical narratives are full of such dramatic dialogues—e.g., *Genesis 3:1-19*, *Exodus 3:1 - 4:17*, *John 3:1-16*, *John 4:4-26*.

Try it! Luke 7:36-50 describes a shocking social event where Jesus' religious and people values clash resoundingly with his host's values. Throughout the event Jesus is drawing out the faith of two very different individuals.

Before the group study ask three people to practice reading. These should be 1) the narrator (leaving out "he said", "Jesus replied" and such); 2) Jesus; 3) Simon the Pharisee. Instruct the other members to read the part of the guests (v. 49).

Use this for reflection that leads to prayer and praise.

1. David grew up as a shepherd boy tending his father's sheep. Picture him on a clear night relaxing on a grassy hillside, contemplating the sky. He is awed at God's wondrous world (v. 3). *But what is even more awesome to him (vv. 4-8)?*

What do you find most awesome about being a human being?

2. No wonder David began and ended his psalm with outbursts of wondrous praise of his God (vv. 1-2,9). *Now as God's chosen Shepherd of Israel, what has he further learned about praising God (v. 2)?*

Since you began knowing God as your Lord, how has your praise of him matured?

3. Some people don't know how to praise the Lord, apart from singing praise songs with others or simply repeating certain acceptable phrases. *What can help people praise God more heartily and spontaneously?*
4. **Close your session with praise and prayer.** All have their Bibles open to the psalm they have been studying. Read one verse at a time and allow time for people to respond in praise or prayer to that verse. Anyone is free to respond to that verse. That could be praise, confession, request, intercession or recommitment.

Encourage reflection during silences when no one is praying aloud.. Be sensitive when to move on to the next verse, and when to conclude.

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