

One-to-one evangelistic Bible studies
(with special reference to doing this with international students)
 (from a seminar by Bartow Wylie)

Why don't we do this, or do it more

- "I might offend"
- "They won't be interested"
- "I wouldn't know how to do it. Too complicated."
- Simple timidity, or fear of rejection

Why should we offer to do one-to-one Bible Studies?

Hebrews 4:12 *'For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.'*

- Many internationals are more likely to say yes than your home student friends
 - curiosity: they may never have had such an opportunity before
 - many are genuine seekers, looking for an opportunity to learn, and unhappy with the cynicism they find in many student circles
 - they may find it more difficult to say 'no!' (So be careful not to abuse this.)
- Of the many 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.

SO ... make it an aim to offer a 1-1 BS with someone this term?

You: "Oh, but we'll all be too busy!"

Me: "But starting a 1-1 BS with someone could be a major step forward for them, and a major step forward for you too!"

Contents of this booklet

In this session we're going to be thinking about:

- why and how to read the Bible one-to-one with anyone , especially with a non-Christian
- issues you may need to bear in mind with international students
- some practicalities of how and when and where
- a study in a particular passage in the Bible

Aims of a one-to-one evangelistic Bible study

- They will have the opportunity to hear God speak through His Word (cf general discussion) (SO ... aim to make the teaching of the passage clear, not your own thoughts about it.)
- 1. They will understand the passage and so know more about the good news of Jesus.
- 2. They will see that Jesus challenges us to respond to him and his teaching.
- They will leave with at least one truth to remember or one issue to think about. (Don't aim unrealistically high - but remember Ethiopian eunuch!)
- They will leave excited about the Bible and wanting to return and find out more. (eg Sabrina)
- They will feel that they can understand the Bible for themselves. (Important)

What are the advantages compared with a group Bible Study?

- *Just one person – you can answer their questions and look at passages that relate to where they are.*
- *Regular – can really get to know them and can build on previous studies. If they are busy one week they don't miss anything.*
- *Less danger of them getting left behind because of the language being too difficult or because of not having enough Biblical background.*
- *Less threatening – they feel more free to say what they really think. (If things go well ...)*
- *Flexible – you can fit round their timetable.*
- *They can't avoid answering questions – they have to say something.*

Remember that each person is different so each Bible study will develop its own format

BUT also remember that for some people a 1-1 may seem too intense and a group BS might be more appropriate.

Style of possible studies

(Lots of factors to decide between, can you match the pairs of alternatives?)

One to one	Passage-based
Topic-based	Prepared course
“Own” notes	Discussion
“Teaching” approach	Group
Consecutive	Discrete passages

Let's discuss these briefly.

How to get started – practical considerations

1. WHO TO OFFER TO STUDY WITH (Those you meet!)

- Genuine friend, or at least going that way (the best studies are relaxed and friendly – you need to be able to trust each other to be able to talk openly about what you believe or feel)
 - how to build a genuine friendship?
 - spend time together apart from Bible study
 - ask questions (not just superficial) and *listen* to the answers
 - share your own life with them – struggles and joys
- Genuine interest in Christianity (though this may start as a cultural interest for some people)
- Same sex (very important, especially with some cultures, but in fact always)

2. HOW OFTEN?

- Regularly e.g. once a week
- Ideally same time each week (routine)

3. FOR HOW LONG?

- 1 - 1 1/2 hours, but try to keep the formal study part to no more than 1 hour
 - it's better that they leave interested and wanting to find out more than that you go on until they're bored.
 - People are usually busy (you too!), so we mustn't take up too much of their time.
- Time limit initially of e.g. 8 weeks (hopefully they will want to continue beyond this)

4. WHERE TO MEET?

- Your house/room? Their room? A church room? Somewhere neutral? Probably best to invite them to your home/room unless you live a long way apart and they don't cycle etc.

5. WHAT TO STUDY?

This will depend on who you are reading with:

- With people who've not really read the Bible before it may be best to start by working through a gospel (gives continuity, but less flexibility)
 - LUKE is good with Muslims (but may be a bit 'slow to start') (contrast Mark)
 - JOHN liked by some, but can be too 'deep' or complicated
 - Choose suitable passages (not too long), and encourage them to read for themselves the parts you don't cover.
- A series of 'Encounters with Jesus'
- With those who've read a lot of the Bible before and know the gospel stories well ACTS can be good
- If you're not confident preparing your own studies then you could try using something like 'Passport to the Bible' (but you will still need to do your own preparation).

Do they have their own Bible or do you need to buy/borrow one for them - make sure you're using the same version.

For internationals, can you get them a Bible in their own language too?

Preparing Evangelistic Bible studies

The best Bible studies are well prepared. Good preparation in advance makes room for flexibility on the day if this is needed. Casual preparation can lead to ineffective and discouraging studies.

Understanding the passage yourself

1) Start by praying – for your preparation and the study and the person you'll be reading with.

2) If you're using a study guide or commentary then you will almost certainly have a better study if you prepare the study for yourself first, before looking at the study guide or commentary. This way you can engage with the passage yourself and then add helpful insights from others. The process of thinking about it for yourself first will give you a much better understanding of the passage.

So make sure you understand the passage yourself and think about what its main points are.

- Our Bible studies will be dull if we don't consider the context of the passage. We need to ask '*Why was it written?*', '*What were the issues being dealt with?*'. To get a feeling for the context we need to see what came before and what comes after. (You can then help your friend to see how the passage relates to previous passages you've studied together.)
- We need to think '*What are the questions I want to ask about this passage?*', '*What are the things in this passage that I really don't understand?*'. Use commentaries to help you understand and then think about how you can help others to understand as well.

3) Make sure you understand the *whole* passage (even if there are parts you don't intend to focus on, since they may ask questions).

Preparing the study for the other person

- 1) Look through the passage and note down any words or phrases you think they will find difficult to understand. This is particularly important for internationals, but worth considering for home students as well. Think of a clear explanation for each one.
- 2) Think very carefully about what questions you will ask in advance. Find the simplest way of phrasing your questions *and think of alternative ways of expressing them* in case they don't understand the first time.
 - PREPARATION: A question to get them thinking about the main ideas in the passage before reading it. (e.g. 'Who do you think Jesus is?' before studying the 'who do you say I am?' passage in Luke 9)
 - OBSERVATION: 'Comprehension' type questions (What happened?) (important to check they understand what is happening in the passage – you may need to use a lot more observation questions with internationals than with British people, but beware being patronising).
 - INTERPRETATION: 'What does it mean' type questions (Why did it happen?).
 - APPLICATION: 'How should we respond to it' type questions.
- 3) Avoid questions where the answer is just yes or no.

Cross-cultural issues during preparation

In your preparation it is very important to think carefully about the person or people you'll be reading with.

What assumptions may they have about the Bible?

For example, who might have a starting position that the Bible is:

- foreign religious book
- fairy tale
- falsified

Consider what their religious background is and what they already know (and don't know) of the teaching of the Bible – this will affect how easily they will understand the passage and how they might misunderstand it.

For example, what different understanding might be had by

- someone from a Catholic background looking at the word grace?
- someone from a Buddhist background looking at teaching on the resurrection?
- other examples?

Be alert to the many other misunderstandings that can occur.

Think in advance how you can help them to understand correctly.

As you gain more cross-cultural experience, you will discover countless other issues that will affect the way you prepare the studies.

Try to see the passage through their eyes, especially if they're someone who hasn't really read the Bible before.

What do you expect them to find strange/surprising/difficult to understand?

What questions do you expect them to ask? (However well you prepare, you'll probably still be surprised!)

What cultural misunderstandings might arise?

Think how you will respond to them if they do react as you expect.

Some examples I've met:

- "The father of the lost son was too soft on him - he should have punished him."
- "If the Law says the woman should be stoned, what right has Jesus got to disagree?"
- "The rich lord who went away leaving his servants in charge is a stinking capitalist and an absentee landlord, who has no right to benefit from the work of the labourers."

In any passage there are likely to be many different points that you could draw from it, so think carefully about which are the things that are likely to be most helpful/relevant for the person you'll be reading with and focus on those things.

These may not be the same things that would speak to us, so we must avoid the indulgence of focussing on our own favourite points, if these are not the ones that speak most to the international students.

Pray about what God would want them (and you) to learn and to put into action.

Leading Evangelistic Bible studies

General Pattern

- Spent time socialising together before you start.
- Pray (because we need God's help, *and* because we want our friends to know this) – but not if you know this would alienate your friend
- Briefly explain (as appropriate) the context of:
 - The passage within book
 - The book within the Bible
- Read the passage (get them to read it if they're happy doing so – they can do it at a speed they understand).
- Allow them to ask about any words or ideas they don't understand, or would like to discuss (most relevant for internationals – this could seem patronising to home students)
- Ask your questions and discuss together.
- Pray

General points for leading Bible studies

- Allow/encourage them to ask questions as you go along. If you can't answer their questions tell them you'll think about it or find out and answer next time (and make sure you do!) If their question is nothing to do with the passage, encourage them that it is a reasonable question to ask, but suggest you look at it another time.
- Listen carefully to what 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 (see them as a guide, you may find yourself asking them in a different order or leaving some out or asking supplementary questions). THIS IS DIFFICULT WHEN YOU START, BUT GETS EASIER AS YOU GROW IN CONFIDENCE. But don't allow the discussion to drift too much from the main points of the passage (avoid long red herrings) - be able to bring the focus back to the main points of the passage.
- Keep directing them to look at the text - teach them to look in the passage to find the answers to your questions (except when the answer isn't in the text! e.g. how would you feel?). Answer questions with the Bible as much as possible 'the Bible says....' rather than 'I think...' (This is important as a way to help them to learn from the Bible themselves, without any other person to guide them.)
- Ask what they think or feel about different ideas - encourage them to be honest about their questions, doubts, feelings etc. if they are comfortable doing this (usually you can do this more as you get to know them better).
- Be gentle - it should be a discussion not an argument.
- Let the Gospel come up naturally - don't rush in too early just for the sake of it, and don't force "gospel ideas" into a passage that doesn't contain them.

- Avoid jumping about the Bible too much (this can confuse, and also make the person feel they would never be able to do "real" Bible study alone) but within reason it is OK to look at related passages to emphasise a point or make something clearer.
- Give testimony/real life examples to illustrate a point. This will help it seem more real to them. Show by the way we live 'between studies' that what we learn from the Bible affects us.

Cross-cultural issues during the actual study

- 1) If English is not their first language then it's important that you use simple language as much as possible. Try to avoid Christian jargon like 'redemption' or 'atonement' (and if you must use words like these, then explain very clearly what you mean). And if *they* use what seem to be standard Christian expressions ask them to explain what they mean - they may be using words in a different way.
- 2) Don't talk for too long at a time in case people don't understand what you're saying (keep asking questions to check they are following your explanations). *In general aim for dialogue, not monologue!* You can often tell by the blank expression on someone's face, but some people have an amazing capacity to look interested, even when they don't really follow.
- 3) Don't be afraid of silence – allow people 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, probably rephrasing it at the same time. (It's important to know that in some cultures, eg Japan, it may be considered immodest to answer quickly without reflection.)
- 4) In many cultures (East Asian and others) it is considered very rude to disagree with someone (criticising their ideas is the same as criticising them). This is especially true if the person speaking to you is seen as "the teacher", and triply so if you are older than those studying with you. In this situation people may give the answer they understand you to consider 'right'. e.g. you ask "Why do you think Jesus died?" and they reply "to save us from our sins". This does not necessarily mean they really believe that Jesus died to save them (though, of course, it may truly be what they have come to believe.) The point is that gentle unpacking of what is said is often necessary, and in fact very helpful. We should do this not as some sort of interrogation, but with sensitivity – both to the person concerned and to whatever God's Holy Spirit may be doing.

Encouraging a response

If our desire is to see people coming to faith in Christ, growing to Christian maturity and so bringing glory to God, there's a danger that in our enthusiasm we will put pressure on them to 'pray a prayer of Christian commitment' before they are ready for that.

And yet we do want to be encouraging them to respond to what they're learning. How can we do this in a way that doesn't make them feel pressurised?

- 1) We don't need to know exactly where they are in their response to the gospel. That is between them and God. If we ask them directly 'do you want to become a Christian' or something similar they may feel they have to say 'yes' to be polite (especially if they're East

Asian – in East Asian cultures can be seen to be rude to say no). So it may be better not to ask, or only to ask when you are fairly confident that they are ready for this.

- 2) We just need to faithfully teach them from God's word and pray that his Spirit will guide us to choose the right passages and work in them to give them faith. We can leave the exact timing to him. Many people can't say exactly when they became a Christian anyway.
- 3) Encourage them to respond by asking them application questions *indirectly*:
 - 'Here's a question for you to think about...'
 - 'John wants us to think about how we respond to Jesus. Maybe you could think about that for yourself.'
 (But if studying with a Dutch or German, for example, it would be OK to be much more Direct – in fact they might find indirectness objectionable.)
- 4) 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.
 - Some British Christians get over-excited when the international says that they have now starting to believe in God, but may not have turned to Him as Lord.
 - Some people may not 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 read the whole Bible, or sign a document, or be baptised before you are a Christian.
- 5) Help them to understand how they can become a Christian (but explain this is in case they want to be a Christian in the future, so they don't feel pressurised). You might give them a copy of a suitable prayer at the end of a study where you've been looking at what it means to follow Jesus. Explain that the exact words don't matter but this is the sort of thing they could pray if they decide they want to follow Jesus. But only do this if it really is clearly the right moment to do it.

Lord God, I admit that I have sinned and gone my own way in what I have thought, said and done. I admit that I have ignored you, I am sorry.
 I need your forgiveness.
 I want to turn away from all that I know is wrong.
 Thank you that Jesus came to die on the cross to take away my sins.
 I believe that you rose from the dead.
 I receive your gift of forgiveness and eternal life.
 I want you to be first in my life
 Please come into my heart.
 Come in as my Saviour to forgive me.
 Come in as my Lord to teach me how you want me to live.
 Come in and change me by your Holy Spirit.
 Come in and be with me forever.
 Thank you for answering my prayer.
 Amen.

Our Attitude and Expectations

- We should be **humble**

- expect to learn from those we study with, as well as help them to learn
- not be surprised when we make mistakes (especially early on)
- learn from these mistakes

- We should be **realistic**

2 Corinthians 4:4

'The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ'

- We should be **confident in God's Holy Spirit**

2 Corinthians 4:6

'For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.'

It is God's job to convert - our responsibility is to tell them the truth, praying that God will open their eyes and bring them to faith.

If it becomes clear that your friend's interest is purely academic and they are not responding in their hearts to what they're learning, then it might be right to encourage them to join a group Bible study instead, where they would be exposed to other Christians as well. This would also free you up to meet one-to-one with someone who is more genuinely searching. You need to be very prayerful when making this kind of decision as only God can really see inside someone's heart, and you don't want to damage your relationship with the person.

It's a huge and exciting privilege to read the Bible with another person, especially someone from another country – I pray that you will have many opportunities to do this, and that God will use you in that!

Bartow Wylie - 2009