



## *EQUIPPING THE SAINTS*

# **LEADING BIBLE STUDY DISCUSSION I**

NOTES

## **Introduction**

In many parts of the world, committed Christians are experiencing the dynamic impact of small home Bible discussion groups. Sparked by a growing hunger to know God's Words, people are banding together to study and discuss the truths of Scripture. The fellowship and personal interaction over the Bible along with mutual commitment to apply the discovered truths make the Bible discussion group one of the most effective avenues of Christian growth.

We have already examined the "Word Hand" and we discussed the importance of personal Bible Study. We will now learn how the Bible discussion group can be effectively used to encourage the regular and systematic study of the Word which is so indispensable to a vital Christian walk.

The early church met in small groups in the homes of believers. They studied the Scriptures, prayed, fellowshiped and set about reaching their community with the Gospel. The Book of Acts records their stories and the impact they made on the world for the cause of Christ.

*And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;*

*(Acts 17:6)*

It only takes two people to get a group started. That group can spawn others which in turn will affect a whole community for Christ.

## **Why Discussion Groups Are Helpful**

There are at least five ways in which a Bible Study Discussion is beneficial for a Christian.

- ***Provides incentive to do and complete Bible study***

Because the group will be actually discussing what each member has prepared, everyone will be motivated to complete his Bible Study.

- ***Enables people to study beyond their limits***

Being a part of a group exposes each individual to the ideas and discoveries of the other members.

- ***Creates an atmosphere conducive for sharing***

Personal discoveries, questions, observations, problems or needs find expression and help in a discussion group. An atmosphere of love and acceptance builds confidence and allows members the freedom to talk about the Scriptures without fear of criticism.

- ***Fosters positive Christian fellowship***

Group members can develop solid personal relationships in an informal environment. They can learn how to pray, share and bear the burdens of others.

- ***Equips Christians with a tool to help others***

Bible discussion groups are one of the most effective and simplest tools available to Christians today as they seek to help fulfill Christ's Commission to make disciples in every nation. Even a young Christian can learn to lead a group if he is willing to do the preparation.

## **Starting a Discussion Group**

When a person understands the value of a Bible discussion group, his next question will certainly be, "Where do I find people for such a group? Most people don't seem to be interested in the Bible or in spiritual things. How do I get started?"

### **Pray**

Begin praying daily that God would help you get a discussion group started. Ask God to attract the people He desires to the study, to unify them and to lead and encourage the group.

*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

*(James 1:5)*

### **The Objectives**

It is important that the leader and the group understand the objectives of your Bible Study Discussion Group. Objectives do three things:

- ***They tell you where you are headed or what you are trying to accomplish.***

- ***They help you evaluate your progress and detect deviation so the proper correction can be made.***

- ***They are the basis of all decision making and help you to be productive rather than just active.***

## Sample Objectives For a Group

*The objective of our Bible Study Discussion group is threefold in nature:*

1. To encourage Bible study and discussion for the purpose of knowing God better and personally.
2. To apply His commandments to our personal lives so that we walk in obedience to His Word.
3. To learn to share our faith with the world we are commanded to disciple.

*We will do this by studying a portion of Scripture and discussing it in the group each week. We will aim to apply the passage personally and digest it well enough so as to be able to share the principles with others whom we hope to disciple.*

*Our objective will be accomplished when these three objectives are a reality in our lives weekly and not just a philosophy or theology.*

### Select the Type of Study

Before you start inviting people to a discussion group, determine what type of Bible study you want to do. There are many good materials available for any type of Bible study. Some Navigator materials that may be helpful to you are:

- *Leader's Guide for Evangelistic Bible Studies* (Using the Gospel of John) — The leader is the only one who needs to prepare for this type of study.
- *Design for Discipleship* — This series of seven booklets helps a Christian grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This series is very good for people with a Bible Study background. There are more thought questions which require some previous knowledge of basic Bible truths.
- *Search the Scriptures* — A method of studying books of the Bible one chapter at a time is presented.
- *Studies in Christian Living* — This series of nine books encourages growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ. It takes you from a simple question-and-answer type of Bible study to a chapter analysis study. This series is ideal for people who have little or no Christian background because it presumes no prior knowledge of the Scriptures. But

the later books can also be used very successfully with any group of young believers who are eager to learn basic Bible doctrine as well as how to analyze passages for themselves.

## **Invite the People**

Once you obtain the materials you need, begin inviting people to the study. Whom you invite depends upon what type of study you are planning. For example, you would invite non-Christians to an evangelistic study.

When inviting people be specific. Tell them what you are planning to do, when you plan to meet and how many weeks it will take to complete the course of study. It is a good rule to have the first study course last no longer than six weeks. Then you can make plans with the group for further study if they show continued interest. One way to get a neighborhood Bible discussion group started is to invite several people to your home for coffee and dessert. Then you can share your desire to start a Bible discussion group and ask them to join you.

In a dormitory or barracks just invite people to the first session. At work you may find a few people interested in joining you for discussion during the lunch hour.

## **Considerations for Inviting the People**

- Invite people who have common interest background, education, and vocation, age or location.
- Be positive and enthusiastic about the study.
- Explain that in order to have an interesting and profitable study, you are going to ask them to commit themselves for a specific period of time and to do the individual preparation necessary for the study.
- Don't pressure people to come. Interested people make the best members.
- Keep the group small enough to be manageable. Five to eight people is ideal. A group this size is big enough to provide an interesting discussion, but small enough for everyone to share.
- If only one person comes, rejoice. That's all you need to get a group started.

People often accept an invitation to a Bible study and then fail to come. It is easy for them to forget something that is not part of their normal routine. The devil desires to keep people from God's Word and will set obstacles and distractions in the way. Remind them of the study a day or two in advance. After the first couple of weeks this shouldn't be

necessary. By then they will have discovered the profit of their Bible discussion group.

## Prepare the Lesson and Discussion

### Preparation

A successful Bible study leader needs to prepare for every session. Purposeful, stimulating and rewarding discussions seldom “just happen.” It requires careful and prayerful preparation, and the degree of success is usually proportional to the thoroughness of the preparation.

What kinds of preparation are necessary for the leader to do?

#### *The Leader Must Prepare Himself...*

*...in the art of discussion leading.* It will be helpful for you as the leader to read these notes periodically. As your experience increases, your understanding of these principles will deepen and these notes will become a part of you. But until that time, it will help to review the suggestions listed in these notes.

*...in the study itself.* In order to lead well, the leader’s personal preparation must be adequate. If you have already done the study some time ago, review it in depth before leading it. Many leaders become slack in their review, and as a result the discussion suffers.

*...in prayer.* The most important part of any discussion is you, the leader—not materials or methods. Personal preparation in prayer is therefore essential. You should pray for the following things:

- *for your own personal dependence upon God during the discussion,*
- *for wisdom to lead the discussion well,*
- *for sensitivity to each member of the group,*
- *and that the Holy Spirit will cause those things to be emphasized which He wants to teach the group.*

### Practical Considerations

Many practical details affect the success of a group. You need to plan in advance for your guests. Have every thing ready when they arrive so you can devote your attention to the people and not to last-minute details which should have been taken care of before.

#### • *Meet in a comfortable atmosphere.*

Make sure the room is not too large or too small. The warmth of a living room, the unity of a kitchen table, or the informality of a dorm room or barracks all lean themselves to a learning atmosphere.

- ***Make appropriate physical arrangements.***

Meet in a circle because this is the best arrangement to see and discuss with one another. Plan your seating in advance. Don't sink into a soft chair—be as high or higher than your group for good eye contact.

- ***Maintain good lighting.***

Lighting not only helps illuminate the room, it also creates a warm feeling. No one should have to look into the sun or toward a bright window.

- ***Provide proper ventilation.***

Too much heat or cold will make group members uncomfortable. Start with a well-aired room which is warm enough to be comfortable.

- ***Guard against distractions.***

Pets, TV's, radios, etc. take attention away from the discussion. Make arrangements with babysitters if they are needed.

- ***Start and stop on time.***

Starting promptly will encourage late comers to be on time. Stopping on time is courteous and thoughtful since people may have other commitments after the meeting. It is better to quit on time and not finish the study than to cover every last point.

- ***Consider refreshments.***

These are not essential, though they do encourage people to stay around and meet informally after the study. If you have refreshments, let them be simple so as not to require extravagant preparation which could be better spent in prayer for the Bible study. Elaborate refreshments can even become a distraction rather than a help to a discussion group.

You will discover other practical details as you lead your group. Strive for the best possible situation. However, remember God working in hearts is the key to successful Bible study.

## **The First Meeting**

This is the most important meeting since you will set the stage for the following weeks. It is almost impossible to overestimate the importance of the first meeting. The impressions created during this meeting may influence the participation of the members for weeks to come.

Remember this is a group discussion. You are the leader, not the director. Be unpretentious and honest. Don't assume airs of superiority, but exhibit the quiet confidence that comes from having a plan and knowing how to execute it.

The effective discussion leader will act as a chairman and guide, not as a teacher or authority, because he realizes the authority is the Word of God and the teacher is the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures are the sword of the Spirit. The leader's role is to guide the discussion, encouraging personal interaction according to each individual's need. This means the Bible will be the focus of attention, not the leader. Your major objectives for this meeting are fourfold in nature.

- ***Get Acquainted***

Honest discussion and interaction takes place best when people know one another. As each person arrives introduce him to the others. To help the people remember each other's names call each person by name as often as possible. Name tags can also be useful.

Help them get to know one another by having each person share about himself. Start with general, impersonal questions. Home town, occupation and hobbies are good topics to begin with. You should share first. This helps establish what to cover and how long to take. If the group is comprised of Christians, you can have each share a brief testimony. By this time everyone should feel relaxed in the group.

- ***Introduce the Materials***

Now it is time to introduce the group to the Bible study plan and give them any materials they will need. If you are using printed materials, be sure to go over the introduction and instructions carefully. To help everyone pay close attention, go around the circle having each person read a paragraph. Stop and discuss what has been read whenever a question arises.

- ***Set a Standard***

It is also important that everyone adheres to a set of standards for the study. You, as a leader, should suggest these standards. Be sure not to assume a dictatorial attitude and start telling everyone what is expected. Instead you might say something like, "Can we agree that everyone will finish the study before the discussion each week?" (or "complete the assigned lesson?") Everyone should concur on the importance of attendance at the discussions and the preparation of the Bible study.

It is crucial that we also agree that the Bible will be our final authority for the Bible will take precedence over every other book, idea or feeling in the discussion. Even in an evangelistic study where some members may not believe that the Bible is God's Word, you can establish this important ground rule by saying: "Since we have all come here to study what the Bible has to say, let's establish that we will look to the Bible for the last word on whatever we are discussing." Most non-Christians will agree to this, and it sets an important precedent for any later problems that may arise.

## **Get Started**

Ask God to guide the discussion and to teach you from His Word. Get the people started doing the study. There should be a sense of expectancy in the group. Enthusiasm can often be developed as the people actually do a little of the study. Without leaving their seats, ask them to quietly start working on the first part of their study. This should probably take five to ten minutes.

Then ask the group to share what they have discovered from this little glimpse into God's Word. There probably won't be time to discuss these observations extensively. Instead, work at creating curiosity and anticipation for the rest of the study.

Be sure not to disparage the responses from the group at this first meeting—especially as they share what they have learned from the Bible study time. Instead, work at giving sincere compliments. People are encouraged by praise.

As you complete the time of sharing, close in prayer. If you have budgeted your time carefully, you should not be running late. Each of the four steps should take about one fourth of the time.

As you adjourn, remind everyone of the time and place of the next meeting and their assignment.

**NOTES**