

Investigative Bible Study

Ruth Siemens

Hassam, a young man from Egypt, just called to remind me that it is four years since he found Jesus Christ in a Bible study in my house! Tomorrow he will be baptized. Vasti, Ph.D. candidate from Brazil, recently reminded me of my first visit to her campus and the Bible study that brought her to the Lord. She then won her whole family! I have seen more people find God in evangelistic Bible studies than any other way.

It is better to use the term Investigative Bible Study (IBS), because you can use it in the hearing of non-believers, who would be offended or put on guard by the word "evangelistic."

What is an IBS?

This remarkable tool is a group discussion, where two or three believers lead a majority of non-believers in the study of a Bible passage, usually from the gospels, so they can patiently learn about Jesus Christ and invite him to be their Lord.

Will non-believers come? Today's young people have grown up in a post-modern culture, and have become skeptical of the scientific truth approach of modernism. But they are open to religion, if it is not Christianity, which they think has been tried and has failed. (Look at the mess in the Western world of Christendom!) But they are intrigued by non-Christian religions and cults—New Age ideas.

The fact that many have never read a Bible makes them curious. Some welcome a chance to study it in a group, because it is rumored that you can't just read it and hope to understand it.

Many other non-believers had some experience in a Protestant or Catholic church when they were children. We find that many people will come to a Bible study if it is a genuine IBS. We can invite them to our Bible studies for Christians, but most do not return because they are not comfortable as the only outsiders present. But many IBS groups on campuses, in workplaces and homes, show that seekers who will not attend church or other Christian meetings, are eager for Bible studies, led by Christian peers, for groups of mainly outsiders, in non-threatening, non-religious settings.

But the four evangelical students I met at the University of Coimbra in Portugal did not think so. (At that time the city of Coimbra probably did not have a total of 100 evangelicals.) I had come to help these four students start a campus fellowship. They told me that Bible studies would not work in Portugal—no one would be interested. Finally, I asked if we could experiment just three times. If it did not work, I would desist. They asked where we should meet. I asked, "What is the busiest place on the campus?"

So we sat in the cafeteria lounge of the medical school of this prestigious old university—four believers and two friends—all of us frightened. I led the study. As people passed our little circle, some turned back to ask what we were doing. Some pulled up chairs and sat down. A girl, seated with her back to us, kept scooting her chair closer so she could hear. Before I finished that short passage, we had one circle of students sitting around us and another circle standing around them!

I announced we would study a similar passage the next day—same place and time. You should have heard the protests! One said, "Tomorrow I am only free at 10." Another wanted 4 PM. Someone said, "Do it at noon." We scheduled more than a dozen studies for those three days! We analyzed a different passage each hour because some students came every time—they even cut class!

In the third study, two girls argued that Jesus could not be God. Then engineering student Carlos Jose surprised us by saying, "It's true! I found out last night. I wanted to talk to God so much, and suddenly I knew he was in my room with me! Then I didn't know what to say." We were awed and convinced he had met God!

Then everyone ran off to class—except for Jorge, also in engineering. He said nothing. So I asked, "Jorge, have you ever invited Jesus Christ into your life?" He said, "No, but I would so like to do it!" So we prayed together. He and Carlos Jose became roommates. The skeptical girls and others found God in succeeding days.

Usually, our evangelistic conversations lead naturally into IBS's, as we answer seekers' questions. (See GO's Workplace Evangelism: How to Fish out Seekers.) In Brazil we also posted small ads on campus bulletin boards. In Spain, where we dared not do that, we gave out papers with a Bible passage, half a dozen questions, and phone numbers of group members for information on times and places of studies. But friendships and personal invitations are the best way to get people to attend.

What is the value of the IBS?

The IBS is useful even for strangers we meet in travel, but is ideal for co-workers, clients, fellow students, neighbors, acquaintances from affinity groups—people with whom we have sustained contact. The IBS is an essential tool for tentmakers—who support themselves abroad, making Jesus Christ known, on the job and in free time—like the Apostle Paul. The IBS is essential for local believers in hostile countries.

The IBS is a building block for pioneer student work and church planting. As seekers find God, the IBS becomes a DBS, a discipleship Bible study—for mutual instruction and encouragement. The campus DBS is the core of a new student group. A home IBS grows into a small house church. Churches and campus fellowships can be revitalized by giving members IBS-DBS training.

An IBS is an easy way to evangelize. Although not everyone can preach, almost everyone can learn to lead studies—even new believers. If the following guidelines are observed, a leader does not need to be a veteran church member or have formal Bible training.

An IBS-DBS program is designed for multiplication—for cell division. If a group has two experienced leaders, each can choose an untrained partner and start new IBS's. Seekers who find God in an IBS become familiar with the ideal tool for the immediate evangelization of their family and friends!

Some start doing this before making a profession of faith, like Marisa, in Spain, who took a set of leader's questions so she could guide her father through a passage we had just examined. Seekers Juan and Teresa took, questions to share the passage with another couple.

Both the DBS and IBS consist mainly of inductive Bible study, not theological discussion, apologetics or the sharing of experiences. Both consist of question-oriented discussions—not talks or sermons, because people usually do not accept their peers as religious authorities. Participants examine the text for themselves. (Sermons are effective in the church because the congregation respects the pastor's spiritual authority and greater theological knowledge.)

An IBS discussion is excellent communication, because participants are not passive listeners. (When people only listen they forget about 90% of what they hear.) Group members are fully absorbed in analyzing the text and sharing their findings. A leader skillfully guides them with questions. A truth they discover in the text makes more impact on them than a truth we present to them. The IBS enables God to speak to seekers directly through the pages of his Word.

Consider the following IBS characteristics in more detail.

1. The composition of the group

An IBS may have from 5 to 13 people, but not more than half should be believers. Preferably there should be only two believers for every six to ten who do not yet know God.

So a study group for believers does not become an IBS because a couple of non-believers attend. They may find God, but when seekers are outnumbered, many fail to return. Or they become defensive, or then, afraid to speak. A decision may owe more to the pressure of the majority or a particular friendship than to spiritual conviction. The majority must be seekers.

2. Two frequent questions

a) How can you keep the majority non-believers from agreeing on a wrong interpretation? Ground rules are set. At the beginning of every session, the leader says, "Are we agreed that although it is interesting to exchange religious opinions, our purpose today is to see what we can discover about Jesus Christ in this passage?"

Then, if Jim gives a wild answer, the leader can say, "That's a fascinating comment, in which verse did you find it?" It gives him an easy way to back down and the discussion proceeds. (But you may want to chat with Jim afterward, since his comment reveals what is going on in his mind and heart.)

b) What if the participants do not believe the Bible is true? Few seekers will believe the Bible is infallible or God's absolute truth. Today's post-modernists do not believe there is absolute truth. Should you try to convince them? Usually, not at this time. They need only believe that this primary source document of the Christian faith is sufficiently trustworthy to merit investigation. They don't have to believe it—just see what it says.

The Bible has the "ring of truth" (J.B. Phillips). It is self-validating. The Hebrew word for truth means reality—that which actually is, the world the way God made it. Non-believers cannot live by their agnostic world views because they keep bumping up against God's reality. Even as they argue against Bible truth, their conscience says, "You know it's true." You can count on God's Spirit! God's Word not only informs but is powerful to convict and to give life and to transform!

As someone pointed out, "What is the best way to defend a lion? Just let him out of his cage!"

3. IBS advantages for seekers

a) Seekers do not feel threatened by a believing majority, so they are more comfortable and discussion is more spontaneous. When most participants are novices, they lose their fear of giving foolish answers. They say what they think. They are less likely to become defensive. You do not want people to do much arguing because it will be harder for them to admit they were wrong.

b) The Bible study will be more genuine—not artificial as it often is when the majority know God and are subtly phrasing all their answers for the benefit of the outsiders. The visitors soon detect they are everyone's targets!

c) The study can be less complicated. Theological controversies are not raised unless the participants ask, because they confuse. But study of the text must be thorough, not shallow. English majors may be skilled at literary analysis, so we must do thorough analysis of our passage or lose credibility. Some may be history majors.

Bill Moyers led a TV series of Old Testament studies with participants who were writers mainly from different religions. They did superb literary analysis, but completely missed what God was saying through the passages. Do good study, but don't split theological hairs.

d) Everyday language is used, avoiding evangelical jargon, and unnecessary theological terminology. Exception: Terms like justification or salvation, which are rich with content and have no exact equivalent in everyday speech should be explained and used.

e) Seekers can patiently learn the core truths of the gospel in a non-threatening atmosphere. Maria told her sister, "At first it may seem confusing then everything begins to make sense."

f) It is easier to make a commitment to Jesus Christ in a group where others are doing it too.

g) New believers can immediately evangelize others, using the same passages and questions that won them!

h) For tentmakers it is important that the IBS/DBS provides the ideal matrix for a new house church that should develop.

4. IBS advantages for believers

a) The IBS is better use of your human resources, time and effort. Rather than bring two non-believers into a group of twenty members, divide the twenty into ten teams of two, each leading a study with six seekers. They are evangelizing sixty seekers!

b) No pastor or campus staff worker need be present, since even a new believer can lead a study, if ground rules are followed, and if prepared study guides are used.

c) Believers learn effective personal evangelism as they listen to seekers' comments in the study. They are often surprised at what they hear! The Christians meet the seekers during the week and continue discussing points that arose in the group. Several Christians asked me to teach them how to evangelize—that is, techniques—not realizing they were already doing effective, natural evangelism, in these conversations between scheduled studies.

d) Study leaders quickly develop spiritual leadership and responsibility. This is superb training. Reproduction is a mark of maturity, and spiritual parenting brings rapid growth. Pair a mature leader with a new believer. It is good training for a lifetime of ministry, at home or abroad—training that is difficult to acquire any other way.

e) The fellowship's larger group activities are more fruitful. Rather than struggle to bring a handful of miscellaneous outsiders to a larger evangelistic meeting, each IBS leader easily brings 6 to 8 already half-evangelized seekers. Expect good response to a gospel appeal from such select group.

f) The IBS is effective for commuter type, non-residential campuses, These usually have few social organizations. It is effective also for the workplace and the neighborhood.

g) The IBS is ideal where larger group meetings are inconvenient or not allowed. A small study group can meet almost anywhere.

h) The IBS is essential in spiritually hostile countries. Many restrict all open religious activity of Christians. But if small groups can sit together anywhere to study math, or talk about soccer, they can talk about Jesus Christ. Instead of large Bibles, use pocket Testaments, small Gospels, or even just a page with the typed text and a few questions..

i) Special care can be given to the seekers, because co-leaders have responsibility for only a few. The personal interest is crucial in winning people. Jesus met seekers' families, and took them to meet his, even before his own brothers believed in him—helpful to seekers whose conversion would alienate their families.

The IBS is a patient, realistic kind of friendship evangelism, backed up by personal concern for each individual's needs. Seekers see the difference Jesus makes in the lives of their Christian friends, as they study, or work or relax or play together.

They receive Jesus Christ and continue to be disciplined by the leaders, even as they begin their own IBS's, and disciple their converts to the level they have been taught. When several find the Lord in a small social group (like the local bank, freshman biology, or the English-as-foreign-language class), the impact is big. A chain reaction of conversions may occur.

5. The IBS objective

The ultimate objective of the IBS is to enable non-believing friends to receive Jesus Christ as Lord.

But the immediate objective is to enable them to make any positive response to Jesus Christ. It is a good IBS if a participant: realizes that he or she is not a real Christian, or that sincerity is not enough, that indifference to God is rejection of him, or that Jesus really is God, is alive and sees and hears.

In Brazil, Guaracy said, "Now I know why I have never found God. It was never my priority." Edgar came early to our study in Lima, Peru. He said, "I hope you don't mind that I cheated. I just had to peek at the next chapter!"

Rejoice over your group participants' intermediate steps toward God. Let their partial response encourage and inform your intercession for them.

6. The IBS content

Mainly gospel passages are studied, to see who Jesus really was, and to watch him in action. Observation of Jesus is the shortcut in all evangelism. He is the way to the Father—Jn. 14:6. (To prove the existence of our Creator God, don't begin with Genesis, but with Jesus.) The gospels are the evangelistic literature of the Bible. John 20:30, 31, Luke 1:1-4.

It is significant that the gospels are not a modern biography of Jesus, but a series of moving pictures that show him in action, so seekers can interact with him vicariously through the characters in the narratives—like rich Zacchaeus, the woman at the well, Nicodemus, the Syro-Phoenician woman, blind Bartimaeus, the widow of Nain, etc. (Today, as in ancient times, story-telling is the traditional method of communication in non-Western cultures, rather than linear, logical arguments.) Lead the studies in such a way as to feel the suspense and emotions in the original encounters.

Let seekers discover who Jesus was, in the same way that he guided his disciples in John 1. If Jesus had said, "Now I want you men to know that I am God," these fanatically monotheistic men would have charged him with blasphemy and left. When John and Andrew first asked him who he was, Jesus said, "Come and see." John 1:39, 46. As they accompanied him and observed his humanity, his deity stood out in sharp contrast. When he calmed the storm at sea they exclaimed, "What kind of a man is this?" They knew Psalm 65:5-7 says that only God can calm a stormy sea!

They had quickly become convinced that Jesus was Messiah, but it took longer to be convinced that Messiah was God. Jesus gives them time, until near the end of his ministry when he asks, "Who do you say that I am?" Only Peter has courage to say the awesome words out loud, "We have become convinced that you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!" Matt. 16:13ff. (The God who intervenes in history. This was not just a repetition of "Son of God"—the messianic title and synonym for "King of Israel," which Nathanael used in John 1:49.) You probably could have heard a pin drop, until Jesus confirmed Peter's confession.

Lead seekers to make the same discovery by causing the narratives to live for them. To explain away Jesus' humanity is to rob the incarnation of its meaning. Do not say Jesus took no risk when he touched the leper, because he was God. Or that he always knew people's thoughts. The gospels make clear that only sometimes he used his prophetic insight and power. Jesus became one of us, and accepted our limitations, but without sin. The gospels show him thirsty, hungry, sleepy, tired, hurt, and in need of prayer. We can identify with him only because he became man.

As seekers observe Jesus in action, he draws them to himself through the gospel narratives, exactly as he did in the first century when physically present. Imagine Jesus' gentle voice and the compassion in his eyes as he speaks harsh words to the Syro-Phoenician mother in Mt. 15. The harsh words were meant for his disciples, not for her. I have seen seekers already loving this man Jesus, even before they know that he is God or that he died for them.

Plan short units of study—not 28 chapters of Matthew, but series of three to eight narratives. Then see if individuals are ready to receive Jesus Christ.

However, there is great advantage in choosing consecutive narratives, as they appear in a gospel. Each story builds upon concepts from previous ones, so introductions can be shorter and explanations fewer.

Select only the most appropriate narratives, and summarize the material between them in the introductions.

Some O.T. passages make good IBS's, like Psa. 1 and 23. For Jewish Vera, I began with Psalm 139. Some N.T. are helpful when people are ready for commitment, like 1 Peter 2:18-25, Rev. 3:20, 21. The gospels tell how Jesus lived and died; the letters explain why. Mainly we need to break seekers' wrong stereotypes of him.

It is helpful to use prepared Bible study guides, but few are evangelistic—with content suitable for seekers. Not all are inductive, because the questions only test people's ability to read, which is boring, and does not lead to discussion. Inductive questions help members discover, understand and correlate the facts in a text, and apply them to their individual situations.

Start with *Jesus the Disciple Maker*, by Ada Lum—8 studies from John. See other suggestions in the bibliography.

But leaders need to learn how to prepare their own Bible study guides, in order to lead the passages most suitable for their friends, especially, if these are of Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist background. (Request G.O.'s paper *Inductive Bible Study Preparation*.)

7. The time and place

The IBS could be in your home or the seeker's home. But ideally you should meet in a religiously neutral location in or near your place of work or study. It should not be in a church. As to time, it should be during an interval you and the seekers share—coffee break, lunch hour, etc., so it takes the minimum time and effort. But interested seekers will even come to work or campus early or remain later, to study.

You may be able to use an empty office or classroom, a coffee shop, or nearby home. In good weather, many groups meet outdoors. Some American students led studies in their cars. Engineering students in Brazil met on the roof of a campus building. I spoke to a group of aeronautical engineers who brought sack lunches to their factory once a week. Even Pizza Hut employees found a time and place to meet.

Time and place are rarely an unsolvable problem, but reflect the fear of believers. But in Brazil, Walter and Tietje, the only believers in their chemistry classes, were bussed to their new campus building just in time for the first class, and brought home after the last one, with no free time in-between. There was no other transportation. We prayed for them at our Saturday meeting. That week the administration rearranged the whole schedule, leaving a two-hour block of free time! We knew they had to do it because we prayed!

It is advantageous to find a quiet place without too many distractions, unless you wish to attract new seekers. Then find exposure in a crowded place.

A home has more warmth and it is easier to serve light refreshments. But don't let refreshments become burdensome. Take turns bringing cookies. At lunch meetings in Cambridge, students served themselves to bread, cheese and apples, and put coins in a dish.

8. Hosting an IBS

a) New participants should be made welcome and comfortable. See that all are introduced, and initial conversation helps everyone relax. (We did not object that some seekers smoked. They were nervous, and we were not at church. Today people are more sensitive to the practice, so do what your group wants.)

b) All should use the same New Testament to avoid the confusion of varying translations. You can indicate passages by page number. A paragraphed, modern language N.T. is ideal, like the RSV or NIV in English—even Good News for Modern Man (simplified English). If you are working with internationals, bilingual Testaments are popular if you can find them in modern translation. English is on one side and another language on the opposite page. Paraphrases like Phillips N.T. or the Living Bible, are good for reading, but are too freely translated for study.

c) The atmosphere should be relaxed and reverent, but not Church-like. It should be loving and accepting. A drunk medical student walked into our Bible study group, noisily, and fell onto the sofa. She was so disruptive, that I summarized the rest of the passage and served refreshments. But Joao Olavo, angry at her, was convicted by our gentle dealing with this needy young woman, and received Jesus Christ that evening.

d) If believers feel spiritually superior, seekers will sense it. Believers are forgiven, but sinners still. They should be honest about struggles and failures. A desperate couple went to church for help, but left, disillusioned, saying, "Those happy smiling people could never understand our problems." Honesty about our struggles helps seekers share theirs.

e) Light refreshments add warmth to the meeting. Even more important, if served at the end of the study, they keep participants around long enough for socialization and for individual chats about points in the study.

9. IBS discussion guidelines

You lead an IBS in much the same way as a DBS, but with significant differences.

a) You need not begin a new group with prayer. Paul did not pray aloud at the Areopagus. Your discussion could be about football—but happens to be about Jesus. It might be appropriate to say, "Since we are studying God's Book, let's ask for his help." Or you could pray at the end. Ask, "Why don't we talk to God about what we have seen today?"

b) Leaders should guide with reverent enthusiasm. The gospel is so fantastic, it demands excitement, or seekers will never believe we believe it.

c) The leader sets the ground rules. "Are we agreed that our purpose is to see what this passage shows us about Jesus Christ?" If anyone gives a wild answer the leader can ask "In which verse did you find that?"

d) The leader gives an introduction—not on the lesson of the passage, but on its historical-geographical background. Do not spoil the element of surprise, of discovery, by announcing the lesson in advance! (Too often study guides make this mistake.)

Also, God may intend different lessons for different people. Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones told us he did expository preaching of consecutive passages because there would always be something for everyone. Inductive study shares this "cafeteria" advantage. I do not like introductions that predispose seekers to expect a certain lesson so they fail to see others. Application is important. But the most important outcome of Bible study, is gaining a new perspective on the Lord that leads us to worship, and to a deeper relationship with him.

Let the introduction provide historical-cultural background and build suspense for the narrative. Imagine yourself in the story and feel it.

e) Have participants read the passage aloud, by paragraphs, not by verses. Verses interrupt the thought.

f) A well-prepared Christian leads the discussion firmly, but sensitively, with flexible use of written questions. But if someone refers to a point that comes later in the passage, comment on it briefly, and resume your planned, more logical order. When you come to the out-of-order question, say, "Now as we already noted. . .," and then proceed.

g) Leaders ask the main questions, using supplementary ones only to help the group dig more deeply. If answers are superficial, add questions. Don't be nervous over silent moments—people need time to think.

h) If they answer by reading a verse, ask them to restate the answer in their own words. Mere reading can be dull, and you must see if they understood.

i) Pace the study well—not too fast or slow. Plan to reach the midpoint before mid-time, so there will be enough minutes to summarize the story and discuss the applications at the end.

j) Encourage the timid to speak, asking them to read a verse or answer a simple question. But not an embarrassing, simplistic one. Once the ice is broken, they often speak again.

k) Tactfully restrain the too talkative participant. Refer questions to others by name. Ask the repeat offender to help you involve the less talkative.

- l) Get the participants to ask questions, then refer these back to the group. The leader does not throw the ball to each person in turn and receive it back. Rather, anyone may catch his ball and throw it to anyone else. Let group members interact. When the ball drops, the leader summarizes the discussion and throws out a new question.
- m) Define terms and give sufficient historical and cultural information to clarify points in the passage. The leaders provide this data. Less is needed if consecutive passages are studied.
- n) Keep the discussion within the limits of the passage, and summarize frequently. If an extraneous subject comes up, jot it down, for a private conversation. If everyone is interested, suggest a future study of a relevant passage on that subject.
- o) Avoid unnecessary references to other parts of the Bible since participants will have trouble following. This point is often misunderstood. Christians who do not know inductive study, often substitute cross-references, ranging from Genesis to Revelation, instead of determining what the basic text means. This misses the point of the study. It also discourages participants from reading the Bible on their own, because they think you have to be an expert on the whole Bible to understand any part of it.

But to rule out all cross-references is to impoverish the study. The leader should use relevant references from the immediate context, from chapters the group has already studied, and from anywhere in the Bible—if they quickly resolve problems in the text or enrich a lesson. Don't make excessive use of them. But it is good to show how we let the Bible interpret itself. This is especially important for Catholics who charge Protestants with interpreting the Bible as they please.

- p) Listen carefully to what seekers say and the intent behind their words. (I list names of seekers on a little paper, and jot down a word or two to remind me of their significant comments so that I can follow up in personal conversations.) Watch body language. At what point does a bored seeker lean forward and give total attention?
- q) Do not correct all wrong answers immediately. Never say an answer is wrong. Because seekers rarely know much about the Bible, they fear looking foolish. Say "That's interesting. What do some of the rest of you think?" Receive several right and wrong answers without comment. Then ask the group if any verse in the text clarifies the point. It is not humiliating when several people are wrong.
- r) Do not attack the faith of participants, but do not soften the text if it contradicts their beliefs. Allow it to make its full impact.
- s) Do not raise theological problems, but be prepared to answer those that seekers raise. Don't split hairs. But make sure the study is substantial. You must dig under the surface of the text for a credible study, interesting study. The seekers are not children.
- t) If there is controversy, first seek a solution in the text and context, or refer to some other part of the Bible. If it is a history-long theological issue, summarize both positions, and proceed. For example, whether Jesus had brothers, or just cousins—as Catholics insist. If a subject like predestination is of interest to everyone, suggest a special meeting with a speaker.
- u) The leader must finish the passage at the set time. Or some may be reluctant to come next time. So if the study has lagged behind, summarize the whole story, then its main lessons.

The main lessons cannot be fully appreciated until the whole story has been understood and felt. In a time crunch, it is better to finish the whole story first, and let seekers make their own applications, than to have spent time discussing lesser applications and never finish the story and main lesson.

v) The leader should be prepared to continue the discussion with those who can stay. Our Saturday Bible studies in Curitiba, Brazil, with medical students, were to last an hour, but would often go two or three hours after the closing. When the group had become much too large, we had people sign up for one of three different time slots. But almost everyone then came three times a week! We couldn't keep enough Testaments on hand. Even faculty in the medical school carried them around.

10. The crucial step to God

When is a seeker ready to receive Jesus Christ? If you reap too soon or wait too long you spoil the harvest. When a seeker has understood the facts about Jesus, expect response. Eventually, the seeker should understand most of this 3-point checklist:

1) God created everything—by whatever means. (Do not get drawn into a discussion of evolution.) God is love, but he is also holy (like fire). His love keeps us away from him so we won't be destroyed by his holiness, until we allow him to change us, by putting his Spirit into us. 2) People are guilty before God, spiritually dead and doomed. 3) Jesus is God and man. He lived a perfect life and then voluntarily gave his life as our substitute to pay our sins and give us life. Jesus arose bodily from the grave, and lives today.

Commitment involves 3 essential steps: 1) Believe the facts of the gospel. 2) Repent—accept God's verdict that they are guilty and dead. 3) Invite Jesus Christ to come into their lives through his Spirit, to be their Lord and King. His Spirit in them assures them of eternal life. The test of commitment is loving obedience to God's Word.

The seekers' comments in the study tell you when they have found God—a new light in their eyes, a new joy, a new thirst for his Word. Make sure their faith is based specific promises.

If you think a seeker is ready, ask the crucial question: "At this stage, what do you think is the most important reason Jesus died?" (Leave room for several answers.) If they say he died for their sins, ask if they have thanked him and invited him in. If they say "yes," ask for details. Pray together, and start their follow-up program about assurance, life in Christ, forgiveness, prayer, Bible reading, obedience, witnessing and Christian fellowship.

If they don't know how to invite him, explain a Bible passage like Rev. 3:20, 21. Don't pray a prayer for them to repeat. But talk with them about what they might like to tell God. Then let them find their own words—God will understand. Focus on Jesus' promise.

If they say Jesus died to give us the supreme example of love, use 1 Peter 2:18-25, which agrees with them. But show that we cannot succeed in following his example, so Peter goes on to say Jesus died on the cross in our place. Then suggest a prayer of invitation.

If a seeker drops out, he has probably just understood the cost of discipleship. Inner struggle begins. Go after him. Show unconditional love. Pray.

11. The preparation of leaders

Many study guides are available—see bibliography. But leaders should be trained in inductive Bible study so that they can also prepare their own. It pleased God to give us his revelation as literature. It is more than literature, but not less. So we must observe the writer's literary devices. The form is as important as the content; how something is said is as important for meaning as what is said.

Ancient literature requires these 4 steps: 1) Observe what the passage says. 2) Interpret—discover what it meant for the writer and the first recipients in their milieu, and correlate the data. 3) Apply—determine how it applies to us today. 4) Organize this data for sharing, as a question-based discussion guide, a sermon, an article, a play, a poem, a song, etc. (See GO Paper Inductive Bible Study: How to Prepare a Passage, with worksheets and a sample study.)

In an inductive study—you examine details, and let them lead you to conclusions. (A deductive method begins with conclusions and seeks proofs.)

A study guide consists of questions and notes to assist leaders to help participants to discover inductively and quickly what it took someone much longer to dig out.

Leaders will need to prepare study guides because not enough evangelistic guides exist, although excellent guides for believers exist on every Bible book and on many subjects. (See IVP's Life-guide series, and the Neighborhood Bible Study series. Quite a few of these studies and others are available in foreign languages.)

Even when using a Bible study guide, leaders should prepare the passage first, as though they have no guide. They should have the joy of making their own personal discoveries. Then they can look at the guide to see what they missed or misunderstood, and add their own findings. Then they can change the discussion questions, but they should do it with care. One of the hardest tasks in preparing a guide is designing good questions that will help participants dig under the surface and make their own discoveries—and questions that lead to good discussion.

When you are training new leaders it can help to have a small form with discussion leadership guidelines which the trainee can use for self-evaluation. If other Christian participants also fill it out it can help the trainee improve leadership skills. Trainees can serve as co-leaders, helping the leader pace the study and involve participants, and by praying. Then they take their turn for leading and evaluation.

I sometimes brought all the leaders together once a week to study the passage and to pray for their respective groups. (See attached sample study.)

I hope you will discover what an exciting and fruitful evangelistic tool an Investigative Bible Study is!

--Ruth E. Siemens

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Ada Lum and Ruth Siemens, *Creative Bible Studies*, on how to prepare passages inductively and how to lead studies for believers and seekers. English edition, Bombay, India, Jyoti Pocketbooks. Spanish edition, El Estudio Biblico Creativo, Buenos Aires, Argentina, Ediciones Certeza. English and other languages, International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, 55 Palmerston Road, Harrow, Middlesex, HA3 7RR, England, UK.

James F. Nyquist, *Leading Bible Study Discussions*, Downers Grove, IL, IVP. Excellent guidelines.

Peter Scazzero, *Introducing Jesus. All you need to know for starting an IBS, with six lesson guides and leader's notes.* Downers Grove: IVP. The author found God in an IBS and pastors an exciting, self-reproducing, inner city church with IBS's.

Lifeguide Series on the whole Bible and many subjects. IVP.

(IVP, IFES and NBS have studies translated into many languages.)

IBS Sample Leader's Guide:

Luke 19:1-10. A Tax Collector Meets Jesus

Note: This IBS sample leader's guide presents:

1) The main questions in bold. 2) Supplementary questions which follow are used only when the group needs help to dig for fuller answers. Some questions need only one word answers. 3) Explanations are in parentheses. If this narrative were studied as part of a series in Luke, the introduction could be short and explanatory notes few. It could build on previous concepts.

Introduction: Trees, flowers and birds announced springtime, and pilgrims were walking to Jerusalem for the annual Passover. Picnics, singing and festivities began enroute. But this year the air was highly politicized, with rumors of revolution. First century Palestine was part of the Roman province of Syria, but it was so rebellious, that Emperor Tiberius sent his own man, Pilate, to be Procurator, and report directly to him. Jewish separatist groups committed terrorist acts. Additional Roman soldiers were sent to Jerusalem at Passover, as it filled with visitors from the countryside and from all over the Empire.

Every able-bodied Jewish man within reasonable traveling distance was required to attend. Jesus makes his way slowly through the region of Perea, teaching, on his way to Jerusalem. In this third year of his ministry, the common people have become convinced that he is God's long promised Messiah who would one day use his miraculous powers to liberate them from imperialist Rome. Some day he would set up "the kingdom of God," with a great inauguration banquet in Jerusalem. Gentiles would be ousted, along with many unworthy Jews. All good Jews would be well-off. The kingdom would also somehow usher in the end of history and a new age. Now in this pilgrimage, the crowds around Jesus have grown large. Lk.12:1 says "So many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they trod upon one another!"

Why are the crowds so excited? Where was Jericho? (On the Jordan River, about 17 miles from Jerusalem—one long day's uphill climb.) What does the crowd expect on arrival? Lk.19:11 says that rumors have spread that this is the year Jesus will inaugurate the kingdom, on arrival in the city! What did Jesus do at the entrance of Jericho that would further encourage their expectations? Lk. 18:35-43. (He had healed the blind beggar, Bartimaeus!) Contrast Jesus' mood—what does he expect in Jerusalem? Lk. 18:31-34. (Arrest and crucifixion.)

Have two people read the passage aloud in two parts, to see what happens in the streets of Jericho (Lk.19:1-7), then what happens inside a house (Lk. 19:8-10).

Luke 19:1-7. In the streets.

Find all the facts that you can about the main character of this story before he meets Jesus. What is his name? his nationality? his economic status? What can we assume about his clothing and his home? What is his occupation? Who are his employers? his employees? his clients? What is his social status? his reputation? What about his physical appearance? What personality problems do you suppose he had? (Tax contractors and their employees collected for imperialist Rome. Whoever promised the most revenue to Rome was hired, and could collect for himself, too. Tax contractors were hated, classed with prostitutes and bar owners, and shunned as traitors to the nation.)

What shows how desperately Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus—and why? Think of all the things he probably tried to do before the humiliating climb into the tree. (A sycamore-fig tree in spring would be full of leaves.) Why must Zacchaeus see Jesus—who does he think this itinerant rabbi is? What had he heard about Jesus on the tax grapevine? (Lk. 5:27-32—Jesus, God's promised King, called a tax collector—Matthew Levi—to join his team! Levi gave a banquet to introduce his colleagues to Jesus. Lk. 7:34—Jewish leaders despised Jesus for befriending these outcasts, but Jesus called them his "lost sheep." Lk. 15:1ff.)

Try to visualize what happens in 19:5-7. A rabbi always walked ahead of his followers. The crowd would respect God's king. When Jesus stops walking, what does the crowd do? When Jesus looks up into the tree, what does the crowd do? What mixed feelings would Zacchaeus have over his predicament? (Fear, humiliation?) Over Jesus' words in v. 6? (Joy, awe, pride, jubilation, worry if his house was ready?)

How far does the crowd follow Jesus? Why are they offended? What political and religious risks does Jesus take? (Religious leaders would object that the house was as ceremonially unclean as a Gentile's! Nationalist zealots charged him with siding with the enemy!) Why does Jesus disillusion his avid fans? (They follow for wrong reasons—a king of their own imaginations. The kingdom Jesus began would be spiritual and worldwide, and not publicly inaugurated till the end of history. John 18:36, Rev. 11:15.)

Luke 19:8-10. In the house.

It was customary for servants to wash the dusty feet of weary travelers. Imagine the instructions Zacchaeus gives his servants about Jesus' sleeping quarters and the banquet to be served! In vv. 8-10 they are all together.

Why is it significant that Zacchaeus stands up to speak? What does it suggest about the others in the room—Jesus and his disciples? (They sit. If eating, they recline on couches extending outward from the table.) What does the host's standing up show about his speech? (It is an important, formal announcement.)

In v. 8 Zacchaeus tells Jesus, not about what he hopes to do, but about what he has already been doing. What is his current policy? (A few Bibles translate the verb as future, but the RSV and others correctly translate the Greek verb as "I give"—present continuous. It is what he had already begun and was continuing to do. Or else, he would not have been eager to see Jesus.)

Since Jewish law required restitution of only one and a fifth of the amount stolen (Lev. 6:2-5), why does Zacchaeus repay so much? What does it show about his degree of repentance? ("If I defrauded" means "wherever I have defrauded". . . Think what it would mean to go back through his record books!) Why does he give also to the poor? (He is grieved that he has caused the poverty of many. How can he give half his fortune to the poor and also compensate those he cheated? What does this show about his wealth?)

Zacchaeus probably started cleaning up his act the day he was convinced Jesus was the promised King. Some townspeople might already have benefited from his reimbursement, but most of the crowd were tourists who would not know. His faith and repentance were clearly demonstrated. Yet Jesus says, "Today has salvation come to this house."

What did Zacchaeus still lack that was given to him that day? John 1:12. (A personal encounter with Jesus! Without inviting Jesus into one's life, there is no salvation, no new birth. Rev. 3:20, 21, 1 John 5:11, 12.)

Why would it comfort Zacchaeus to hear Jesus say he was now "a son of Abraham"? (Zacchaeus was now a man of faith like Abraham. Abraham had laid foundations for the kingdom Jesus came to establish, and would have an honored place at the banquet—Lk. 13:28, 29. Now the King himself declares that Zacchaeus, traitor and outcast, has all the rights and privileges of full citizenship in the kingdom! He can even go along to Passover!)

In v. 10 Jesus says, "The Son of man came to seek and to save the lost." What is the connection between this incident and Luke 15:1-7? Who is Jesus to Zacchaeus? How does this explain Jesus' terms "lost" and "saved"? (He was a sheep that was lost to the Shepherd and the flock, in danger, doomed to death, left to the lions and bears. "Saved" or "salvation" means to rescue, restore to God, heal, make whole.)

Zacchaeus searched for Jesus, but how can we know Jesus came to Jericho also seeking Zacchaeus, as he says? How does Jesus know his name? How does he know that Zacchaeus' house is big enough for his team? Probably every inn and house was already filled with pilgrims. How does Jesus know Zacchaeus' mansion has no guests? (No one would stay with this traitor!) Jesus invites himself. What makes Jesus think Zacchaeus would welcome him?

How might Jesus have heard about Zacchaeus? Luke 5:27-32. (Through the same tax-collector grapevine that helped Zacchaeus hear about Jesus!) Probably Levi learned through an ex-colleague that this repentant outcast's mansion might be the only available lodging in overcrowded Jericho. How did Jesus know Zacchaeus was in that very tree? (Maybe a local friend saw him running and followed. Or the disciples have been looking for him)

Why is it important that Zacchaeus sought Jesus that particular day? (It is the day Jesus was looking for him, and he would never again return to Jericho. "Now is the day of salvation.")

A beautiful old hymn expresses this experience:

" I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew,
He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I who found Thee, Saviour True,
No, I was found by Thee."

Practical applications:

What are common stereotypes of Jesus today and how can they be corrected?

What are the three steps necessary for "salvation"?

Why is it not enough to believe all the right facts about Jesus? (Many people believe and reject, like the Jewish religious leaders. If Jesus was right, they would lose all religious influence, political power, social position and economic advantage.) Why do convinced people reject Jesus today?

Zacchaeus found "salvation" before Jesus died. Like Abraham, he was saved on credit—a debt Jesus would soon pay. Today, our salvation is prepaid. As Zacchaeus had to believe what Jesus would do, we must believe what he has done. What are the facts about Jesus we must believe? (He is God, he paid for our sins, he arose and is alive today. He is King!)

Zacchaeus could express his new loyalty to Jesus by receiving him into his house. How can you invite him into your life today? In Rev. 3:20, 21 Jesus speaks of our innermost being and all the activities and relationships of our lives as being our house. He waits for us to open the door and invite him in—to be in charge. Anything less insults the King of glory! We can trust him—he loves us more than we love ourselves.

If seekers today really believe Jesus is alive and present and able to hear everything we say, what things might they want to tell him they will change in their conduct and relationships?

What does it mean to have Jesus as our personal Shepherd? To have him as our King?

All "lost" persons can know the Good Shepherd has been following, softly calling to get their attention. What are some ways he calls to them today? 1) He turns their thoughts to himself and to ultimate questions. 2) He exposes them to some part of the Bible. 3) He gives them good gifts hoping they will thank him—Rom. 2:4. 4) He allows them to have problems so they will call for his help—Psalm 119:67, 71. 5) He sends them messages through radio, TV, books, magazines. 6) He sends followers of Jesus Christ into their lives. 7) He gets them into a Bible study group.

None of this is ever an accident. Whenever he speaks to them through any of these ways, they can know he is present, and should respond.

That day in Jericho was Zacchaeus' last chance!

All seekers who imitate Zacchaeus can find God, because he promises, "You will find me when you seek me with your whole heart." Jer. 29:13.

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