

Leading a Bible Study

Leading a Bible study takes practice and improves with experience. There are very few people who are natural study leaders. Most of us need a few pointers and some practice to find out how to best help the others in the group discover the truths that you have learned during your preparation. This lesson will focus ways to make your leadership of the Bible study more interesting and useful for all those who attend.

How to Lead a Bible Study

1. Begin and end on time. If you announced the study for 7 PM, arrive early enough to get set up, say a few hellos and how-are-you's, and begin promptly. Letting people know the quitting time helps them relax and not get restless wondering when the study will conclude. Those with children and babysitters want to know when they can expect to get home. Save the talking and conversations for the fellowship time at the end.
2. Begin with prayer and maybe even share some prayer requests if the group wishes to do so. This makes a natural start to the Bible study and focuses the group's attention on the study itself.
3. Make people as comfortable as possible around a table or in a circle. Don't seat people so close so as to be awkward.
4. Make sure everyone has a Bible and then read the passage. You may ask someone to read the passage, but it's best to make it an open invitation, not directed toward any one person. If you call on one individual to read, a newcomer in the group may think he'll be called on next and if he feels threatened by that, his fears may prevent him from learning much from the study and you may not see him back again. Bible study should be as non-threatening as possible. That means that no one should be afraid that they will be called on to read, pray, or comment on a question. Shy people will often come to a study if they don't have to be concerned about being called on. But if you call on them to read, pray, or comment, you may lose them. It's better to have them there, not saying a word, than to not have them there at all. God's word can work in hearts that are listening, even if they don't speak. We learn the most when we discuss, talk, and interact, but those who only listen can learn a great deal as well. Some of us ought to listen more than we do.
5. Begin to ask some of the questions you have prepared, remembering the inductive method and the three basic questions that are asked. Again, direct your questions to the group as a whole and not just to one person. Don't be afraid of short periods of silence. These quiet times are good chances for everyone to think. Don't answer your own questions. This leads the group to think you might have a "right" answer for all your questions. If no one responds to your question, try to rephrase it or ask another question that is more specific or deals with a smaller aspect of the original question. Some questions lead to other questions you hadn't thought of. Don't be afraid to go off on useful tangents if the group is interested. Don't be afraid to bring the group back to the main topic even if you have to say, "Let's get back to our main topic." If someone asks a question that seems addressed to you as the leader, refer the questions to the whole group by saying, "What do the rest of you think about that?"
6. Accept ideas and comments in a way that will encourage free sharing and an openness to different ideas. If someone makes a comment that is scripturally wrong, don't embarrass him or put him down. You might ask if that person knows any Scriptures that support that idea. That question could also be directed to the group. The individual might even be assigned to research the idea for next week and bring further information back to the group.
7. The leader should occasionally summarize during the discussion. This helps to pull together the various ideas and thoughts and keeps the discussion on track. Short summaries also help to make the application time better if the main points have been emphasized and refreshed during the discussion.
8. Limit the use of Bible cross references during the discussion. "Hopping around" in the Bible is impressive on the outside, but it can be confusing and takes a lot of time. Properly developing the context of each passage becomes difficult also, so it is better to limit cross references to a small number that amplify or clarify the passage being studied.

9. Try not to let talkative people dominate. Try tactfully to ask if other people have comments or ideas after the talkative one has shared. If necessary, talk to the dominant person individually after the study and share with him that others aren't able to benefit as much because they don't get a chance to talk.
10. Always be sensitive to the group and the Holy Spirit. Don't be determined to cover a certain amount whatever time, speed, or effort it may take. Remember the importance of good eye contact, a sense of humor, and an atmosphere of freedom and acceptance. We never want anyone to think that the study is a collection of spiritual giants. Bible study, when conducted properly, is fun and exciting, not drudgery.
11. If you can work an extra week ahead, consider writing out questions that can be handed out for the next week. This enables people to work on the passage ahead of time. They often will get more out of the study if they have done some prior study on their own.
12. In the prayer time, don't pray around the circle, but encourage conversational prayer that skips all around the group. Everyone should know who will close the prayer time. Requests should be shared but don't get bogged down in discussing them. Encourage the group to remember praise, worship, thanksgiving, and confession in the prayer time, so it isn't just an "asking session." Short periods of silence are good in a prayer time, but the leader must be sensitive to insure they don't become awkward.
13. Refreshment and fellowship times should be simple and uncomplicated. This time is not a contest to see who makes the most sophisticated dessert, but a chance to get to know people. Include everyone in the conversation and make sure everyone knows they are free to leave anytime they wish.

Thoughts and Tips about Leading Bible Studies

1. Not everyone has the gift of teaching. Other gifts are just as important and we must not exalt teaching out of proportion. Don't let someone force you into teaching if you don't feel it is your gift. On the other hand, you may never know if you have the gift unless you try it out a few times.
2. Leaders must be prepared for discouragement if (and when) the members of the group don't seem as enthusiastic or committed as they are. Satan would love to destroy a group with discouragement like this. Keep on praying and working and realize that as the leader, you will be the most enthusiastic because you have spent the most time studying and preparing this lesson. Come prepared to infect others with your enthusiasm.
3. Be flexible, sensitive, and open to changes in format or style the group may suggest. Don't take it as a personal insult if they want to conduct the study in a different way than you had planned. A leader's goal is to build scriptural truth into each person's life and there are many different ways to do that.
4. Have a spouse or close friend give you frank feedback on how the study is going, how it could be improved, and problems or conflicts that exist. Be open to suggestions and be teachable.

Leading a Bible study seems like an awesome task to the one who has never done it. For those who have the gift of leading and teaching, leading a Bible study is a very rewarding experience and very valuable in the teacher's life as well as in the life of every person who is a part of the study. Experience the joy that comes in helping other people discover truths from God's word, the Bible.