

## One-to-One Bible studies training

When I think of the international students who have become Christians in Cambridge over the last few years, almost all of them spent some time reading one-to-one with someone and it seems this was a key part in them coming to faith

- Who has studied the Bible with someone one-to-one before?
- What was your experience like? What are your feelings about it? Did it work (if so, why)? Were there any problems (if so what/why)?

### TOP TIPS ON LEADING A GOOD ONE-TO-ONE BIBLE STUDY

#### 1) Prepare well

- Make sure you understand the passage for yourself and know what questions you want to ask them. Otherwise your Bible study is likely to be directionless and drift way off topic.
- Think about the context of the study to make sure you really understand the passage you're looking at. Ask *'Why was it written?'*, *'What were the issues being dealt with?'*
- If you're using a study guide or commentary to help you, make sure you think about the passage and prepare your questions before looking at the guide or commentary – only look at that at the end to see if you missed anything.

#### 2) Make the study 'fit' the individual

- You can really make the study 'fit' the individual: So think very carefully about where they are at, what passage/passages/book would be most helpful for them, and what questions you can ask them to help them move forward in their understanding.
- Think about their religious background and how much they already know.
- Try to see the passage through their eyes – what questions will they ask, what will they find hard to understand etc. and be ready to respond!

#### 3) Be open to the Holy Spirit

- Be open to the Holy Spirit guiding you in your preparation and the study – each person is different and needs to hear different things at different times
- Sometimes it's right to encourage them to respond to what they've learnt, other times it's right to leave them to think about it for themselves.
- So these are some general principles, but you will need to be flexible sometimes too.

#### 4) Be a disciple

- We mustn't think that we're the teacher giving someone a private lesson, but that we're coming alongside them to disciple them and help them understand God's word for themselves and encourage them to respond (whether they are Christians or not).
- It's important we see it not as a Bible teaching relationship, but a friendship in which we look at the Bible together. That way we can share not only the Bible with them but also our lives so that they can see how our Christian faith works out in practice. Make sure you apply the passage to yourself first, and share with them examples of what it means for you to take God's word seriously (ways God has been faithful to his promises, ways he has challenged you to change your behaviour/attitudes/lifestyle etc.)
- Encourage them to think about how the teaching of the Bible applies in their culture too
  - E.g. Acts 17 – where could Paul start if he was visiting your country?

## 6) Deal with their questions/comments

- Encourage them to ask questions as you go
- Listen carefully to anything they say and pick up on anything that's interesting. Allow the discussion to develop naturally and be willing to digress a little from your prepared questions  
THIS IS DIFFICULT WHEN YOU START, BUT GETS EASIER AS YOU GROW IN CONFIDENCE
- Keep directing them to look at the text - teach them to look in the passage to find the answers to your questions
- Be gentle - it should be a discussion not an argument.

## 7) Be sensitive to the fact they're not British

- Keep your language simple and clear
- Don't assume that they know anything, but get them to tell you what they understand about God etc.
- Don't talk for too long at a time in case they're not understanding what you're saying (keep asking them questions to check they are following your explanations). You can usually tell by the blank expression on their faces too.
- Don't be afraid of silence – allow them time to think (especially if East Asian or if their English is not so good). If it's clear they didn't understand the question then repeat it. If they still don't understand try rephrasing it.
- In many cultures (East Asian) it is considered very rude to disagree with someone (criticising their ideas is the same as criticising them) so they may give the 'right' answers. E.g. you ask 'Why do you think Jesus died' and they reply 'to save us from our sins' but this does not necessarily mean they really believe that Jesus died to save them

## 8) Challenge them to respond in a right way

- Challenge them to respond to what they're learning, but DON'T pressurise them (intentionally or unintentionally) to respond (especially East Asians, who want to give the 'right' answer)
- Help them to understand what it means to be a Christian.
  - Some people think it's just believing the message in the Bible and don't understand the need to accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour.
  - Others don't understand that if Jesus is my Lord that means I must give my whole life to him and obey him in everything.
  - Or maybe they think you have to pass an exam or be baptised before you are a Christian.
- Help them understand how they could become a Christian but then leave them to respond. Pray that God will open their eyes and trust in his timing.
- Some people are very open about their own opinion, others are reluctant to say. We don't need to know exactly where they are in their response, just keep faithfully helping them to understand God's word and praying for them and trust him to work in them.

## 9) Prepare them for living as a Christian in their own culture

- Most of them will eventually return to their own country so we don't want to clone them into British Christians, we want to prepare them for Christian life in their own culture. This means we need to understand:
  - Their cultural background.
  - The church situation in their country.
  - Particular difficulties they might face as Christians within their country e.g. difficulty finding a job.
  - Particular ways in which their Christian faith is likely to conflict with their culture e.g. ancestors.
- We then need to help them think through these issues.

- However we need to remember that our understanding of their culture is limited so we must be slow to tell them what they should do. Rather we should teach them to study the Bible for themselves so that they can apply its teaching to their own situation.

### **10) Care for them as whole people**

- They may share with you some difficult situations in their own lives or things they're worried about. Important to respect confidentiality and to pray for them (could pray with them if they're happy).
- If there are practical ways you (or others) can help then do, but be careful they don't become overly dependent on you (we want them to learn to depend on God).
- If you feel out of your depth consider seeking advice from others more experienced in the relevant area, but usually need to get their permission first.

### **11) Have realistic expectations**

- Over time we should expect to see response and growth, but don't expect instant conversions
- Not all will come to faith. If it becomes clear that their interest is purely academic and they are not responding in their hearts to what they're learning then it might be right to finish your studies together and encourage them to join a Bible study group instead.
- It doesn't have to be a regular weekly thing, you could just meet up occasionally (but better if regularly).
- If they're already going to lots of Bible studies and are unsure about spending more time doing Bible study, you could just meet up with them socially, but ask them how the other Bible studies are going and what they are learning and address the questions they have that weren't answered in the other Bible studies – can lead to some very fruitful conversations.