

Skeptic's Bible Study

Developed by Glen Michaels for the Missionary Spirituality Project

This is a plausible format for many connecting with the church for the first time. Reprinted with the permission from Chapman.

1. Leader assures folks that skeptical questions are not only welcomed but encouraged, that no one needs to answer any question and can refrain simply by saying “pass.”
2. Read selection (we usually go in rotation, having each participant read 2-4 verses of the reading).
3. Go around circle answering the following question: “What do I like about the reading?”
4. Go around circle answering the following question: “What do I dislike about the reading?”
5. Go around circle answering the following question: “Is there anything I don’t understand or would like more information on?”
6. Either before or after step 5, read the reading again, in the same manner as in step 2.
7. Go around circle answering the following question: “What is this passage trying to tell us about what God is like?”
8. Time permitting, if the passage has been read before step 5, then read the passage again as in step 2.
9. Go around circle answering the following question: “What is the passage calling us to do?”
10. Go around circle answering the following question: “Is there a word, phrase, or image from the passage that you would like to stay with you throughout the next week?”
11. Concluding ritual: Thank everyone for their participation; offer a next meeting date; if participants seem ready for it, ask if there are needs that can be prayed for and pray for these.

Notes:

- Not all participants need to be literate. We regularly do this form of study with a participant who cannot read or write.
- The central questions of the study are in steps 7, 9, and 10, but the prior questions are necessary icebreakers.
- The leader, especially if a clergy person, needs to resist the temptation to answer questions, especially those in response to step 5. At most provide a tidbit of historical/literary context that will help us understand what the passage is saying. Do not as leader provide theological interpretation. The goal is for the participants to provide this for themselves — guided by Scripture and the Spirit.
- The format can be shortened, if need be, by omitting one of the three readings of the Scripture passage and/or question from step 10.
- Scripture passages can be selected in any manner: the upcoming Sunday lection; one of a group of 4 — 6 relating to Jesus and his ministry; or one of 4 — 6 exploring a topic of interest to the participants.
- Praying for one another at the end of the session is a very appropriate way to end but only if the participants seem ready and comfortable with this.