

Tool 2



Leading Successful Bible Study

A meaningful discussion that is focused and lively begins with questions that help participants forge a link between the biblical text and their lives. Author and teacher Walter Wink is a master of writing questions that stimulate both creative and intellectual thinking. Well-formulated questions can spark conversations that we carry with us long after the session ends.

1. Read the biblical text several times.
2. Jot down every question that comes to mind before you consult reference works of any kind. Take note of the “tough” questions—especially those that may not have immediate answers and the ones that may not have a definitive answer. Author Walter Wink explains that these kinds of questions often open windows into the deepest mystery of what is being communicated. Questions such as “What is implied about the nature of God in this text?” and “What kind of consciousness was required for Jesus to say this?”
3. Now consult secondary sources—reference works such as commentaries and Bible study guides. What is the historical, social and economic context of the passage?
4. Suspend your assurance that we know all the answers.
5. Never ask several things in one question. Avoid two- and three-part questions. Edit the questions many times for clarity and simplicity.
6. Formulate broad questions that do not set people up for a specific answer such as yes or no.
7. The goal is to engage people in the text both intellectually and personally so they can bring both thought and feeling to the exploration of the meaning of the text and its possible implications for their lives.
8. One of the most fruitful lines of questioning lies in exploring the meaning of images and symbols. Modern thought is so abstract many people find it difficult to perceive the meaning of symbols and images. Try to help people see the image and describe what they see.
9. Set guidelines for the discussion: No idea is a bad idea. Be positive. Listen attentively to one another’s ideas. Allow only one conversation at a time. Paraphrase. Ask participants to build on one another’s ideas. Stay focused. Stay with the process. Have fun!

Source: Walter Wink, “Developing and Using Questions,” in *Transforming Bible Study*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1980.

Any questions or comments? Please contact the Elders’ Institute for information.

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