



How-To Lead a Bible Study

Skills

GOAL

To understand the skills necessary to run an effective small-group.

SKILLS

Optional Lectio

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

- **First**, read Matthew 25:31 – 40.
- **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 25:31 – 40?
2. What is the relationship between the stranger you greet and Jesus Himself?
3. How does this change the way we approach others as we welcome them into our studies?

Traffic Cop

Have you ever watched a traffic cop in action? Whether it's due to a broken street light or because of a busy sporting event, traffic cops step into some intense situations. Their ability is almost an art form as traffic cops smoothly direct hundreds and thousands of vehicles in an hour with just the power of their hands and a whistle.

Leading a Bible study can sometimes feel a bit like being a traffic cop. There are numerous obstacles and traffic jams that can cause your study to not flow properly. To avoid these challenges, you need to develop some simple skills that will allow your Bible study to go well. While your study members may not always notice all the time and effort that you put into these skills, they will notice the obstacles that arise if you don't set up your Bible study for success.

In this article, we will cover four skills to help you lead a Bible study:

- Foster Hospitality
- Facilitate an Encounter
- Generate an Engaging Conversation
- Model Leadership

Foster Hospitality

What is the best party you have ever been to? What made it so great?

Parties are great, but Bible studies are so much more important. They allow us to communicate God's word to others. It's so important to make your Bible study hospitable and take the time to create a fantastic environment.

Consider and discuss these questions together for your Bible study:

- When will you meet?
- Where will you meet?
- What food and drinks will you bring?

Don't worry — you don't have to come up with all the answers on your own. We've provided some suggestions below.

Location, Environment and Timeliness

As the day of your first meeting draws near, set up the right meeting spot for your Bible study — a place that is inviting and comfortable for your group to come to each week. Here are some tips to help make this happen:

- Find an accessible and informal location that can be used or reserved each week. Dorm rooms and possibly hall lounges can work well, as long as they are free from distractions and noise (and if your roommates approve). Be sure there is enough room for all the members to be comfortable and to see one another.
- Provide food and refreshments, especially the first few weeks. (People love free food!) It also gives the participants a natural activity as they begin to arrive and chat with one another.
- Schedule a time when all your group members can attend. As a rule of thumb, Monday through Thursday nights usually work the best. Also, be sure to let your participants know how long the Bible study will last (usually between 60 and 90 minutes) and then stick to that time. Some Bible study members will fall off simply because they don't know how long the study will go and how this might affect homework or other activities they might have.

- Bring extra Bibles in case a member doesn't have one.

Mastering the art of hospitality will allow you to avoid several pitfalls that can hurt Bible study attendance and the Bible study itself. Take the time to make sure you set your Bible study up for success.

Facilitate an Encounter

It's important that we remember the goals of a Bible study: divine intimacy, authentic friendship and spiritual multiplication. Each week, you want to facilitate an encounter for your participants — an encounter with our Lord and with each other.

At World Youth Day, Pope Francis said, "Be servants of communion and of the culture of encounter! I would like you to be almost obsessed about this. Be so without being presumptuous, imposing 'our truths,' but rather be guided by the humble yet joyful certainty of those who have been found, touched and transformed by the Truth who is Christ, ever to be proclaimed" (Homily, World Youth Day, 27 July 2013).

One of the best ways to help make this encounter happen is to pick out a material that fits your group. It's important that you know where your group is at and where they are going. The Bible studies on focusequip.org fall into three different categories: WIN, BUILD and SEND.

WIN studies are for those who need to commit or re-commit their lives to Jesus Christ and His Church or who are in the initial stages of this relationship. Caution: Just because your study members can speak about the faith or seem further along in their faith journey doesn't mean these studies would not be helpful. The basics are always good for people, no matter where they are at. *We recommend*

that all participants, no matter where they are in their faith journey, go through The Crux and The Story of Salvation during their time in FOCUS Bible studies.

BUILD studies are for those who have a relationship with Jesus Christ and His Church, but who want to learn more about the faith or how to live out the faith in their daily lives.

SEND studies are for those who want to share the faith with others. Whether the people in your study are disciples who lead Bible studies or are only getting started, these studies can help the members of your group realize that all Catholics are called to be missionary disciples.

For more on these studies, check out focusequip.org.

Once you choose a study that will best help your group encounter the Lord, it is important that you know how to use the materials to get your group to a point of encounter. Normally, a leader's ability to do this starts with how they prepare for their Bible study. We will cover this point in greater depth in another article in this series, *How-to Lead a Bible Study: Preparation*.

Generate an Engaging Conversation

Several difficulties can arise during a small-group conversation. Perhaps someone in your study rarely participates, or another participates too often. What can you do?

As the facilitator, your job is to direct the conversation. In some ways, you become a traffic cop: At times, you will need to hold off certain traffic, especially if one or two members are dominating the conversation. You can say something like, "We've heard from this

side of the room; what does this side of the room think about the question?"

At the same time, just like a traffic cop, you can use one hand to "stop" one side of the room and the other to invite someone else to "go." This allows quieter members the chance to speak up, which can help balance out the group. You may also want to take a more vocal member of the study aside, telling them how much you appreciate their participation and asking if he would be willing to hold off on some of their comments to help you encourage the others to participate more.

If you experience a total lack of participation, try to keep a few things in mind. As the leader, don't be afraid of silence; people need time to process the question and think about what they will say. If you are always quickly answering your own questions, the group will get used to not having to participate. Feel free to count to 15 or say a slow Hail Mary while you wait for a response. After waiting, if no one responds, consider asking the question in a different way or make sure everyone understood you.

One image that can help with facilitating a Bible study conversation is a captivating, well-played volleyball game: As the leader, you serve the ball by asking a good question. Then someone answers, setting the ball up for someone else in the group, who then passes it along to another. When the volley is dead, you serve up another question. The goal is not to simply keep the discussion going but to achieve the goals of divine intimacy, authentic friendship and spiritual multiplication.

Also, use discussion starters and time outside of the study to build up the relationships within it. People are more comfortable sharing when they know one another. The skill of effectively leading a conversation does not happen overnight. Continue to work hard, practice and read

up on how you can do a better job. For more on how to ask great questions to get a good conversation going, check out our article [How-to Lead a Bible Study: Preparation](#).

Model Leadership

One of the best ways to learn the skills needed to become a master Bible study traffic cop is to learn from others' examples. Take some time to go to your discipler's Bible study and/or the Bible study of a FOCUS missionary. Watch them lead the study, and then stay afterward and ask questions. This way, you can learn not only what they did, but why they did it.

Also, if you've led a Bible study before, ask other people to sit in on your study and give you feedback. Leading a study is an art form, and we can always get better. We all have blind spots; having others attend our study can help us learn how to become even better leaders.

Conclusion

In Bible studies, little things can go a long way to making your small group a success. Through preparation and practice, you will begin to master the skills needed to lead a Bible study well. Continue to learn and be open to getting better.

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

1. What is the best party you have ever been to? What made it so great? How can we make Bible studies have amazing hospitality that brings people back week after week?
2. When have you truly encountered the Lord or others during a Bible study? What did the leader do to create this encounter? What can you learn from this?
3. What does it mean to be a traffic cop in your study? Do you think this will be easy or hard to do? What can you do to be better in this role?
4. If you've been in a Bible study before, what did you learn from the leader? What did they do well? What could they have done better?

