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## Getting into the Word

*The basics of Bible study and discussion in small groups.*  
by Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey

If community is the glue of your group, worship is the heart, and evangelism the fruitful mission, then the foundation of the group is your weekly time spent together in the Word of God.

Do not underestimate the power of the Word of God. Among other things, the Bible is the best-selling, most read, most studied, and most memorized book in the world. It is also the most published book in the world—currently available in 1,500 languages—and the world's most quoted, cussed, and discussed book. History reveals that it is the most influential book ever written.

The Bible has inspired more songs, poems, and other books than any other written work. Archeology shows that it is the most reliable ancient text known to man. Fulfilled prophecy makes it the most unique book on the planet. Careful reading shows it to be the most honest, accurate, and interesting religious book ever penned. Because it is God's Word, the Bible is by far the most important book imaginable.

The point of the Bible and the reward for reading it is more than just to know interesting facts about what one finds within it. It is to know God and his plan for our lives. It was written so that you and I can become transformed—changed into his image. It is also here to help us become better equipped to make a difference in the world.

### Bible Study Basics

When studying a passage of the Bible, there are three basic questions your group must always address:

1. **What does this passage say?** This is the act of Observation. Read the passage through, asking: What does this passage seem to be saying? What is the author saying? Who wrote this passage? Who was he writing to? Why was he writing?
2. **What does this passage mean?** This is the act of Interpretation. Take each passage in chunks of phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. As you look at it, answer the question: What did the author intend for this to mean? Try to paraphrase the answer into your own words.
3. **How can we apply this passage to our lives?** This is the act of Application. Interpretation without application leads to spiritual abortion, but interpretation with application leads to transformation. Try to make sure that every member of the group can finish this sentence: "Based on what this says, I should\_\_\_\_\_." People's responses may include a sin to confess, a promise to claim, an example to follow, an encouragement to accept, or a command to keep.

## Bible Discussion Basics

Good leaders always help the members of their group discover biblical truths by themselves. Good leaders do this by facilitating a discussion rather than preaching a sermon.

There are four major types of questions to aid this process:

1. **Introducing the discussion.** Learn to ask questions that lead into the Scripture or topic of study and "break the ice" between members. For example, during a discussion on the Ten Commandments, you could ask:
  - Who laid down the law in your family?
  - Why do parents make rules?
  - Which rule did you like the least?
  - Which family member tried to get around the rules? How?
  - What were the consequences of breaking the rules?
2. **Guiding the discussion.** The point of these questions is to dig deeper into the passage. Some examples would be:
  - What did you feel as you read these words?
  - Why do you think God put this passage in the Bible?
  - Who will paraphrase this passage in their own words?
  - Who else would like to comment on that?

During this time, you may need to help the group get back on track. If your group starts chasing rabbits, say something like, "That's very interesting, but we're off topic. Let's get back to the passage."

3. **Summarizing the discussion.** One of the most important roles of a group leader is summarizing the discussion so that the group will be able to apply it at a later date. You may ask the group questions like, "We have been having a very good discussion. Who will try to summarize the main things we are learning (or we have said) in just one or two sentences?" Another way to help the group summarize is to ask, "If a stranger rang the door bell and asked you what our group discussed tonight, what would you say?" Then keep the discussion going by asking, "Who else? Would you say anything different or in addition to what he (or she) said?"
4. **Applying the discussion.** Application questions can be the most powerful part of your discussion. Help each member of the group verbalize how they will apply the Bible passage to their lives. Ask such questions as:
  - What one thing that was discussed tonight do you want to remember all week?
  - Specifically, how will your life be different this week because we studied this passage tonight?

- What do you hope to do differently or more of based on what we talked about tonight?
- In light of what we've learned tonight, does anyone here have anything they'd like to confess?

Build your group on a firm foundation of the Word of God. Study it, discuss it, and most importantly, apply the Word to your lives!

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