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## How-To Lead a Bible Study

# Preparation

### GOAL

The goal of this article is for you to know how to prepare a Bible study.

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# PREPARATION

## Optional Lectio

Before we get started, take some time to pray over a Scripture passage about God's word.

- **First**, read Matthew 6:25 – 33.
- **Second**, reflect on the words that caught your attention.
- **Third**, pray from your heart and respond to what Jesus is saying to you.
- **Fourth**, rest in what God has told you and in His presence.

**Discussion Questions** *(These are sample questions; feel free to develop your own.)*

1. What jumped out at you as you read Matthew 6:25 – 33?
2. In the Gospels, Jesus asks more than 100 questions. Why do you think He uses this method so often?
3. What do you think about the questions He asks here? Did they have an impact on your own life?
4. What are some ways you can use questions with others?

## Trail Guide

If you've ever gone hiking, you know how helpful it can be to have a guide who has been on the trail before: They know which way to go, when to stop and where all the good views are. With your Bible study, you need to be a trail guide — someone who has been through the material before and who knows where to go. You won't be able to lead a good discussion if you haven't taken the time to properly prepare for your study.

In this article, we are going to cover three topics to help you:

- Personal Prayer
- Determining the Truths
- Selecting Questions for Encounter

## Personal Prayer

Prayer is the best place to start as we prepare our Bible studies. Before we assume our Bible studies will be successful simply because of our hard work, we must recognize the spiritual dimension that occurs. Scripture tells us, "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against the powers, against the world rules of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

When you are leading a Bible study, you are engaging in a spiritual battle for the souls that God entrusts to you. Be sure to be using your Spiritual Multiplication Depth Chart to be praying for the members of your Bible study on a daily basis. Ask God how He can use you to serve the people in your care.

Next, pray over the material you will present at Bible study. As the saying goes, "You can't give what you don't have." If you don't have an

ongoing relationship with Jesus, where you are encountering Him in your life, how can you give this to others? As a leader, you should have time each day in quiet meditative prayer. All of this applies to the Bible study material itself. If you take time to pray with the material and allow the Lord to use the content to work on your own life, two things happen: First, you are more aware of how to apply the materials to someone else's life; and second, your Bible study members will be more open to sharing their own lives when you share yours.

### **Determining the Truths**

Your devotion to praying with the material leads right into your ability to determine the truths of the study. Going back to the trail guide analogy, what are the key "views" you want to share with your group? What spiritual truths emerged in your prayer, and what do you think will have the greatest impact on your group? Knowing the one to three truths you will share can help you know where you hope to take your study. (Note: Some FOCUS studies have a goal for each chapter. Take a look at these before you determine the truths you want to share.)

To return once more to the trail guide analogy, all this preparation can help you avoid wasting time in the "trees" instead of "great mountain views" — in other words, to not spend time on parts of the Bible study that may not be helpful and instead spend time on the places where you are ultimately hoping to lead others. Looking at the context of the passage or going on tangents aren't always a bad thing, but if they get you off course and don't allow you to get to the heart of what you need to share, then ultimately, they aren't going to be helpful.

When you understand where you want to take people, knowing when to stop and when to move on will become so much clearer. Take time to prepare your study so that you can lead your group well.

So, if you've prayed with the material and determined the truths, how do you get people to those truths? The key is asking good questions.

### **Select Questions for Encounter**

Proverbs 20:5 tells us, "The purpose in a man's mind is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out." One of the best ways to draw out the thoughts of your group is to ask good questions. As a small-group leader, your goal is to facilitate a conversation with your group. Questions encourage this facilitation because they help the group members respond and interact with each other.

At times, it can be tempting to simply act like a teacher and lecture to your group, but one of the best ways people learn is by discovering the answers for themselves (also known as self-discovery learning). Asking questions allows the members to reflect on the information and retain it in a personal way.

As the leader, try not to simply tell information that could be learned through questioning. For example, someone might ask you, "What do you think this passage is saying?" Turn the question back to the group by asking, "That's a great question. What do you *all* think this passage is saying?" While certain topics or situations will call for you to do some teaching — whether it be clarifying the Church's teaching on a subject or moving the group through the material — you ultimately want your group to feel like it is their study, not your study. Asking good questions will help you achieve this goal.

#### *Four Types of Questions*

Once you have your truths in mind in preparation for your study, you will want to brainstorm what questions to ask. FOCUS materials have questions to guide your reflection, but you are free to ask the questions in ways that might be more meaningful for your specific

group. Try to avoid rhetorical questions and yes-or-no questions (an example of both: Did John the Baptist baptize people?). You can find more information on how to use FOCUS materials within each study.

Here are some ideas of what questions to ask:

*Launching Questions*

How do I begin? Launching questions are designed to get the discussion started. It can be something as simple as, “What stood out to you in this chapter?”

*Observation Questions*

What are the details? These questions help to recall what was read. You might ask: “Could someone summarize what happened in this section?”

*Understanding Questions*

What does it mean? These types of questions will help the reader understand the ramifications of what they are reading. For instance, “How would you state the theme of this chapter?”

*Application Questions*

How should I respond? These questions help apply the material to their lives. For instance, “How do you see yourself in the story we just read?”

Ultimately, these questions should all work off one another and help you build toward the point of truth you want to share. For instance, if you are leading a Bible study on the Prodigal Son and a truth you want your group to encounter is the way the heavenly Father looks at them when they sin, you can use the four types of questions to build to that moment of encounter.

Perhaps you could start off with a launching question at the beginning of the study that would ask about a time when members of your group

had to ask for forgiveness from someone. This gets them thinking about sin and forgiveness even before you dive into the material.

Then, you could ask an observation question: When the son came home, when did the father see him? Here you are just trying to make sure everyone is tracking with what is going on in the story.

Next, you could ask an understanding question: Since the father saw the son at a distance, what do you think this says about what the father was doing while the son was gone? What does it say about the character of the father?

Finally, after asking these questions, you can ask an application question that gets right to your truth: When you sin, how do you think our heavenly Father looks at you? How does that image match up to the image of the father in the story?

Notice that if you asked the application question without the rest of the questions, it wouldn't have packed the same amount of punch. Your ability to ask all four types of questions can help you build to a truly meaningful moment in your Bible study.

## **Conclusion**

It is amazing when someone encounters the truths of the Gospel. As a leader, remember that the first step in this process is your commitment to prayer. It is God's work first. However, He wants us to participate by discerning the most important truths to share with our group, asking good questions and navigating the most effective path to help them encounter those truths in a powerful way. It can be tempting to take shortcuts in your preparation or not really prepare at all. But taking the time to prepare effectively can make all the difference for your Bible study.

**Discussion Questions** *(These are sample questions; feel free to develop your own.)*

1. How have you been praying for the people you want to invite into your Bible study, as well as the people already involved? Is there anything else you can do to intercede on their behalf?
2. How can you be a more effective trail guide for your group? How can you create effective paths that will lead your group to encounter the most important truths?
3. What type of question (launching, observation, understanding, application) do you think is the most important? Which one is the easiest for you to ask? Which one is the hardest?



