

GUIDE FOR BIBLE STUDY LEADERS

How to Approach and Prepare
For a Fruitful and Impactful Bible Study

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Guide for Bible Study Leaders

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Guide for Bible Study Leaders!

As a Bible study leader, you have my utmost respect and appreciation. Yours is an extremely important ministry to the Christian church, because it contributes to another person's sanctification and to a deeper understanding of God's word.

If your study is evangelistic in nature or incorporates those with a non-Christian background, then your joy is multiplied since you will contribute to a better understanding of Scripture and may have the privilege of seeing someone come to faith through your efforts.

And so I commend you for taking on such a wonderful responsibility. I have no doubt that the Lord will use your leading of a study to greatly strengthen or increase the numbers of his church.

MY GOALS FOR A BIBLE STUDY

While there are many ancillary benefits to participating in a Bible study: fellowship, accountability, support and pastoral care, to name a few, my interests in creating these free Bible study lessons is primarily two-fold:

1. That people would grow in their love, understanding

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and study of the Scriptures and in so doing grow in their love for the Lord and his work in the world;

2. That people might truly experience all of the joy and fulfillment that comes from seeking and following God's word and his son Jesus, the Word made flesh.

ORIENTATION FOR OUR BIBLE STUDIES

All of the Bible studies at Free-Bible-Study-Lessons.net are formatted in a similar fashion and contain two sections.

1. Bible Study Lessons - This is the heart of the study and contains:
 - Lessons for each week of the study including helpful commentary and historical background on the text for that week.
 - Questions related to the passage to help you dig deeper into the text for that week.
 - Questions related to the application of a passage, which allows the Bible to speak into our everyday situations and life.
2. Outline of each book

HELPFUL ADVICE FOR BIBLE STUDY LEADERS

The following information provides an important foundation for the leading and facilitating of any Bible study.

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Rule #1 For Bible Study Leaders

“You must do justice to the text of the Bible...”

Your first task as a Bible Study leader / facilitator is to do justice to the text of the Bible. This does not mean that you must become an expert in biblical languages, exegesis and the like.

It does mean, however, that you should take the time to understand what a particular portion of Scripture is trying to communicate.

Your Goal is To Draw Out the Meaning of a Text

People can make the Bible say any number of crazy things, and in all likelihood, they will do that as you facilitate a study.

Thus, your part is to try to facilitate the conversation in such a way as to draw out the probable meaning (s) for the text.

This does not mean you shut down off-base discussions or you prohibit people from an honest wrestling of what a passage is trying to communicate. It simply indicates, that in some form or fashion the group should arrive at a satisfactory place in terms of a passage's meaning.

How do you know if you've arrived at a passage's true

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meaning?

Your own preparation will be helpful in this regard because it will give you confidence that you are on the right track. After this, you should rely on the work of others (commentaries, dictionaries, study bibles, etc.) and on the contributions of the individuals in the group.

Many passages will yield their meanings by simply slowing down, carefully reading and observing what the text actually says (and does not say), and asking the right questions. This will come with time and with the acquisition of more knowledge for each book or topic you happen to lead.

Context is King

You may have heard the old adage, “a text without a context is a pretext.” Let me tell you, I’ve been around long enough and have experienced Christianity in many different contexts (including cross-cultural) to know this is a very true statement.

Because people sometimes approach the Bible from their own pre-conceived notions, cultural perspectives or personal /theological agendas, it is quite easy to read a text out of context and misinterpret its meaning.

Thus, one of your greatest allies to doing justice to the text is to

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begin with a proper understanding of a book's context. Who wrote it, for what purpose, to whom and when?

This is especially true when studying the epistles in the New Testament because all were written for specific audiences and with specific intentions in mind.

Colossians, for example, was written to combat a particular sect of Christianity whose focus was ascetics of the body, worship of angels, special knowledge and Jewish legalism.

What was Paul's answer to this insidious teaching that was threatening the Colossian church? Jesus is the express image of God, supreme over all creation, head of the Church and superior to any human knowledge or tradition!

The more you understand those specifics (the context), the more conviction you will have that your interpretations are on target.

These in turn will lead to great applications for a modern context because, the more you understand God's word for the original audience, the more you will understand it for a modern (or post-modern) audience.

How does this play out you ask?

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Be Prepared - Do Your Own Study First

1) In order to add good content and depth to your Bible studies, I would suggest you purchase or obtain some quality Bible resources: These include a study Bible, a Bible dictionary and a one-volume commentary on the whole Bible.

- For a study Bible I would recommend: [NIV Study Bible](#).
- For a Bible dictionary I would recommend: [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary](#)
- For an excellent, one-volume commentary check out: [New Bible Commentary](#)

On my [Bible Study Tools](#) page, I give you more in-depth information on each type of resource (contents, benefits, types, etc.)

It is not critical that you take my suggestions; however, what is important is that you avail yourself of the incredible resources that have been put together by the Christian community.

I promise they will take your personal study and your leading of studies to a whole new level.

2) Read the introduction to the book you are studying in order to get a feel for the historical context, flow, purpose and main

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themes that are covered in the book.

This one exercise alone will give you great confidence as you begin studying the different parts of a particular book. Things will make sense as you read each individual section of the book.

3) Study the outline of the book to get a sense for the flow of the content. (Our Bible Study Guide contains an outline for each book study.)

4) Now, sit down and read the book in its entirety. Trust me on this. It is a beautifully satisfying exercise.

Most of us read the Bible in chunks, a verse here or there. Reading the whole book will give you a very different perspective. (Indeed, it is likely that all of the epistles were read in one sitting at different church gatherings. Check out this quote from Paul's letter to the Colossians:

“When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.” Col 4:16

If you are reading a long book, then read a complete section. For example, if you are reading Genesis and will by studying

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Abraham's life, read Gen 12 – 25.

5) Next, read the specific text that you will be talking about for that week several times. Ask yourself what ideas are being communicated.

6) Look over the Bible Study Lessons that you downloaded from Free-Bible-Study-Lessons.net for that section to gain further insights.

7) Read the appropriate section in your one-volume commentary to get even more insights in the Scripture for that week.

8) Read over and answer the questions in the Bible Study Guide (both textual and application) to see how they relate to the text for that week.

While this process may seem burdensome, don't approach it that way. View this time as a way to deepen your understanding of God's word and as a way for God to speak to you about your life situations.

Also, keep in mind that your goal is to be well prepared to lead a Bible Study. Spending a few hours each week will pay off handsomely in your confidence, your ability to facilitate a study and in the how deep people are able to go in their

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understanding of Scripture.

In all, it is a great privilege to be in this position. So spend a little time to make your Bible study the best it can be.

Finally, let me add that if you really want to ramp up your ability to study and interpret the Bible for yourself, head over to our Hermeneutics / Exegesis section of our site Free-Bible-Study-Lessons.net for some resources that will really blow your socks off.

Once you start down the road of acquiring some basic tools for bible interpretation you will not want to stop.

With time, you will be creating your own outlines, resources and Bible studies to share with others.

Rule #2 for Bible Study Leaders

“You Must Bring It Home - You Must Make It Relevant”

Your second task as a bible study leader / facilitator is to help people apply the word of God to different facets of their life.

Scripture has something to say (in its applicability) on every subject that touches our lives. This includes our own emotional, psychological, mental or spiritual well being as well as the interactions we have in the different spheres where we

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carry out our lives: relationships, home, work, church and society.

People study the Bible for a variety of reasons, but surely these reasons include wanting to hear a word from God regarding the particular circumstances of *their* lives.

It is wonderful to study the history and the culture of the Bible in order to understand its context on a deeper level. But don't stay there. You are more than a tour guide or archeology explorer of the Biblical sights and sounds. Always bring it home.

People want to know "so what?" How does the event I see in Scripture translate into actionable wisdom in the present for my life?

The best way to make an application is to extract a principle from the text you are reading. This is why it's so important to understand the context and the meaning of the scripture for the original audience.

The principle of not eating animals that chew the cud (Leviticus 11) has nothing to do with animals per se or eating pork (though some would argue there are many health benefits to eating kosher).

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The principle has to do with two things primarily: 1) Being holy (i.e. not doing the things that Israel's neighbor's were doing) and 2) Identity – Every time you sit down to eat, your dietary restrictions are supposed to remind you that you are God's special people. (And since you eat several times a day, then you should dwell on this idea several times a day...)

Once you understand the principle, a modern day application becomes much easier. If you really want to get discussion going you could even throw out the question in your study, “How would the principles we’ve discussed be applied in our modern context?”

Rule # 3 For Bible Study Leaders

“Remember you are a facilitator not a seminary professor”

Please remember that your task in leading a Bible Study is to facilitate, to move the study along, to make sure everyone is involved.

If people wanted to hear a 40-minute Bible lecture, they would have chosen to go to seminary instead of your Bible study. (Unfortunately, that doesn't speak well of my profession, but we're trying to improve that on a daily basis. ☺)

Your task is also to lead people in the proper understanding of the text but without giving people the answers. You want your

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group to discover things for themselves. People do not want to be spoon-fed.

They want to participate; they want to be heard (and yes, sometimes they just want to hear how eloquent their ideas sound, but that's game too!)

This is called wrestling with the biblical passage. What does it really say? What doesn't it say? Can it mean this, or that? It's what honest (and sometimes controversial) discussions and questions are all about.

Besides, no one has all of the answers. Don't facilitate a study as if you do (even if you know a lot more than most participants).

Finally, be sure to encourage different applications of the text as long as they fit the principles the passage is talking about.

Rule #4 for Bible Study Leaders

“All you need is love...”

Sometimes, we tend to make the Christian faith really complicated.

Jesus summed it up this way. “Love God, love your neighbor...” ALL of the Bible is contained in those two

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commands!

How does this pertain to a Bible study?

Love must abound. This means being kind and compassionate for others' ideas (no matter how crazy or how much you disagree). You can disagree in a loving way.

This means patience for people who take too long to answer a question or who seem to bring up their personal problems often.

This means demonstrating humility (and not pride) in how you approach the Scriptures and how you approach your leading of a Bible study.

This means lavishing people with praise, encouragement, grace and genuine concern, because at the end of the day, people don't care how much you know as much as they know how much you care.

Ultimately, your study is about facilitating an encounter with God's written word and with the triune God who loved us and gave himself for us. Love is the perfect reflection of these goals.

May God richly bless you as you lead people into a deeper

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understanding of his word!

If I can be of service to you in any way, answering questions or providing resources or advice, please don't hesitate to contact me through my website in the footer link.