



Leading a Small Group Bible Study

Quick Start Guide 7



Leading a Bible study requires an understanding of the dynamics of the group as well as the Bible passage. You won't become an expert in this all at once but this resource aims to help you get there quicker! Don't forget to see the big picture with the Bible study as just one crucial aspect of what the small group is about.

Preparation check list

1. Have you prayed?
2. Do you have the Bible study well prepared?
(using a study guide also requires preparation too, e.g., adapting the questions for the group)
3. Have you enough handouts/pens/spare Bibles for the group?
4. Have you agreed with the group leader (if that's not you) when you should start and finish?

Practical arrangements: The physical environment is important. Before you start make sure:

- Everyone can see you
- It's not too warm or too chilly
- Any distractions are turned off/removed (like mobile phones unless they are being used for an online Bible).
- You have everyone's attention.

Important! Bible reading: ask people to read large sections or the whole passage and not a verse each which interrupts the flow. Try and use the same Bible version as much as possible.

Being a guide on the journey of discovery

Leading a Bible study is like being a guide on a journey and definitely not a lecture. As a guide you need to:

- Know your **destination** – know your material well enough to know what you want them to learn and apply. No one wants to come away from the Bible study lost and confused.
- Know the **route** – remember they haven't yet walked through the process of understanding that you have. Don't assume understanding – check they have understood at each stage or you will have left them behind.
- Set the **pace**. Keep an eye on the time so that you arrive at the application. Don't rush and leave people behind.
- Allow them to **take in the sights** – don't answer your own questions but as an expert guide feel free to add to them. However, be careful not to make them dependent on your expert knowledge – rather help them understand the Bible for themselves. This may mean asking extra questions you have not pre-prepared.
- Make **course corrections**. If someone pursues a tangent steer them back perhaps by saying 'we can talk about that over coffee'. If someone is wrong; gently correct them by saying something like 'are you sure that is what the Bible text says – if we look a bit closer it says...' If they are partly right be sure to affirm what is right too.
- Be prepared for the Guide, the Holy Spirit, to make a **course adjustment**. Someone might share something deeply personal or profound that demands a response. The Holy Spirit might prompt you to take a different tack. But remember God was in the preparation too and major changes to direction are not the norm.

Guiding the group as a whole

Leading a group Bible study is very different to giving a talk/sermon or studying by yourself. Someone will answer a question and someone else will add to it and the interactions become much more complex but also rich and diverse—this is the strength of group study. However, sometimes you might have to butt in to ask the next question. Other times you'll have to handle a long silence. Here are some tips:

- **Don't be afraid of silence** – people need time to think. If it goes on too long or you see that people are confused, re-phrase and then re-ask the question.
- **Remember you have limited time** – make sure you ask the next question, you could say, 'it's great that this question brings out so much but let's keep going' (giving a sense of progress on a journey).

Including different learning strengths

People tend to have strengths either in learning by **hearing** (or reading), by **seeing** (or imagining) or by **doing** (or talking about the practical outworking). Engage with these three different strengths by:

1. Encouraging questions for clarification. Encourage 'thinking out loud' and bouncing round of ideas before settling on an answer. Give space for reflection and digesting of what has been spoken.
2. Encourage imagining what it was like to be in the Bible story. Encourage people to use picture language, e.g. 'what picture springs to your mind when you think of Paul speaking of adoption as sons?'
3. Ask, 'what will you do to try this out?', 'what will it mean in your life?' or 'what has it meant in your life?'

Encourage everyone to engage with all three of these learning strengths (as a personal exercise, think about how Jesus did this in the Gospels) and be prepared for some of the group to be stronger in different ways – this adds to the group learning experience. Be aware of your own learning strengths so that you do not play solely to them.

Guiding individuals in the group

Not everyone will fully engage. Some may even resist going where you are leading. Resistance happens in different ways for different reasons – as the guide you need to recognise this and respond appropriately to the individual. Some possibilities are:

- **The very quiet person:** might not be resisting (but how can you tell?). Ask them an easy question directly, 'what do you think?' but avoid embarrassing them with a difficult question which requires knowledge – that might be why they are saying nothing. Affirm their answer as much as you can without affirming error.
- **The overly talkative person:** they're not resisting actively but by saying too much they are preventing everyone else making progress. Thank them for their input (when they pause for breath) and ask the rest of the group (or one person you can rely on to answer) what they think. Do this as often as it takes for them to get the hint but don't silence them completely. If the hints don't work, a private word may be necessary.
- **The person with their own agenda:** you are the guide not them. Their different destination may be perfectly valid but it is discourteous of them to try to assume your role. Say, 'we can talk about that over coffee sometime' or 'that's interesting, but today we are focussing on...'