

**Study Questions for “How the Closed Brethren Became Open”
by Dale R. Stoffer**

1. Stoffer believes the original Brethren were quite “open” before 1850. In what way would you say they were “open”? What were they open about?
2. You might say that the Brethren became more closed to maintain a separation from the influences of the world. To what extent is a separation from the world important to you today? Should the church stay away from involvements in the workings of the world, such as politics, finance, entertainment, or should Brethren witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ in these endeavors?
3. One of the historical points of contention between Brethren was the choice between a focus on mission or service. In your mind, what’s the difference between mission and service? What should be the attitude of Christians toward mission? Toward service? Is one more important to you than the other? Which? Why?
4. Open and closed communion was also a big issue at one time. Do you think communion should be available only to those who have made a commitment to Christ and the church, or should it be open to anyone who is seeking a relationship with God and the church? Why?
5. There is a certain amount of openness and closedness within the Church of the Brethren and within The Brethren Church. In either case, how do you view tough issues such as military service and membership in the church, homosexuality and membership in the church, and doctrine versus belief? The churches are struggling today to know how to deal with these controversial issues. Is there a single answer in each case? How do you know when to apply strict adherence to the beliefs of the church or leniency? Do any parables come to mind to illustrate this dilemma?