

Suggestions for Leading Bible Studies

The evangelistic Bible study (EBS) is best held in an informal but regular, quiet place that is natural to your friends. The number of times it is held is flexible; people and circumstances vary. It may last for a few weeks, or a year. At the beginning, however, it is best to invite people for a shorter, defined period of time such as four to six weeks.

It may consist of only two people—the Christian and his or her friend—or six to eight people, depending on the circumstances. In any case, it should never be dominated by Christians.

The **ultimate objective** is that people, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will come to believe in and submit themselves to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The **immediate objective** is to help seekers respond in any positive way to biblical truth.

Inviting People

When inviting friends to study, it is important to be honest and clear about what you are planning to do. You might suggest, *"Would you like to take an hour this Saturday evening to see what the Bible really says about Jesus?"* Some are ripe and ready to commit themselves to a series of six to eight studies. Others will respond to, *"Some of us are going to be studying a very helpful guide to basic Christianity. would you like to join us? It's only four studies long."* Later, if their interest continues, the studies can be extended.

If the study is with students, it is best to begin early in the school year, after you have had time to develop real friendships with non-Christians, and to end the study well before exams start. Having a short series focusing on a season (e.g., Christmas, Easter or graduation) or current events can be very effective.

Getting Started

- Pray much and specifically—for your non-Christian friends and for yourself as you prepare to lead. Enlist the prayer support of Christian friends also.
- Prepare the studies well. Find a good study guide if possible, which focuses on the person of Jesus—especially your first time.
- If possible, get help from someone with experience leading such studies. Talk through goals of the study, group dynamics and how to handle problems.
- Trust and expect God to speak to your non-Christian friends through His Word!

Leading Study Discussions

One basic responsibility is to **GUIDE THE GROUP INTO DISCOVERING WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS AND MEANS**. We leave the preaching to our campus pastor or congregational minister and keep our studies a true dialogue of give-and-take. This is absolutely essential,

especially with internationals. Although we have leadership roles, we are also to be learners. Here are some practical helps for encouraging others in the group to participate.

1. Relax! Keep your sense of humor; be ready to laugh at yourself, too.
2. Be enthusiastic without being irreverent or overpowering. Lead in such a way as to encourage honesty and confidence.
3. Be ready with questions that will stimulate discussion and not simply one word answers. Also be a listener yourself.
4. Resist the temptation to answer your own questions.
5. Encourage questions from others, but refer them to the group.

Keep the discussion moving by asking several people to contribute viewpoints, especially on strategic interpretation or application questions.

Be sensitive to hesitant or shy members. Ask them questions that you are quite sure they can deal with, but which are not insultingly easy.

Allow freedom of expression so anyone in the group can say what is on his or her mind, but keep to the subject. Carefully challenge superficial answers by asking others to suggest additional ones.

Summarize the discussion at the end of the study into one or two clear points of fresh knowledge, insight and challenge.

Setting guidelines at the beginning helps. For example, "We want to focus on what the text has to say."

Climate or Atmosphere

- Create an open, relaxed atmosphere. It is worth a few minutes at the start of each study to tell informally about mutual concerns or interests.
- Sit in a circle so that all can look at each other comfortably.
- It's better not to have any singing unless it is popular or folk songs which all know. Also, praying before or after the study may be out of place at first.
- Avoid a comparative religious discussion. It is generally better not to use the terms "*Christianity*" and "*Christians*," since these have formal connotations for most people. Instead, use phrases like, "*the Bible says*" or "*according to the record*," when referring to the Christian faith.
- Ask questions in a non-threatening way. For example do not say, "*What do you believe about ?*" Rather say, "*What do most Buddhists/Japanese believe about?*", followed by, "*Do you agree?*"
- Honesty in personal testimony is essential. Our witness is to Jesus Christ and His accomplishments, not to our problem-free lives. Let's take off our masks. At times it will do wonders in the group for a Christian to say, "*I don't know the answer to that problem but I'll look into it and try to find an answer before we meet again.*" Spend time together between meetings.

- The Christian must have no sense of spiritual superiority. The Christian is simply *"one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."*

The Study Itself

1. To avoid confusion, try to use only one (modern) translation of the Bible. For internationals, a Bible in their language, or a diglot (English and another language in parallel columns) is very helpful.
2. The study must be relevant to the non-Christian's needs and level of understanding, relating them creatively to the Jesus of the New Testament.
3. The study must be contemporary. Relate it to modern literature, current philosophical trends, social problems, etc., but do not get off on tangents.
4. The language used must communicate biblical concepts accurately. Avoid evangelical jargon. Explain theological language and figures of speech in a simple way.
5. Avoid cross-references unless necessary. Skipping all over the Bible may confuse or discourage your friends.
6. Stick to the Bible as your authority. At the beginning of the discussion it should be agreed that the purpose is to see what the Bible says and means. Be careful also that Christians in the group do not depend on experiences, subjective opinions or what some Christian authority once said.
7. Get through the planned passage even if it means summarizing part of it. Getting through only a few verses each time can kill a study. It is helpful to be guided by this question: What overall impression of Jesus Christ is this study leaving with us?
8. Avoid dogmatism. Strong convictions have more effect when expressed quietly and with reference to the passage. For example, *"It seems to me from verse 10 and 12 that . . ."*
9. Our invitation to our friends is to "come and see" Jesus in the Gospels. Let Jesus' authority, compassion and attractiveness compel them to draw even nearer.

Bible Studies with International Students

Suggestions by Michael Paul

I. Basic Considerations

- A. English ability
- B. Christian background, if any
- C. Cultural background
- D. Size of group
- E. Teaching style
- F. "Accessories" (music, food, and fellowship)

II. Top Ten Questions asked by non-Christian international students about Christianity

10. But babies aren't sinful . . .

9. Who or what is the Holy Spirit?
8. Who wrote the Bible?
7. I thought Jesus was just the *Son* of God . . .
6. You mean everyone who's not a Christian is going to hell?
5. Won't God be offended if I ask so many questions?
4. But Christians aren't any better than anyone else . . .
3. If God forgives all of a Christian's sins then they can just go and sin all they want.
2. You mean America *isn't* a Christian country?
1. Why are there so many different denominations?

III. How to Lead a Bible Study with Internationals

A. Learning about the Bible and English.

1. It will take roughly twice as much time as if just studying the Bible.
2. It will often require a two-phase approach:
 - a. first understand the English words
 - b. second, understand the theology
3. English translations that have simpler English will be more understandable (e.g., NIV, TEV [Good News], GWN [God's Word to the Nations] as opposed to KJV or RSV, or NASB).

B. English teaching considerations

1. The overwhelmingly predominant student need is for speaking, (followed by listening, then writing, then reading), therefore:
 - a. Try to plan classes accordingly with as much chances as possible for students to speak and express themselves.
 - b. Stay away from long lectures, if possible.

Ask "probing" questions and questions that will lead to the right answers, so the student will be saying them and not you.

2. Different student English levels in the same group make things difficult. Try if possible to have more advanced students help the less advanced.

3. Having some type of printed material is often helpful as it's tangible proof to the students that they're learning something. For example:
 - a. If only studying a section from the Bible, maybe photocopy it, thereby allowing them to write in definitions, etc., or make up a vocabulary sheet (see examples in Sample Bible Study #4).
 - b. If not studying a section of the Bible, then have copies of whatever you're doing for the students to keep, to write on, and refer to as a written (not just oral) medium.
 4. Some students may have time to do homework or prepare for an upcoming class—give them opportunity for this with written materials.
 5. Pictures and diagrams are often helpful in teaching/explaining.
 6. Native Language Bibles and Native Language/English Bibles
 - a. Many students won't want these. They want to study English!
 - b. These can often help out when you're in a bind—especially for lower level students.
 7. Singing
 - a. If you're musically motivated, singing is a popular addition to the Bible studies for people of many cultures.
 - b. Some learn easier through the singing medium.
 - c. Pick songs with simple melodies and simple words.
 - d. It's helpful to review/teach the English in the songs before they're sung.
- C. Bible teaching considerations
1. Don't assume anything!
 2. Don't be overly concerned about offending (as long as you're not criticizing their religion) since they, at least, consider Christianity to be a part of American culture and most will want to learn American culture too.
 3. Unless it's a small group and you know well their level of biblical understanding, aim for the basics, particularly in larger groups.
 4. An overview of the whole Bible is often helpful.
- D. Group size considerations
1. The smaller the group the more helpful for the students, but the less students helped.
 2. Smaller groups (1–4 people) typically require less structure—maybe just open up the Bible and go. There are more chances for conversation, comprehension checks, and individualizing.
 3. Larger groups typically require more structure.

4. The smaller the group, the greater the likelihood for individual continuity.
5. The larger the group, the more the necessity for self-contained lessons/studies.

IV. Example of a Bible/English study based on Mark 8:31–9:1

English Vocabulary Words by verse:

- 31: the Son of Man
- 31: to reject
- 31: the elders
- 31: the chief priests
- 31: the teachers of the Law
- 31: to put someone to death
- 31: to rise to life —
- 32: to make something clear
- 32: to rebuke
- 33: Satan
- 34: to carry your cross
- 35: the gospel
- 36: to gain something
- 36: Of course not!
- 37: to regain
- 38: to be ashamed of something
- 38: godless
- 38: wicked
- 38: godless and wicked day
- 38: angel
- 1: Kingdom of God

Writing Practice:

In verse 36, Jesus says, "*Does a person gain anything if he wins the whole world but loses his life? Of course not!*" The words "Of course not!" are often used to answer a question that has the very obvious answer, "No." Write your own obvious question and answer it with "Of course not!" When you're finished, let your teacher check your question to make sure it's grammatical.

Conversation Question:

In verses 32 and 33 Peter and Jesus are rebuking each other. What is something in your home country that children often do that their parents rebuke them for? Were you ever rebuked for this, or have you ever rebuked your children for doing it?

MEANING

With 8:31 we begin the second half of the book of Mark. The first half told us a lot of what Jesus *did*—especially many of the miracles he performed. The second half tells us more of what

Jesus *said*—his teachings. The second half also focuses more on how Jesus is going to die and rise again, and at the end of the book he does die on the cross and rise from the dead—his real purpose in coming to earth.

1. In verses 31 and 32 Jesus tells his disciples plainly that he will be put to death and then rise again three days later. Why do you think Peter rebukes Jesus for saying this? Last week we read how Peter in verse 29 answered correctly that Jesus was the Messiah. Do you think Peter really understood what the Messiah was supposed to do? Are we ever like Peter and want God to do things *our way*? If so, can you give some examples?

2. Why do you think Jesus said to Peter, "*Get away from me, Satan?*" Do you think Satan wanted Jesus to die and rise again? Why, or why not?

3. Peter and the other disciples were probably thinking about how they would become powerful and famous with Jesus here on earth. What do you think Jesus means, then, when he tells his disciples and the crowd around them that "*If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget himself, carry his cross, and follow me?*" Are Christians promised an easy life here on earth? When will Christians have a wonderful, perfect life?

4. What do you think verse 36 means: "*Does a person gain anything if he wins the whole world but loses his life? Of course not!*" What is the only way a person's life can be saved?