

Preparing a Bible Study

In the Christian world, there are many people who want to be involved in a Bible study, but not very many people who are willing to lead a study. The need for leaders also points to a need for training in how to prepare and lead a Bible study, so this lesson is focused on the preparation time before the Bible study.

How to Prepare a Bible Study

What does it mean to study? The word “study” means the process of applying the mind so as to acquire knowledge by research and investigation. It also means careful attention to critical examination of any subject of event.

Bible study must be more than just acquiring knowledge—we must put that knowledge into practice. Our goal in Bible study must be to seek God’s will and apply it in our lives. Achieving this goal will show us practical applications from the Scriptures that will help us face problems and questions in life. Bible study as a group has the advantage that it stimulates more thought and discussion than individual study. All Bible study leaders will admit that even after extensive study and preparation, insights and applications come out of the group discussion that they had not considered or realized. Other benefits of group study include fellowship, united group prayer, sharing of needs, and an ever-deepening bond of friendship.

The leader is a key figure in the success or failure of any Bible study. He does not have to be a Bible scholar or theologian, but is rather a steering wheel that guides the group to discover truths and applications. He doesn’t spew facts. He doesn’t lecture. He keeps the group on track, steers away from unnecessary tangents, asks thought-provoking questions, and helps people discover the truths in the Scripture passage. A leader telling someone about a truth or application is not nearly as significant as helping that person discover the same truth for himself.

How can you as a leader prepare for and conduct a Bible study? There is no simple formula for making a good study, but one method that has worked well for many groups is the inductive method. This method develops partial facts and illustrations and combines them to reach a conclusion. The inductive method basically asks three questions:

1. **Observation**

What does the passage say?

Summarize the passage in your own words. What is happening in the passage? Who is involved in the story? This is where you ask the questions, “Who, What, When, and Where?”

2. **Interpretation**

What does the passage mean?

How does the passage fit in where it is? What is the significance of the events, statements, actions, and reactions in the passage? These questions get into the “How and Why.”

3. **Application**

What does it mean to me?

What lessons can we learn from the examples or mistakes of the people in the passage? What applications can we make to help us in our homes, families, jobs, and lives? What is the Lord trying to teach us from this passage?

The leader doesn’t have to ask these questions exactly as they are stated here, but through variations of them, he is reaching the same goal and answering them at the same time.

How do you prepare for a Bible study? The following is a method that is very simple but has worked well for many people. Let’s assume that you have six days to prepare for a weekly study and can spend a small amount of time each day in preparation. A most important starting point for any preparation is prayer. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you prepare and understand the passage and make the Bible study meaningful for everyone. Pray as Solomon did, for wisdom and understanding. Remember, you are seeking to exalt Christ through this study, not yourself as the leader.

Days 1-3 - Read the passage over several times thoughtfully and carefully. There is no formula for the ideal length for a passage, but it shouldn't be so long that you forget the beginning by the time you get to the end. Approximately 20 verses is a good starting point, but even 20 verses will be far too much if you are studying a difficult passage. Read the passage in several different versions or translations. Have a notebook handy to jot down ideas, questions, and observations that will help you to remember your thoughts for further study and research.

Days 4-5 - Read the passage over several times each day and look at cross references. Consider how they relate and compare. How do they add new light to the passage? Look up difficult words in a concordance to see how they were used in other passages. Here we are using Scripture to help explain and amplify Scripture. Commentaries and other books come later. Begin to write down questions for the group to discuss. Here are a few tips for making good questions:

1. Except for the initial observations in the passage, avoid questions that can be answered directly with a fact, a word, a statement, or a yes or no answer. These questions insult the group's intelligence, require little thought, and tend to stifle a group rather than encouraging discussion.
2. Concentrate on questions that start with "why, how, compare", or other thought-provoking words. This type of question requires thought, interpretation, and analysis of the passage. They stimulate others to think and help the group move toward personal applications. Study guides, leader guides, books, and other helps can be a source of good questions, but often the leader will have many good questions of his own after several days of study. Study guides should never become a crutch that prevents original thinking and question development.

Day 6 - Read related areas in commentaries, Bible handbooks, Bible dictionaries, or other references. Here you are learning what others think about the passage, how they view it, and how they interpret it. These references may fill a gap, give history or cultural background, or answer a question that you had, but saving them until last insures that you aren't biased or prevented from original thinking in your own study. The sixth day is also the day to finalize your questions and decide which ones to use.