

Leading Bible Study Groups

For Growth and Outreach

A workshop on the dynamics and skills needed in
leading successful small group Bible studies



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Four Steps in the Creative Process

Evaluating Your Group Bible Study

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1 Bible Study Groups and Their Leaders

A Healthy Bible Study Group

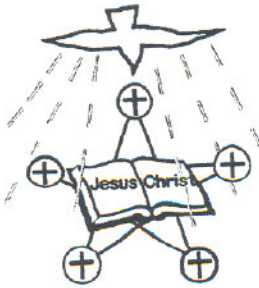


What does this picture suggest about a healthy Bible Study?

1 _____	6 _____
2 _____	7 _____
3 _____	8 _____
4 _____	9 _____
5 _____	10 _____

Biblical precedents Small groups anywhere, everywhere were the backbone of the early churches. Here disciples learned to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Here they introduced their relatives, friends and even strangers to Jesus, the Expected One (Acts 2:42-47; 5:42; 8:26-40; 10:24; 16:13-15; 18:26; 28:30-31)

1. Bible study groups are mini churches in some ways. Take a look at *Colossians 3:16* for Paul's picture of what a church and/or Bible study group should look like. (He is addressing the church. "You" is plural.)



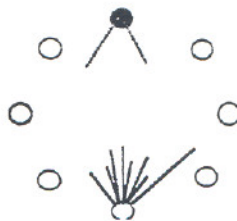
Let the Word of Christ dwell in you
richly
as you teach and admonish one another
in all wisdom
and sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
with gratitude in your hearts to God.

- * What's the difference between *teach* and *admonish*? How are they related in Bible studies?
- * Note the bold, italicised words describing the verbs, "dwell...teach and admonish... sing". How do these modifiers add to your understanding of effective group Bible studies?

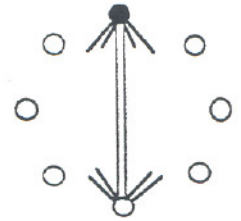
2. But observe these patterns of inexperienced Bible study groups. Compare each to the ideal pattern Paul shows us above. *What is missing in each group?*



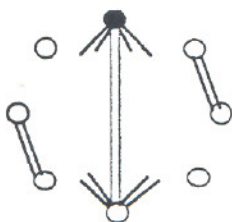
Senior Lecturer



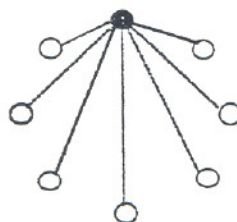
Junior Lecturer



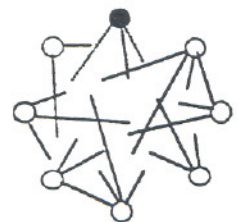
A Cozy Dialogue



3 Cozy Dialogues



School Teacher



Free for All

"Like a shepherd, lead us."

An enthusiastic group began a Bible study at the beginning of the term. They asked John to lead "because he knows the Bible from Generation to Revolution". Three or so weeks later the group had shrunk from eight to four. When I asked one of the dropouts why, he replied, "The leader didn't lead. So we didn't follow." It's quite simple: people will follow if the leader leads!

1. Bible study leaders are "undershepherds". In small groups read 1 Peter 5:2-4 aloud. In privacy reflect on Peter's words. Then share with the group: *What part especially grabbed you?* Write your prayer of commitment to your Chief Shepherd to lead your group as God's flock.

2. Bible study leaders have these overall tasks.

- They encourage personal relationships in an open climate.
- They help the group to dig for the facts in the text and together to discover the meaning of those facts.
- They guide the group to link the text to life.



2. Bible study leaders care about people. They regularly pray for each member. They follow up on concerns that have been shared. They are ready to help in practical ways.

3. Bible study leaders follow Jesus as their model of a good shepherd. Read John 10:1-18 thoughtfully. Then think of similar ways that you as Bible study leaders can follow Jesus.

Jesus the Good shepherd

- vs 1-3a He is not a thief or robber with bad motives but appointed by the Watchman.
- v 3b, 4 The sheep listen to his voice.
- v 3c He calls his own sheep by name.
- v 3d He leads them out.
- v 4a He goes on ahead of them.
- v 9 He finds pasture for them.
- v 11 He lays down his life for them.
- vs 12-13 He stays with the sheep in danger.
- v 16 He will bring in other sheep.

Bible Study Leaders

*They have good motives for leading their groups.
They know God has appointed them.
The group acknowledges their authority.
They know each member personally by name.
They lead the group out of their comfort zone.*

Which aspects of Jesus' shepherding example do you need to work on? Pray for one another.

2 Approaching the Bible Inductively

The group “leader” mentioned on page 4 could lecture on the fine details “from Generation to Revolution”. But he did not help others to study the Bible for themselves. That’s what Bible study leaders must do. They set the example in basic Bible study—dig, discover and do.

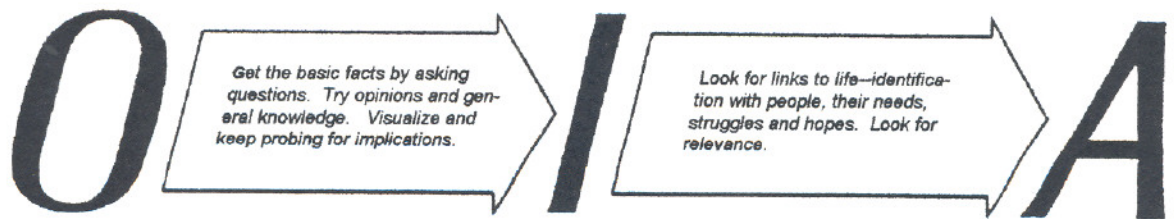
Inductive Method or Approach?

The inductive method of study is the process of gathering specific facts that can “lead into” a general conclusion. Strictly speaking, in Bible study it is not possible or even desirable to use this method in its rigid, rational procedure in order to be “objective”. In a more pliable way we prefer to say *approach* rather than *method*.

A strict inductive method would use only a logical, historical process. A flexible inductive approach recognizes many ports of entry into the biblical text. Anything that helps us to observe and think harder about the text is valid—and natural to learning.



This inductive approach follows three broad steps, though not always lineally. These steps are 1) observing the textual facts, 2) interpreting those facts from the writer’s view, and 3) applying his message to our contemporary situation. (For details see “Keys to Inductive Bible Study”.)



Exercise in O-I-A: Studying Acts 17:10-12

1. Observation: List ten facts that the writer Luke has recorded here. Ask questions for understanding the facts, avoiding speculation and application questions. *But do not stop to answer. Keep going.*

Facts in the text	Questions for understanding
1 The brothers sent Paul and Silas to Berea.	Who were these brothers? Why send them away? Where is Berea? Who is Silas?
2 They sent them at night.	What's significant about this time factor?
3 _____	_____
4 _____	_____
5 _____	_____
6 _____	_____
7 _____	_____
8 _____	_____
9 _____	_____
10 _____	_____

2. Interpretation: Summarise Luke's message (main point) for his readers to understand.

3. Application: Look for practical lessons to draw from Luke's message.

The Text and What We Say about the Text

Bible study leaders should help the group distinguish between what the text actually says and what people say about the text.

a. Textual fact	what the Bible actually says
b. General knowledge	what is known from other sources
c. Implication	what is hidden (not plainly stated) in a fact or set of facts
d. Opinion	what is suggested as a possible view
e. Imagination	what can be visualized in one's mind
f. Interpretation	what the author intended as his message
g. Identification	what people can personally relate to
h. Application	what is considered relevant and practical for us today
i. Speculation	what is theorised with little or no factual basis
j. Spiritualising	what is turned from concrete reality to fanciful symbolism

Try it! Based on Mark 4:35-41 (and context), match each statement with a description above.

- ___ 1. Jesus and his disciples were tired after a day of teaching the crowds and private explanations.
- ___ 2. Jesus knew the importance of rest after hard work.
- ___ 3. We can learn from him when to take rest from work.
- ___ 4. "Other boats" are worldly cares to leave behind as we sail with Jesus on the sea of life.
- ___ 5. Because of the mountains surrounding it, Lake Galilee often had sudden, violent storms that even experienced fishermen like the disciples could not easily handle.
- ___ 6. The sun was setting behind them. Dark clouds began to hang over them. Then suddenly strong gusts of wind upset the boat. Water began pouring into the boat.
- ___ 7. Jesus slept deeply because he worked harder than the disciples and so was more tired.
- ___ 8. Jesus was only pretending to sleep. He actually had one eye half open to see when the storm would naturally calm down. Then he could get up and command the wind and waves.
- ___ 9. The pillow (v 8) is God's love on which Jesus rested.
- ___ 10. The disciples may have been angry because it was Jesus' idea to cross the lake, not theirs.
- ___ 11. I also would have been very annoyed with Jesus at that point.
- ___ 12. It's better for us to be honest about our anger at God than to pretend that we have no such feelings.
- ___ 13. The disciples moved emotionally from fear of the storm to annoyance at Jesus, and then to awe at a new revelation of him and his powers.
- ___ 14. Before this event the disciples had respected Jesus as a unique teacher, deliverer from demons and a healer. But they had not yet recognised that he was the Creator Lord of all.
- ___ 15. This miracle proved conclusively to the disciples that Jesus was God.
- ___ 16. We can trust God in any crisis. He never panics. He's always there for us, ready, able, wanting to help.

Using Questions Inductively in Groups

Has it occurred to you that—like us—Jesus had to study the Bible? See some ways that he did this in Luke 2:39-52. You'll also see that he had a curious, probing mind that kept asking questions. Later in his ministry he taught by asking questions whether to crowds, religious leaders or his disciples. E.g., see his confrontation with critical religious leaders in Luke 5:20-23, or with his disciples in Matt. 16:13-16. *What are several values of asking questions?*

Yes, questions are your best tools in group learning—to dig, discover and do. There are three basic types of questions that correlate with O-I-A. (See Chap. 5 for framing good questions.)

- 1 **Observation questions** to help people dig into the text for facts
- 2 **Interpretation questions** to help people discover the meaning of those facts
- 3 **Application questions** to help people do something practical about the truth learned

The following questions are based on Acts 17:10-12, which we have studied. After analysing the type of question (O? I? A?), try to find as many answers as possible to each question.

Context During the second missionary journey, Paul and his partners have just been fiercely persecuted by Jewish leaders in Philippi and Thessalonica (Acts 16 – 17).

1. Observation questions to see both open and hidden facts in the text

- a. Does anyone happen to know what the synagogue was? (*general knowledge question*)
- b. Visualise the Bereans in the synagogue as they listen to Paul. Based on verse 11, what do you see about their facial expressions and body language? (*imagination question*)
- c. What different groups of people does Luke refer to in this event? (*textual question*)
- d. Paul and Silas are the key characters. How does each group relate to them? (*implication question*)

2. Interpretation, probing questions to get at the writer's main points/message

- a. Luke makes an emphatic contrast between the Berean Jews and the Thessalonian Jews (17:5-9). What truth do you think he wants us to see? (*opinion question*)
- b. Remember that Paul and his partners have only recently been kicked out of Philippi and Thessalonica. So, what may be Luke's reasons for mentioning the three groups of new believers in verse 12? (*implication question*)
- b. Try putting yourself in the sandals of one of the Greek converts. How might your thoughts and feelings have progressed through verses 11 and 12? (*identification question*)

3. Application questions that can lead to practical reflection and action

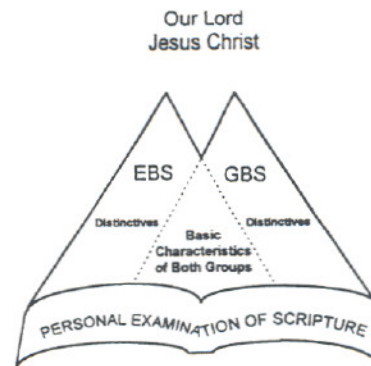
- a. How can we develop noble characters like the Bereans? (*reflection question*)
- b. *How well is our church doing in reaching other ethnic/tribal/social groups in our community? What obstacles do we first have to overcome? What positive steps can we take this year? (reflection/action questions)*
- c. A large missionary organisation reports that one third of their first-term missionaries do not return to their field. So they are constantly recruiting new candidates. *What can our churches do to produce persevering missionaries like Paul and Silas?*
- d. IFES took a global survey to learn what influenced Christian students in their conversion and spiritual growth. Church services? Family? Evangelistic crusades? Good music? Bible study groups? 85% said it was the last! *How central is the Bible in your evangelism? How are you going to make it more central?*



3 Two Kinds of Bible Study Groups

Growth Bible studies (GBS) and evangelistic Bible studies (EBS) are two basic kinds of groups. They both share the general characteristics of any inductive Bible study group: 1) personal examination of the Scriptures and 2) mutual learning through study discussions.

Small groups: *But what are differences in aims? assumptions? texts used? possible applications?*



Growth Bible Studies

1. Growth Bible studies aim to build up one another. Here are some of the 59 "one another commands" in the NT. Give the reason/purpose/manner/promise given or implied in the text..

	Mutual Pastoral Care	Reason/Purpose/Manner/Promise
Rom. 12:10	Be devoted to one another.	<i>*In (family) love, honouring one another above yourselves</i>
Rom. 12:16	Live in harmony with one another.	<i>*Not being proud but willing to associate with people of low position</i>
Rom. 15:7	Accept one another.	
Gal. 5:13	Serve one another.	
Gal. 6:2	Carry each other's burdens	
Eph. 4:2	Be patient with one another.	
Eph. 5:21	Submit to one another.	
Col. 3:16	Teach and admonish one another.	
1 Thess. 5:11	Encourage... build up one another.	

Heb. 10:24 **Spur** one another on towards love
and good works.

James 5:16 **Confess your sins to** one another...
and pray for one another.

Which MPR is the easiest for you to exercise? the hardest? Why?

2. For an example of a GBS guide see *Philemon* on page 27 in the Appendices. Later we will practice a growth Bible study in *Philemon*. For now examine it for preliminary preparation.

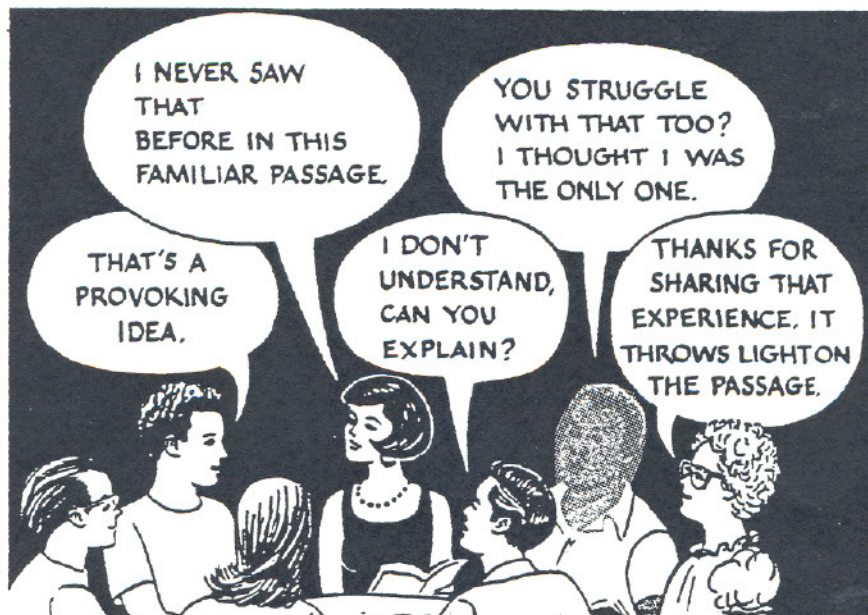
Encouraging Authentic Fellowship

Sometimes in a Bible study I can't tell if it's a GBS or an EBS! Why? Because everyone is being authentic in searching for the truth! *How do we arrive at such authenticity?*

Good leaders keep a balance between studying the text and promoting a Caring fellowship. Your example sets the pace in honesty and Caring.

- * Encourage members to tell their story. This does not mean giving their autobiography, but sharing their real selves—where they're coming from, why they are what they are.
- Affirm each other's strengths and accept each other's weaknesses. Everyone who comes is an imperfect person in one way or another. We're in the same lifeboat.
- Articulate support of these goals and needs. If you have been faithfully praying for your members, you can take the lead in sensitivity to goals and needs they have expressed.

Observe below ways that members express these feelings and personal responses to the text—and to one another. *How do you feel when people respond to your contributions like this?!*



What other ways of encouraging authentic fellowship have you observed in any Bible study group? Fill in the balloons!



3. Where is the Real Jesus?

Most people know some facts about Jesus. But often they do not know enough to grasp his eternal significance. They have not yet met the real Jesus in the Gospels.

It is no wonder that many Christians can identify with Philip Yancey, a prominent journalist and best-selling author. He "grew up in a Bible-believing church with Bible-believing parents who sent him to a Bible college". He writes of his turn-about in *The Jesus I Never Knew*. It was not until he began to teach the life of Jesus and had to do his first-hand studies in the Gospels that he met the real Jesus.

About 90% of the four Gospels are about people's personal encounters with Jesus the Christ. These were real people with real needs living in a real world with real problems—like us and like ours. Jesus was a man who made them feel comfortable, free enough to ask him for personal help. And they got help that changed their lives forever.

When did you meet the real Jesus of the Gospels? What initially attracted you to him?

4. Two Master Keys to Workable EBS

The first key is your friend's ability to identify with the original seekers who met Jesus. Guide the study so people realise that those seekers are very human—just like us, and their problems like ours. Bring out attractive, positive characteristics—not just how bad they are. Encourage people to be sympathetic with the seekers in the story. Frustrated with irrelevant religion? Desperate but seeing hope in Jesus? Highly intelligent but confused? Struggling?

The second key is your friend's beginning to be attracted to Jesus. They probably know only a stereotype Jesus. They must see him as provoking, appealing, totally relevant. How could he attract all kinds of people—rich and poor, religious and non-religious, men and women, sophisticated and outcast, Jew and foreigner? mature leaders and little kids? Why did individuals go out of their way to meet him? How does one explain that while the religious leaders were trying to kill him, "all the people hung on his words" (Luke 19:47-48)?

Try it! Examine Luke 19:1-10. How might your friends be able to identify with these seekers?

5. A natural 4-part evangelistic outline

Now let's see these two master keys in the EBS as a whole. In the first place every personal encounter in the Gospels follows this natural evangelistic outline in textual order.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| A. Background of the encounter | Establish the realistic background of the encounter. This avoids a mythical aura that people often associate with religious literature. You will usually see this background in the first verse of the text or its preceding context. |
| B. People who encounter Jesus | One of your master keys, remember? Help your friends to identify with the people who met Jesus. See each person as Jesus did—a unique human being, full of potential, infinitely valuable to God and redeemable by God. |
| C. Jesus and his response | Go beyond Jesus' actions to his character. See him the way people saw him that day. <i>Arouse people's curiosity!</i> People must SEE Jesus first—attractive, interesting, appealing, awesomely human. |
| D. Results of the encounter | Jesus <i>always</i> made some kind of difference in his people encounters—a changed condition, vigorous discussions about his identity or rejection of his mission and claims. Jesus never left anyone neutral. Maximise this point. Follow the Spirit's gentle touch about concluding the EBS. |

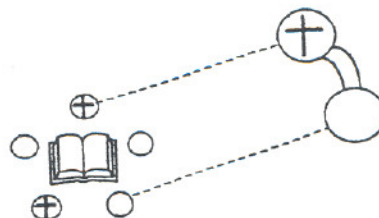
Try it!

- 1) Examine a working EBS outline of Luke 7:36-50 on page 29 in the Appendices. It follows the same four-point outline with jottings of evangelistic points.
- 2) Make a similar outline of Luke 19:1-10.
- 3) Examine the guide to an EBS on page 30 in the Appendices. Mark 4:36-41 also follows this four-point outline with study discussion questions and application.
- 4) Write an EBS guide for Luke 19:1-10 or 7:36-50. (The latter is challenging because Jesus encounters two very different individuals with very different needs. By the same token you will find Jesus even more fascinating!)

6. Inviting the Seeker to Trust Jesus

A personal confrontation with Jesus of the Gospels should lead seekers to an inescapable truth: they must respond to God in some way. Not human pressure but sensitivity to the Spirit's guidance will help you know who is responding positively.

Find a link from the study. For instance, after Luke 19:1-10 -- "That was a good question you asked—how a good man like Jesus can help us today when he lived 2000 years ago. You did not seem satisfied with the group's ideas." Let the seeker respond.



Or consider a leading question to help seekers to express themselves more personally, especially after several studies. For example, "We have been looking at Jesus as a unique person who made great claims. What could be the implications for you?"

Or, "Have you considered the meaning of Jesus' life and death for yourself?"

Or, "You seem to be responding positively to what you've been seeing about Jesus. Have you begun to trust him with your life, or are you still on the way?"

Or, "Is there any reason why you cannot trust Jesus Christ to save you now?"

When they express readiness, explain what they must do and what they can expect.

- 1) Admit that I am indeed a helpless sinner before God. (Romans 3:22)
- 2) Believe that Jesus Christ alone qualifies to be the savior I know I need. (1 Peter 3:18)
- 3) Come to him and claim my personal share in what he did for all. (Revelation 3:20)
- 4) Repent of my sin, including restitution if necessary. (Acts 2:38)
- 5) Surrender to Jesus Christ as my new Lord as well as Savior. (Mark 8:34)
- 6) Confess Jesus Christ before others. (Matthew 10:32-33)

Encourage them to pray a simple prayer to ask Jesus to save them from sin as Savior and to commit their lives to him as Lord.

Jesus, I believe you came to our world to save sinners like myself. I ask your forgiveness for my past life of sin and independence from you. I want you to be my one and only Lord in this new life. As best as I know how I now commit myself to you.

