

# The Inductive Method

One of Q Place's four core values is Self-Discovery, the idea that people grow and learn best when they discover truth for themselves through discussion and study. The value of self-discovery leads us to promote an inductive—rather than a deductive—approach to learning.

## WHAT IS THE INDUCTIVE METHOD?

A deductive approach to learning starts with an assertion and then seeks to prove it. It begins with generalizations and then moves to the data to support those generalizations. Questions can be used to gather information in a deductive approach, but they are often set up either to drive students to a predetermined conclusion or to test comprehension. A lawyer uses the deductive approach when defending his client in court. Participants in a debate use the deductive approach to prove a certain argument; they start with a conclusion and then build a case with evidence that supports that conclusion.

By contrast, an inductive approach to learning involves actively exploring an area of study, discovering, evaluating, and coming to conclusions through careful, thoughtful observation. Good questions are essential to this approach. A detective uses the inductive approach when gathering information at a crime scene by asking good questions about every aspect of the scene and recording all observations before evaluating the evidence and coming to conclusions.

When applied to Bible study or a discussion of spiritual issues, the inductive approach means that you start with a whole book, paragraph, or complete unit of thought and ask questions that help you explore, make discoveries, and process the information in context of the whole. The questions could be prepared by someone else, but they will help you notice, evaluate, and apply rather than prompt a “right” answer.

## WHY USE THE INDUCTIVE METHOD?

- 1. Vibrant discussions:** In a group, an inductive approach sets the stage for lively, meaningful discussions. Participants all have something to offer as they explore a topic together. A deductive approach tends to have the opposite effect; a few people who feel confident in the subject talk a lot and everyone else tends to talk very little.
- 2. Deeper learning:** Studies have shown that people learn more and retain a deeper understanding of what they learn as they interact with it in a variety of ways. Inductive learning in a group involves actively wrestling with ideas and seeking answers, expressing thoughts out loud, and considering what others are noticing. People are relating to the subject matter in a variety of ways rather than just passively listening.
- 3. Appeal for skeptics and seekers:** When someone has doubts or major questions about the subject matter, a deductive approach seems to offer two options: accept the teaching or reject it. An inductive approach provides built-in opportunities to identify, clarify, explore, and evaluate beliefs. As a result, it's a more effective approach to help people engage and wrestle with crucial issues.
- 4. Preparing the ground:** Ironically, as a result of exploring a topic inductively, a person can become willing to engage with related content that is presented deductively—and to be a better deductive

learner. The inductive experience prepares a person to be a more active listener, evaluating and interacting with the information, rather than passively hearing and absorbing parts of it.

- 5. Integrity in approaching Scripture:** Using a deductive approach, a teacher can find and assemble isolated verses to prove ideas that aren't supported from a careful reading of Scripture. In fact, this is how cults lead people to believe that the Bible supports what they teach. An inductive approach treats Scripture with integrity. It requires careful reading, examination, exploration of the context, and discovery of the original author's purpose. A model of approaching Scripture inductively safeguards against careless or destructive teaching.
- 6. Communicating the authority and value of Scripture:** The inductive method encourages people to immerse themselves in a passage of Scripture rather than to depend on a human expert. Those who facilitate an inductive approach encourage people in their group to see Scripture as the authority rather than themselves. They also help people to taste and see for themselves, so that they see the value of investing time in studying the Bible.
- 7. Trust in the Holy Spirit:** It takes faith not to circumvent the process of discovery. By letting go and allowing the Holy Spirit to

use his Word as you discuss it together, you are trusting him to illuminate the truth of his Word in his timing. You are also leaving room for group members to discover truth without becoming dependent on you, or on another human teacher or leader.

- 8. Respect:** An inductive approach communicates that thinking adults are capable of understanding Scripture. As you approach the Bible inductively, discovering its message on an equal plane with your group members, you are communicating a message that understanding the Bible isn't for an elite group. As the Holy Spirit works in them, they can see and accept the Bible's message for themselves.
- 9. Sharing joy in the journey of seeking God:** You can learn inductively on your own, but the inductive method provides a rich context for groups to learn together. The insight of one person can spur on the thoughts of another, which in turn leads to new understanding for everyone. It is like a group of researchers who pool their gifts and abilities together to unearth new discoveries, giving everyone involved a sense of excitement and joy. Each person contributes a piece of the puzzle, and then all share in the satisfaction of completing it.

“There isn't another book in the world that's been more misquoted, regardless of context or purpose or reference, than the Bible. That's one reason inductive principles are so important.”

– Catherine Schell,  
co-founder of Neighborhood Bible Studies, now Q Place