

Appendix A

Bible Discussion Group Leader's Manual

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The following section is a *Bible Discussion Group Leader's Manual*. Please don't be discouraged when you read it. There is no need to be. There are many very fine groups functioning without all of the elements or suggestions being present. No one that I know of follows all of the suggestions. You certainly don't have to know it all in order to lead a group and to have the group be effective. It is designed to stimulate your thinking, make the groups more effective, and to be a reference source for those who desire to accept the responsibility of leading a Bible discussion group.

At the end of each chapter you will find "Extra Helps." The books and pamphlets listed there may be obtained at your local Christian bookstore or online at abebooks.com or amazon.com. The Godly Man Bible study audios (mp3) are downloadable and may also be obtained on CD or cassette audio on a free loan basis from:

Discipleship Tape Library
435 West Boyd
Norman, Oklahoma 73069

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Table of Contents

01	Why Bible Study?	99
02	Why a Small Group?	99
03	The Types of Bible Study	101
04	The Discussion Group Itself	102
05	The Elements of an Effective Bible Discussion Group	102
06	How to Start	103
07	Preparing for the Discussion	109
08	Goals of Bible Study	112
09	Leading the Discussion	116
10	Sharing Responsibilities	122
11	How to Make the Discussions More Interesting	122
12	Handling Problems	125
13	Roles in the Group	126
14	Evaluation	128

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Why Bible Study?

Many people throughout the world today are biblically ignorant. Many claim not to believe the bible, although they have never read it. The Bible claims some amazing things for itself, among which are: it is a guide; through it God brings health, growth, peace, understanding, salvation, and protection, just to mention a few. Since God can do these things and many more through the Bible, men desperately need to know what God has to say in His Word. Men who are confused and bewildered by their own lives and the world around them, when exposed to the powerful Word of God, find answers to their deepest longings and needs. As Bible discussion leaders, we have the privilege of being part of God's plan for reaching, teaching, and training men and women to accomplish His perfect will for their lives.

Why A Small Group?

The small group idea is not new. Almost two thousand years ago, the followers of Jesus Christ drew together in small groups to continue in the Word, prayer, fellowship with one another, and seeking for a greater outreach in the community (Acts 2:42). The book of Acts records the impact and vitality of these small groups and their experience around the person of Christ. One man with a genuine desire and hunger for the Lord is enough to spark and inflame a group. One group, in turn, is enough to ignite a dormitory, military barracks, business office, neighborhood or church. And motivated, inflamed men and women are enough to penetrate and saturate a community with Christ-centered disciples. Initially, the real question is not one of quantity, but quality. As Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Perhaps the Lord will work for us, for the Lord is not restrained, save by many or by few." (I Samuel 14:6b)

What ingredients will make a group successful? Here is an almost sure-fire recipe:

START with one person with a desire for the Lord,

SIFT in a few other eager Christians, plus some others who want to meet Jesus, or know Him better.

BLEND in a balanced, interesting course of study,

ADD a cup of prayer and another cup of preparation.

STIR in a tablespoon of common sense, **DROP** in a pinch of humor.

SKIM off the religious jargon, the do's and don'ts, the over-emotionalism.

SEASON with generous portions of acceptance, genuine, personal interest and love.

REMOVE preachiness, self-effort and the holier-than-thou attitude.

ALLOW the influence of the Holy Spirit to lift hearts to worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Follow this recipe of leading group discussions, and they will almost never burn, over-bake, sour, or fall flat.

There are some specific values in meeting together as a group:

1. Fellowship

“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him.” (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10 4) We need each other God has made us that way. “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” (Proverbs 27:17)

2. The interactions of a group produce faster learning.

There is more to learning than listening. We learn to do by doing. By meeting each other in small groups we benefit from group dynamics in:

- finding what the Bible has to say
- having open discussion
- having a meaningful sharing of our lives
- learning to pray together
- motivating us to outreach
- there will be time for each to contribute
- regular study will be encouraged
- there will be better stimulation of personal application
- each will be more free to share
- all will get to know the others well

There are hindrances to every one of these benefits:

- Finding what the Bible has to say - Laziness, preconceived ideas, unwillingness to accept it as the authentic and authoritative Word of God.
- Having open Discussion - Domineering leader. Leader who is an authority figure or who is afraid of revealing his lack of knowledge.
- Having a meaningful sharing of our lives - Having an honest sharing life is a difficult thing in the Christian context today. We are afraid to be honest with each other. Some of the fears are well-founded. Some are afraid they will be judged and rejected. Others, that they will be gossiped about. Still others, that people will not understand their problems. Yet others, that they may simply get a pat answer from the Bible instead of understanding and counsel. Whatever the cause for this faking each other out, it is one of the means which has effectively blocked the full flow of God's power by His Spirit into many groups.
- Learning to pray together. Some people are afraid of the sound of their own voices. We learn to swim by getting into the water. We learn to pray by praying. Some practical suggestions can be found under the heading, “The Elements of an Effective Bible Discussion Group.” These suggestions will enable you to help the group members to experience the joy of praying together.
- Motivating us to outreach. Many Christians either want to reach out to a lost and

dying world but don't know how, or are afraid to try. The Bible discussion group can be helpful in overcoming these problems by preparing the members to share their own personal experience with Christ in a meaningful way, equipping them to present the facts of the Gospel and by providing settings in which outreach may occur most naturally. Some means available for such help are:

- 1) Personal calling on friends or associates with another group member.
- 2) Evangelistic coffees or teas.
- 3) Andrew dinners. Committed couples bringing uncommitted couples together for an evening of food and fellowship.
- 4) As a group inviting friends to join you at a crusade, evangelistic film showing, special speaker, etc.
- 5) Group members organizing and leading evangelistic studies. Groups without outreach soon become ingrown and die.

3. Pressure to prepare.

Most of us are lazy and won't do an effective job of preparing in Bible discussion if we do not have the pressure of a group.

4. Application and a way to check up on our applications. God is not nearly as interested in teaching us something as He is in making us something. He is more interested in what we are (Ephesians 1:12) than what we do.

5. It will help us learn how to lead a group ourselves.

The Types of Bible Study

1. Mama-Bird Study.

This is one where the mama bird (teacher) goes to the Bible, digs out all of the little goodies and drops them into the open, waiting, and expectant mouths of the members of the group. This is the least effective type of study because it has the least retention and effect upon the personal lives of those who attend.

2. Share Your Ignorance.

This is when a group decides that they will get together for Bible study and upon arriving they decide to look at the second chapter of Luke, for instance, and then share their ignorance on the subject with no prior preparation.

3. Question and Answer.

There is a sense in which this is predigested food but is an excellent study for teaching basic Bible doctrine and truth.

4. Inductive.

This is where each member of the group goes to a portion of the Word of God and discovers the facts that are there, tries to understand what they mean, makes an application to his own life with the group coming together simply to discuss what they have found in personal study.

The Discussion Group Itself

A discussion group is not a lecture or a conversation between two opinionated people. The United States Post Office has a definition of a group that readily applies to the definition of the Bible study discussion group:

“A group of capable people put together by design
working with shared concern
toward meaningful objectives
according to a plan
at high levels of performance
within a framework of policies
*(a relationship to God and
a relationship with each other)*
to which all are committed.”

Ideally, group Bible discussions are the cooperative search for the solution to a problem, the type of interaction where decisions are made, and real learning takes place. This demands a mutual expression of interest in the subjects under study by the members of the group. The leader asks a question, and waits for the group to respond. He can then ask what the others find, or what facts did someone else discover? Again, looking around the whole group, waiting for anyone to speak. His job is that of a traffic policeman or a band director, bringing the members in or allowing them to contribute as the discussion continues. The leader should not do all of the talking, or even most of it. The leader does not have to possess all of the answers or be the authority figure. When the discussion group is functioning properly, the leader will no longer be the focus of the group. Replies will not be directed to the leader, but soon they will begin to reply and discuss among themselves. Then the discussion becomes group-centered.

The Elements Of An Effective Bible Discussion Group

The elements of an effective Bible discussion group should be:

1. A consistent study and personal application of the Word of God.
2. Prayer.
3. An honest sharing of the life.
4. Outreach.

Learning to pray together can be one of the richest experiences of the discussion group, many of whom have never prayed aloud in the presence of one another. One suggestion for “easing” one into praying before others without causing them embarrassment or fear is to have a time of group prayer with each one taking his turn. Suggest that prayers be sentence prayers, thanking God for one specific thing. Explain that if a person does not want to formulate a prayer of his own, when it comes his turn, simply to say, “Thank You, Lord” which will indicate to the next person that he may begin to pray.

After having experienced sentence prayers of thanksgiving together, another type of prayer

is conversational prayer. It is an easy thing to learn how to pray together. The honest sharing of the application will naturally lead to an outpouring of confession, praise, and petition, and heart-felt prayer at the end of the discussion. To do this, a group needs to concentrate on saying things that they really mean. Learning how to say exactly what they think or feel at the moment requires honesty and openness with the Lord and to one another. The objective is to learn to pray conversationally about common needs, in sentence prayers in order to give all the opportunity to take part. As a leader, you might begin, for instance, by sharing your heart with the Lord in the first person singular. (I, me, my, instead of we, us, or they). As you begin, and then continue, hopefully, another person in the group will feel led to share his heart on the same subject. He is simply carrying on the same prayer of the first person with hardly a break in thought. To encourage the group to stick to one topic at a time, you, as the leader should change the subject the first few times until the group catches on to the process. The tendency is to want to change the subject too soon. You will want to keep your prayers to one or two sentences so as not to monopolize the prayer time and to set the example for the next person. You should let the group then volunteer to pray but not force them. This can be accomplished, naturally, by going around the circle.

Here are some simple rules for conversational prayer to keep in mind.

1. Pray briefly so that everyone has the opportunity to pray several times.
2. Pray loudly so that everyone can hear.
3. Pray topically, so that everyone has the opportunity to pray about the same subject.
4. Pray specifically so that everyone zeroes in on a particular request.
5. Pray persistently so that everyone present sees that the group really means business.

Another interesting change of prayer is to ask each member of the group to pray for the person on their right after all the applications have been shared. This can be a very rich time indeed. Yet another idea is bidding prayer. In bidding prayer, you, as the leader, have decided on a number of things which the group could or should pray about, and will ask, "Who will pray about this?" When someone has prayed about that particular topic, then introduce another topic. This also can be a meaningful time of group prayer.

How To Start

1. Recruit people for the group.
 - a. Decide on the target group
 - b. Test their interest
2. Decide on the materials to be used.
3. Keep it small. We should grow in the business instead of going in the business.
4. Decide on a place and time.

5. Decide on the overall length of the study. (6 weeks, 12weeks, etc.) Bible discussion groups should always have an ending time. No group should form to go from now until Jesus comes.

6. Decide on the length of time to be invested when the group meets. (One hour, 1 1/2 hours, 2 hours, etc.)

7. Some do's and don'ts of inviting people:

DO:

- Invite people who have common interests and who contribute toward better understanding and communication.
- Be positive, optimistic, and enthusiastic about the study.
- Ask people to commit themselves to come each week for the specified course of study and to do the necessary preparation.

DON'T:

- Pressure people. Eager people are the best students.
- Have more than you can handle. Ten is the maximum number I have found practical with which to start.
- Be discouraged if only one person is willing to meet with you. God is intensely interested in the individual

8. Set the Stage.

a. Prepare a comfortable place. A home setting is a very relaxed and comfortable place to hold a Bible discussion group.

b. Insure proper ventilation. People being too hot or cold limits their learning ability.

c. Be sure that you have proper lighting.

d. Plan the seating ahead of time. (A semi-circle with the leader in the middle or around the table, et cetera)

e. Make sure everyone has a Bible. In a new group it may be advisable to buy an inexpensive new copy of the same translation by the same printer for each person in the study. That way, instead of looking for the verses by books, chapter and verse, you can look for them by the page number which will keep those who are not very familiar with the Bible from being embarrassed.

f. Prepare against disturbances ahead of time. Telephone, television, doorbell, pets, children, et cetera.

g. Have a good clock clearly visible.

9. Control the size of the group.

An ideal group would be not less than four nor more than 10 people. If a group grows too large all the values of being a small group tend to disappear. Fellowship becomes less intimate. Personal involvement diminishes. Stimulation to prepare and the opportunity to share application decreases. The atmosphere becomes less of a group of close friends and more of a committee meeting.

On the other hand, in a small group:

1. Each member counts and knows it. He will be missed if absent.
2. Most homes or rooms can accommodate a small group.
3. More people are willing to lead a small group than a large one, and thus have the opportunity to grow in spiritual leadership.

Sometimes it is helpful to have a group covenant. Because a flimsy, purposeless, undisciplined group works worse than no group at all, it will drive away, rather than attract.

The covenant should look something like this:

1. The supreme authority is to be the Word of God. I am willing to accept this as a rule for the discussion group.
2. The attendance at the meetings will be priority during the duration of the study. I pledge myself to be there for ____ weeks unless providentially hindered. If I cannot come, I will let someone know.
3. I will prepare my assignments in advance or not participate in the discussion. I will attend but only audit the sessions.
4. I will maintain a daily devotional time.
5. I will hold in confidence those things which are shared in the group. I will not gossip about other members of the group.
6. I will pray daily as God gives grace for the other people in my group.
7. I will seek to relate my faith to the world outside, and to share what I have learned with others.

10. The First Meeting.

It is important that people get to know each other if they are to be an effective part of the Bible discussion group. At the first meeting you might suggest that they give their name, where they are from, something about the work they do and their family. Another good way to

introduce people is to ask them to answer three questions and give them five minutes within which to do it.

Question:

- #1: What is the first thing you remember?
- #2: What people or events have made you what you are today?
- #3: What is the happiest moment of your life that you can remember?

Another way of getting a group introduced to each other is to use what is called the Quaker dialogue. The questions are as follows:

Question:

- # 1: Where did you live between the ages of 9 and 13?
- #2: How did you heat your home during those years?
- #3: What room in your house (or personal thing) was the center of emotional warmth to you during those years?
- #4: When did you first come to realize that God was something more than an idea? (In asking this last question you may explain that you are not looking for their conversion experience, but simply when their own consciousness of God came about and the circumstances which surrounded it.)

In using the Quaker dialogue, you first, as a leader, should answer each of the questions in order to give other members of the group an example of how you intend for them to be answered. On the first three questions you can go around the circle in the group. On the fourth question the answer should be optional.

Anything which can transform them from a number of individuals into a group will be helpful at the outset. Sometimes this can be accomplished through humor, other times by singing, but the necessity of welding the group together is real.

11. The Discussion Group Leader.

A. The discussion group leader's responsibilities:

1. To tell the group **WHY** Bible discussion is important to this particular group at this time. As a group leader, you need to be properly and effectively motivated. Your enthusiasm in goal setting will spur the group on to achievement.
2. To show the group **HOW**. Example is the best way to teach. You must have a workable study plan that you are personally using so that you can show them how and what to do.
3. To **get** the group **started**. Many people are just waiting for something to do and for someone to show them how. You can provide the incentive for getting started by having a plan, getting them the materials and requiring a fulfilled assignment.
4. To **keep** the **group going**. Having a regular weekly meeting to attend and

prepare for, is the best way of helping people regularly to do Bible study. Requiring a completed assignment that you will be discussing the following week will encourage them, motivate them and challenge them to be prepared.

B. As the leader, you need:

1. To know well the passage to be studied. It will take a little extra time to dig a little deeper and to look more closely at the verses being studied. Be sure to know and understand the context. But there is no substitute for diligent preparation and prayer. Don't be sidetracked from the priority of your own intensity of study. When you stop studying you stop leading effectively.

2. To be excited about the discoveries of group members. Often a Bible discussion leader will get excited about what he himself is discovering from the text of the scripture. He acknowledges what others find with a nod of the head, an appreciating remark, or a further question. But, when he fails to get excited about new truths the group members are discovering, he de-motivates them. Because you have previously discovered a truth that someone has just now discovered, don't quench his search for new truth by your superior attitude. Get excited about what others are excited about - and show it!

3. To use your sense of humor. Spontaneity and freedom are important areas to be developed in the life of the leader. Humor that is well placed, well timed, appropriate, and in the context of what is being studied, will sustain interest in the study. You must develop your own style of humor and not try to imitate another's style.

4. To be enthusiastic. You need not be the one who comes up with the best discoveries, interpretations, or applications. Neither do you need to be the one who uncovers the most revealing background material, character sketches, or facts. You should, however, be enthusiastic as you prepare for the discussion and as you long. Pray that your discussion will be one they will never forget. Ask God to give you a spirit of enthusiasm as you prepare for the discussion and as you lead it. Your attitude will help determine the attitude of each member in your group.

5. To use creative illustrations and visualizations. Eye-catchers and ear-catchers captivate interest. Simple little illustrations communicate more readily than complex ones - a picture, a drawing, a story, or personal illustration, can provide your group members with a point of identification with you. Encourage the participants in the group to share their own creativity.

6. To put the group to work. Those who consistently and enthusiastically complete the study, apply the Word of God and participate in the discussion, will want to get involved in helping others to do the same. Putting them to work leading other discussion groups or involving them in personal evangelism, visitation programs, Sunday School classes, conferences, personal follow-up and counseling will help them to reproduce Christ-centered lives in the lives of others. This is called making disciples.

7. To become personally involved with the members of the group. “Love never fails.” (I Corinthians 13:8) People desperately need someone to care whether they sink or swim spiritually. As a leader you can make all of the mistakes in the book, but if you genuinely care, people will continue to come and respond to your leadership. The apostle Paul is an excellent example of someone who really cared. “But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children. So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own soul, because ye were dear unto us.” (1 Thessalonians 2:7,8) Then he said, “I pray that you will live good lives, not because that will be a feather in our caps, proving that what we teach is right; no, for we want you to do right even if we ourselves are despised.” And, “We are glad to be weak and despised if you are really strong. Our greatest wish and prayer is that you will become mature Christians.” - II Corinthians 13:7 and 9 (Living Bible)

a. **Learn to Listen.** Listening to someone is one of the highest compliments that you can pay them.

1) Listen attentively. Use your eyes to look at a person. Don't glance off because he doesn't seem eager to respond. Be observant of what people say and use their statements to formulate other questions. It was said that President Kennedy made you think that he had nothing else to do except ask you questions and listen, with extraordinary concentration to your answer. You knew that for the time-being he had blotted out both the past and the future.

2) Be prepared to wait for an answer. Waiting demonstrates your real interest and concern. Give a person time to think. You may want to re-state the question. Also be attentive to second thoughts. Often a person will think of more to say on an issue or be able to clarify his position after he makes his first statement. It is common for people to think of what they should have said. If you sense this, be alert enough to come back for more information. “Do you have any more thoughts on that?” or, “Would you like to add anything else?”

b. **Pray.** One of the biggest ministries that you will have is praying for your group members. Much more will happen in their lives throughout the week if you conscientiously and consciously concentrate on praying for their specific, individual needs. Bring these things boldly before the throne of grace. The Lord will honor this heart-felt conviction and concern.

c. **Live what you teach.** The example of your life will speak more loudly than all the high advice you can give. Different members may not always believe what you say, but they cannot help but believe what you are.

Preparing For The Discussion

As a discussion group leader, you need to do at least three things in the way of specific preparation prior to the group meeting. You need to:

- determine your objective
- divide the lesson into manageable segments
- prepare a lesson plan.

1. Objectives. A good discussion group leader will begin with an objective clearly in mind. “He who aims at nothing hits it every time”. So be sure you have an objective in mind. Don't fall into the trap of flying by the seat of your pants, hoping that everything will work out. An objective is a brief statement which summarizes what you want from the group meeting. Ask yourself, “What do I want the group to know, feel, and do by the time the discussion is completed.” A clear objective will help you do four things.

a. It will help tell you where you are heading with the discussion and give you direction for your questions.

b. It will help you evaluate progress at any point during the discussion. After this evaluation you can make any adjustments.

c. It will allow you to make decisions along the way as to what to discuss. If a tangent issue arises, you can direct the group back to the main goal and temporarily table the tangent. But remember the tangent and deal with it later, perhaps in private.

d. It will help you evaluate how effective the time has been.

2. Divide the lesson into manageable segments. In question and answer studies or in studying portions of the Word of God you will find that the writers had certain basic ideas in mind which they were trying to put across. When you have discovered how much of the lesson a major idea covers, then you are prepared to lead the discussion on that portion. Sometimes, chapters cannot be broken down into neat packages but it's well worth the effort to attempt to determine what these logical divisions are in order to make the discussion more meaningful.

3. The Lesson Plan. The lesson plan will be helpful in assuring that you accomplish your objective, cover the material that you need to cover, and that you do not spend too much time on any one particular point. The following is an example of a suggested lesson plan.

LESSON PLAN

Chapter discussed	One
Time of discussion	One hour
Date of discussion	6/2/08
Place of discussion	Dining Room table
Objectives:	<i>(What do I want the group to know, feel, and do?)</i>
To know:	Be sure each one knows Jesus Christ personally and is assured of it.
To feel:	Assured of their salvation - based on the facts of God's Word.
To do:	To be able to clearly share the gospel with another.

I. Introduction and Prayer. (10 minutes)

II. Discussion

A. FIRST DIVISION: Main Truth, Theme, or Concept Who Jesus Christ is. Time Allotted 10 minutes.

Leading Questions:

1. What divine attribute of Jesus means the most to you?
2. What human characteristic of Jesus means the most to you??
3. What does Jesus have to do with the operating of the natural laws today?

B. SECOND DIVISION: Main Truth, Theme, or Concept What Jesus did. Time Allotted 10 minutes.

Leading Questions:

1. Is conversion the completion of salvation?
2. Luke 19:10 says "Jesus came to seek and to save the lost." Who are the lost?
3. How does Jesus "seek the lost"? How does He save them?

C. THIRD DIVISION: Main Truth, Theme, or Concept What the Life, death, and resurrection of Jesus means. Time Allotted 15 minutes.

Leading Questions:

1. Why is the resurrection important to genuine Christianity?
2. In your opinion what is a Christian? How does one become one?
3. What is repentance? How important is this to conversion?

(Some lessons may have more or less divisions, depending on the number of main themes)

III. CONCLUSION. Summary and prayer. (10 minutes)

IV. Assignment for next week session. (5 minutes)

Traps to Avoid

As you begin or continue leading Bible discussion groups don't fall into the three major traps of discussion leaders.

1. Comparing yourself to others.

The Bible warns us against doing this. “Not that we venture to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.” (II Corinthians 10:12) Comparison is the denial of God's special place for you. Each individual is unique, and the Lord has given each special abilities that are needed if the body of Christ is to function properly.

2. Giving up.

Don't throw in the towel. There is a need to stick with the goal to completion. “Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof.” (Ecclesiastes 7:8) Be a finisher. Everybody has to start where they are with what they have and do what they can. “Never give up” is the best policy to follow in leading discussion groups.

3. Discouragement.

Discouragement is spiritual anemia. Our God is the God of encouragement. And you can always trace discouragement to Satan. Don't get discouraged, but continue to “press toward the mark for the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14) He will encourage you with blessings from His Word. “Don't be impatient for the Lord to act. Keep traveling steadily along His pathway and in due season He will honor you with every blessing.” - Psalm 37:34 (Living Bible) There are three main ways you can discourage a discussion group:

- a. Rushing the lesson. If you have too much material to cover and are rushed, you will transfer your tension to the group and they, in turn, will get frustrated. Most groups prefer less to swallow, and less to chew on, than gulping down big bites. Choose the most crucial material and skip the rest.
- b. Skipping around the text. Sometimes you may be tempted to skip around the Bible using cross-references, to interpret and explain obscure passages. If you do this too much, you will lose your group in page-turning and thought-following. It is best to stick within a chapter and uncover what it has to say about a particular subject before moving outside.
- c. Monopolizing with monologues. It is so easy to move into spontaneous sermonizing and sharing your brilliant observations and ideas instead of getting into the Bible and helping the group discover the meaning. People are basically hungry to know what the Bible is saying and not necessarily what you are saying. Be sure that you give your discussion group first crack at the text before you get turned on. Keep your finger close to your own “OFF” button.

Remember that we are teaching people and not lessons. Don't be bound by the materials, but meet the needs of the people in your group.

Goals Of Bible Study

The three basic goals of Bible study are:

- **DISCOVERY** - What does it say?
- **UNDERSTANDING** - What does it mean?
- **APPLICATION** - What does it mean to me?

In your own study and in the study time of the group, these principles should be taught and followed:

1. Discovery.

Discovery can be defined as the act of seeing and taking notice of things as they really are the art of awareness. It answers the questions, "What does it say?" Accurate discovery is essential to accurate understanding and application. Adequate discovery depends upon root attitudes. The basic attitudes are openness of mind and openness of life. Too often, people come to Bible study with preconceived notions. Their attitude is "Don't confuse me with the facts. My mind is made up." The wise man is always open to new ideas. In fact, he looks for them. - Proverbs 18:15 (Living Bible)

The person who doesn't have an open life won't see certain things. Whenever we guard some area of our life, we hinder our understanding. A man who is not open to being changed in his marriage won't see anything that would indicate that a change should occur. The woman who won't admit to vanity in her life won't see it described in the scriptures. There are three steps to making good discoveries.

- Prayer
- Reading
- Recording

PRAYER is an act of the will and an acknowledgement before God that you are dependent upon the Lord and His Spirit to reveal truth to you. The psalmist prays, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." (Psalm 119:18) Paul continually prays in his letters that the Spirit would open the eyes of understanding to his converts. (Ephesians 1:17,18)

READING must involve the attitudes of diligence, purpose, thoughtfulness, and inquiry. Reading is not a lazy man's art. Chewing over and assimilating the Bible, meditating until it filters down and jogs the mind and heart requires quality time. When you study you read for the message, not for the mileage.

RECORD what you discover. As you write it down, it will force you to clarify your thoughts. You may feel you can't write down everything. The more you can, the more help it will be. If you don't have a good study Bible, try to get one. In it, you can underline important words, write in the margins, and use arrows to connect associated terms.

Often the first step in making a discovery is defining words and phrases. Without the meaning of words there is no possibility of communication or understanding. If you do not have both a good regular dictionary and a Bible dictionary, get them. They are the best possible reference books for Bible study. Unger's Bible Dictionary and New Bible Dictionary are two suggested helps. Haley's Bible Handbook and Unger's Bible Handbook will also help.

2. Understanding. We assume that the Bible is literal. That is, the Bible means what it says. However, there is often more than one definition to a word. Understanding means finding which definition the writer had in mind when he wrote the words. Here are some of the questions which will help you in gaining good understanding.

WHO - Who are the personalities involved?

WHAT - What ideas were being conveyed, and what results were expected or gained?

WHERE - What was the geography? Where did it happen?

WHEN - What was the time element involved? When did it really take place?

WHY - Purpose. What was the reason for which it was written?

WHEREFORE - Application. What did the writer expect to happen as the result of what he wrote?

HOW - Implementation, method. What plan did the writer have for seeing that his objectives were reached?

There are times when we cannot come to clear conclusions. At this point we must acknowledge the possibilities without being dogmatic. Real understanding is not finding some mysterious hidden meaning through the use of allegorical or symbolic words. The Bible does use some allegories, and symbols but there are usually very easily identified.

You will also want to use the rest of your Bible as a commentary on the particular passage you are studying. The basic approach to the scriptures is dictated by the scriptures themselves. The Bible is its own best commentary. Use cross-references in your study.

3. Application.

Since God is more interested in what we are than what we do, application is the most important part of Bible study. It means putting the Word of God into practice, stating the problem and attacking it head-on, recognizing the voice of the Lord, and responding accordingly.

The benefit of Bible study is not the method, the technique, or the diligent efforts of deciphering the text. The benefit is in obeying the voice of the Lord, taking what He says and putting it into practice. Application doesn't happen by chance or by osmosis. Application is by intent. The starting of application is a healthy and immediate response to the truth. A rejection of truth is the result of unbelief and disobedience. The response should be trust, obedience, praise, and thanksgiving. An unwillingness to apply the scriptures personally may tend to develop an intellectual knowledge with spiritual insensitivity to the Lord, and to people.

Our response is always to God and not to a rulebook. Our response is to be motivated by love ... the goal is to respond to Him at the point where we meet Him in the word. Our ultimate goal is the pursuit of God, pleasing Him in every area of our lives, getting to know Him better and better. Our depth with God can be measured by our obedience to Him and by the depth of our relationship with other people. Shallow relationships with other people indicate a shallow relationship with God.

How To Make A Personal Application From Bible Study

1. What impresses me most?

(Generally, as you study a subject or a portion, God by His Spirit will lay some particular aspect on your heart. Pray that God will open your eyes to a specific application. Ask Him what He wants you to do about it.)

2. Where do I fall short in this?

(When God speaks to you about a particular aspect of the study, write out the way in which you fall short in this area. Use personal singular pronouns - I, me, my, mine, etc. An application should be personal, practical, and possible. It should be concerned with a truth which may be translated into daily life and should be clearly stated. The application may deal with your relationship to God or your relationship to man. It should result in personal spiritual enrichment and uplifting by deepening your relationship to the Lord, or should improve your relationship to fellow Christians or those outside of Christ.)

3. What do I intend to do about it with God's help?

(Write out your intentions as a definite action that you will take now to correct the weakness, build the needed quality into your life, strengthen the understanding, etc.) This action may be memorizing a verse on the subject, or making a special study on it, or praying daily about the need. It may be writing a letter of apology, righting some harm done, et cetera. Whatever the action - be specific. Always realize that unless God helps you, real lasting application is impossible.

We need to ask our discussion group members to make personal applications. Two primary questions must be in the heart of every believer before he tackles the text of any scripture. "Do I have a desire to know God's Word?" and "Do I have a desire to do God's Word?" If either of these questions triggers a negative response, stop the boat, because here's where the Bible student has jumped overboard heading for the falls. The Bible was never given to satisfy men's curiosity, but to change and redirect their lives. God has given His Word in order to reveal Himself and to cause a response in our lives to Him and His principles of living as found in the Bible.

Seven traps that keep us from applying the Word of God properly:

1. The human heart resists change. It always is costly to the pride to stop, change gears, and move in a different direction. We tend to write it off by saying, "I can't possibly do that" or "The Bible is too complex for me to understand" or "Besides, I'm doing okay now."
2. An unwillingness to admit our faults. There is a lack of understanding as to what application really means. The opposite of understanding is not ignorance. In the Christian faith the opposite of understanding is disobedience. To know and not do is not to know at all.
3. There is pressure from society to conform to relative standards and not to the absolute standards of God's authoritative Word. Some say "That's all right, everybody's doing it", or "If I applied that to my life, it would cause me a lot of difficulty at home and at work."
4. There is a tendency to apply the Word of God in areas where I'm already using it. Therefore I redefine sin to fit my model of life and avoid a confrontation with truth that steps on my toes. This can be seen in my attempt to draw up a list of the filthy five, nasty nine and the dirty dozen - a compilation of things I NEVER do.
5. There is a tendency to substitute interpretation for application. This can be seen by too much concern for "How many toes are on the beast of Revelation?" rather than living a holy life in the midst of a perverted generation. When we see conflict of interpretation we shouldn't say "This is unclear and therefore I don't have to follow it." That is excusing, rather than attempting to understand.
6. There is the substitution of an emotional experience for a volitional act. I get carried away with an "experience" - a new "sensitivity to feeling", a glob of non-directed emotional vibrations that leave me nowhere. I say, "Oh what a beautiful sermon. Wasn't it eloquent and dramatic," but I avoid the pointed demand for commitment and action.
7. There is the fogging of clear thinking by prejudice, bias, and laziness. I get the human viewpoint or my group's viewpoint confused with the divine, and I'm off on another tangent. Because this truth conflicts with my preconceived ideas, it can't possibly mean that I do thus and so. "And besides, I'd have to give up this habit and attitude to do that, and God doesn't want me to do that yet."

The place to start with application of the Word is with a healthy, immediate response to it, admitting that sinfulness exists within our own hearts and moving in the direction of obedience to Him, with a specific act.

Leading The Discussion

The importance of questions.

Asking questions to help a person discover scriptural principles for himself is not a new technique. Jesus used over one hundred questions in the Gospels. There were many purposes behind the questions of Jesus. One man has said Jesus came not to answer questions but to ask them. Not to settle men's souls, but to provoke them. Jesus used questions to:

1. Secure information. Luke 8:30
2. Express emotion. John 3:10
3. Recall the known. Mark 2:25,26
4. Awaken conscience. Matthew 23:17
5. Elicit faith. Mark 8:29
6. Create a dilemma. Mark 3:4

Jesus often used a leading type of question which suggested the answer He wanted but which allowed the one being questioned to draw his own conclusions. The nature of the leading question is to lead toward a conclusion without forcing acceptance of the answer, or a preconceived idea. For example, in Matthew 5:13 Jesus asked this question on the sermon on the mount. "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?" The conclusion is obvious. You need to stay salty to have the effect of salt.

Sometimes He used questions to stop the opposition. He used questions that His foes were unwilling to answer. Compare Matthew 21:25-27, Matthew 22:45, and Luke 14:5,6.

From Jesus' example, you can see that your job as a discussion leader is to help others discover truth for themselves. Therefore, it is necessary for you to cultivate the ability to develop and ask the right questions. These questions become the springboard for discussion in the group. Do not simply repeat the questions in the lesson, if it is a question and answer study. Formulate questions which will help the members make new discoveries about what they've studied. Never tell when you can ask. Be open to answers you didn't have in mind. By looking for your own preconceived answer you may miss new insights from God. Questions are valuable because:

1. They help evaluate the group members' understanding, knowledge, and progress in the lesson.
2. They cause the group members to think.
3. They reflect a personal approach which elicits a personal response.
4. They prevent you from becoming the authority figure.
5. They allow the group members to discover truth for themselves.

Robert Lewis Stevenson discerned the value of questions when he said, "You start a question and it's like starting a stone. You sit quietly on top of the hill, and away the stone goes, starting others."

After you have done a Bible study to completion you have in a sense, climbed the mountain. You have discovered, understood, and applied truth. You have attained a sort of satisfaction having walked through the passage of scripture to your destination.

Now that you are on top of a hill, you look down at others who want to climb it. The tendency as a discussion group leader is to throw out all the pearls that you have found along the way. If

you do this, you stifle study and quench inquiry especially when you become impatient with others when they don't seem to grasp quickly what you saw.

It is possible to get so bound up in meeting a time limit, trying to cover too much material or waiting impatiently while another stumbles around, that you forget that the purpose of a discussion is to help others learn to dig from the Word, and develop their relationship to Christ. Your refusal to listen or take the time to help them “see” and “understand” what is there, may cool their curiosity to desire more from His Word. Remember, we teach people, not lessons. “People enjoy climbing mountains, but only the feeble enjoy being carried up.”

The real key to asking questions is your genuine concern and interest in people. Genuine questioning conveys the attitude that you are truly interested in what people have to say. You cannot successfully fake genuine concern. Neither can you conceal a lack of concern. True dialogue begins when people genuinely want to share in another person's thoughts. If you are really interested in what the other person feels and thinks, you will never be ineffective in asking questions.

It's true that there is an art in asking questions. But anyone who wants to, can learn a lot about the knowledge, skills, and techniques in asking good questions.

There are basically three avenues of questioning in a group discussion. These avenues parallel the three parts of Bible study. These questions are **LEADING**, **GUIDING**, and **APPLICATION**. These correlate with the parts of Bible study **DISCOVER**, **UNDERSTANDING**, and **APPLICATION**.

1. Leading Questions.

Leading questions are to initiate meaningful discussion of a section or division of the study. The questions you use to start a discussion should be carefully selected. The questions will determine to a large extent both the direction of the discussion and the type of response you will receive. Leading questions are aimed at discovery. You should have two or three carefully prepared in advance for each section of the study, in case one of them or two of them don't really get the discussion started. Some helpful beginning questions could be:

“What have you discovered about _____?”

“What new insights have you seen concerning _____?”

“How does your discovery in this area relate to any other portion of the scripture?”

Leading questions must be simple, relevant, and short. Avoid using “and,” “or,” “but,” in your leading questions as this introduces a second question. Some other general examples of leading questions are,

“What concept in this section was of uppermost importance to you?”

“Would you describe what you studied from this section?”

“What impressed you most from this section?”

2. Guiding Questions.

The purpose of guiding questions is to reveal “What does this section mean?” It is aimed at understanding. It is difficult to fully prepare guiding questions in advance because each discussion will determine its own course. However, it is helpful to have a few ideas in mind, prior to the

discussion. Your own preparation of the lesson will help you in this.

Each paragraph or division of the lesson should be summarized before the application question is asked. It will be helpful to keep short notes on what was contributed during that part of the discussion in order to be able to summarize it. Your summary might go like this: "It seems that what we have said is, _____". Summarization should clarify, analyze and arrange logically, or structure the chief points in that phase of discussion. One of the keys to learning is to organize, structure, or synthesize the truths discovered. Some examples of guiding questions could be:

"What does that mean?"

"Can you illustrate that?"

"Can you give us an example, preferably from your own experience?"

"How do you relate that to our discussion today?"

"Does someone else have an idea on that?"

"Is there any scripture to help us on that point?"

Some key words to remember in guiding questions are: *feel, think, mean, respond*.

3. Application Questions.

The purpose of application questions is to help each individual determine what he thinks God wants him to do as the result of the study. "What does God want you to do about it?" These questions should draw specific acts or attitudes which the passage being studied implied or commanded. No study is complete without bringing attention to what should be done as the result of what has been studied. These questions will be asked at the end of each section. They should not be saved until the end of discussion time. Application should be emphasized throughout the discussion.

A realistic evaluation of your questions can be done by asking the following questions about your questions.

(1) To whom is the question directed?

(2) What is the underlying purpose of the question?

(3) What answer does the question expect or suggest?

(4) How personally are the hearers involved by the question?

(5) What degree of urgency does the question suggest? The more we think about and evaluate the questions we ask, the greater will be our usefulness as a leader and chairman of the group.

Let us remember at the same time that spiritual truths and spiritual gifts are spiritually discerned (I Corinthians 2:12-14) and that the Lord longs to give us the wisdom from above that we need so much.

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." (James 1:5)

1. To whom is the question directed?

a. To oneself - *rhetorical*; Avoid rhetorical questions; they usually kill discussion at once.

b. To one member of the group - *direct*; Beware of direct questions; the person asked may have nothing relevant to say.

c. To the one who asked the previous question - *reverse*

d. To the group, other than the previous questioner - *relay*

e. To the group as a whole – *general*; Normally use general and relay questions; they stimulate the group most.

2. What is the underlying purpose to the question?

Is it to accumulate facts, to define, to clarify, to explain, to compare, to contrast, to develop, to relate, to bring the group back to the subject, to change direction, to involve, to arrive at conclusions, to summarize findings, or to stimulate applications?

3. What Answer Does the question expect or suggest?

Type Of Question Examples Answer Value As Guiding Question In Leading Discussion

Type of Question	Examples	Answer	Value As Guiding Question in Leading Discussion
a. Loaded	Of course you all agree, don't you?	Yes	None - it neither stimulates thought nor discussion.
	Surely you don't think that, do you? <i>(A question where you have a preconceived answer and will accept nothing else)</i>	No	None – it is clear to all that you've an exact answer in mind. Instead of stimulating discussion, you've started a mind-reading competition. It would be much better to ask: "What are some great truths in this chapter?" Then it becomes an open question.
b. Limiting	What are the three great truths in this chapter?	What the group thinks you think.	Some – it insists on a decision. But it must be followed by an open or wide-open question if you want to stimulate further discussion.
c. Open	Do you agree with that?	Yes or no.	Much – it stimulates discovery, understanding or application according to how you word it.
	Who is this all about? Where did this happen? When was this? Why was it? What was the outcome? How can anyone benefit	People Places Times Reasons Results Conditions	
d. Wide-open	What do others think?	Any	Very much – it stimulates maximum thought discussion. It is best used after an open question has been answered.
	What does anyone think about that? What does anyone else think?	relevant thoughts.	

4. How are the hearers involved personally by the question?

- a. What should other people do about this? - not at all
- b. What should 20th Century man do about this? - very little
- c. What should unbelievers do about this? believers? - only if the hearers are of the group named.
- d. What should you do about this? - all except the questioner.
- e. What should we do about this? - all, including the questioner.
- f. What will you do about this? - all, fully committed, except the questioner.
- g. What shall we do about this? - ALL fully committed.

Notice how Jesus Christ helps His disciples to think first objectively (without being personally involved) and only then subjectively (being personally involved) about so important a matter as who He is (Mark 8:27-29, NEB).

- Verse 27 - “Who do men say I am?”
- Verse 29 - “Who do you say I am?”

5. What degree of urgency does the question suggest?

- a. What could we have done about this? - none
- b. What could we do about this? What can we do about this? - vague
- c. What shall we do about this? What should we do about this? - urgent
- d. What should we do about this, as soon as possible? - most urgent
- e. What should we do about this, when ever possible? - recurring

There are three criteria for good questions.

- Good questions are: Clear
- Good questions are: Relevant
- Good questions: Get A Response

1. *Clarity*

Does it ask for observations and facts rather than opinions and feelings? Can it be easily remembered and understood? Does it avoid complicated wording?

2. *Relevance*

Can it be answered from two or three of the truths in the section of our study? What is the underlying purpose of the question? Does it focus attention on the main point? Does it relate to contemporary life?

3.. *Response*

Will it stimulate good participation and discussion? Does it give more than one person opportunity to respond? Does it draw from their personal preparation?

Learn to avoid the use of these types of questions:

Guessing Questions which require chance answers. Would make no difference.

“Guess which question has the most answers?”

Pumping Questions which try to squeeze the right answer from the group members.

“What does this mean?” “Okay, what does this mean?” “Okay, what does this mean?”

Fact Questions which only require knowledge of facts, and generalizations.

“What did Jesus do when He went to the temple?”

Digressionary Questions which lead the group astray and off on to tangents.

“Concerning the authority of the Bible, what does the Koran have to say?”

Double-Answer Questions which require two different answers - really, two different questions.

“What does this verse say, and what about the verse in the next chapter?”

Obvious Answer Questions which require no thinking or very little.

“How many members are in the Trinity?”

Questions With Involved Wordings which are too complicated and complex to answer or understand.

“Seeing the 60 different items in chapter two, how many complex and complete sentences can you construct using just a word or two from each verse?”

Too-Difficult-To-Answer-Questions which require thinking or facts beyond the aptitude or ability of the reader.

“How many camels can get through the eye of a needle?”

Questions In A Haphazard Sequence which have no order or method in the questions.

“Who finished the assignment?” “Who would like to begin in prayer?”
“Did you understand the chapter?”

“A skilled question is the half of knowledge.” – *Francis Bacon*

Sharing Responsibilities

One of the finest opportunities for training others is in the choosing of an assistant who could take your place when you're gone, and eventually start another group. In choosing an assistant, look for the person who will:

1. Pray with you for the group on a regular basis.
2. Help you lead the group more effectively by going over the evaluation after the discussion time.
3. Discuss with you what happened in the discussion. Why it happened and how to improve. He will often be able to see more clearly what happened in the group because he is not under the pressure of asking questions, redirecting questions, and answering questions.
4. Learn how to lead a group himself, so that if you have to be absent he can take the responsibility of leadership.
5. Be prepared to start and lead another group. You should meet with your assistant 10 or 15 minutes before the study and then stay with him 10 to 30 minutes after the study in evaluation.

How To Make The Discussion More Interesting

As the old saying goes, "There is more than one way to skin a cat." The same is true in leading a discussion group. There is a sense in which "variety is the spice of life." Don't get in a discussion rut. Try some new approaches. You may be surprised how positive the response will be. Employing audio-visual aids is one way to be a creative leader. The ability to learn and retain knowledge is increased when audio-visual aids are used.

Science has proven that over 70% of our mental impact is made through the eyes. The "eyes have it!" So here are some helpful hints in utilizing visual and audio aids. Try a few before you say "They won't help me!"

Why are visual aids so important to Bible study? They accentuate and strengthen learning in at least eight ways:

1. They catch the students' interest. They get attention, surface needs and curiosity, and orient them to the subject at hand.
2. They contribute to the depth and variety in learning. They offer an alternate to just writing, talking, and listening.
3. They clarify words and concepts. They visualize the verbal, and translate observation and interpretation to communication.
4. They stimulate thought and imagination. They sensitize and personalize objective facts into subjective feelings.

5. They aid logic and reasoning. They allow a viewing of the process, sequence and organization of ideas and concepts.
6. They make learning more permanent. They project upon the mind's eye images and pictures that are permanently etched. They are pass-on-able!
7. They help students assimilate information. They make remembering and learning easy and fun by giving a package construction to study.
8. They aid in personal growth. They emphasize the problems and processes and not the product of growth, showing the relationship of study, time and evaluation.

What are some visual aids that can be used?

1. Slide projector - 2x2 slides can be organized into short teaching segments. Make your own slides by taking your own pictures and telling your story with them.
2. Overhead projector - Very useful with your own creative transparencies. They are transferable and useful in small groups. Everybody in the group can use it, adding to your transparency or creating their own.
3. Opaque projector - Although very expensive, it is useful when you want to use material on a screen from a book or picture.
4. Filmstrip projector - Many film strips can be ordered from your local library or denominational Christian education publishers.

How can visual aids be developed for Bible discussion? Here are some tips:

- Watch for new ideas. Openness to new ideas, thinking and viewpoints is a key to finding visual aids. You will find visual aids in everyday items. Learn to carry paper and a pencil with you to jot ideas down.
- Learn to think creatively. Look for new ways to use familiar aids. Creativity is the ability to view the usual as unusual and the unusual as usual.
- Create your own teaching tools. Make your own charts, pictures, cartoons, flash cards, posters, puppets, objects, models, maps, slides, films to illustrate specific lessons.
- Visit your local library, church media department or bookstore. You may stumble across a book, pamphlet, or article that jogs your thinking, and stimulates a creative thought for a visual aid.
- Write publishers and producers for listing of visual aids. Ask for catalogues, listings of films, filmstrips, slides, pictures, object lessons, overhead transparencies, etc.
- Check with public school teachers and friends for ideas. One of your greatest sources of ideas is the imagination and thoughts of a friend who is involved in the teaching profession. Some of your best ideas will come from a “brainstorming session” with a few people who want to think along with you.

Visual Helps

1. Pictures - start a file of pictures of things you can use to illustrate material in discussion groups.
2. Exhibits - make a display of useful evangelistic tools or helpful study books and literature.
3. Objects - use common things, like a marble in the hand to show how the Lord has the world in His hand.
4. Specimens - sharing artifacts, a grain of mustard seed, a wheat germ, a grapevine can make a dull conversation more interesting.
5. Charts - chart the course of Paul through Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Africa, and make his travels come alive.
6. Graphs-have the group make a graph of their Christian growth or to show the rise and fall of King David, etc.
7. Maps - a good map of the Bible lands make history and narrative material understandable.
8. Figures - draw figures, sketches, stick-figures to show the action and movement of Bible personalities.
9. Diagrams - a drawing of King Solomon's temple, Jerusalem, or Noah's ark helps communicate size, thought and feeling.
10. Cartoons - add a little humor to otherwise dry material.
11. Posters - great to show a group to communicate ideas, events and attitudes.
12. Chalk boards - every discussion group leader should have one of these on which to write. A newsprint pad serves the same purpose. Both are ideal for writing outlines, sketches, and diagrams.
13. Newspaper and magazines - these are great to draw from for ideas, pictures, and articles.
14. Games - these are fun to play and can be organized around some Biblical principle.
15. Field trips - a trip out to see something of interest or to get involved personally in practicing a newly learned skill can really meet needs. You might take your group on door-to-door evangelism.
16. Dramatization - this fits into the category of role-playing and can be effective in communicating emotions and feeling.
17. Role-playing - taking the part of an angry Herod can add a new dimension to Bible study since you are walking in the shoes of another.

18. Handouts - *why handouts are important in bible discussion:*

- They convey large amounts of information for group members to see.
- They leave time for the group to interact and work.
- They are useful in summarizing a session and pointing out key concepts.
- They help communicate a written form, such as “How to Write a Lesson Plan” or “How to Prepare a Testimony.”
- They facilitate note-taking and encourage group members to write things down.

Audio Aids

1. Audio recorders.
2. Video recorders.
3. Radio - you might schedule a Bible discussion during a radio program that corresponds with your topic.
4. Telephone - you can use a telephone in a discussion on prayer, comparing it with our conversation with the Lord.

Audio visual aids offer a variety of opportunities. Try it, you'll like it! The other group members will catch on quickly, and will be adding their own to your accumulation of teaching techniques and tools.

Handling Problems

In every discussion group you will run into problems. These problems, or obstacles can turn into opportunities with proper handling. Here are some suggestions to help you solve these problems:

How to draw everyone in: Your role as leader is one of a guide, not a teacher. Beware of dominating situations, or appearing to be the final authority on questions that arise. Keep a mental note of those who have not been contributing and direct some questions to them. Be sure the questions are easy so that they are not embarrassed. If necessary, call the group members by name, to help them participate. Leave enough time for them to answer.

How to control the talkative. This is a difficult task. You can call for a contribution from others by asking “What do others think?” or, refer questions specifically to other people. If this doesn't work you may have to have a private conversation with the talker explaining the necessity of group participation and getting that person to help you draw others out.

How to get back on the track. Look upon tangent issues as possible fish bones you may put aside in order to get at the meat. A recognition of the situation generally helps. “This is interesting. However, we have left our topic. Perhaps we could discuss this further after the

group has completed its discussion.” Or you might suggest that the question be tabled until you complete the idea being discussed. But if you do this don't fake it but actually go back to the question and handle it if they want to.

How to handle wrong answers. Never contradict a person flatly and tell him he is wrong. You might want to direct the same question to someone else in the group. For example, “Okay, what do others think?” or, “Has anyone some scripture which may help us here?” or, “What does someone else have to say about this?”

How to handle silence. Don't be afraid of pauses. Don't try to fill in verbal voids. Give people time to think. The silence may do more good than the discussion has done. The silent times may be uncomfortable times but they are productive.

How to answer questions. Don't ever be afraid of saying “I don't know.” You may not know the answers, so don't try to fake one. You don't always have to have the answer but you can tell them that you can find out and discuss it with them later. Someone else in the group may have the answer.

How to cover the lesson. Make a simple lesson plan so you won't get bogged down in the details.

How to handle controversial subjects. When a group faces a serious quest for truth, there is a fear that fellowship may be broken. There is a temptation to skirt the difficult issues of life and to rely on superficial answers. The best way to handle these when they come up is to see what the Word of God has to say and rest the verdict on principles or commands in the Bible which apply to the situation. God's Word is the ultimate authority.

How to spark a lethargic group. Generally, the group will respond to your attitude. Pray for enthusiasm and respond enthusiastically. If you want them to be a little enthusiastic, then you may have to be overly enthusiastic.

How to draw out applications. First, make good, solid applications to your own life from the portion being studied and be willing to share it with them. Then learn to ask effective application questions like, “What does it mean to you?” or, “Is there anything that you can do about this today?”

Roles In The Group

Dr. Howard Hendricks introduces some amusing but informative characteristics on the roles that people play in a group situation. You'll find yourself identifying with some of these brief character sketches.

Each member of the group is faced with the right and the responsibility of being a mature participant. To accomplish this he must apply himself to the task of being an effective group member, constantly evaluating himself and his relationships with others.

Characteristics of Immaturity:

Onlooker - Content to be a silent spectator. Nods, smiles and frowns. Other than this, he is a passenger instead of a crew member.

Monopolizer - Brother Chatty. Rambles roughshod over the rest of the conversation with his verbal dexterity. Tenaciously clings to his right to say what he thinks - sometimes without thinking.

Belittler - This is Mr. Gloom. He takes the dim view. Minimizes the contributions of others. Usually has three good reasons why "it will never work."

Wisecracker - Feels called to a ministry of humor. Mr. Cheerio spends his time and talent as the group play-boy. Indifferent to the subject at hand, he is always ready with the clever remark.

Manipulator - Brother Ulterior knows the correct approach to the problem, obviously. He manipulates the proceedings so his plan will be adopted.

Hitchhiker - He has never had an original thought in his life. Unwilling to commit himself. Sits on the sidelines until the decision has jelled, then jumps on the bandwagon.

Pleader - Chronically afflicted with obsessions. Always pleading for some cause or for certain actions. Feels led to share this burden frequently. One-track mind.

Sulker - Born in the objective case and lives in the kickative mood. The group won't accept his worthy contributions so he sulks.

Characteristics of Maturity:

Proposer - Initiates ideas and action. Keeps things moving.

Encourager - Brings others into the discussion. Encourages others to contribute. Emphasizes the value of their suggestions and comments. Stimulates others to greater activity by approval and recognition.

Clarifier - The one who has the facility to step in when confusion, chaos and conflict dominate. He defines the problem concisely. He points out the issues clearly.

Analyzer - Examines the issues closely. Weighs the suggestions carefully. Never accepts anything without first "thinking it through."

Explorer - Always moving in to new and different areas. Probing relentlessly. Never satisfied with the obvious or the traditional.

Mediator - Facilitates agreement or harmony between members; especially those who are making phrases at each other. Seeks to find mediating solutions acceptable to all.

Synthesizer - Is able to put the pieces together. Brings the different parts of the solution or plan together and synthesizes them.

Programmer - The one who is ready with the ways and means to put the proposal into effect. Adept at organization. Moves in the realm of action.

One way to use this material is to read this section to your discussion group, and then have them react and respond to the various roles in the group. You may want them to privately evaluate their role in the group and then publicly discuss it at the next meeting. This type of evaluation helps the group members see themselves for what they really are. It gives each member an appreciation for the other members in the group. The humorous way the above captions are written helps objectify the personal involvement of each member in the group.

Evaluation

It is always good for us to have some form of checkup period. The following questions will help you evaluate your leadership of the discussion group.

Leader's Private Evaluation

1. Leader's Preparation

- a. Do you consider yourself to have adequately prepared? If not, what was needed?
- b. Did you personalize the group? What did you do with tension? How did you react?
- c. Did you go too deep for the group's ability? Were you too shallow?
- d. How was your eye contact? Your seating position? Your gestures? Voice tone? Mannerisms?
- e. Did you listen? Were you sensitive to group member's needs?
- f. How well did you use illustrations? Visual Aids? Humor?

2. Leader's Planning.

- a. Did you arrive at a useful outline for the discussion, including objectives, introductions, questions, conclusions, etc.?
- b. Did you follow the plan closely? Why or why not?
- c. How should you have introduced and concluded the discussion?
- d. Was the purpose of the discussion clearly grasped by everyone?
- e. Did you plan any illustrations, visual aids or humor?
- f. What did you learn that you could include in future planning?

3. Group Procedures.

- a. Did you guide the discussion with questions? Did you lead or were you led?

- b. Was sufficient relevant information presented to provide a basis for discussion?
- c. Was the desired result of each main question realized? If not, why not?
- d. Was the information carefully observed, interpreted, correlated, and applied?
- e. Did you keep to the subject? Was the material covered? Why not, if not?
- f. What procedures could be eliminated and not affect performance? What new procedures would stimulate the group?

4. Group Participation

- a. Did everyone expected come to the group discussion? If not, why not?
- b. Did everyone in the group take part? (Rank the members in order of how much they talked.)
- c. Were there any tangents? How did they occur? How could they have been avoided or best answered?
- d. Did anyone ever answer or question the group? Did any group member question another group member? Who? How many times?
- e. Was each person stimulated to contribute his best? If not, what could you have done to accomplish this?
- f. Did you notice any members who continuously performed certain functions or played such roles as “harmonizers,” “initiators,” or “obstructionist”?

5. Group Personalization

- a. Were attitudes of cooperation and permissiveness generally evident?
- b. Did the others listen to each other?
- c. Was the atmosphere a healthy balance of enthusiasm and relaxed participation?
- d. How well do the members know each other?
- e. Was each person stimulated to contribute his best? If not, what could you have done to accomplish this?

6. Group Product

- a. Were the solutions and conclusions practical and desirable?

- b. To what extent was the original objective accomplished?
- c. If personal applications were read or shared, were they specific and practical?
- d. Have any thinking patterns been changed? Whose? In what way?

From the member's point of view, they each should be able to answer affirmatively to the following five statements.

I have experienced a good discussion session when:

- 1. I feel that the leader took me right into the subject and not around it.
- 2. I feel we interacted with the subject itself and not with the personal opinions of the leader.
- 3. I feel that I now have a better understanding of the truth than before I came to the discussion group.
- 4. I feel that the time was basically spent in meanings and not in a confusion of religious rules and generalities.
- 5. I feel challenged, comforted, encouraged and practically instructed.

For further help in evaluating their own behavior, you may want to give them the following 12 questions to answer privately, and then later discuss their feelings as a group. Or you may want to get together with each one personally and discuss the answers. The purpose of these 12 questions is to surface some needs and feelings so that the group can continue to experience spiritual health.

Questions For Member's Private Evaluation

- 1. What was the most exciting thing you learned this week?
- 2. What two ways would you improve this discussion group?
- 3. Do you know the group's objectives?
- 4. Are you as an individual receiving help in applying the principles learned in the weekly Bible discussion?
- 5. Do you feel like a member of the discussion group?
- 6. When you are absent from a weekly discussion, are you missed?
- 7. Do you have a group of Christian friends with whom you can share the doubts you are ashamed of or embarrassed about?
- 8. If you feel lonely, how effectively are the other group members helping you to feel accepted and needed?
- 9. Is anyone helping you to control yourself in areas where you know you are irresponsible or unconcerned?
- 10. In what ways are you learning what your gifts are, and what your ministry is to the Body of Christ?
- 11. Do you feel inside that other members of the group care whether you sink or swim spiritually?

Appendix B

Twelve Steps to Leading Better Bible Studies

Twelve Steps to Leading Better Bible Studies

The Navigators

YOU CAN LEAD A SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY

Leading a small group in Bible study is not as hard as you may think. The focus of attention is not on you as the leader, but the Bible. *Your* role is simply to guide the discussion, encourage personal interaction with Scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to make application according to each group member's needs. Many committed Christians are witnessing the dynamic impact of small Bible discussion groups. Sparked by the growing hunger for personal knowledge of God's Word and close fellowship, these bands of eager learners are springing up everywhere. The intense fellowship, the personal interaction over God's Word and the mutual commitment to application experienced in these groups can cause great spiritual development. One person, such as you, with a genuine desire and hunger for the Lord is enough to spark a group. That group can ignite a neighborhood, church, business office, dormitory or barracks. The resulting disciples could saturate a community with God's Truth. And you could be the person to start this process.

Goal of the Discussion Group

The type of discussion group presented in this booklet involves prior personal preparation by each participant. Otherwise, the discussions become a substitute for personal study and the time is spent with everyone "sharing their ignorance." Those who have prepared will not learn anything new from those who haven't prepared and will soon lose their motivation for personal study. Therefore, the goal of a discussion group is to amplify the results of each person's individual Bible study through your interaction together.

A successful group:

- * Provides an incentive for each member on a regular basis.
- * Enables all of you to go beyond the limits of your own personal findings by exposing you to the ideas of others and by stimulating further thoughts.
- * Creates an atmosphere of love and acceptance which stimulates honest talk of personal discoveries, questions, problems or needs.
- * This acceptance builds the confidence of group members and allows them the freedom to speak about the Bible without fear of embarrassment or criticism.
- * Fosters positive Christian fellowship where group members can develop close personal relationships in an informal setting. You learn how to pray together, and how to bear the burdens of others.
- * Equips growing Christians with a method for helping others grow spiritually. Small Bible study groups are one of the most effective tools to help Christians fulfill Christ's Great Commission to make disciples in every nation.

The Nature of the Discussion Group

Group discussions are not lectures in which an infallible expert displays his knowledge to a captive audience.

The lecture is unnecessary in a group discussion because the members have prepared their studies in advance and should be able to share what they have learned. Nor are group discussion conversations in which overly opinionated people carry on a dialogue. In this situation the quieter members of the group will soon lose interest and may stop coming altogether if they are not given opportunities to share. The spontaneous interaction of a good discussion provides a setting for sharing, learning and making new discoveries. God's Word achieves its life changing effect on people through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The effective group leader will act as a chairman and guide, not as an authority and teacher, because he realizes the authority is the Bible and the teacher is the Holy Spirit. And *you* can be such a leader as you rely on the Holy Spirit in applying a handful of principles to turn the Bible discussion group into a dynamic center of fruitful ministry. This booklet covers the fundamentals of leading a discussion group. If you are planning to start a group for the first time, it will provide a step-by-step explanation of how to lead a discussion. If you are looking for some new tips to improve a study you are already leading, this material will provide a resource of ideas and practical suggestions as well as a thorough review of basic principles.

HOW TO ORGANIZE A GROUP BIBLE STUDY

Every successful endeavor begins with prayer. Before you start inviting people to a group Bible study, begin praying daily that God will attract the group members He wants, that He will unify them and will enable you to lead and encourage the group. The kind of Bible study you want depends, of course, on the type of people you invite to be in the group. Are they couples, single adults, housewives, businessmen, senior citizens, church members? Are they non-Christians, new Christians, Christians with a few years of maturing, seasoned veterans or a combination of all four? Your Christian bookstore carries many good studies on individual topics, concerns and books of the Bible for varying age groups and Christian maturity levels. Just be sure the study you choose fits the needs of the group, contains lessons that are not too hard or long and is applicable to group members' situations. If you are choosing the study *as a group*, narrow your selections to three and let the group members decide by vote which to use. Some bookstores will allow you to take home some studies to help you decide. If you want to start a study with fellow church members, extend an invitation in your church bulletin or newsletter.

Or you might want to help follow up new Christians in your church or witness to recent contacts in the community.

Specific Bible studies could be the right vehicles for meeting their needs. Always *personally* invite potential group members and then give them a telephone call later in the week. This shows you really are concerned about them as persons and not just numbers.

Be specific about the details of the study when you're inviting people. Tell them *what* you are planning to do, *when* you plan to meet and *how many weeks* the course of study will require. Probably, the first study series shouldn't last longer than six weeks. Then you can make plans with the group for further study.

Informational Coffee Hour

One way to start a group Bible study in your neighborhood is to invite several people to your home for coffee and dessert, tell them of your interest in starting a group and then ask them to join you. When you invite them be sure you tell them what you will be talking about so they don't come under false pretenses. Your informational coffee hour shouldn't be "religious." Don't open with a prayer or use Christian jargon such as "I've been led to start a Bible study." You may be familiar with these words but they will only scare prospective participants.

After serving refreshments and simply explaining the format of the study group, suggest they call within two weeks *if they are interested*. Therefore, those who are not interested will not have to call and offer an excuse. Don't feel hurt if everyone isn't as excited about the Bible study as you are. Not all will want to join.

Just be loving, gracious and kind to everyone so they will have the freedom to make their own decisions without feeling guilty. Try to keep the group small; you don't have to start a big program. A big group can stifle discussion because fewer people can participate. *Grow* into business, rather than go into business. Start with a few interested and eager people, a good group size is six, and as they become trained they can lead other groups.

The natural progress of a healthy Bible study is growth. But don't be disappointed if you only have one or two people in the group. God is intensely interested in the individual. "For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them" (Matthew 18:20). People often accept an invitation to a Bible study and then fail to attend. It's easy for them to forget something that is not yet part of their routine. The devil desires to keep people from God's Word and will set obstacles and distractions in the way. Remind them of the study a day or two in advance. After the first couple of weeks this shouldn't be necessary. By then they will have discovered the profit of their Bible discussion group.

Practical Details

Many practical details affect the success of a Bible discussion group. An uncomfortably warm or cold room, noisy children or pets, or studies that run too long can distract the group members. Here are some things which you, as the group leader, can plan in advance.

* *Meet in a comfortable atmosphere.* The warmth of a living room, the unity of a kitchen table, or the informality of a dorm room or barracks all lend themselves to a teaching atmosphere. Your attitude and approach can make the time together friendly, natural and conducive to honest searching.

* *Make appropriate physical arrangements.* Meet in a circle so all can see and discuss with each other. Make sure your chair's height allows you to have good eye contact.

* *Maintain good lighting.* Good lighting will not only illuminate the room, it also creates a warm feeling. Also, no one should have to look into the sun or toward a bright window.

* *Provide proper ventilation.* Make sure the air temperature is comfortable.

* *Guard against distractions.* Pets, television and radios take away attention from the discussion. If needed, make arrangements with babysitters.

You will discover other practical details as you lead your group. But remember the key to a successful group Bible study is God working in hearts. So again, the best preparation is your prayers.

YOUR FIRST MEETING

The first meeting of the group Bible study is the most important session. The impressions the group members receive during this meeting may greatly influence their participation during the rest of the study. If you are leading a study within your church, the members of the group will probably have differing levels of Christian maturity. Some may never have been in a group Bible study and may be apprehensive. If they are uncomfortable and don't feel accepted during the first meeting, they may not come to the second. Though it may be difficult, the leader in this situation should try to stimulate discussion with questions of varying difficulty so that all will be helped. Remember this is a *group* discussion. You are the leader, not the director. You will set the members at ease if you don't assume an air of superiority but show the quiet confidence which comes from having a plan and knowing how to execute it.

Objectives

As a good leader, you should always begin with a clear objective for each session. You shouldn't fall into the trap of "flying by the seat of your pants" and hope everything will work out fine. The objective will summarize what the group should understand and apply by the end of the discussion period. It can be stated in one or two short sentences. A clear objective will help you:

* know where you want to proceed with the discussion and give you direction for your questions.

* evaluate progress at any point during the discussion. After this evaluation, you can make needed adjustments.

* make decisions during the session as to what to discuss. If a tangent or unrelated issue arises, you can direct the group back to the main goal.

Plans for the First Meeting

Your major objective for this first meeting is to have the participants start studying the Scriptures. Here are three major steps to accomplish this:

* *Become acquainted with one another so honest discussion and interaction can take place.* As a person arrives, introduce him to the others. When the group is gathered, ask each member general questions about their hometowns, occupations, hobbies, etc. You should share first to establish what could be mentioned and how long each person could talk. Even church members may discover many new things about each other.

To further "break the ice" you could distribute cards on which are written such unusual question as:

- *Who was your fourth grade teacher? Tell something about her.*
- *What qualities do you like in a cookie?*
- *What do you like to do on a rainy day?*

If the group is comprised of Christians, you can ask them to give their testimonies.

* *Explain how the Bible is going to be studied and how it will be discussed in the group.* Before you begin your explanation, pause for prayer and ask God to guide the discussion and to teach the group members from His Word. Explain that all Christians need spiritual food, fellowship and training and a small Bible study group is an excellent way of providing all of these. Through the study, the members should not only be fed but also learn how to *feed themselves*, a basic requirement for maturing. Tell them you will ask four basic questions about the Scriptures: *What does it say?; What does it mean?; and How can it be applied?* Be sure they understand you will ask these three types of questions in different ways during the study sessions to stimulate thinking and not to test or belittle anyone. Tell them that through their active participation in the study, they will *discover* the facts of the Bible, begin to *understand* those facts and their relationships to each other, and then *apply* those facts in their lives. Stress the purpose of Bible study is to become good friends with a Person, not principles.

Everyone should adhere to a set of standards to help unify the group. You, as the leader, should *suggest* these standards so you will not assume a dictatorial attitude in telling everyone what is expected. Everyone should agree that *attendance* at the discussions and *preparation* of the Bible study is important. Then agree on the length of each session. Tell them you will be diligent to end the sessions on time. Now introduce the Bible study plan and give them their materials or have the group decide from a list of three or four, the study they want to use. If you are using printed materials, have each person read aloud a paragraph of the introduction and instructions.

Stop and discuss whenever a question arises.

**Complete part of the first lesson.* Enthusiasm and an expectancy can be developed as the members actually complete part of the study. Ask them to quietly start working on the first part of the first lesson for five or ten minutes.

Then ask the group to share what they have discovered from this short glimpse into God's Word. Work at creating curiosity and anticipation for the rest of the study series. For example, you might ask, *I wonder if we will discover a relationship between these things as we complete our study?* Or say, *That is an excellent observation. I have a hunch we will see more about that as we complete the study.* Be sure to encourage the group members as they respond, especially as they tell of what they learned from the study time. Work at giving sincere compliments. They will be heartened and motivated by your praise. End on time so as to start a pattern for each session. Each of the three steps for this first session should take about one-third of your time. As you adjourn, remind everyone of the time, date and place of the next session and of their assignment. Before writing an objective for your second session, in which you will thoroughly study the first chapter or lesson, you should write an outline for that chapter.

Outlines

The outline is the basic framework which underlies a particular biblical passage or topical study. It consists of a few sub-points which logically break down the chapter into smaller sections. As a contractor views a building blueprint, so you can look at an outline to see the basic framework of the lesson chapter. When you are leading a discussion group, an outline will:

**provide a general direction for the study.*

**help you prepare discussion questions.*

**help you evaluate the progress of the discussion.*

**serve as a teaching aid by helping the group members remember the content of the discussion if you share the outline with them.*

In many studies the lesson chapter subtopics already form a brief outline. An example is in the chapter, "God Cares for You" (book one, chapter one) of NavPress' *Design for Discipleship* (DFD):

1. God Created You
2. God Knows You
3. God Loves You
4. God Made You Part of His Family

Writing an Objective

The outline provides stepping stones for determining the objective of the session. A possible objective for the chapter "God Cares For You" of the DFD could be: *At the conclusion of the session, the group members should express thankfulness of God's love.* How can you evaluate whether this objective has been accomplished? Valid indicators might be a brief testimony concerning salvation, new excitement over a verse or a prayer of thankfulness for God's love. Don't be disappointed if you don't always seem to reach the objective of the session. Remember, you may be the leader but the Holy Spirit is the director and He has plans for the study of which you couldn't dream. If you relax in your role and allow the Spirit His, you and the members of the study are going to enjoy many fruitful hours of teaching and warm fellowship.

HOW TO STIMULATE VALUABLE DISCUSSION

The Bible discussion leader asks questions which help group members discover biblical truths for themselves.

Therefore, the leader should cultivate the ability to develop and ask the right questions to elicit discussion.

Questions in a group are valuable because they:

- *help evaluate the group members' understanding, knowledge and progress in learning.
- *cause the group members to think.
- *reflect a personal approach which evokes a personal response.
- *prevent the group leader from becoming the authority figure.
- *allow the group members to discover truth for themselves.

If your questions are well written they will help the group members *discover* the truths of the Bible, *understand* or interpret their meaning and relevance and *apply* the Bible to their daily lives.

Discovery questions

Discovery questions should be carefully selected because they initiate meaningful discussion on a topic. This type of "launching" question determines both the topic you discuss and the response you receive.

Since you are trying to stimulate discussion, ask general questions which have several possible answers. You can use such phrases as, *What did you learn?; What did you observe?; What did you discover?; What impressed you?*

For a specific example, *What did you learn from this section about prayer?* Discovery questions must be simple and short. Avoid using "and" or "but" for these usually

introduce a second question. Be sure your question can be answered by the facts contained in the study.

To evaluate discovery questions, review the following criteria:

Clarity...Does it ask for observations and facts rather than opinions and feelings? Can it be easily remembered and understood? Does it avoid complicated wording?

Relevance...Can it be answered from two or three truths from the particular section of the Bible study? What is the underlying purpose for the question? Does it focus attention on the main point?

Response...Will it stimulate good participation and discussion? Does it give more than one person an opportunity to respond? Does it draw from their personal preparation?

Understanding type questions

Understanding questions open up, deepen, illustrate or clarify the discussion started by the discovery questions. This type of question encourages group members to go beyond their initial observations. Understanding questions guide the discussion, while drawing out the members' personal thoughts. Your goal here is to help the group understand more fully the *meaning* of the discovered truths. Ask yourself what words and phrases may not be clearly understood and then develop clarifying questions. Often during the discussion someone will ask *what does it mean?* This may replace your prepared understanding question. Answering that question is to your advantage because you are discussing their concerns. However, if the discussion wanders too much from the topic you could say, *what we've been discussing is interesting, but we've left our topic. Perhaps we could discuss this more at a different time.* Then you could present a thought-provoking question that draws the group back to the biblical issues you were discussing. To evaluate an understanding question, review these criteria:

Clarity...Does the question ask, *What does it mean?* Does it help clarify the meaning?

Relevance...Does the question relate to truth already discovered? Are the questions in order of importance? Will the answers reveal what the Author of Scripture meant?

Response...Does the question lead to personal involvement by the group members? Do they have the personal knowledge to answer it? Is the question aimed at their personal understanding?

Application questions

Application is the ultimate goal in Bible study. God wants to change us, not just inform our minds. Correct applications depend upon accurate discovery and understanding. Application questions stimulate the members to act upon the discovered truths. They also serve to summarize the discussion. Use discretion when you ask an individual a question. Only ask a person directly about his personal application when it would benefit the group. One way to encourage sharing is to have everyone write an application one week during the study and then the next week they can tell the *results* of their written application. This encourages them to write short-range applications and to expect God to help them apply what He brought to their personal attention. Application questions are hard to formulate, but they are the link between Bible study and daily living. You need to live with the passage, asking God to help you see where it applies.

Here are some examples:

What can you do to better glorify God as part of his creation?

How can you benefit from God's complete knowledge of you?

How do you receive love from God?

What assurance do you have that you are part of God's Family?

To evaluate an application question, review these criteria:

Clarity...Does it ask *What should I do about the truth of the passage?* Is it clear what kind of response is expected? Does it give freedom to choose what to do?

Purpose...Does it call for a possible and practical response? Does it relate to truths already discovered? Is it built on a clear understanding of the passage?

Response...Does it personally involve the group members? Is it embarrassing to any of them? Does it encourage not discourage the members? Does it refer to a realistic application?

A method of asking questions

When you ask a question, look around the group until someone answers. Then you can ask *What did others of you find?* Or *What did someone else discover?* Again, look around the whole group, watching for anyone who wants to speak, instead of pointing out a specific individual. At the start, the group members will probably look directly at you as they give their replies. But if you patiently persist with good guiding questions, the members will begin responding to the group instead of to the leader. Thus true discussion will begin.

QUALITIES OF A GOOD LEADER

Because leaders often neglect to take inventory of their experiences, they miss opportunities for improvement. Now that you may have led a few sessions of the group Bible study, evaluate your ability to lead and the progress of the group members with the following questions (You may use this evaluation throughout the study series):

Planning and preparation

- *Do you adequately prepare? If not, what is needed?
- *Do you closely follow your plan? Why or why not? (Veering from your plan is not always detrimental.)
- *What have you learned that you could include in future planning?

Your leading techniques

- *Do you lead or are you led?
- *Do you listen or are you always talking?
- *Are you sensitive to group members' needs?
- *Have there been any tangents? If so, how did they occur? How could they have been best handled or possibly avoided?

Biblical context

- *Do you ask enough quality questions so group members can discover, understand and apply biblical truth?
- *Do you keep to the subject of the session?

Participation of the group

- *Did everyone who was expected, come to the sessions? If not, why not?
- *Through your leadership, is everybody stimulated to contribute his best? If not, what could you do to accomplish this?
- *Do group members question and talk with each other rather than just to you?

Personal relationships within the group

- *How well do the members know each other?
- *How well do the members listen to each other?

Three “traps”

In the process of developing skill in leading a Bible study, you may find yourself falling into one or more of three traps:

1. *Comparing yourself with others.* God's Word tells us not to do this. "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise" (2 Corinthians 10:12). Comparison is a denial of God's special place for you. Each individual is unique. The Lord has given every person distinctive abilities that need to be developed.

2. *Discouragement.* When the discussion doesn't meet your expectations, you may focus on what went wrong and become discouraged. However, obstacles and mistakes will alert you to new ways of improving your ability to lead the discussion. This is part of the learning process. Don't allow Satan to discourage you. God is honored when His Word goes forth. He is the Encourager.

3. *Giving up.* Don't throw in the towel. Stay with the goal of the study until completion. "The end of a matter is better than its beginning and patience is better than pride" (Ecclesiastes 7:8). If it's God's Will for the study to continue, then in time it will prosper if you persevere.

Concentrate on the positive

Sometimes you may only be aware of the negative evaluation - the mistakes, problems and omissions. But remember it's more important to concentrate on the positive: What went *right*? What was *good* in the discussion? Emphasizing and maintaining the strong points of your leadership is just as important as improving the weak areas. The most exciting outcome of your discussion group is *not* the development of your leadership abilities. More importantly, God's Word is being studied, discussed and applied. He us using each discussion you lead to proclaim His Word.

INTRODUCING CONVERSATIONAL PRAYER

Does conversational prayer make you nervous? If your answer is "yes," you're not alone. Most Christians have seldom or never prayed aloud in a church group. They're afraid of sounding stupid, or not knowing what to pray, and, worst of all, making "mistakes." Of course, their fears can be allayed with a little experience in the real thing. Your job, as a leader, is to let them see that praying as a group can be a uniquely worshipful time, not something to dread at the end of a study. Actually, praying together is vital for an effective discussion group.

After the members have discussed their biblical discoveries and applications, a time of praise, petition and thanksgiving will be the next most natural step. In this time of prayer, you should remind the group that it is a team and should learn to pray as a unit. To do this, they will have to forget the ritualistic King James phraseology and concentrate on things they really mean. Learning how to say exactly what is thought or felt requires perfect honesty and openness with the Lord and with one another. The person praying doesn't have to be concerned with the form of the prayer, with the specific words he prays or how he sounds to other group members. All he has to do is simply communicate with

God from the heart. Remind the members they aren't being pressured to pray with the group. Allow them to work on this at their own speed. Most of them probably want to pray aloud but they need to feel the encouragement of the group to do so. God will bring all this about in His own timing. Here are several guidelines for conversational prayer:

1. *As the leader, pray first.* Unless led otherwise, pray first and in the first person singular (I, me, my, instead of we, us, they).

After you pray, another person may be led by the Holy Spirit to pray on the same subject. He is simply "continuing" your prayer with hardly a break in thought.

2. *Don't send too much time sharing prayer requests.* Much of your valuable prayer time can be spent in sharing requests rather than praying. Usually the person with the burden for someone or something will be the one to initiate prayer about that person or thing.

3. *Pray about one topic at a time.* It is important to pray topically as much as possible. One person may pray about a sick friend and a second person may stay on that topic by asking for strength for the Family. Then possibly another could pray the Family's financial needs will be met.

You don't want a disjointed time, where you skip from topic to topic, but a time in which you can join in meaningful prayer about the requests at hand. All of you will want to pray in your hearts with the person praying, rather than just listening.

4. *Pray briefly.* When each person prays about only one aspect of the topic, he can pray again sooner. This helps everybody keep alert, awake and involved in what is being prayed.

5. *Pray spontaneously, not in sequence.* Don't pray around the circle, but let each person pray for that which interests him. For example, if six subjects are prayed about in the conversational prayer time, you may have a vital interest in only three of them. Members shouldn't have to pray for something about which they are uninformed or not motivated.

Praying spontaneously doesn't mean praying thoughtlessly. While another is praying on the subject at hand, the Holy Spirit may confirm in your heart what you would like to pray.

To summarize:

- *As the leader, pray first.
- *Don't just share; pray.
- *One topic at a time.
- *Be brief.
- *Be spontaneous.

As you start praying as a group, often there will be a few moments of silence while the members quiet their hearts and focus their attention on praying effectively. Normally the focus of prayer should start with *praising and thanking God* and then on to specific requests. Some may start praising Him for His greatness, another for His power and another for His faithfulness. One may thank Him for a neighbor who recently trusted Christ. Another may thank Him for the abundant life he has in Christ. Then you may pray for *needs within the group*. The members will find their relationships in the group will grow more personal as they pray for each other.

They will also acquire an added burden to pray for other members of the group. Next you might pray for *needs outside the group*. Obviously, the number of needs is limitless, but it's more important to do a thorough job of praying for a few items than to scatter the prayers over too wide a range. By praying conversationally, you will experience a new excitement about praying in a group. You will also find it leads to more praying - both in the group and when you are alone. "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:19-20).

ROLES PEOPLE PLAY

Dr. Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary, says, "Each member of the group is faced with the right and the responsibility of being a mature participant. To accomplish this he must apply himself to the task of being an effective group member, constantly evaluating himself and his relationships." In the following amusing and informative material, Dr. Hendricks describes roles people play in a group situation. You will find it helpful in evaluating the members of your group.

Characteristics of immaturity

Onlooker Content to be a silent spectator. Nods, smiles and frowns. He is a passenger instead of a crew member.

Monopolizer Brother Chatty. Rambles roughshod over the rest of the conversation with his verbal dexterity. Tenaciously clings to his right to say what he thinks - sometimes without thinking.

Belittler This is Mr. Gloom. He takes the dim view. Minimizes the contributions of others. Usually has three good reasons why "it will never work."

Wisecracker Feels called to a ministry of humor. Mr. Cheerio spends his time and talent as the group playboy. In-different to the subject at hand, he is always ready with the clever remark.

Manipulator Brother ulterior knows the correct approach to the problem, obviously. He manipulates the proceedings so his plan will be adopted.

Hitchhiker Never had an original in his life. Unwilling to commit himself. Sits on the sidelines until the decision has jelled, then jumps on the bandwagon.

Pleader Chronically afflicted with obsessions. Always pleading for some cause or certain actions. Feels led to share this burden frequently. One-track mind.

Sulker Born in the objective case and lives in the kickative mood. The group won't accept his worthy contribution so he sulks.

Characteristics of maturity

Proposer initiates ideas and action. Keeps things moving.

Encourager Brings others into the discussion. Encourages others to contribute. Emphasizes the value of their suggestions and comments. Stimulates others to greater activity by approval and recognition.

Clarifier The one who has the facility to step in when confusion, chaos and conflict dominate. He defines the problem concisely. He points out the issues clearly.

Analyzer Examines the issues closely. Weighs the suggestions carefully. Never accepts anything without first "thinking it through." **Explorer** Always moving into new and different areas. Probing relentlessly. Never satisfied with the obvious or traditional.

Mediator Facilitates agreement or harmony between members; especially those who are "making phrases at each other." Seeks to find mediating solutions acceptable to all.

Synthesizer Is able to put the pieces together. Brings the different parts of the solution or plan together and synthesizes them.

Programmer The one who is ready with the ways and means to put the proposal into effect. Adept at organization. Moves in the realm of action.

You may want to read this section to your discussion group and then have them react and respond to the various roles. They can privately evaluate their role in the group and then, at the next meeting, publicly discuss it. This type of evaluation helps them see themselves for what they really are and gives them an appreciation for the other members in the group.

HANDLING CONFLICT IN YOUR GROUP

In most discussions, controversy, tension and excitement of any kind is avoided like the plague! Many leaders associate conflicts with dissension and strife and therefore they try

to steer any trace of disagreement down a deserted alley and off a steep cliff. It's true that some unnecessary disagreement is caused by misguided opinions, petty issues and false doctrines. But not all disagreements are bad, wrong or un-Christlike. The group that sails along, with its members always giving the "right" answers may be the group that isn't thinking. It can be worth the time to discuss a controversial conflict. Some very profitable discussions have taken place after an issue or question introduced tension, disagreement and a difference of opinion. When this happens, the group leader can point the members to the *Word of God* as the final authority, instead of tradition or illogical reasoning.

Three stages

This type of good group tension is best used to point to the truth when it is produced and resolved in three stages: *personalization*, *confrontation* and *clarification*.

1. Before controversial subjects are introduced, it is best to begin with a relaxed atmosphere, the *personalization* stage. This is best accomplished by refreshments, singing, games and other openers. Be careful not to allow this stage to run too long!

2. The *confrontation* stage begins when you introduce the possibility of tension. You do this by asking questions that lead the group members down the "streets of the unknown response" to the eventual goal of agreement around the Word.

There are many ways to create a difference of opinion and get to the honest answers. Having each member respond in turn to a specific question, staging a debate or intentionally having someone take the opposite view on an issue can create the kind of disagreement that forces the group into the Word. Following are examples of questions that often generate confrontation:

*Questions that require a decision - *Which is better: to do what is right when you don't feel like it, or wait to get the right motive, feeling or desire?*

*Questions that imply a truth that is not true - *Why might we say Muhammad was the greatest man who ever lived?*

*Controversial questions - *Why does God allow suffering? Is there a biblical basis for women's liberation? Should a Christian go to war?*

3. In the *clarification* stage the leader takes control and directs the group back to where the answers wait. The goal is to get the group into the Word to uncover for themselves the answer that will relieve the tension caused by the variety of views. Sometimes resolution occurs when the group realizes the Word *doesn't* give a specific answer but allows room for several opinions.

You should be ready with some summary questions and a summary statement to put into one sentence the conclusions of the Scriptures. From there the group can apply the principle with many possible applications.

Be cautious

Of course, you have to be cautious with confrontation questions that cause tension. Animosity, division and strife also can be caused by group tension: "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels" (2 Timothy 2:23). "The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (I Timothy 1:5). Aim toward love! But don't avoid healthy group tension.

TURNING PROBLEMS INTO OPPORTUNITIES

By now you have probably run head on into problems in the discussion group. These problems, which may seem like obstacles, can be turned into opportunities with proper handling. Here are some ideas:

How to control the talkative

Calling for contributions from others often helps - *What do the rest of you think?* In very difficult situations you may have to take control of the discussion and call for a show of hands before anyone responds. Then you can call on the group members in turn. Sometimes it may be necessary to talk privately with the "talker", explaining how group participation is imperative. You may enlist him to draw in others. This may not only solve the problem of his dominating the discussion, it will also help him become more sensitive to other people.

How to get back on track

A verbal recognition of the problem usually helps - *This is interesting. However, we have left our topic. Perhaps we could discuss this further after we finish our topic.* Or you can present a thought-provoking question to draw the discussion back to the initial thought. At times, you can suggest tabling the question or idea until after the discussion when those who want to, can discuss it further. Your *attitude* toward the tangent is most important.

How to handle wrong answers

Never tell a person he is wrong. You may want to ask the group the question you asked him. For example, *Okay, what do others think? Or Does someone else have something to say about this?* You may want to restate the question or ask another question which would help clarify or stimulate further thought. Always keep others from losing face or becoming embarrassed because of a wrong answer.

How to handle silence

You don't have to feel uncomfortable during long pauses in the study. If you give the members time to think, they will ask good questions as the discussion progresses.

By being patient, you may be surprised with the number of excellent thoughts they will give.

How to handle difficult questions

Don't be afraid of saying, *I don't know*. You can always find the answer later, have someone else research it or a member of the group may have a good answer. There is no merit in being known as a "know-it-all." If you always have the answer, your discussion group will turn into a lecture.

How to cover the passage or chapter

Make a determined effort to cover the entire portion allotted for the discussion. Continually getting bogged down in details and falling behind can have a very demoralizing effect on the group. Moving ahead gives a feeling of accomplishment and success. If you have trouble getting through the material, you may have tried to cover too much and may need to cut back.

How to speak to a lethargic group

Generally the group will respond to the attitude of the leader. Pray for enthusiasm for yourself and the group. If you want them to be a little enthusiastic, you may have to be overly enthusiastic. The source of enthusiasm is a desire for the Lord Himself and for His Word.. The leader, by example, will have to demonstrate these convictions. You cannot expect excitement from the group if you are not excited yourself.

How to handle controversial subjects

To smother honest questions and convictions is detrimental to the growth of the members and the study. A Bible discussion marked only by the smile, the pious utterance or the literary, well-verbalized prayer is unproductive. Even when a group is seriously looking for truth, you may have the temptation to skirt the difficult issues of life and rely on superficial answers. The best way to handle controversial topics is to see what the Scriptures have to say and rest the verdict on the principles or commands of the Bible that apply to the situation. God's Word is the utmost authority.

How to elicit good applications

Pray that God will speak through His Word so the members will realize it applies to them. The Holy Spirit will use passages to cause them to think about their lives. Be direct in your approach where the Word is direct. You can help people see the relevance of the Scriptures for themselves by asking them application questions such as *What does this mean to you?* Or *Is there anything you can do about this today?* Learn how to share your own applications with honesty and humility. If you are open, they will be open also.

How to give reinforcement

It's important for you to give approval or reinforcement to the members as they respond. You can do this by acknowledging an answer with comments like *good, that's right*, or giving a positive nod of the head, a smile or other subtle behavior. You can also reinforce by supporting an anticipated response. For example: *Take a moment to think. I know you can answer this*. Even when a wrong answer is given you can reinforce participation: *That is a thoughtful answer*. Too often leaders are pleased with answers but fail to show any outward sign of their pleasure. Overuse of a particular word, inappropriate exhortation or seemingly insincere enthusiasm will probably not reinforce at all.

How to increase listening ability

Listening is not only being able to hear what people really say but also what they can't and won't say. This ability requires sensitivity, concentration and attention to the other members of the group. Some members tend to think more about what they want to say rather than about what the others are saying. They often become preoccupied with their own thoughts. One way to end this lapse in listening is to have each person in turn summarize what had been said by the previous person. Doing this requires the members to concentrate on every contribution to the discussion.

IMPROVING YOUR LEADERSHIP

No amount of planning, preparation, new methods and ideas can guarantee a successful small group Bible study unless the leader truly loves God and people. Then, and only then, can he lay the study in God's hands so the Holy Spirit can do his work. The following points can only be used to improve your leadership if you have settled in your heart to serve the group members. You cannot expect for these procedures to work unless you've committed to help carry out Jesus' love in their lives.

Know the passage to be studied

There is no substitute for diligent preparation and prayer. Take extra time to dig a little deeper into the passages. Don't be sidetracked from this priority. When you stop studying, you'll lose your incentive and excitement. And you will have little to give to the members.

Be excited about the discoveries of group members

Often a discussion leader will be excited only about what he himself has discovered from the text of Scripture. He acknowledges what others find with a nod of the head, an appreciating remark or a further question but he fails to get excited about the new truths group members are discovering. Just because you already know a truth that someone is now discovering, don't quench his quest for new truth by your superior attitude! Get excited about what others discover - and show it!

Utilize your sense of humor

Humor that is appropriate to the audience and to the context of what is being studied, will help create a warm, spontaneous environment. You have your own unique sense of humor, so relax and let God bring it out.

Be enthusiastic

A leader is not necessarily the one who comes up with the best discoveries, understandings and applications. Neither is he the one who uncovers the most revealing background material, character sketches or trivial facts. However, those things can be replaced by a God-given enthusiasm for not only the study, but for living. And then He will use your attitude to change other members of the group.

Use memorable and relevant illustrations

Eye-and ear-catchers captivate human interest. Simple illustrations communicate more readily than the complex. A picture, a drawing, a story, personal illustrations can help the group members identify with you. Also, encourage the participants to share their illustrations and visual aids. Visual aids accentuate and strengthen learning by:

- *contributing to the depth and variety in learning. They offer an alternative to writing, talking and listening.
- *clarifying words and concepts. They visualize the verbal and translate the members' discoveries and understandings to communication.
- *stimulating thought and imagination. They sensitize and personalize objective facts into subjective feelings.
- *aiding logic and reasoning. They allow a viewing of the process, sequence and organization of ideas and concepts.
- *making learning more permanent. They project upon the mind's eye images and pictures that are permanently etched. They are pass-on-able!
- *aid in personal growth. They emphasize the problems and process and not just the product of growth. What kind of visual aid can best be used in a Bible study? I must be:
 - *simple and clear, containing only the essentials.
 - *suitable for the group. Don't shock them!
 - *pertinent. Its main point should be clearly related to what is being discussed.
 - *easily concealed after its use to prevent distraction.

Sources for ideas include your local library, church media department or bookstore. You can also write publishers and producers for listings of visual aids. Ask to catalogues, listings of films, filmstrips, slides, pictures, overhead transparencies, etc. The Bible study leader wants to do more than just meet with a group of people, ask questions, talk about applications and bid them farewell until the next week. All of us need occasional individual help outside of regular group Bible study hours. We need someone for counsel. Sometimes we just need a person to listen to us. Maybe you're saying *I'm not a*

counselor. I'm not skilled in handling problems. You don't really need to have abundant abilities and gifts. The only imperative is a love for God and a willingness to give your life to people. Helping others will test your hold on your time, sleep and many times, patience. But God has chosen to love His children *through* His children. And when we agree to be that channel, their lives and our lives becoming pleasing to God and, in the process, others see His goodness. And *that's* the real purpose of Man.

Getting into another's "shoes"

God beckons Christians to this deep love. "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart" (I Peter 1:22). To love from the heart, we have to try to understand and to identify with one another. Here are three questions that will help you do that with a particular person you may be helping.

1. What is the *reality* of this person?

- *Family history
- *Major good and bad experiences
- *Religious background
- *Current environment
- *How he's previously reacted to God's teaching

2. What are possible *feelings* this person has?

- *Despite his reactions to major experiences, what are his true emotions?
- *What are the prevailing feelings he has at this point in his life? Are they honest feelings or is he trying to hide something?
- *What problems, if any, do these feelings point to?

3. How might this person, with his reality and these feelings, *act*?

- *Are his actions and words consistent with his reality and feelings or do they conflict?

4. With this information, how can you practically *help* this person?

- *Possibly suggest a course of action
- *At times listening is the best help or
- *Look through the Word *together* on the subject or
- *If problem is too complicated for you, refer him to other, more experienced counsel.

Remember, throughout this process you are trying to understand this person to help him, not to analyze him.

TRAINING OTHERS TO LEAD

One of the goals of the discussion group has been personal growth. A possible result of a person's maturing is the ability and desire to become a leader himself. You should be sensitive to this and begin to decide if there is one person in the study you would like to train as an assistant. This person could eventually replace you or be the leader of an offshoot group. When choosing an assistant, look for a person who will:

- *pray with you for the group on a regular basis.
- *help you lead the group more effectively by reviewing the evaluation with you after each session. Discuss with him what happened, why it happened and how to improve. Often, he will be able to see more clearly what is happening in the group because he is not under the pressure of asking, redirecting and answering questions.
- *learn how to lead a group himself so that if you happen to be absent he can take the responsibility to lead it.
- *be prepared to start and lead another group.

When people want to join a group after it has begun, you can do one of two things: either invite them to join another existing group in its early stages or start another group.

As the number of people in the group grows, make plans for starting another group. A maximum of six persons is best. Your assistant, who has been helping you and learning about leading a group, is probably the one you will ask to lead the new group.

Frequently the group will not want to divide. After all, it may be the first time they have really gotten to know other Christians well. So you will need to share some of the reasons for dividing.

If the group grows too large, all of the advantages of being a small group decrease: fellowship becomes less intimate, personal involvement diminishes, stimulation to prepare and opportunity to share lessons and the atmosphere becomes less of a group of close friends and more of a committee meeting. On the other hand, in a small group:

- *each member counts and knows it. He will be missed if absent.
- *there is time for each to contribute.
- *regular study is stimulated.
- *participants are likely to have more personal applications.
- *each person feels more free to share.
- *all can know each other better.
- *the members can meet in most homes or rooms.
- *more people are willing to lead and, thus, have the opportunity to grow in spiritual leadership.

Help the new leader arrange a place for the new group to meet. Let all the members know of the new arrangements. Allow the new leader to exercise his responsibilities but be

available for advice and encouragement. As you and your previous assistant choose assistants and train them to be leaders, you will be able to see how you have begun to start a process that will result in an increasing number become disciples of Jesus Christ!

COMMON ERRORS IN LEADING GROUPS

Problems are not always caused by errors, but errors will *always* turn into problems if left alone. Here are some common errors of Bible study leaders:

**Not making the questions sound conversational.* Even though you prepare and write out your questions beforehand, speak them in a conversation tone. And use your own vocabulary.

**Being afraid of silence after asking a question.* Don't be impatient or nervous. Give everyone time to think.

**Limiting yourself to asking questions.* The leader is also a participant in the group. Share freely your answers and observations but don't dominate the discussion

**Combining two questions in one.* Ask one question at a time.

**Not explaining what you want the group to do.* You're in charge. Don't hesitate to step in from time to time to influence the direction of the discussion, to end the discussion on time, to call on someone to pray, and so on.

**Trying to maintain too much control.* If the discussion "takes off" don't worry about it as long as the group doesn't wander too far from the Scriptures.

**Asking a question which can be answered "yes" or "no".* This type of question hinders discussion.

**Asking questions that are too complex.* State each question simply and clearly.

**Emphasizing your own viewpoint or application.* Don't expect everyone to be deeply impressed with the same things in Scripture that deeply impress you.

**Not being familiar enough with the material.* If you don't feel comfortable with the material, then you won't feel free to lead the study.

**Not ending the study on time.* If you promise the study will last only to a certain time, keep your word.

**Lecturing, not participating.* Lecturing by the leader is the "kiss of death" for a study group.

**Not summarizing the main ideas as they are presented.* Summarizing allows you and the other group members to stay focused on the subject and reach the session's goals.

**Not adequately discussing how Scriptural truths can be applied.* It's possible to concentrate so much on understanding the Word that we never apply it.