

Asian Crescent

How to Lead Bible Studies

Session 1: Perspectives on Bible Study

- I. Introduction: Staff and students can be trained to lead excellent Bible studies, but without training most will be mediocre

- II. The Essence of Scripture
 - A. False (incomplete) evangelical views of the Bible
 - 1. Guidance for life
 - 2. Directions for getting saved
 - 3. Moral instruction and example
 - 4. Instruction for ministry

 - B. True evangelical view of the Bible
 - 1. The word of God (2 Timothy 3:16)
 - 2. The source of life (Psalm 119:50; John 6:68)
 - 3. The gospel of Christ

 - C. As ministers of God's word we want to avoid a completely utilitarian view of scripture, but in our ministry bring the dead to life, give hope to the hopeless, and enable people to encounter the living God

- III. Receiving Scripture
 - A. Hearing
 - 1. The unique benefit: clear, accurate explanation and application of scripture
 - 2. Thus the preacher must strive for careful exegesis and thoughtful application

 - B. Reading
 - 1. The unique benefit: personal focus
 - 2. Thus the individual can freely pursue his own personal interests

 - C. Discussion.
 - 1. The unique benefit: individual verbalization and inter-personal interaction
 - 2. Thus the leader must strive to involve everyone in discussing the passage

- IV. Good Discussion
 - A. Small group Bible studies must be interactive. (From "[Ministry to Students by a Church](#)")
 - 1. This is where students learn to think, to encourage and correct each other, and to interpret the Bible accurately.

2. Without interactive Bible studies, ministries often produce students with theological prejudices. They believe what they have been taught, but have no depth and cannot defend their beliefs. Such students are easy prey for shallow ministries or false teaching, or even the lies of Satan.
3. To be a bit simplistic, the student minister should preach the gospel with a well-digested text in the gathering of all students (the Large Group Meeting) . Then the students should be turned loose to explore the Bible on their own in the Bible studies without a lecture from the leader.
4. For this to be effective and to prevent pedagogical chaos requires trained Bible study leaders.

B. Iconic cultural image of friendly discussion

C. Accuracy in Bible study groups

1. Accuracy of interpretation and application must be pursued in Bible studies, but it is not the highest goal
2. The highest goal is to get everyone involved in talking and struggling with the passage
3. If accuracy were the highest goal, we would lecture
4. Bible studies can never be the only source of biblical input; preaching and teaching are necessary to provide that clear, accurate exposition of scripture
5. In the Bible studies, people will at times say things that are wrong
6. Mark Lowrey, founder of RUF: if there isn't some heresy being articulated in your small groups, something isn't right
7. In the process of talking, often the thoughts of participants become clearer
8. Sometimes people will leave the study with wrong views
9. We trust God to correct this in His time, using preaching, teaching, etc.
10. Our role is to follow up the Bible study with one-to-one meetings
11. What you see in Bible studies should also influence the Large Group teaching

V. The Goal of Bible Study.

- A. To be transformed (Romans 12:2)
- B. Renewing of the mind comes first
- C. Moving from knowledge to assent to trust
- D. A changed mind changes the will, body (behavior), emotions, and conscience
- E. Interaction: changes in the will affect the behavior, emotions, and conscience – etc.
- F. Feedback loop: changes in will, behavior, emotions, and conscience promote further changes in knowledge and belief

VI. Assumptions

- A. The Holy Spirit is working in people when they study the scripture!
- B. Scripture is literature

- C. The process of studying the Bible is no different than the process of studying any piece of literature
- D. Scripture is God's word
- E. God's word always has a powerful impact when it is delivered (Isaiah 55:10-11; Hebrews 4:12-13)
- F. We expect the Holy Spirit to be at work in everyone who is present in a Bible study
- G. God works in everyone in different ways; people in a Bible study will experience God differently
- H. Therefore, we do not need to correct every mistake. Let the Holy Spirit do His work!
- I. Sometimes the Holy Spirit will lead a Bible study in surprising or even unnerving directions

Session 3: Preparing a Bible Study

- I. Goal of preparation: get everyone involved in talking about the passage and heading toward the main point
 - A. Thus the main point must be clear in your mind
 - 1. If you are not clear on the main point, the study will wander aimlessly
 - 2. You don't need to have answers to all questions in the passage
 - B. Your preparation must be oriented toward provoking conversation about the passage
 - 1. Dynamic we are after: energetic discussion with friends of a sports event or movie
 - 2. We want to hear the opinions of everyone present
 - C. Must know well both the passage and the people
 - 1. Commentaries can help you understand the passage, but don't take the place of your own study of scripture
 - 2. Study guides can help you understand how to engage abstract people with the passage, but can't take the place of your understanding the specific people in your group
 - 3. Using a study guide to lead a Bible study is like reading a sermon in your large group meeting that someone else wrote
- II. Study the passage carefully yourself (See "[How to Study the Bible](#)")
- III. The key to a fascinating Bible study: lead the group through a natural thought process
 - A. Difference between preaching and a Bible study
 - 1. Preaching
 - a. You present a carefully prepared explanation of the passage
 - b. The whole message is a presentation of your conclusions about the passage
 - c. It is generally undesirable and unhelpful to burden the congregation with an explanation of *how* you studied and prepared your sermon
 - d. People benefit by understanding and responding to the word of God
 - 2. Bible study
 - a. You assist the group in studying the passage together
 - b. You don't get to the conclusions until the end of the hour

- c. The whole point is to go through the study process
 - d. People benefit by understanding and responding to the word of God – **and** by learning *how* to study scripture
- B. Respond naturally to the text
- 1. How did *you* respond to this text when you studied it? What caught your eye?
 - 2. What is naturally eye-catching, perplexing, shocking, etc.?
 - 3. What in this passage will your students in particular especially respond to?
 - 4. How will they respond?
- C. Let OIA fall out naturally
- 1. Don't ask all the observation questions first, then all the interpretation questions, then the application questions
 - 2. Often, especially with attentive people, it works best to mingle observation and interpretation questions
 - 3. In fact, sometimes if the facts are rather obvious you can jump right to interpretive questions ("Why did this happen?")
 - 4. You can tell if they missed an important observation – their interpretation will be off; then you can go back and observe some more ("Wait a minute, I think we missed something in verse 2")
 - 5. If you have spent a good portion of your time on a part of the passage and there is a significant application in it, go ahead and discuss that application before you finish the passage
 - 6. If they can't resist discussing the end of the passage first, let them – then go back and pick up the beginning
 - 7. People are impatient; they want to rush to application, but maybe they will pause to consider a puzzling interpretation. Occasionally let them race ahead until they get stumped; then go back and observe what the passage actually says
 - 8. Always make sure the application cuts to the heart – of the passage and of your students; don't let them apply it to hypothetical people out there – make them apply it to themselves, their roommates, their families and friends
- D. Ask well-worded questions
- 1. Not too simple; they will insult or embarrass people
 - 2. Not too complex; they will confuse people
 - 3. Must be clear: simple structure and obvious intent
 - a. Avoid complex and compound sentences
 - b. Avoid difficult vocabulary
 - c. Avoid insider terminology or cultural references
 - 4. Must lead toward the main point
 - 5. Must drive application to the heart
 - a. Not abstract theological points; theological points grounded in real life
 - b. Not generic moral principles, but real issues your people struggle with
 - c. Not to generic people out there somewhere, but to your people in their situation

- E. Creative questions
 - 1. Identify with the perspectives and attitudes of your students; e.g. “those tiresome Old Testament laws” (Mark 1:44)
 - 2. Play the devil’s advocate; promote a wrong, but plausible interpretation, and see how long it takes them to figure out the problem
 - 3. Suggest real situations in their own lives where the passage applies
 - F. Differences between male and female thought patterns
 - 1. Among men understanding tends to grow through contrast; among women understanding tends to grow through cooperation
 - 2. See *You Just Don’t Understand*, by Deborah Tannen
- IV. Write out your questions
- A. This will discipline you to make them clear
 - B. Write them on note cards or half-sheets of paper, or an app that is easy to use
 - C. Write the main questions at the left margin
 - D. Write secondary, support and clarifying questions indented under the main question
 - E. Write optional questions in parentheses
 - F. Write the answers to any questions which are not completely obvious to you
- V. Common Bible Study Pitfalls
- A. Leader talks too much
 - B. Leader answers his own questions
 - C. Stiffly march through OIA
 - D. Questions are not written out, resulting in a study that wanders
 - E. Questions are so simple they insult or embarrass people
 - F. Questions are so complex they confuse people
 - G. Questions are just murky or vague
 - H. Questions don’t lead to the main point
 - I. The leader fails to discipline himself to avoid delicious but irrelevant side issues
 - J. Application fails to grab the heart
- VI. Monologues
- A. Useful for introduction, conclusion, and explanation of points they need to know to understand the passage but could not know themselves
 - B. None is better than too much
 - C. Must be **essential** and **brief**
 - D. Long monologues cripple discussion and short-circuit the learning process
 - E. Monologues are most useful to explain some necessary cultural data, e.g. leprosy
 - F. Suspense is desirable
 - 1. Suspense promotes curiosity and desire to learn
 - 2. Jesus left people wondering
 - 3. Suspense creates space for the Holy Spirit to work

Session 7: Leading a Bible Study

I. Preparing for the Meeting

A. Recruiting the people

1. Where will you get the people?
 - a. Shared life (e.g. language, hometown, high school)
 - b. Dorm or area of residence
 - c. Class or team
 - d. Special interest (e.g. sports, gaming, Japan)
 - e. How you form the group will affect other aspects of your ministry
2. How will you contact them?
3. How will you invite, encourage, persuade them to come?
4. Weekly contact and encouragement

B. Selecting a place

1. Easy to find
2. Easy to get to
3. Comfortable, warm atmosphere
4. No distractions
5. This is more important than you think
6. Possibilities: dorm room, lounge, seminar room, cafeteria corner, your house

C. Choosing a time

1. When the people will be available
2. When the people will be most receptive
3. When the leader is available

D. Setting up the room

1. Enough comfortable seating
2. Good lighting
3. Comfortable temperature
4. Reasonably tidy

II. Mechanics of the Meeting

A. Beginning the meeting

1. Welcome everyone and make introductions
2. Use an ice-breaker for a few weeks to facilitate relationships
3. Explain the process and expectations of the Bible study to the people in the group.
 - a. The purpose of the group: discuss the passage at hand
 - b. We are not interested in what someone else thinks; we want to hear *your* thoughts
 - c. No one knows all the answers
 - d. Everyone says something wrong at some point

- e. We are all learning together
- f. Your role is to facilitate discussion, not to teach
- g. Come to large group to hear teaching
- h. When the study will end
- 4. Begin with prayer
 - a. For a new group, it might be best for the leader to open with a simple prayer for God's blessing
 - b. As the group develops, they ought to share requests and pray for each other (This could also be done after the study.)

B. Leading the meeting

- 1. Encourage everyone to speak
 - a. Recognize those who have not spoken much
 - b. Call on people by name if necessary, but only those people who will not feel too awkward about it
 - c. Be sensitive to different levels of spiritual and personal maturity; direct questions appropriate to the ability and comfort level of each person
 - d. If necessary, speak to someone who talks too much outside the meeting; enlist his help in drawing out others
- 2. Affirm all contributions; learn to find something positive to say about anyone's contribution, even false ideas – be encouraging
- 3. Keep the study moving
 - a. Develop a sense of pace that is appropriate for your group
 - b. Don't get bogged down on minor points
 - i. This means you must be clear about what the 2 or 3 major points of the study should be
 - ii. Deflect minor points to another time, like after the study
 - c. Summarize the discussion
 - i. Do this when enough has been said on a point and most people have had a chance to speak
 - ii. Here you are playing the role of moderator
 - iii. E.g. say, "So are we all saying this passage teaches that Jesus is the Son of God?"
 - iv. One sentence is about right; this is no time for you to hijack the study and preach a sermon
- 4. Encourage interaction among the group members
 - a. Set the example by using one person's comment as the basis for your next question
 - b. Call attention to agreement or disagreement among members
 - c. Encourage them to resolve differences of opinion themselves
 - d. Ask one what he thinks of another's statement

- e. If they too easily (unthinkingly) state a position, express doubt so they can gang up on you
- C. Keep the study moving in the right direction
- 1. Try to avoid dead periods in conversation, but give people time to think
 - 2. If you get a glazed look from one of your questions, reword it to make it clearer
 - 3. **Never** answer your own questions!
 - a. This is the fool-proof way to sabotage your Bible study
 - b. Remember the idiotic professor in *Paper Chase*
 - c. Reword the question
 - d. If that doesn't work, move on; often the point will come up later
 - e. In the worst case, go home, ask someone for help, and try again next week
 - 4. Try to avoid conversation off the topic
 - a. Listen politely to a tangent, then steer the conversation back to the passage
 - b. "That's interesting. Now what do the rest of you think about Jesus' statement in verse 5?"
 - c. Keep the conversation on track by making your questions very specific
 - i. Not: "What are some false ideas people have about Jesus?"
 - ii. But: "What are the two most common heresies about the nature of Jesus?"
 - d. However, don't make them so specific they are insulting
 - i. Not: "What did Jesus do to the leper in verse 5?"
 - ii. But: "Why did Jesus touch the leper?"
- D. Ending the meeting
- 1. Close in prayer
 - a. For a new group, the leader might pray for God's help in applying the scripture
 - b. As a group develops, others should join in praying for application
 - 2. End on time!!!
- III. Tips for Stimulating Conversation
- A. Communicate that you are really interested in the views of the people attending
- 1. If you are willing to listen to them so that they will listen to your little sermon, they will get the message that you are not really interested in them
 - 2. If you are not really interested in them, they will not share anything of real significance
 - 3. Do you care about them as people, or only as objects of your teaching ministry?
 - 4. If you love them, you will be interested in their views
 - 5. If you are genuinely interested in their views, they will share their views with the group
- B. Always try to involve the group in answering questions that arise
- 1. Refuse to answer questions they can figure out for themselves
 - 2. Redirect questions to the rest of the group

- C. Identify with the perspectives and attitudes of your students in asking your questions
 - D. Play the devil's advocate; promote a wrong, but plausible interpretation, and see how long it takes them to figure out the problem
 - E. When the group is stuck with two competing views, solve it the American way – hold a vote to decide which truth is correct
 - F. Let them pass by an essential point until they get stuck, then point them back to it
 - G. Occasionally refuse to clear up a murky secondary point for them – let them stew on it for a few weeks
 - 1. Suspense is a good thing. Jesus used it
 - 2. Missed points can be great topics for your one-to-one time
 - H. Suggest real situations in their own lives where the passage applies
- IV. Tone of the Group
- A. You want to create a warm and accepting, but also stimulating and exciting environment
 - B. You want to create a sense that scripture is both understandable, but also mysterious; practical, yet rich literature; serious, but enjoyable
 - C. You want to develop an insatiable appetite for discussing God's word

Session 17: Conclusion

- I. Most people can lead effective Bible studies if they are trained and supervised, and if they practice
- II. The goal of a Bible study is to transform people
- III. The means of accomplishing this goal is conversation on scripture – discussion among everyone in the group
- IV. Your personal thorough study of the text is essential
- V. Carefully prepare questions which will engage the group
 - A. Follow a natural thought process
 - B. Use creative questions
 - C. Drive application to the heart
- VI. Keep the study moving in the right direction
 - A. Get everyone talking
 - B. Prompt students to interact with each other
 - C. Keep moving toward the main point
 - D. Call attention to when they hit the main point; summarize their conclusion

VII. Our Convictions

- A. Scripture is the word of God, the source of life, and the gospel of Christ
- B. Scripture is inherently fascinating and transformative
- C. "...my word...that goes out from my mouth...shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11)
- D. "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:12-13)

VIII. Results come with practice