

## THE HANDBOOK OF GLAD TIDINGS BIBLE STUDIES M.Janatuinen

### WHAT IS A GLAD TIDINGS BIBLE STUDY?

#### **Evangelistic activity**

You can introduce Jesus to your friends and relatives through a Glad Tidings group. We can learn from church history that a small group has always been a vehicle of reaching new people.

#### **Lay activity**

If a lay person is asked to organize an evangelistic meeting, it requires much preparation from him/her. A Glad Tidings group, however, is very easy to arrange. The more such groups you have in your church, the more lay people can take part in evangelization.

#### **Learning by discovery**

Because the participants answer questions, they always make many discoveries about the text. People learn much more effectively by discovering something for themselves rather than by hearing what others have already discovered.

#### **A place to meet Jesus**

Jesus is the Word who became flesh, which means that we can always meet him in the word of the Bible. The purpose of a Glad Tidings group is not primarily to teach facts about Christianity, but to let people meet the living Savior. Jesus himself speaks to the participants during a Bible study, comforts them and helps them. See Matt.18:20.

#### **A Christian fellowship where non-Christians are also welcome**

When we discuss a Bible passage, something happens also among us. Hearts are opened; problems are shared with other participants as well as with Jesus. And when fellowship becomes meaningful, people bring their friends and the group starts to grow.

#### **What is the difference between a usual Bible study and a Glad Tidings group?**

Usually the participants of a Bible study are expected to have some previous knowledge about Christianity. Not so in Glad Tidings group – the questions for these studies are written such that even newcomers can take part in the discussion just by looking at the passage. Participants are also led to apply the text in their own lives with the help of the questions. One more thing: in Glad Tidings groups we are not after “the right answers”, but rather want to encourage the participants to say what they really think and mean.

### LET'S START WITH MOTIVATION

#### **A. The motivation of a church worker**

The church worker must believe that lay people learn to lead Glad Tidings groups better than themselves. Also, we learn from our mistakes. It is like raising children: you can do everything by yourself better and faster than your child, but if you do, he/she won't learn anything. After a few months, Paul always left new churches in the hands of new Christians, i.e. “to God and to the Word of his grace” (Acts 20:32). Why should it take such a long time in our day? Also, we can learn from church history that during the times of revivals lay Christians were always leading small groups. Trust in the Holy Spirit! It is neither you nor the group leader who makes a Glad Tidings study alive; it is Jesus and his Spirit.

#### **B. The motivation of Christians**

Tell your congregation that there always comes a special blessing to those homes which open their doors to gatherings around the Bible. Don't start the first Glad Tidings group in a big home, spick-and-span from corner to corner, with a wonderful meal in the end. If you do, it will be difficult to have other people start groups in their homes. You should start in a modest home with a very simple serving and others will follow suit. Tell the congregation that Glad Tidings groups can help your church in three ways: 1) They bring new people to services and to baptism. 2) They help old Christians to grow in faith. 3) They nurture new leaders.

### C. How to select the first group leaders

Don't ask people who are already busy with other things. Don't ask people who are very talkative and very dominating. Ask those who have been recently converted, or who have been encouraged by Glad Tidings Bible studies themselves.

### D. Don't start with theory, start with experience

It is impossible to understand the point of Glad Tidings groups without first taking part in an actual Bible study. You can ask experienced people to come to your church and lead a Glad Tidings Bible study there (see the last page.) Then you can use Glad Tidings questions in many meetings, camps etc. until all the Christians of your church have experienced a Bible study like this.

## THE GROUP

### Is it possible to change an old group into a Glad Tidings one?

It is possible but not very easy. The older the group and its participants, the more difficult it is to change. Rather than trying to change the old ones, start new.

### When should you start?

After an evangelistic campaign is a good time to start, but you should also recommend Glad Tidings groups to new people who come to your weekly services and other meetings.

### The ideal size of a group is 4–8 people

If two Christians invite their two friends, you already have a group of four ready. When the number of participants exceeds 8 persons, you must absolutely divide it in two. If you don't, the group stops growing. If you do, both halves go on growing.

### Length and intervals

One study session shouldn't take more than one hour, or one hour and a quarter at the most. If the study drags on, participants become tired and tend to stop coming. A group can gather anywhere from once a week to once a month. You can also hold a Glad Tidings group limited number of times: one semester, ten times etc.

### Ingredients

- **A house.** It is better that someone other than the owner of the house leads the study.
- **A leader.** It helps greatly if the leader has participated in a Glad Tidings training course (or at the very least heard the cassettes of the course).
- **Participants.** In an ideal situation, half of the participants are Christians, and half are non-Christians, but you can conduct a Glad Tidings group even if the situation is not that ideal. You can invite any person from 10–100 years of age. There is only one exception: don't invite Christians who you know talk too much. Other types of meetings are more suitable for them.
- **Bibles.** Everybody must have a Bible or a copy of the text in hand. Take copies if you suspect that some people will come without bringing a Bible. The easiest translation for non-Christians should be preferred for these studies.
- **A Glad Tidings Bible study guide.** Glad Tidings Bible studies are based on questions, which should be neither too difficult nor too easy for Christians and non-Christians alike. (See the last page).
- **Serving tea etc.** Make sure that people feel free to leave after the actual study. A simple teatime is for those who have time available. A meal should be offered only before Christmas or on other special occasions.

## DURING A STUDY

The group has gathered in somebody's living room for the first time. What will you do?

- First explain "the rules of the game": 1) During this study the leader is not going to answer his/her own questions. 2) On the other hand, the leader will never say that an answer is wrong. 3) The leader will bring the discussion back to the text if somebody starts to speak about other things.
- The participants read the Bible text aloud. The leader explains the background material according to the book and prays a short prayer. Then the passage is read silently once more.
- The leader asks one question at a time and waits for more than one answer. A question is marked with \* or a dot. A question in parenthesis must be read only if no one answers the previous question.
- As a rule, answering is voluntary. Only in the case of young children may the leader ask by using names.
- We don't take notes in a Glad Tidings group. Neither do we look at other Bible places except for the one we are studying.
- Participants shouldn't look at the questions while answering. They can be distributed to everybody after the study or participants can buy their own books.
- If the group is talkative, the leader must skip some questions in order to finish in time. Don't, however, skip the last questions because they are the most important ones.
- If the leader is honest, others will be too.
- When the questions are finished, everyone can tell their main discovery from that text. The leader can also tell his/hers now.
- Finally the leader prays for the problems of the participants, which were mentioned during the study.
- If even one person was touched by the love of Jesus, you can conclude that the study was a success.

## SOME PROBLEMS THAT THE LEADER MAY FACE

### **What do you do when nobody says anything?**

This problem is common during the first two or three questions in a new group. Don't panic! People will start answering if they see that you won't do it for them. It is usually only the leader who feels the silence is too long. Others are thinking about the Bible text! The silence in this case is positive silence, not negative.

- But if no one really answers, ask the same question once more.
- Ask the question in a little different way.
- Go on without any answer to the next question.

**What do you do if you don't know the answer** to a question that one of the participants is asking you?

- Encourage other participants to answer. Someone else may know what you don't.
- Promise to find out for the next time – and keep your promise.
- You can simply admit that you don't know – and go on.

### **What do you do when someone gives a wild answer?**

You should never say to the face of a participant that he/she is wrong, because he/she may feel it like a loss of face.

- Again, ask the others. Usually someone gives the right answer.
- Ask the person: "What in this passage made you think that way?" and hopefully he realizes that text does not say the things he thought it did.

### **What do you do if the participants drift away from the text?**

There are people who always tend to do this. If the leader lets them, there will be no meeting with Jesus for anyone during that study.

- To forestall this problem you should say in the beginning of the study, "We will try to go through this text in an hour. If you start to talk about other things, I will return you/bring you back to the text."
- If someone starts to tell lengthily about his/her experiences, which don't have anything to do with the passage, you can say, "Let's hear the rest of this story during the teatime, and go through the questions first."

### **What do you do if somebody tends to answer with a sermon?**

- If you are afraid that such situation might occur, you should say in the beginning of a study, "Please give short answers so that we may hear as many opinions as possible!"
- Go on with the next question when this person stops to draw his/her breath.

**What do you do if the same person answers every time** so fast that the others don't have time to think?

- Say, "Please, answer first in your heart and then aloud." Don't look at this person.
- In every case, you ask the opinion of others, when this person has finished.
- Discuss with him/her in private about this problem.

### **What do you do if there arises a disagreement on some doctrinal matter?**

This doesn't happen often, but if it does...

- Summarize both viewpoints and try to make both sides look at the text.
- Agree that you disagree and go on.
- If the matter is very important, then ask your pastor to come next time and explain the matter. Or else let participants read a book or listen a tape about the doctrine in question.

**What do you do if somebody interrupts the Bible study** by saying that he doesn't like the system?

There are people who would like to have "a right answer" to every question, and become unhappy when nobody seems to give them.

- Say, "Please, sit here to the end of this study. Perhaps you will see the point..."
- Or you can lead a person like this to a more traditional meeting where he/she can hear a sermon every time.

### **What do you do if one of the participants doesn't ever say a word?**

Try to find out if this person really wants to be silent. Those who like to sit still don't usually look at the leader. Don't force them to talk. Those who would like to say something but don't have the courage to do it, usually look at the leader. You can encourage them to say their opinions every now and then.

**What if somebody becomes angry?**

If somebody gets angry to what the Bible says, it is God's responsibility, not yours.

- The leader should not try to remove what is offending in the Bible. Jesus let both the rich young man and Pharisees leave him without trying to pacify them.
- Say to yourself that perhaps it is better to be angry than indifferent.
- But if somebody gets offended with real shortcomings and sins of the church or Christians, then we should admit them and ask forgiveness.

**What if a participant has mental problems, which make him/her talk all the time?**

Experience shows that in that case it is better to find another group for the person in question, otherwise the Glad Tidings study will not last long.