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## How to Start and Lead Bible Studies

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Into Thy Word Ministries [www.intothyword.org](http://www.intothyword.org)

*Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Joshua 1:8*

This primer is intended to help you and your church to start, lead, develop, grow, and manage Bible studies. From “small group” Bible studies (4 to 10) as well as larger Bible Studies (10+), to even very large Bible studies (100+), because the principals apply to small and large groups, the difference is how you lead and structure them. Such as a “regular” Bible study will have less discussion and more teaching, whereas “small group” Bible study will have more discussion and less formal teaching, then larger studies have formal teaching and then break up into smaller discussion groups, while all are Bible centered with godly prepared teachers.

So what can you start to do? Realize that the study of the Bible is incredibly important and essential! They are the primary and best means for your church to disciple its people in God’s precepts so your people can learn and grow in their walk with Christ. All Christians who are serious about their faith should be in a Bible study or a small group that is studying the Bible. Yet, most churches do not do this vital call!

In the article, “Why we should be in a Small Group, ([Why should I be in a small group?](#) and [The Importance of Bible Study](#))” we discussed the importance, impact and reasons why we should be in such groups. The same principles apply to Bible Study; because the philosophy of small groups here at into Thy Word is that they are Bible centered studies. The only difference is small groups have more discussion, and they are smaller for more intimacy, whereas Bible studies have discussion also, tend to be larger, and are more teaching centered.

Now that we understand that Bible studies are essential for the formation of our Christian faith, we must realize their importance and how they help give us the ability to transfer our learning into real, practical influence to others around us. It is as *iron sharpens iron*; this means we help one another to hone our faith and develop our character. We can listen to all the sermons, read all the best books, buy great CDs, and go to seminars—even seminary; but, unless we are learning, studying and challenging one another in the Word and faith, we will only have a shallow understanding of and impact on the Christian life. Learning and Community breeds maturity and growth compared to individualism and selfishness which tends to breed pride and isolation. Do not get me wrong; we need to be in church under good teaching, we need to do our devotions individually, and be in personal prayer and study. But, to get the most out of our Christian learning so to impact our Christian living, we have to be learning and

growing and working it out with others who are working it out; and that place is in Small Groups that are Bible centered and or larger Bible studies that have discussion groups and or opportunities for discussion (Phil. 2:12-13).

## **What Does My Church Need to Do?**

Even though there is no set formula, there are a few “tried and true” ways Small Groups and Bible studies can develop that will be more consistent and purpose-filled so they can be more impacting and rewarding for all those involved. Our primary spiritual growth comes from our personal devotional times. Our involvement in Small Groups and Bible studies helps us further our growth and be the “iron that sharpens” one another as each one in the group helps another grow in Him and apply our faith into the world! Make a commitment to develop a Small Group ministry. All the tools you need are in this article, and the rest of the resources can be found in our Small Group channel ([Small Groups](#)) and in the various links provided. You can see our article on how to start programs ([How to Start, Develop, and Evaluate Programs](#)). In addition:

Have a clear ministry vision of what you will be doing with a Bible study and communicate this to the leaders and congregation. This will explain what it is, what it means, its values and purpose, and its benefits. Then develop a structure and plan for it.

- Put in lots of prayer!
- Who will be the leaders?
- Who will train the leaders?
- What materials will you need?
- How will they be organized?
- When and where will the meeting (s) take place?
- What curriculum will be used?
- What resources will be needed?
- What will be the obstacles and potential problems and how will you address them?
- How will the leaders of the church communicate with the Bible study leaders?
- How will accountability be structured?
- How will you deal with problems?
- How will you learn and be flexible to make changes?
- How will you evaluate it?

Then, seek how people will be encouraged and equipped, listen to input, and then make the adjustments. Then, go to the congregation with your passion and plan, and just do it!

## **Marketing Bible studies to a Church That Thinks They Are Scary**

The people in your church, whether you have no Bible studies and two Small Groups, have never had them, or half of the people are in them, need to be challenged and inspired to be in Small Groups and Bible studies. You have to tell them why they need to be in one, that it is fun and easy, and help alleviate their fears. The pastor must share the passion, personally be in one, and give his testimony. Then, further help enable your church membership to get in one by modeling them through demonstration, skits, testimonies, and literature. Have a table in your church lobby staffed with the leaders to sign people up and answer questions. Then, once the people are coming, continue the testimonies, share success stories, and honor the people with celebration and encouragement.

The congregation also needs to know how pastoral care and counseling will be provided (know the limits of the Small Group; they can provide listening and encouragement but not resolve serious issues or do therapy unless the leader is licensed and trained!) Small Groups and Bible studies can unravel deep hurts and issues that have not been dealt with prior, so people need a place to go to be helped.

### **Create Clear Leadership Responsibilities!**

Have a plan to recruit and develop leaders. Make sure the leaders are growing in their walk, have a plan to deal with problems such as crisis, conflict, and abusive people, have regular meetings for prayer, evaluation, encouragement, and mentoring and apprentice development. These people do not need to be experienced, seminary trained or theologians, but willing and able to learn and grow themselves before asking others to do so.

### **A Model to Equip Leaders**

The church is called to find the most capable people possible and protect the flock from potential harm. Never put just anyone in any position; it is better to have empty positions than the wrong people in them! The essential key is for you to find people whose heart is after God's heart (1 Cor. 11:1)! It is always best to find people who have done it before, but this is not necessary, as long as you train effectively. The biggest reason why churches fail at a Small Group and Bible studies ministry is they fail to train the leaders; the result is the occurrence of all kinds of problems (Rom. 12; Phil. 3:10-14, 4:8-9, 13; Col. 1:28-29; 4:7ff)!

As church leaders come together to pray for wisdom on group dynamics and direction. If you are developing more than one Bible study, here are some helps:

- Create your own Bible study training booklet; use this article, the article on why to be in Small Groups ([Small Groups](#)), and how to resolve conflict. You will then have your own manual. Make any needed changes and put your church name on it. (Please keep our copyright info on it, too.)

- Realize that since the dawn of the Church, finding leaders and workers has been a tough task. Our call is to do it even when the results might seem like failure (Matt. 9:37-38).
- Look for a person who is grounded in the Word, has a good temperament, an aptitude and desire to lead, and the willingness to be supervised. If he or she does not like supervision, consider that a red flag warning!

A good facilitator needs to strive for obedience to the principles of God's Word and practice the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, fellowship, worship, and stewardship. He must have good relationships with spouse, children, friends, church members, neighbors, co-workers. If he does not, find out why; you do not want toxic people in leadership. Sometimes people are shy and that is OK. In addition, these characteristics are very important: have an attitude of prayer, a sense of humour, listening skills, a willingness to learn and follow, one who influences people for Christ and is sensitive to others, an organizer, one who is responsible, who possesses an attitude of servant leadership, and one who is willing to explore his spiritual gifts and use them (Matt. 20:26; John 3:30).

The *Into Thy Word Bible Studies* are self contained, have the notes, outlines and questions already in them, thus the “leaders” are more like “facilitators.” Whereas when you develop your own Bible study then you or they are more active in their creation process, in either case below are some principles to help create a better “safer” Bible study where people can feel welcomed and loved that smoothes the progress for better learning and growth:

### **Tips and Techniques for a Successful Bible Study**

- The leader or facilitator will honestly express the Fruit of the Spirit (1 Cor. 13; Gal. 5:22-23) so everyone can better experience authentic care from one another!
- The leader or facilitator will have a high view of Scripture and accept a solid biblical statement of faith and sign it (2 Tim. 3:16)!
- The leader or facilitator will come prepared, be on time, keep people on the subject, and realize one cannot lead others where one has not been before!
- The leader or facilitator will understand and apply the passage to their own life first before asking of it from others.
- The leader or facilitator will provide the atmosphere of a safe place to ask questions, and be encouraging, loving, caring, and vulnerable.
- The leader/facilitator's main purpose is to get the conversation going and provide the teaching points and or exegetical message.
- The leader or facilitator will introduce the subject or text of the Bible and give any background information. (This can be delegated for smaller groups.)
- The leader or facilitator will then engage the group in dialogue to keep the interaction going without dominating the conversations, unless it is a large group study.

- The leader or facilitator for smaller groups will ask questions and help people respond to the passage or subject for a better understanding of the Bible.
- The leader or facilitator or teacher for large groups can do this a bit during the message for stimulation, and for larger groups this can take place in the small groups, then those leaders can do that.
- The leader or facilitator will seek to challenge the people to think on a deeper level to discover the precept, learn what it means, how to be a changed person because of it, and then how to apply it to life. He will demonstrate excitement, when people are growing, by giving affirmation.
- The leader or facilitator will inspire by example that we are people in the process of a spiritual journey and growth; no one has arrived yet. He will share life stories, help others discover and apply God's Word, discuss the precepts, encourage—but not force—everyone to participate by asking “what do you think; anyone else?” realizing that there are many times when there can be more than one good answer or perspective to any good question, and be open to the leading of the Spirit.
- The leader or facilitator needs to be willing to drop the subject of the week to address a current stress or crises with a member and be open to the leading of the Spirit (this mainly applies to smaller groups).
- The leader or facilitator will keep confidences and insist others do the same.
- The leader or facilitator will not be afraid to discuss significant issues about real life or the struggles to personally apply Biblical principles.
- The leader or facilitator will value people's time by starting and ending on time.
- The leader or facilitator will be flexible, sensitive, and open to changes and receive feedback and suggestions from other people as long as it does not compromise the integrity of the Bible.
- The leader or facilitator will be interested in the people there and be enthusiastic about the Bible and Study.
- The leader or facilitator will encourage people to give their comments or ideas.
- The leader or facilitator will realize fallen sinful humans are in the group and thus people will not get along with everyone else; there will be at times personality clashes, disagreements and conflict. Seek to carefully listen and allow each person's views, ideas to be vented in the parameters of love encourage everyone to respect and learn from one another!
- The leader or facilitator will be aware of setbacks, flakiness of people and not allow discouragement to reign.
- The leader or facilitator will endeavor to not let certain people dominate or control the discussion or force their opinions on others. In the Fruit of the Spirit, ask them to slow down, show your appreciation for their insights, and say *lets hear from some others*. If they continue have a loving talk with them afterwards or at another time. If they are belligerent and refuse to respect the leaders and the leaders are operating in the Fruit, then the quarrelsome person needs to be asked to leave until they can behave.

- The leader or facilitator will realize that sometimes you will not finish the study, you can ask to resume it the following meeting or just move to the next one. It is best to have a set pace for the study, so you are not bogged down being rushed or spending too much time on any one question or passage.
- The leader or facilitator will try to avoid going off subject unless led by the Spirit to do so and not too often. Also help others in the group to stay focused and if people roam away, in kindness bring them back to the topic and passage. Asking questions helps people stay focused.
- The leader or facilitator will in love point out misunderstanding from peoples faulty or heretical positions, there are essentials and there are things we can agree to disagree with.
- The leader or facilitator will laugh and have fun, and plan social outings and get-togethers outside of the Small Group!
- The leader or facilitator keeps his people in prayer during the week!

## Preparation

How much time does it take to prepare? It depends on if you are using a prepared lesson like we have. If so, just a few hours or less, read the passage at least three times, then read the lesson and mark which points you want to cover, usually the general idea first, then do the questions and as questions from people come up, go over some of the word meanings to answer them. Then end with the application questions and then the closing thoughts. Most people say they can use an *Into Thy Word* study after a couple of hours of preparation. If you are using another prepared study guide such as one from Navigators, it may take you around an hour to read the passage and go over the study notes and questions. Why do ours take longer? Because they are more in-depth and comprehensive and we have 2 to 3 times more information than you would normally use. So you have to go over it to see what fits your people and study goals. Remember the more time you put in it, on any curriculum or format you use, the better quality the teaching, learning and discussions your group will have. Keep in mind this is stewardship, how much will God be glorified if we are in a rush and skimp on it, is He glorified?

To totally develop your own study may take at least 10 and up to 20 hours, to outline the passage, do some inductive research and prepare some questions. It takes us 40 to 100 hours to prepare each of our studies due to all the research we put in it, this is because we use them as training tools and to be published, your studies do not need to be that comprehensive.

We have to be aware that we are led and embowered by Jesus and can do nothing apart from Him (John 15:5). Facilitating takes work and time and not everyone will be able to do it every time. However, a growth in this direction is essential to growing a healthy, interactive group. Remember, any good Small Group that is "Christian" will have the Bible at its core! And, also spend time in prayer for each member and concerns of the church and world.

## Types of leaders

Depending how you feel called to structure your Small Groups you can assign leadership functions to one or more people for each group and even rotate leadership in those groups.

**Teacher:** This person is the primary leader for the Bible study. They can provide the teaching, be in charge of the curriculum, and/or for starting and facilitating the discussion, making sure everyone has a chance to contribute and no one person dominates the group. This role can rotate from week to week but it is best to have a consistent person. If there is a rotation, then someone needs to take responsibility of choosing the leaders, curriculum, make sure it flows, and that the right set of course and questioning are being used.

**Host:** This person provides the logistics, hospitality, a place for the study (small groups work best in a home, Bible studies can be at the church too), keeps it fairly neat and welcoming, and facilitates the refreshments. Also, he or she keeps a list of the members, takes attendance to make sure absent people are followed up in the week to see how they are doing, provides good driving directions, gets the curriculum out to people a few days ahead of time if needed, and gives an email or call to remind people periodically. This position can also be rotated as long as consistency and the location are known to all.

**Prayer:** This person is in charge of the prayer to start the group, and facilitate the prayer at the end. This is an important job; each person should have the opportunity to share prayer requests. Keep your pastor, church, community, government and other concerns in prayer, too. It is best to write down each person's request and keep a record of it for seeing answers and growth and to follow up when necessary. Many resources are in our prayer channel under Discipleship ([Prayer](#)).

**Other roles** can include a **Socials Coordinator** as each group should do something fun every other month, like a dinner out, a movie, a trip, a yearly retreat, or? There can be a **Care Coordinator** to follow up on people in times of stress or absence, a **Worship Leader** to provide a few minutes of worship, a **Child Care Coordinator** (I have found that if three or four Small Groups that meet at the same day and time pool their resources to hire a sitter, this provides an excellent way to have cost-effective child care in a central location). The point is, not everything should be done by one person!

These people do not need to have theological knowledge or experience; they are the pump primers to get things moving and ask the questions. This works best when you use curriculum that already has the teaching and questions in it, such as any of our *Into Thy Word* studies. You can have groups where people take turns to lead; this has also worked well, especially for professionals and moms who

are busy. A good leader is a listener and will help everyone get involved in the discussion. Not all will talk; but there needs to be an atmosphere for dialogue without reproach from others. A good leader will not allow one person, especially him or her, to dominate the discussion unless it is a leader-based Bible study. Even so, community and discussion must be practiced and encouraged.

### **Basic Bible Study Structures**

There is no best way to structure your Bible study, but there are proven precepts that help structure each group for efficiency, learning, and care in the time allowed. These are suggestions based on a one hour to a one and a half hour and two hour model. For more length, add several minutes of time to the teaching, and break into sub small groups for at least 20 minutes of discussion and prayer!

Before you begin the study, it is essential that you spend time in prayer before people come and to start off with when they do come!

Suggested Schedule for a 1 1/2 Hour Bible Study:

7:00-7:10 Fellowship  
7:10-7:25 Worship (3 to 5 songs) and or prayer or welcoming and *how is your day* questions.  
7:25-7:35 You may want a bathroom and snack break  
7:35-8:15 Bible Study (40 min)  
8:15-8:30 Prayer requests and prayer  
8:30 Dismiss in prayer  
8:30-? Fellowship

Suggested Time Schedule for a 2 Hour Bible Study:

7:00-7:10 Fellowship  
7:10-7:25 Worship and or prayer (3 to 5 songs)  
7:25-7:35 Break for snacks and bathroom  
7:35-8:15 Bible Study (40+ min)  
8:15-8:45 Discussion and prayer (sub-groups or together) (15+min) and prayer (10+min)  
8:45-8:50 Re-gather for dismissal in prayer  
9:00-? Fellowship

- **Fellowship / Warm up:** Serve refreshments, fellowship, perhaps have instrumental worship music playing too.
- **Prayer:** Open with prayer!



- **Worship:** not necessary but it is great to have! If you do not do worship, then add the time to your prayer time. Also in this section you can have *how is your day* questions see Life Groups ([Doing Life Together](#)) for smaller groups.
- **The Study:** Lecture, Curriculum, inductive, exegetical, verse by verse, or...read the passage, then give any relevant teaching that will help stimulate learning and discussion (20 to 40+ minutes), keep in mind that most people are bored after 20 min, thus ask questions from the lecture to stimulate interaction and thinking. Consider a fun opening question (5 minutes). (The Serendipity Bible is a great resource for this, as well as any discussion starters from Youth Specialties; they work great for adults too.)
- **Discussion & Questions:** Encourage discussion; make sure everyone has the opportunity to participate, and seek to end with an application (15+ minutes). For larger groups with more time divide up into small groups for discussion and then you also may come back for a rap up.
- **Close in significant Prayer:** Spend some time asking how everyone's week has been, then spend time fervently praying for one another, the issues from the above categories, and specifics that have come up (15+ minutes)! For larger groups (20+) this should be done in the small groups.

Bible studies are usually one and a half hours to two hours; it depends on time constraints and availability of the people. Sometimes in an adult Sunday school class you may just have an hour. Do not forget to leave room for fellowship. Perhaps your time is 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., thus you actually start at 7:10 and end promptly at 8:30. This leaves room for people to get to know one another, share life, and fellowship. Make sure you respect people's time.

Then, you need to structure and organize Bible studies in your church for area coverage, days of the week, and types offered to benefit each member. Also, a leadership structure needs to be in place. For example, for every seven to 10 Bible studies, you need a coach/trainer and a pastor or coordinator in charge of them all. In larger churches you will have Bible studies at the church and in people's homes, you can group the home based Bible studies and Small Groups into groups according to where they live under regional coordinators/leaders whose primary responsibility is to train and be a help for the groups in their area. You can have three areas, four to six or more for major metropolitan areas. Make a flow chart, but make sure your chart and structure is flexible and based on prayer, not in feelings and/or personal agendas. It is also best to have regular meetings for group leaders at least every other month for prayer, training, encouragement, and feedback.

## **Bible Study Training**

What does the essential training entail? Basically, it is what is in this article: Also focus on the Basic Inductive Bible Study Principles and how to resolve conflict ([Talking your Way out of Conflict](#)). Typical training can also include:

- Ministry vision, philosophy, and leadership structure.
- Various curriculum offerings, training in how to use them, and their Bible content.
- Prayer ideas.
- Group dynamics.
- Interpersonal relationship skills.
- How to care better.
- How to gain new members.
- How to facilitate more effectively.
- How to resolve conflict.

The Bible studies need to be under the influence of the church and its set parameters, but not over-controlled. Some liberty and freedom needs to exist to allow room to grow and explore other options that the church leadership did not consider, as long as biblical integrity is kept.

### **How Do I Recruit Leaders?**

So, how do I recruit leaders? The best way to catch new people into your Bible Study is for you and your members to invite their friends. **Advertising creates awareness, personal invitation creates participation!** Another good way to recruit and train Bible study leaders is a “mentor approach.” This means to have a primary lead person for each group alongside a secondary lead person. As the group grows, it can be divided into two, and the secondary lead person would become a primary lead person for the new group. Then, a new secondary lead person would be recruited for each group, and so forth.

For additional insights, see our Article on ([How to Recruit Volunteers!](#) and [How to Form New Small Groups](#)).

Once you recruit the leader, partner them off for a few weeks in another Bible study so they can “get the feel” and give them the training booklet. This provides the model and experiences the leaders will need to have to reproduce the group. Then, meet with them to answer any questions; get their feedback and go over the basics so they have the vision and purpose down. Then, you can supervise, solving problems where and when they occur, reinforce, encourage, and put together more training as you go and grow. Have seminars once or twice a year with all leaders and potential leaders for further training, such as, *how to resolve conflict, and how to interact with the different personality types, how to outline Scripture...*The curriculum’s in this channel (Serendipity also has good resources for this as does Navigators, Inter Varsity and Campus Crusade.) You cannot just

give them a book, no matter how good it is; personalized instruction and encouragement is essential. If you have a small church and limited resources, partner with other churches and do one together.

- It is absolutely essential that you be willing and able to weed out people who should not be leading groups. Have them do a personality inventory such as Myers Briggs, and a Spiritual Gifts inventory ([Spiritual Gifts Discovery Workshop](#)). Get to know the people who are responsible to care for the flock. You want the flock properly cared for and not fleeced!
- A true leader, one who is in Christ, will have the characteristics of Servant Leadership, an essential trait ([Servant Leadership Principles](#) and [Servant Leadership Checklist](#)).
- What should you watch out for? People with wrong or ulterior motives for being in leadership, being over-zealous to lead, spiritually immature and/or a lack of willingness to grow, distrust or dislike for authority, or a personality that seems unstable.
- Is experience required for the leader? No, as long as the attitude and willingness to learn and grow are there, he can learn as he goes. Make sure he gets extra support, mentoring, and prayer (John 1:12).
- Having a method of handling conflict resolution is paramount, and will solve most future problems and issues. Firstly, identify the conflict and the responses from each side and listen carefully to them with encouragement and understanding. Secondly, explore a Biblical model of conflict resolution. Thirdly, integrate Biblical knowledge in a step-by-step fashion. And, fourthly, help teach the parties *conflict resolution* to prevent a repeat of such instances in the future. I sometimes bring other staff or other people in if required. I try to eliminate any misunderstandings and have the attitude for a win/win solution.
- Having a conflict-free environment will enhance recruitment greatly, because nobody wants to work in an atmosphere of strife! Alongside this, it is essential to have a Biblical Vision and Mission Statement, so everyone will be on the *same page* of what we do and why we do it ([How to Develop and Cast your Vision](#)).
- Have a public reporting of your progress and growth in the church newsletter!

### **What do I Study?**

Before you start, it is very important that you spend time in prayer finding what God wants you to teach. Then ask people what they would like to learn, what are their “real” spiritual needs not just their “felt needs.” For example most

people would like to study Revelation, but this is not good unless they have a grasp on the rest of Scripture.

For new groups, it is best starting out with a shorter Book from the New Testament, such as James, also Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Peter, 1 John. You can also go over a few from the Old Testament such as selections from Psalms, Daniel, Ruth or Jonah. If you are an established Bible study over an year, then venture into a larger book such as one of the Gospels, Acts, Romans, Hebrews, and Old Testament books of Genesis and Isaiah. You can also study sub topics in a book and still go exegetically, such as Jesus' Parables, His Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7 or the Olivet Discourse from Matthew 24 (essential before studying Revelation), Spiritual Gifts from 1 Corinthians 12-13 and Romans 12 and 14, also the Life of Abraham from Genesis 11-25, Elijah from 1 Kings 17-19, 21, and 2 Kings 1-2, 12, the Names for God and Jesus. There are also topical studies such as Love, Character, Faith, God's Will or a study for New Believer's and many more topics too.

Here is what we have at Into Thy Word:

[Bible Studies](#) [Small Group Curriculum](#) [Inductive Bible Study](#)

[Matthew](#) [Romans](#) [James](#) [Peter](#) [Revelation](#) [Topical](#)

[The Names of God](#) [The Names of Jesus](#)

(You can use the Inductive Questions to these and any of our other articles too).

[Disciplines of the Faith](#) [God's Will](#) [Character](#)

(You can use the Inductive Questions to these and any of our articles too).

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