

GUIDE FOR LEADERS OF SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDIES

BEFORE THE GROUP MEETS

It is important that you, as a leader, prepare in advance. Preparation should include:

- **Praying** for your group and what God has to say to you through the chosen passage of study.
- **Studying** the passage yourself to be prepared to help the group wrestle difficult or controversial texts or to help seekers or new believers who need basic guidance; this may include locating other passages that clarify the one you are studying. If you are choosing the passage, try to select units—a paragraph, a whole Psalm, a story. You may need to limit the length of the passage you study or plan to spend more than one meeting on it. If studying characters or topics, different passages might be studied at one meeting.
- If it would be helpful, **printing** the passage on paper for each person, with space around the passage and between lines for notes, highlighting, circling, questions, etc. Ideally, each person would bring their Bibles, but giving them a place to work with the text can be very helpful as you study together. Some people add blocks around the passage with study aids. See the next 2 pages for examples. Feel free to copy, imitate, adapt, or discard.
- Be intentional to model helping the group discover biblical truth; you are not just transferring information, you are making disciples and seeking to equip your own group members to teach others (2Tim 2:2). So the simpler you keep it, the more easily they will believe they can pass on what they receive.

STRUCTURING THE GROUP TIME

You can structure the time as best suits the group. Some find it helpful to split the time into 3 equal sections:

1. **Welcome, Care, Worship**—try to make each person feel welcome, find out how they are doing since the group last met (if any made commitments to obey at last meeting, ask how it went, affirm any step of faith, encourage where needed). Depending on the group size and the setting, you may want to spend a few minutes singing together, but keep this informal, then transition to time in the Word.
2. **Word**
 - Begin with prayer (if you haven't already)
 - Read the passage aloud without comments
 - Allow time (perhaps 10 minutes, but may vary) for each to read and make notes
 - Guide discussion; some basic questions
 - What did you observe?
 - What questions do you have? [it is important here to show the group that answers are found in Scripture, not in the teacher; direct the group to the Scripture, so that people in the group can see that they don't have to be experts in the Bible to help others]
3. **Application & Witness**—help each person think about how this text applies to their life, what they should/could do differently because of what this text teaches, and how they might pass on to others what they have learned.
 - You can find helpful application questions in the “guide for personal Bible study”.
 - At ICP we describe discipleship as “loving God, living truth, giving grace, and walking together in the Spirit”. So you might use these to guide toward application by asking questions like:
 - What does this passage tell me about loving God—my relationship to Him and how I should respond to Him?
 - What truth have I seen in this passage, and how can I live it?
 - How can I give grace to someone else based on what I've seen here?
 - Have people share potential applications. You might challenge them to think of one person with whom they could share what they have learned. Depending on the passage, and the applications shared, you may want to even challenge them to split into pairs & practice conversations they intend to have (e.g., testimony, evangelism, etc), and have them pray for each other to apply what they have learned.

LEADING THE GROUP

- Find a location that is conducive to the group's purpose and size. If you are 2-3 people who can discuss Scripture quietly, a table in a coffee shop may suffice. As the group grows larger, or wants to add other activities, e.g., singing, another location such as a park or someone's home might be preferable. The meetings can rotate from home to home to avoid placing an undue burden of hospitality on one person.
- Seek to lead the group in such a way that everyone feels free to participate. Be aware that group size affects participation—generally, as the group grows larger, group participation decreases. You can encourage anyone to say anything related to what you are discussing, and give the group freedom to add or challenge (e.g., “where does it say that?”).
 - **Quiet** members: some are shy, some are afraid, some are internal processors. Calling on someone may not be effective. You can suggest that “someone who hasn't spoken yet” share next; or ask them a low-level question (“please read verse 3”), etc.
 - **Talkative** members: again, suggesting that someone who hasn't spoken yet, or ask them to hold their thought until someone else has spoken.
 - **Knowledgeable** members have perhaps had opportunity for extended or formal study and may intimidate others when they speak up, and end discussion that leads to discovery. It may be necessary to speak with them privately; hopefully they will grasp that this is not just information transfer but discipleship, and can learn to enjoy the process.
 - For a good article on managing different personalities in groups, see the article on ICP website by Neil McBride, “Taming Talker Trudy and Other Perturbing Personalities in Your Bible Study”, from *Discipleship Journal*, 1988.
- Over time, problems will arise in the group. You can help by recognizing it, giving people freedom to discuss without being critical personally, clarifying, and helping the group find the best way to resolution—and using Scripture here can be a great way to show the relevance of Scripture to life situations.

SAMPLE WORKSHEET FOR PERSONAL OR GROUP BIBLE STUDY

1 John 1:1-4

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ²The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. ³We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. ⁴We write this to make our joy complete.

Observation <i>What does it say?</i>	Interpretation <i>What does it mean?</i>	Application <i>How does this passage help me love God, live truth, give grace, walk in the Spirit? To whom can I pass this on?</i>

Possible Structure for Study (“3/3”):

1. Welcome, prayer, care, how did group do with commitments made last time?
2. Word
 - Read passage together aloud, no comments
 - Give a few minutes for making personal observations & notes
 - Guide discussion:
 - What observations have you made?
 - What questions do you have?
3. Application/Witness
 - How can we apply what we’ve learned?
 - Who could you share this with?
 - Can you make any concrete plans for application or witness?

1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— 3that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

Note wide margins & line spacing for marking, questions, comments, etc.

Before you begin passage-by-passage study, read through the whole book in one sitting. This is a good way to begin a study for any new book.

Depending on the genre of Biblical Literature, it may be appropriate to study very short passages of Scripture. Don’t try to do too much.

<u>Observations:</u>	<u>Interpretation:</u>	<u>Application:</u>
<i>What does it say?</i>	<i>What does it mean?</i>	<i>How do I—or my church—learn from this passage to love God, live truth, give grace, and walk together in the Spirit?</i>
Key words/verses:		
Who?		
What?		
Where?		
When?		
How?		
Why?		