

# Investigative Bible Discussions

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I was a junior when my staff worker first challenged me to begin a Bible discussion with the non-Christians on my floor. My initial reaction was "What? Do you really think that non-Christians want to study the Bible? Get in touch with the real world!!!" Although I did not say these things out loud, my hesitation was obvious. But, my staff worker eventually persuaded me to try it.

After my first semester leading an IBD, I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that all kinds of people really do want to study the Bible and that God's Word speaks loud and clear to them. In addition to that first IBD, I had an IBD on my floor for the following three semesters as well. Usually it was the most exciting part of my week as I saw my friend's eyes light up when they saw a certain truth from God's word for the first time.

## Why are IBDs effective?

1. The Bible is the most effective resource for communicating the gospel. "You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." - 1 Peter 1:23. God has spoken to all humanity through the scriptures and this is the best way that your friends can get a clear picture of who Jesus is and what it means to follow him.
2. People do not feel as intimidated studying the Bible if it is with friends or other non-Christians. (They do not feel outnumbered or in the minority.)
3. Because you are looking together to God's Word for answers, your friends will not feel "preached at" and much of the pressure for clearly presenting Jesus is taken off of the leader and put right on the Word of God. Your strength as a leader will come from your confidence that GOD WILL WORK in changing people's minds and wills through his word because his word is truth.
4. Perhaps the best reason that IBDs are effective is that they provide a context for talking about spiritual things. The person who would not feel free bringing up questions about God in normal conversations would be more willing once you are already discussing the Bible.

## How do You Start an IBD?

### Tools of the Trade

Here are some of the things that you will need:

1. At least one non-Christian, At least one Christian (But not more than 2),
2. Bibles (the same version) and
3. A study Guide.

Here are the guides that I would recommend:

1. *Introducing Jesus* by Peter Scazzerro (IVP). Scazzerro wrote this whole book on IBDs and evangelism. In the back are 6 good studies on the life of Jesus.
2. *One to One* for those who are only interested in the basics, have a short amount of time and are ready for immediate challenge (12 weeks 15 minutes each).
3. *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* by Mark Ashton. These studies take 30-45 min and focus on the person of Jesus and the message of salvation. They can be used in a 4 to 8 week series. These are free for the taking.
4. Guides published by Neighborhood Bible Study (NBS). These guides are designed for seekers and go through a particular book of the Bible or topic. Mark and John are quite good.

### **Inviting People**

The first steps in inviting people are prayer and your conviction that God is preparing people to come. Keep your eyes peeled for people that God may be preparing - you will probably be surprised at who is interested!

Be sure that people who you invite know that they do not have to understand or believe anything specific in order to come – just believe that the Bible is worth studying. Let them know that you will be discussing who Jesus is, what he said and did, and how that is relevant today. They also need to know that it will not be a lecture where you tell them all that there is to know about the passage, but a discussion where everyone is looking to the text for answers. Everyone will be sharing their own ideas and listening to the views of others and together you will be able to learn from the passage.

It is always best to have a limited amount of time for each discussion (30-45 min is a good amount). Usually you will want to limit the amount of weeks that you are asking people to come to at first (4-6 weeks works best). When you ask people to come, tell them how long and how many weeks it will be. Most people will feel at ease committing to something for only a few weeks and a short amount of time whereas they may shy away from committing for an entire semester.

Be good about ending on time!! Make sure that if you ask for 45 minutes that you take 45 minutes - this shows respect for the time of your friends. At the same time, you should be willing to stay extra time for those who have further questions that may have been brought up by the discussion.

In a similar way, honor the amount of weeks that you said you would have. At the end of the last discussion you may say "I promised you guys that we would be finished after 4 weeks, but I have really enjoyed it! If I kept preparing studies would you like to keep going next week?" If they are interested, GREAT! - keep going as long as they want to. But, do not make them feel obligated beyond their interest.

## **Preparation**

Prayer - The foundation of a good IBD is prayer. It is God who works according to His purposes in our lives and the lives of those who we are reaching out to. Be sure that you have prayed about inviting people, and that God would bring those who are ready to hear the message. Pray for every person that comes. Pray that God will work - he will!

You will want to pray every week before the IBD. If you have a partner in the group who is a Christian, it would be good to pray together. Ask other people who are not in the group to pray for you and the discussion. Pray at prayer meetings on campus and at your church. Pray, pray, pray and I say it again, Pray!

It is generally not a good idea to pray during the discussion. Your friends will feel extremely uncomfortable as they do not know what to do. We want them to feel as at ease as possible they may have some apprehensions coming to the discussion in the first place. There are cases where the group wants to pray or it would be appropriate to pray with an individual. If this is the case, by all means pray with the people! But remember, it is not necessary to pray during the study. Your prayers are as effective before the study as during it.

The Discussion - Good preparation for the discussion is also of utmost importance. Plan to spend 2 times as much time in prep as the discussion will take. In this way you will feel comfortable in the passage and with the questions that you will be asking. Read the passage as if it was your first time - anticipate the reactions of your friends as they read it for the first time. The more time that you spend preparing, the more you will be gripped by God's truth and the more at ease you will feel leading others through it.

You will want to go through the guidelines the first time that you have the discussion (see attached page). Also you will want to explain that you will be looking at various passage in the gospels - 4 books about Jesus' life. Show them where to find them in the Bible and explain how to use chapter and verse references if necessary.

## **Leading the Discussion**

Do not be afraid of silence! Be sure to give the group time to look through the passage - silence usually means that people are thinking or reading the text. Encourage more than one response. After the first response, you may want to say something like "That's helpful, what does somebody else find?" If discussion is slow the first time, don't worry - it will pick up as group members get used to interacting together.

Encourage all members to participate, but be sure not to get too far off on tangents - try to stick to the passage as well as to your commitment to end on time. Don't lecture! -- Let people find answers from the text. If you don't get responses at first, try rewording the questions.

The discussion should not look like a regular small group with all Christians. Your friends are there only to understand who Jesus is and what Christianity is all about from Scripture. Therefore, there is no need to include community, prayer and other activities that are normal in Christian small group.

### **Helping Group Members Commit Themselves to Christ**

It is important to keep up natural contact with group members outside of the discussion. Find out what their other interests are and try to spend time with them doing those things. Eat meals with them, play/watch sports together, go to a movie or any other variety of things. As you talk with them on many different levels about different topics, it will be very natural to discuss spiritual things as well. If they do not become Christians, continue the relationship and continue to pray. God works in His time, which is not always ours.

It is often awkward to ask individuals to make a commitment to Christ during the study (unless your study is with one person). The study will help an individual to understand the truth while personal contact outside of the group will more likely be the means that God uses to bring that person to himself. It is not necessary that you force or manipulate a person into accepting Christ, but you need to be alert to what God is doing and help your friends take the next step closer to Him. Help her along as long as she is interested, but don't push when her interest wanes.

While spending casual time with your friend, you may ask what was most striking to her in the discussion or if it brought up any new ideas in her mind. If the conversation leads in that direction, you may ask your friend "Is there anything that is keeping you from committing your life to Jesus?" or "Would you like to become a Christian and be sure of it?" If she is ready, walk her through a basic outline of the gospel so that she is sure of what she is committing to. After she has become a Christian, encourage her to become a part of the Christian family in the campus fellowship and church, and help her in her new walk with God.

### **Miscellaneous, but Important**

- The Holy Spirit works through clear channels. Your walk with God is of utmost importance. God uses people who walk with him. A consistent life of devotion and obedience to God will make all of the difference in the discussion, and as you trust God with the study, your relationship with him will be enhanced.
- No more than 2 Christians in a study! Non-Christians can easily feel swamped by too many people who "know the answers".
- Approach the Bible as a textbook, let the material speak for itself.
- You may want to have popcorn, snacks or drinks for the group as this promotes a comfortable atmosphere.