



Leading Small Group Bible Studies



Before the
Meeting



During the
Meeting



After the
Meeting



Common
Problems
w/Leaders



Common
Problems
w/Members

JOHN WADE ALLEN
TEMPLE BAPTIST CHURCH
ROGERS, ARKANSAS



This training guide is intended to help you to become a leader, or facilitator, of small, Bible study discussion groups. When I lead discussion group Bible studies, I do not have answers anywhere in the material, nor do I use a leader's guide with all the answers written in. This is INTENTIONAL! I believe that the discipleship process should be an encounter with God, not just writing down answers in a book. As the questions are asked, every participant (including the leader) is required to search God's Word to discover the appropriate morsel of truth.

That discovery process is the key to the success or failure of this process. There is nothing particularly new or innovative about this; in fact, it is quite ordinary! What makes it extraordinary is the guidance of the Holy Spirit throughout the discovery process.

We cannot forget what Jesus told his disciples the night before his crucifixion. He assured them that ***“when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.”*** (John 16:13a). The most effective teaching that we can experience is when the Holy Spirit is at work guiding every group member to discover the truth that they



need today.

This dynamic interaction with the Holy Spirit is awesome and inspiring! But to be honest, it's also a bit frightening. I never really know what the Spirit has in store for each study, or where He might lead the group.

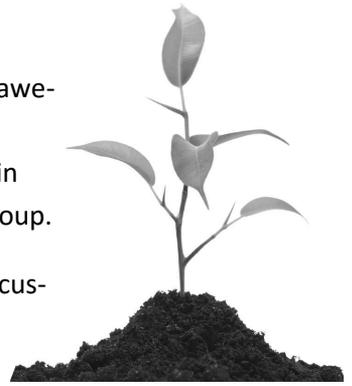
Each time I lead a discovery Bible study, the discussion is unique and fresh. "Why?" you might ask. I believe that this is possible because of the nature of the questions. I always work hard to ensure that the questions in the studies I lead are "open-ended" to allow for the leadership of the Spirit. Questions that can be answered with "yes/no" or single words or phrases do not require much thought. My goal is to ask questions that require contemplation, for in these introspective moments of group silence, the Holy Spirit is unleashed to guide each believer "into all truth."

Don't be afraid of those moments of awkward silence! Embrace them! Celebrate them! Rejoice in the fact that the greatest teacher of all is at work in the hearts of your group members! Allow time and opportunity for His "still, small voice" to be heard. It cannot be heard if I never stop talking!

So I invite you to join me in this journey to discover a different method for communicating God's Word to the hearts of His people. My prayer is that your 'teaching' would be transformational in the lives of your group members because you are relying upon the transforming power of the Spirit and His Word!

"And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by

Small Groups
come grow
in one...



Practical Guide for Facilitating a Small, Group Bible Study



Before the Bible Study Begins

Pray for God’s direction in planning your time together.

You can write your own study questions or use ones that have been prepared by someone else. Go over the study yourself first if possible, so you can change, add, or delete questions. Try to find Bible verses that answer the questions.

Pray for the following:

- That God will meet with your group.
- For each person in your group.
- That God will bring those He wants to be there.
- For the people you and your group members have invited.
- That God will help you to resist the temptation to teach or correct people.

Primary Goal :

A cell leader’s primary goal during the discussion Bible study time is to enable each person to discover what God says in the Bible so that they can believe and obey Him.

Secondary Goal:

The cell leader’s secondary goal is to help train future leaders to lead and facilitate small group, discussion Bible studies.

During the Bible Study Discussion Time

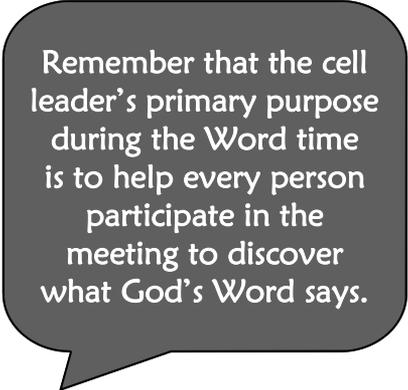
Be a Facilitator

The work of the facilitator, or Bible study leader, is to make the process easier for an individual or group to discover truth from the Word of God. A good leader resists the temptation to teach and/or correct people. Instead, they try to ask questions and refer to Bible verses where members can find God's answers to their questions. Let the Word of God speak for itself! Save your comments for **one** important idea.

Make Visitors Feel Welcomed and Included

When there are visitors attending, have someone introduce them, or ask them to introduce themselves. Then encourage everyone, including the visitors, to answer an icebreaker question. This will help visitors to feel more a part of the group. If everyone already knows each other well, icebreakers should be limited to 10-15 minutes.

Have everyone participate in reading the Bible text by having each person read a few verses. Visitors may not know where to find Bible verses. Have someone help them. Encourage visitors to also read out loud, but allow them to pass if they are not comfortable.



Remember that the cell leader's primary purpose during the Word time is to help every person participate in the meeting to discover what God's Word says.

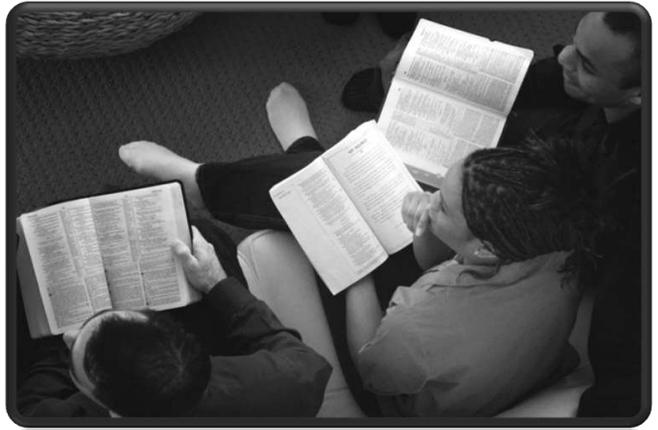
Ask Questions... Wait for Answers

Start by asking a number of simple questions with answers that are easy to find in the Bible text. Then continue on with one or two questions that require some thinking. There is usually someone in every group who likes to answer difficult questions.

Do not repeat what others say, unless people cannot hear what was said. Instead say, "Thank you," "Correct," "Good," or "What

else?” or ask the next discovery question.

Do not be afraid of the ‘awkwardness’ of silence! It is in those silent moments that the Holy Spirit is able to speak to the hearts of your class members. If you interrupt this silence, you may be quenching the work of the Holy Spirit!



Do Not Believe that You Have the Answer to Every Issue

At the end of the Bible study time, the leader may summarize **one** important idea in the text. Or the leader may gently correct **one** idea that might otherwise cause some to be misled. **But the leader should not talk for more than a few minutes.** The joy of discovery will keep people interested in studying the Bible. Over time, people will discover all the Bible’s teachings, if they remain excited about studying the Bible. Almost all wrong ideas will eventually get corrected, if we let the Bible do the talking. But people may lose interest and drop out of groups if the leader gives too many answers and frequently corrects wrong ideas.

Spend Time Applying God’s Word to Life

Always be sure to **ask application questions** at the end of the Bible study time. Small group Bible studies should never just be an academic exercise—



small groups
grow spiritually.

we must be “doers of the Word, not hearers only.” So after discussing the application questions, have people pray in groups of two,

three, or four. People often share more openly and honestly when they pray with fewer people.

Share Testimonies and Praise Reports

Encourage people to share testimonies of what happened when they applied something they learned from the Bible. You can ask for testimonies at the beginning of some meetings instead of having an icebreaker. You can use questions like the following:

- “Share one thing God did in your life last week?”
- “How has our study of the Bible changed one thing in your life recently?”
- “Share one answer to prayer in the last week.”



After the Meeting

After a time of prayer, fellowship and saying goodbye—at the end of each meeting—it is important that you spend time evaluating what happened and how effectively you led the study. You may do this with your spouse, a friend, your cell leader, or your pastor. This process of evaluation helps us continue to improve as leaders.



If the meeting was led by a new leader, it is vitally important that you spend some time evaluating him. You will want to mention the good things he did. Briefly, you might mention **one** thing needing improvement. And only offer **one** suggestion. Anyone can become a good leader with a lot of positive encouragement and some coaching. All the negatives issues will get corrected over time.

So how can I constructively critique my fellow worker in the Lord?

Critical comments hurt and discourage people. However, researchers have discovered that people hate being ignored. They will do almost anything to gain attention. They would rather be noticed for bad behavior than be ignored. The more they are ignored, the more extreme their attempts become to be noticed. But negative behavior decreases when the opposite positive behavior is praised



Practical Suggestions For Dealing with Common Problems in Leaders



A Leader Who Talks Too Much

The most common problem is a leader who dominates the group discussion. A small group leader must resist the temptation to teach or to answer questions when the group is quiet. If you talk a lot as a leader, perhaps you can arrange with someone in your group (e.g., a friend or your spouse) to help you. Agree on a signal that they can give to remind you to let others talk. It may be hard at first not to talk as much as you would like, but you will become a very good leader if you keep working at it. One measure of a good meeting is that everyone participates in the discussion, with several people contributing **more** than the leader.

A Leader Who Wants to Correct Those Who Give “Wrong” Answers

It is best to not correct people nor argue with them in cells and small groups. **Let God’s Word do the talking. Then their issues will be with God, and you can remain their friend.** If you do this, most members will continue to study God’s Word with you, regardless of their preconceived ideas or religious background.

When someone gives a wrong answer, just say, “Thank you.” Then ask if someone else would also like to answer the question.

You may need to ask the question again, and give the Bible verses where the answer(s) may be found. If someone else gives a correct answer, nothing else needs to be done. If no one gives a good answer, the leader may answer the question or ask a follow-up question that restates the original question in a different way. Also be sure to check the footnotes to the study because the author of the study guide may have provided a clue or an answer. Then ask the next question.

Gifted leaders often find it difficult to let significant truths go unmentioned and “errors” to go uncorrected. If a pastor, or other gifted teacher, is visiting the study, talk to him or her before the meeting privately. Explain that **the goal of the study is not to teach or correct every mistake, but to encourage people to discover for themselves the Truth of the Bible and to apply what they learn to their lives.**



People learn to study the Bible by actually studying the Bible, privately and in small groups. People make lots of mistakes during the learning process. If we correct all their mistakes, they will likely get discouraged and quit studying the Bible entirely.



However, **it is important to correct false teachings so that no one is misled.** That does not happen very often in small group Bible studies that use a study guide. Those who write study guides tend to ask questions and provide information that guides people to the truth and away from error.

Try to limit your corrections to teachings that are clearly contrary to the Bible. To encourage people to study the Bible in their personal devotions, give them lots of positive encouragement. This means letting them miss some truths and not correcting their errors in small group meetings.

We should, however, always insist on accurate Bible teaching in public preaching and Bible classes.

What about Questions You Do Not Know How to Answer?

It is good to admit that you do not know the answer to some questions. Say, “That’s a good question. I do not know the answer right now. I will do some research first and get back to you about this.” If needed, you can ask for help from your leader or pastor. If they do not know the answer, they may be able to direct you to a book or a person who can answer the question.

Giving wrong answers is worse than saying you do not know the answer. By admitting that you do not know all the answers, you set a good example for others to follow when they lead a small group Bible study.

No one knows the answer to every possible question that people may ask. And no one expects you to know everything. Some questions have puzzled Bible scholars for centuries. Not knowing the answer to every question only demonstrates that you are human like the rest of us.



What about Bible Studies That Take Too Long or Have Too Many Questions for the Time Available?

There are several possible solutions to this problem.

- **Go Over the Study Yourself Before the Meeting**

Decide which questions to ask and which questions not to ask unless there is adequate time. Decide on what some of the possible correct answers are for each question. That way you’ll know when each question is answered correctly. Decide which reference should be looked up. It is not necessary to look up every reference. They

are there for those who want to do further study. It is not necessary to read footnotes, unless you think they did not understand something very important.

- **Divide the study into two or more studies**

Another option is to divide the study into two or more studies so that you have enough time for everything that needs to be done. Keep the study moving. Give people time to answer. If no one answers within 20 to 30 seconds, call on someone to answer it. Give the Bible references where the answer(s) may be found. If there is still no answer, either answer it yourself or go to the next question. When a question is answered satisfactorily, ask the next question immediately. It is important to keep a study moving. If you do not, it may become too long or boring.



**Practical
Suggestions
for Dealing with
Common Problems
with Group
Members**



Members Who Are Very Quiet

A leader can try to get very quiet members involved by specifically asking them to answer a question that has an easy answer. If they do not answer right away, give them the verse(s) where they can find the answer. If they need more help, ask them to read the verse(s). Then say something positive, so that they feel encouraged that they gave at least part of the answer. Some people need lots of encouragement at the beginning. But once they discover that they can find the answers and that they can understand the Bible, they often become excited and bring their friends

A Member Who Dominates the Discussion

When the person finishes, just say, "Thank you." If he continues for a long time and begins to teach the entire lesson, wait for him to take a breath at the end of a sentence. Immediately say, "Thank you," even though he is not done! Immediately ask the next appropriate question and direct it to someone else. Then direct the next two questions to other people so that others can participate. Let

him answer another question later, after several other people have had a chance to answer a question.

As people become used to participatory Bible study and feel increasingly comfortable with each other, these problems tend to disappear without the leader having to say anything.

If necessary, the leader may talk to that person privately. If that does not solve the problem, you may arrange a private signal with that person to help him learn how to participate in the group without dominating the discussion. In the process, you may help that person become a good leader.

People Who Distract the Group from the Intended Study

Sometimes a member will ask questions unrelated to the study. If no one else in the group can answer such a question, you can say, “That is a good question. We will study that at another time.” If you know where the answers may be found, you can give them Bible references and suggest that they study it at home. Then ask the next question in your plan for that study.



Perhaps you can meet with people privately to discuss their questions. But people may not have studied enough of the Bible to understand the Bible’s answers to more complicated questions. Encourage them by saying that it is good to ask questions, because they help us learn. Tell them that most of their questions will be answered as we continue to study the Bible together.

Members Who Argue with Others

If someone starts to argue, you can say, “This is a good discussion, but we need to continue to the next question. There may be more than one correct answer to many questions. We want every-

one to be free to have their own opinions.” Ask the next question and specifically ask someone else to answer it.

Doing this may not satisfy anyone. But defusing a potential argument early avoids many problems. Once a few additional questions have been asked and answered, people’s attention will be mostly back on what God’s Word says.

After the meeting, talk privately to the individuals involved in the argument. Even a brief argument can cause strong feelings. Someone may not be happy with you for stopping the discussion.



If you need help to resolve a theological question or a damaged relationship, discuss it with your leader or pastor as soon as possible. Many theological questions will eventually be answered as we continue to study the Bible together, but it is best to resolve relational problems as quickly as possible. Disagreements do not have to damage or destroy relationships. They may sometimes be used to build better relationships.





Relationships in the Christian Life

Lesson 1: Loving and Encouraging One Another

Lesson 2: Living Right with One Another

Lesson 3: Living in Harmony with One Another

Relationships in the Christian Life

Loving and Encouraging One Another

Focus on God's Word

*"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another;
as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.
By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples,
if ye have love one to another." (John 13:34-35)*

Discuss God's Word

Have you ever met a person who said that they were a Christian but their life did not show it?

In John 13:34-35, Jesus gives his followers a new commandment. What is that commandment and why does He say it is important to obey it?

Read 1 John 4:7, 11-12. Discuss the impact these truths should have on your everyday life.

Is it possible to love God but not love one another? (1 John 4:20-21)

Is it possible to love one another and live in sin? (1 Peter 1:22)

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11. Is this something you are doing regularly? How could you begin to do this in your everyday life with one another?

Read Hebrews 10:24-25. What are some ways that we can encourage one another to love and do good deeds?

Is it possible to use the Word of God to encourage and comfort one another? What are some examples? (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

What three things does the book of Romans say that believers should do for one another? Why are these important? (Romans 13:8; 14:19; 15:7)

What verse means the most to you? Why?

Examine God's Word

Bible Reading – 1 Corinthians 1-5

Reading Reflection

What did Paul say to the believers in Corinth about the divisions in their church? How would loving and encouraging one another affect these problems they were facing?

Relationships in the Christian Life Living Right with One Another

Focus on God's Word

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:1-2)

Discuss God's Word

Is it important to treat one another according to the standards of God's Word?

In order to pursue righteousness in your life, what must you do? (2 Timothy 2:22)

What are some examples of right living that each of us must do in our Christian life? Why is this important? (Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9)

According to this verse, what should we do if we are not living right? Why is this important? (James 5:16)

Read Hebrews 3:13. How should this truth change the way you live?
What does it mean to “bear one another’s burdens?” (Galatians 6:1-2)

If a fellow believer sins against you, what is the first thing you should do?
(Matthew 18:15-17)

If he will not reconcile with you, what is your next course of action? (v.16)

If he will not reconcile with you, why are you told to remove him from the
group? (v. 17)

What is the most important thing you learned in this study? Why?

Examine God’s Word

Bible Reading – 1 Corinthians 6-11

Reading Reflection

*What is the situation that is described in 1 Corinthians 6? Was this
honoring to God? What advice did Paul give to the believers in Corinth?*

Relationships in the Christian Life

Living in Harmony with One Another

Focus on God’s Word

*“With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering,
forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity
of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:2-3)*

Discuss God’s Word

In your opinion, why do people struggle to get along with one another?

According to the book of Romans, what three responsibilities does each believer have to one another? (Romans 12:2, 10, 16)

What does it mean to “*be of the same mind?*” (Romans 12:16; 15:5)

Read Romans 14:19. How should this teaching change the way you live?

What should your attitude be toward a fellow believer? How will knowing this truth change the way you live? (Philippians 2:1-4)

What specific things must a believer NOT do in order to live in harmony with one another? (Romans 14:13; Galatians 5:26; James 4:11; 5:9)

Since every person is a sinner by nature, is it easy or difficult to live in harmony? What must we do to be able to live in harmony with one another? (1 Corinthians 1:10; 12:21-27)

When differences of opinion occur, what should we do? (Ephesians 4:2-3, 29-32; Colossians 3:12-14)

What is the most important thing you learned? Why?

Examine God’s Word

Bible Reading – 1 Corinthians 12-16

Reading Reflection

According to 1 Corinthians 12, are all believers given the same spiritual gifts? How does God use these differences in each believer to edify—or build up—the body of Christ?

According to 2 Timothy 2:15, what must you be able to do to be approved by God? According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, why was God’s Word given to men?

meet
together
one
encouraging
another

not neglecting
good stir let Day
habit consider drawing
see love
works near



Jesus was in a small group.



life change happens in small groups