



How to Lead a Bible Study

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All words spoken by Jesus Christ are in **red text**.

Introduction

Jesus said, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”
Matthew 4:4

Jesus used physical metaphors to explain spiritual realities. For example, from a physical perspective, we need to eat food daily to stay healthy and strong; and we will quickly become physically weak if we go for days without food. In a similar manner we need to continually “ingest” God’s word to stay spiritually healthy and strong; and will quickly become spiritually weak if we go for days without reading God’s word.

Some Christians only “eat” once per week by attending a church service. Imagine what type of shape your body would be if you only ate food once every 7 days. I can see myself at the end of the week, starving for nourishment as I would ravenously consume anything I could get into my mouth—packing down more than I should with the hope it will last till next week. Thereafter, as each day passes, I become hungrier and weaker as I get closer to the 7th day. The same is true from a spiritual perspective.

However, we have the opportunity to feast upon God’s word more than once a week. For example, every Christian should allocate time each day during the week for a personal study of the Bible.



In addition, it is highly beneficial for Christians to get together to study the Bible—for there are many benefits to be gained when you are able to collectively experience and share the power of God’s word. What’s more, these benefits are greatly magnified in a learning environment where the Holy Spirit is allowed to lead—for He desires to touch the hearts of all who seek God.

This lesson is intended for those who have a desire to lead a group Bible study, and for those who desire to improve their skills in leading Bible studies.

The Bible Teacher

Bible teaching is a gift, and one of the key requirements in equipping and edifying Christians: the body of Christ.

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”
Ephesians 4:11-12

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching.” Romans 12:6-8

A teacher is commonly defined as a person who helps the students acquire knowledge, competence or virtue. However, I would like to add spiritual dimensions to this definition. A spiritually gifted Bible teacher is one who realizes the following:

- They have a desire to serve and help others.
- The mistake of attempting to rely upon their own capabilities and skill sets.
- They are incapable of effectively teaching God’s word without the guidance and assistance of the Holy Spirit—from lesson development to lesson delivery.
- They are simply a means (i.e. a facilitator and intermediary) for the Holy Spirit to spiritually touch each participant.

When the flesh steps aside—and an open humble heart yields to the guidance of the Holy Spirit—is when a Bible teacher will see the power of God’s word in action. What’s more, this experience is an indescribable blessing when we are empowered to explain God’s Word and how it relates to the hearer’s heart, walk, life, and eternity.

But what is also interesting, as the Holy Spirit leads, the Bible teacher will also learn new and insightful truths—which provides confirmation of the influence by the Holy Spirit!

Bible Study Preparation

Preparing for a Bible study involves more than selecting content. It also involves:

- First praying over all aspects of lesson development.
- Determining if the lesson is topical, verse-by-verse, or a combination.
- Evaluating if the content is targeted at the heart and soul.
- Identification of learning objectives.

Topical or Verse-by-Verse

There are two basic types of bible studies: topical and verse-by-verse.

- Topical studies are based upon a topic and will reference Bible verses from different chapters. Topics may include:
 - Who is Jesus Christ?
 - What is the difference between God's mercy and grace?
- Verse-by-verse studies will usually begin with the first verse of a book (i.e. John 1:1). Each verse thereafter is read and explained as the lesson progresses throughout each chapter and book. However, it's important to note that a verse-by-verse study will usually divert from the next verse and go to a different section in the Bible to reinforce a learning objective. Once accomplished, the lesson returns to the next verse in the study.
- It is also possible to have short topical studies embedded within a verse-by-verse study.

Content Designed to Change the Heart and Soul

Lesson content should provide more than simple information for the mind. It should also reach deep into the heart and soul. For example, each time Jesus spoke He selected words that challenged the listener, caused them to think and reflect deeply, and resulted in them in either drawing closer to Him or rejecting Him. No one walked away from hearing the words of Jesus with just information that resided "between their ears." But rather, His words pierced to the heart and soul of each listener—and based upon their response—influenced where they would spend eternity.

There is a spiritual lesson to learn from every person depicted in the Bible. Ask the following questions when preparing the lesson:

- Is there insight into the sinful nature and/or spirituality of this person?
- What was the relationship between God and this person?
- How did the person respond to God?
- What did this person do right / wrong and what were the consequences?
- Is there any correlation between ourselves and this person's behavior, his/her relationship with God, and consequences that were experienced?

An excellent example of the correlation between historical biblical accounts and ourselves may be found in how the Jews responded to God when He freed them from Egyptian bondage. As you study Exodus, the behavior of Jews (as a group) directly correlates to the various ways in how we as individuals respond to God. Every Christian can relate to every positive and every negative response by the Jews: including their accomplishments and failures, the consequences of their sinful nature, and how they responded to God's love and grace.

In addition, when preparing a lesson, it is important to place yourself in the mindset and needs of those who will attend the lesson. Each attendee is seeking how the Bible applies to their lives, such as:

- The eternal relevance of God’s grace and mercy in His Son, Jesus Christ.
- Insightful light and truth that overcomes the darkness and lies we encounter daily.
- A greater understanding of the influence of our sinful nature, and why we do what we do.
- How to overcome our struggles with sin.
- How we may experience a deeper spiritual relationship with our Savior and Lord.
- A greater insight into the spiritual realm, including the influence of the Holy Spirit and Satan.

As such, when you prepare lesson content, determine how the lesson fulfills one or more of the above spiritual needs. Does the content reinforce the relevance of God’s grace and mercy? Does it provide insightful light and truth? Does it reveal our sinful nature and why we do what we do? Does it provide examples of how to overcome sin? Does it foster a deeper relationship with God? Does it provide greater spiritual insight? Awareness of these spiritual needs will assist in determining learning objectives.

Learning Objectives

Many persons who develop content and lead Bible studies do not add this logical, valuable, and critical component in lesson preparation—for it will define the intended outcome after the lesson is completed. For example, when you go on a trip it is best to first create a travel plan: define your destination, determine the best route to get there, evaluate possible points of interest to visit along the way, and identify progress milestones (towns/cities). Without a travel plan you will likely wander aimlessly and will never know if and when you have arrived. As such, learning objectives are like a travel plan.

From a simple perspective, learning objectives define the learning destination, or the desired changes (“takeaways”) that will occur for those who participate in the lesson. In addition, learning objectives will provide insight as to whether or not the content is simple information (for the mind only), or life changing (influences the heart and soul). When lesson content enters the eyes and ears of someone, it will either reside in their mind as information (which may or not be beneficial), or it may speak directly to their heart and soul (where real changes in someone’s life occurs).

Each lesson session should include at least 1 learning objective, and no more than 5 learning objectives. A lesson that is delivered in segments over a period of time may have many learning objectives.

Each learning objective is defined as what the lesson participant will do and speak differently as a result of the lesson content by using words that describe viewable and measurable behavior. Here are 3 learning objective examples: Upon conclusion of the lesson, each participant will be able to:

- **Describe** and **compare** the difference between accepting Jesus Christ as Savior, and yielding to Him as Lord.
- **Identify** which of the 8 Beatitudes they are lacking in their spiritual growth, and **determine** what their next step should be.
- **Recognize** the importance of forgiving others; **explain** the consequences of unforgiveness, and **conclude** they must truly forgive those who have caused them harm.

Here is a list of words that may be used to describe visible and measurable behaviors (i.e. what they will do or speak) after the lesson is completed. Each learning objective should:

- Include one or more of these terms.
- Be written from the perspective of changes that will occur in the heart.

| | | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|----------|-----------|---------------|------------|
| Articulate | Assess | Classify | Compare | Conclude | Contrast |
| Define | Demonstrate | Describe | Determine | Differentiate | Discuss |
| Distinguish | Evaluate | Explain | Find | Identify | Illustrate |
| Indicate | List | Name | Present | Recall | Recognize |
| Recommend | Select | Show | Specify | State | Write |

The learning objective identification process will provide a clearer vision of what needs to be said and reinforced during the Bible study. It will also provide guidance as to what questions to ask the participants to determine if a learning objective is met. Learning objectives are similar to progress milestones (towns, cities) as you “drive” to your destination. Thought-provoking open-ended questions that facilitate interactive discussions are especially useful and revealing if a learning objective has been successfully accomplished. Another technique is to use a quiz (true/false, mix/match, fill in the blank, etc.) at the end of the lesson. However, I have found interactive discussions (in lieu of a quiz) is more effective and enjoyable for the participants.

Here are examples of questions designed to facilitate interactive discussions (where trust-based relationships have been developed).

| Learning Objective | Objective Verification via Thought-Provoking Questioning |
|--|--|
| Describe and compare the difference between accepting Jesus Christ as Savior, and yielding to Him as Lord. | Let’s say you meet someone who professes to be a Christian. However, it is obvious they are living in darkness, fulfilling the desires of their flesh, and in sin. What could you say to (or ask) this person (that is not judgmental or condemning) but yet causes them to realize being a Christian is much more than proclaiming to be one? |
| Identify which of the 8 Beatitudes they are lacking in their spiritual growth, and determine what their next step should be. | Jesus provided us with the Beatitudes. None of us are perfect, and all of us are pursuing improvement in our spiritual walk. As such, which Beatitude is the most challenging for you and why? Plus, is there anything you can do to overcome this challenge? |
| Recognize the importance of forgiving others; explain the consequences of unforgiveness, and conclude they must truly forgive those who have caused harm. | Can you identify one or more consequences of unforgiveness? Who truly benefits when forgiveness occurs: the one who was guilty of the harm, or the one who was harmed? Why is it important for the one who was harmed to forgive? Explain. |

Note: Thought provoking questions (written to reinforce learning objectives) are included with each topical Bible study available on UniqueBibleStudies.com.

Learning Session Preparation

Seating

There are two basic seating arrangements: classroom and circle.

Classroom seating is where everyone is facing the front of the room where the instructor is located. This arrangement is beneficial if the content is projected onto a screen. However, this arrangement makes it more difficult for participants to look at one another when an interactive discussion is occurring. Whereas, a circle facilitates interactive discussion, but makes it may make it more difficult for some in the circle to see a content-projected screen.

I personally like to project content via a TV or projected screen when I teach. I attach my laptop via a HDMI cable (or other means) and use PowerPoint slides to present the lesson content. I also set up a half circle where everyone can see the screen and each other at the same time.

I also suggest eliminating any possible distractions that may occur during the session. This includes asking everyone to turn off their phone's ability to receive calls (i.e. set to Airplane mode), moving pets into another room, and so forth.

Length of Session

A "optimal" learning session should not exceed 90 minutes. This is due to an adult attention span, because we can only fit so much into our finite brains, and our derrieres need a break. The following suggested allocation of time should be broken into three segments: pre-lesson, lesson, and post-lesson.

- Pre-lesson 15 minutes Introductions and prayer.
- Lesson 60 minutes Lesson delivery and interactive discussions.
- Post-lesson 15 minutes Follow up and prayer.

It is important to note that the suggested allocation of time should be flexible and not rigid. Remember to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and the "spirit" of the group. Sometimes personal needs and prayer requests may take precedence over delivering lesson content. As such, use grace, wisdom and discernment as you alter the allocated time to fulfill more important spiritual needs. Here are some possible options if there is insufficient time to complete the lesson content:

- Ask the group if it is OK to extend the allocated lesson time.
- Continue the lesson during the next session.
- If it is not possible to continue the lesson in the future, inform the group of the limited time remaining, and if possible:
 - Minimize interactive discussions.
 - Ask the participants to write down questions. These questions may be answered during the social gathering after the lesson, or via a follow up email correspondence.
 - Summarize the content and focus on the key learning objectives.

Lesson Session

Pre-Lesson

Prior to the lesson, ask someone in the group to write down prayer requests (which will be prayed over during the post lesson), and any topics/issues that were not addressed or answered during the lesson.

I always recommend starting on time—even if there are expected late arrivals. This time is allocated for introductions, asking how each person is doing, prayer requests, and so forth.

In addition, the pre-lesson time is used to facilitate transitioning the group into worship. This may occur by playing a praise and worship song, or collectively singing a song (select one with simple words and is easy to join in).

The last step prior to the lesson is for the Bible teacher to pray over the lesson, or for someone in the group to pray over the Bible teacher.

Lesson

As lesson content is delivered, participants may have questions or may want to state an opinion. If this occurs, let the conversation flow. The Bible study leader may decide to respond, or may ask others to respond. This is especially true if the conversation is based upon the defined learning objectives. However, sometimes the conversation may go down a different and sometimes undesirable path—including disagreements. I call these “rabbit trails.” If a rabbit trail occurs, the Bible study leader should use discernment, grace and wisdom in redirecting the conversation back to the lesson content.

I have found that there are two types of rabbit trails: misdirected and argumentative.

- Misdirected rabbit trails are not harmful to group learning, and can be beneficial for all participants. However, the conversation will misdirect the participants from the intended learning objectives of the session. As such, the Bible study leader may inform the group that the conversation is beneficial and may be the subject for a future Bible study. However, given limited time, it is best to return to the lesson content. Then ask, “Is this OK with everyone?”
- Argumentative rabbit trails are harmful to group learning. This scenario occurs when participants have opposing beliefs regarding doctrine or scripture interpretation. This situation can quickly get out of hand and result in an undesirable uneasiness among the participants.

Here is an example of an argumentative rabbit trail. Each time I teach about end times, someone will ask me about my personal beliefs about when the rapture may occur (pre-, mid- or post-tribulation). This type of question is a slippery slope because those who have formed an opinion will often seek to present their position by stating why they believe in a pre-, mid- or post-Tribulation rapture. Those who differ will do the same. Consequently, I have seen heated arguments quickly develop.

To regain control over the situation, it is best to redirect the group’s focus upon God’s grace, mercy and love. For example, I would ask and state the following truths: “When we die and get to Heaven, do you think God will ask you if you believed in a pre-, mid- or post-Tribulation rapture as a prerequisite for entry? (Or whatever the core disagreement is.) Or, do you think God is more interested in whether or

not you believed in His Son? Besides, there are only two absolute biblical truths regarding pre, mid or post. The first is no one knows when...but God. Second, it will occur at a time when no one expects. (Matthew 24:36-44). As such, personally, I believe it is prudent to prepare for the worst and pray for the best—and keep my life focused upon being ready at all times.”

Allow the Holy Spirit to do His work via scripture.

Sometimes a teacher may feel compelled to reinforce a message by adding a degree of condemnation. For example, a passage in scripture may reveal a sin. The teacher may then ask “Are you guilty of this iniquity?” In truth, if someone in the group is guilty of the sin, the Holy Spirit is already speaking to their heart as the scripture is read. What’s more, they are likely being spiritually chastised. As such, there is no need to attempt to add human influence—for the Holy Spirit and God’s word is sufficient.

Personally, I have found it much better to discuss sin from two different perspectives: me and we.

- Me: This involves discussing how I struggled with (and overcame) this sin. Transparency and honesty facilitate breaking through barriers and healing.
- We: I will state many of us have experienced similar challenges with this type of sin in our lives. As such, we can relate to (and have compassion towards) someone who is dealing with the lies and darkness of this sin.

Here are additional things to remember as you lead the study:

- You are representing Jesus Christ. Mirror His grace, mercy and love in what you say and do.
- Engage every person in the room and recognize their importance in the Kingdom of God.
- Never judge someone or be condescending.
- Recognize:
 - Each person has different levels of spiritual maturity (sanctification).
 - Some in the group may have been raised (and believe) in different doctrines.
- Be sensitive towards those who may feel uncomfortable in speaking in a group setting (especially if they are new to the group or a new Christian).
- Express appreciation for each person’s contribution.
- Personally, I do not like to ask the group to move from one scripture to another scripture in a different section in the Bible. Some have no problem locating scripture in the Bible, others will. As such, this causes unnecessary delays and possible frustration and embarrassment (especially for new Christians). Meanwhile, a delay occurs until everyone has located the scripture. Therefore, I will do one of the following to overcome this scenario:
 - When using a projected screen I will show the full scripture and read it to the group.
 - When I am not using a projected screen:
 - I will print the different scriptures on paper and hand it out, and/or...
 - I will read the scripture out loud, or ask someone ahead of time if they can prepare to read the scripture to the group.
- At least once during the lesson I will ask the group “How am I doing? Is the content clear? Am I going at a good pace? Any questions?” These questions are beneficial in that they:
 - Communicate honesty and transparency.
 - Declares I am responsible to make sure the lesson content is understandable.
 - Express I desire feedback.

Post-Lesson

Here are three things that should occur in sequence once the lesson is completed.

1. I always like to ask the group at the end of the lesson:
 - Has anyone learned something new?
 - If not new, did you gain a different insight or perspective?
 - Was some content relevant to what's going on in your life?
 - Did anything speak to your heart?
2. The list of documented topics/issues that were not addressed or answered during the lesson should be reviewed for accuracy with the group during the post session. Follow up via emails and/or discuss in the next session.
3. This is when a collective group prayer should be made for needs identified during the pre-lesson period. The Bible study leader may ask specific persons in the group to pray for each expressed need. This way a person's prayer request is not overlooked.

Social Gathering

Upon lesson completion is when there is a great opportunity for participants to interact with one another. The participants may move to the kitchen or dining area to consume food and drink as they converse about the lesson or other topics.

I have personally found if food and drink are planned to be served, it is best for participants to take turns providing the food and drink—including disposable cups, plates, forks, spoons, etc. The person leading the lesson needs to prepare their heart, soul and spirit prior to the session. If the person leading the lesson also has the responsibility of preparing the food and drink—it will add unnecessary (and unwanted) stress and time constraints prior to the session. If there is no choice, make it as simple as possible (store bought cookies, disposable paper plates, cups, forks, spoons, and so forth). Personally, I like disposable dinnerware because it makes clean up much easier and provides more time for conversation. Remember...it's about the lesson content and interaction, and not the food.

On occasion, in lieu of a Bible study, it is beneficial for the group to gather for a meal. Planning should include an agreement for each person to bring their favorite dish, beverages, and dessert. Sharing a meal is a great time to get to know one another. For example the Bible study leader may initiate conversation during the meal by asking:

- If someone is willing to give their personal testimony.
- Married couples how they met.
- Parents to describe their children.
- Some to discuss their ministries.
- If anyone can describe:
 - An embarrassing experience in their life.
 - Their favorite vacation.
 - Something they would like to do in the future.

The importance of creating a trust-based environment!

The Bible study group should be perceived as a safe haven for all participants. Otherwise, some will not feel comfortable in sharing personal challenges.

As the leader of the group you should never speak any negative words toward any person, church member, group, political entity, and so forth. In addition, it is best not to express your opinions regarding any topic unless it is possible to express your words in an uplifting and positive spiritual perspective. [“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.” Ephesians 4:29](#)

When the group first meets and when appropriate, you need to reinforce:

- Everyone needs to develop and nurture intimate Christian relationships—which can only occur within a trust-based environment.
- The definition of gossip, why gossip is considered a sin, and the consequences of gossip.
 - There are 3 basic types of gossip: true, hearsay, slander.
 - True: One who has accurate and privileged information about someone and reveals that information to someone who has no business knowing it.
 - Hearsay: True or false information that is often spread by rumor and/or spoken by someone who is not the verifiable source of the information.
 - Slander: False information often spoken with an intent to harm someone.
 - Here are scriptural references that define the sinful nature of gossip and the consequences:
 - 1 Timothy 5:12-13
 - Proverbs 11:3; 11:13; 16:28; 21:23
 - Romans 1:28-32
- Words spoken by members should be considered confidential and should never be repeated to anyone outside of the group.

As trust is enhanced within the group, openness will increase and members will be more likely to share deep and painful experiences (as a means to reach out for help). This is when spiritual empathy and servanthood will magnify between the members as they begin to weep and fervently pray for the one who is seeking spiritual healing. This is also when an indescribable agape love and bonding occurs between the members—for this is what gathering together in Jesus Christ is all about!

Here is an example of the power of a trust-based environment that can facilitate the opportunities for spiritual healing. A woman’s Bible study group lesson was based upon the importance of forgiving someone who has caused them harm—including the spiritual benefits when one forgives. One woman began to cry and asked if it was possible to forgive someone who had died. She explained her father had raped her many times when she was a child, and he died a few years ago. You can imagine the depth of emotions felt by the other women in the group as they surrounded, embraced, cried, and prayed for the heart and healing for this woman. Meanwhile, other women began to open up and share their experiences of being raped—including the associated pain, shame, anger, hatred, rage, anxieties, fears—and a desire for retribution in lieu of forgiveness.

So...I ask you...how does one find a means, a reason, and a justification to forgive someone who has committed such a crime?

The answer is found in the Son of God as He died on the cross. For there is no other way to truly forgive someone until we fully understand the depth and breadth of the absolute forgiveness we have received from our Savior and Lord.

But what's more, the greatest example of forgiveness was demonstrated by Jesus Christ just before He died. He spoke these words after he had been convicted for a crime He did not commit; after He had been beaten to near death; after he had been cursed, spit upon, and ridiculed; and after he had been nailed to a cross to die. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Luke 23:34

He endured the worst possible treatment any person may experience by man...and yet he asked God to forgive His tormentors. What an example our Savior and Lord was, is and will be.

Facilitated by God's grace, forgiveness and His love, over time these women began to collectively experience freedom from the bondage of unforgiveness.

Jesus declared at the beginning of His ministry, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed." Luke 4:18



Being used by the Holy Spirit to teach Bible studies is a wonderful and blessed spiritual experience. I pray this lesson expands your opportunity to witness the power of God's word as it changes the hearts of the spiritually poor, the brokenhearted, those who are slaves to sin, the spiritually blind, and the oppressed.

All for the Glory of God!
Harold D. Thomas

Can you think of at least one person who could benefit from this lesson? If yes, send them a copy!