
GUIDELINES FOR LEADERSHIP

*This material is an excerpt from Approaching the Gospels Together,
by Mary Morrison*

Hold firmly to the concept that this is a *group* activity, in which the important elements are not the learning and expertise of one specialist or even a general level of prior knowledge, but the ease and openness with which the individuals within the group interact, and approach the material.

Your group can proceed with one learner/leader; or with a pair who work up the material together and alternate leadership; or with rotating leadership. **The important thing for a leader is not to have the answers, but to know how to ask questions**; how to keep the discussion focused on the text and moving along at a steady pace; how to encourage all possible points of view; how to keep the more vocal members from dominating the group.

The aim of this work is to get a good look at the Scripture.

Explain that this is not as easy as it sounds. There are real barriers in the way:

- Overfamiliarity, which leads inevitably to a pervasive kind of boredom, though it will be hard to get people to admit this.
- Respect for Holy Writ, which leads people to approach the material in an awed kind of way that keeps them from really looking at what it really says to them in this particular time and place.
- A tendency to *study about*, rather than simply to study, which leads people to look at commentaries and theological interpretations, rather than the biblical text.

Explain ways to get over these barriers:

- Accept the discipline of reading **as if for the first time**. Pretend you don't know anything about the central character or what happens to him. Refuse to think ahead in the story; stay with what you are reading now or have already read in the group.
 - Read simply and directly. As if you were reading a good novel.
 - Use the text only – no commentaries or other guides. Trust your own reading of the text, as checked by the readings of other members of the group.
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- When you and the group begin to meet these big words – sin, forgiveness, faith, love, for example – loaded with centuries of theological content, **free them up by insisting that their meaning must be established each time from the saying or story in which they are used.** A good way to accomplish this is to use the “missing word” technique, in which you all pretend that there is a hole in the manuscript at just that point where the big word comes, and ask, “What word or words would you put in here, guessing from the context?”
 - Similarly when you meet stories or sayings that seem to bear on doctrinal concepts – the divinity of Christ, for example, or justification by faith, or election and grace – set them gently aside, and simply ask of the text, **“What’s the most that is being said here? What is the least?”** This maximum/minimum approach can be a big help at times like these.

These 5 disciplines may seem silly at first, but you will soon see that the awards are very great, for the meaning of the text will grow out of the text itself as you go along. In other words you are going to do all of your work right there with the text, and you are going to have all of your rewards right there too.

The discussion group method is a great additional help. This is the method by which this class will proceed. **Lecturing will be at an absolute minimum – only enough to provide background or guidance as needed, and it should hardly be needed at all.** The leader’s function is simply to ask questions about the text, and to keep the group on the track and moving along well.

“Fortunately, the wellspring of the Gospel of Jesus is still here; to read it with others reveals the full life of that original experience” – Mary Morrison