

**PREPARING AND LEADING
SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDIES**

SESSION ONE PREPARING A BIBLE STUDY

Watch Video 1, *The Unprepared Bible Study Leader*

You are or soon will become a Bible study leader for your small group. One thing you do *not* want to do is to be unprepared when you lead your group's Bible study. As the video, *The Unprepared Bible Study Leader*, has shown, leading a Bible study without adequate preparation can lead to a disaster. However if you are willing to follow some simple steps, such a disaster can be avoided.

This session provides a basic method of preparation to lead a Bible study for a small group. It is based on the same Bible study method that is taught in the *Basic Bible Study* unit. If you have already studied *Basic Bible Study*, this unit will help you to apply Bible study principles that you have already learned to the life of your small group. If you have not studied the *Basic Bible Study* unit, you may choose to do that to supplement and solidify what you will learn in this unit.

Read James 3:1-12

The first step in preparation for leading a Bible study is your own *spiritual preparation*. This preparation begins before you ever sit down and study the passage that you plan to teach. This spiritual preparation begins with examining your own relationship with God. James 3:1 provides the warning: "*Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.*" This means that God will hold you accountable for what you say and do as a Bible teacher.

These words could be overwhelming were they not followed by James 3:2: "*We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.*" Everyone makes mistakes. You will sometimes do and say wrong things that might discourage you from being a Bible study leader. Do not give up! God already knew you would do these things before he called you to lead your group's Bible study, and he chose to call you anyway. So this warning about judgment is not intended to discourage you from being a Bible study leader. Rather it is intended to *encourage* you to remember who you are leading the Bible study for. You are not only leading your small group Bible study for yourself and the other members of your small group. You are also leading your small group Bible study for God. So when you prepare and lead the Bible study, always remember that God is an unseen but very active participant.

You need to think clearly about the purpose of small group Bible study. A basic understanding of the nature and purpose of the Bible will help you clarify this. Consider the following points:

1. There is only one true God. This God created us, loves us, and wants to have a relationship with us.
2. We can have a personal relationship with God through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ.

3. The Bible is God's Word. God used human authors to write the words of the Bible, so the Bible is influenced by human language, culture and history. However, God showed the human writer what to write through the Holy Spirit. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
4. God gave us the Bible to show Himself to us and to teach us how we can have a personal relationship with God.
5. We do not study the Bible only so that we can know about God. We study Bible so that we can know God personally and so that we can know His will for our lives.
6. The final result of Bible study should be not only knowledge, but also obedience to God's will.

God has even more at stake in the Bible study than you do. It is God's Word that you are studying. And it is God's Word that penetrates the hearts of those who participate in the Bible study and transforms their lives.

As you prepare to lead your group in Bible study, you should ask God not only to prepare your heart and mind, but also your tongue. As James 3:3-5 says, the tongue is only a small part of the body, but it is extremely difficult to control. Moreover, in spite of the tongue's small size, it has the ability to wield great influence. It is a like small rudder that can turn a great ship or tiny spark that can set on fire a great forest. James 3:6 clarifies the point: "*The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*"

In the role of Bible study leader the words that you say will have great impact. Your words can be used for right or wrong, good or evil. God and Satan will battle for control of your tongue, so you must enter the Bible study with your tongue and the words that it produces committed to God. If not, in the midst of your small group meeting you may say things that hurt other people. When people meet together there is always a strong tendency to gossip, to lie about other people, and to focus on the faults and weaknesses of people. But James 3:9-10 points out that words that hurt people are inappropriate in a gathering for the purpose of worshiping God: "*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.*"

As Bible study leader, you have the responsibility to lead your group away from tearing down people toward praising God. Bible study should begin with authentic *fellowship* in which people can share the thoughts and feelings of their hearts, and lead to true *worship* in which people meet God in order to receive his grace. As a result, the small group will be empowered by God for *evangelism* and *ministry*.

The second step is considering the needs of your group. Is there an area where you need to understand more about God? Is there an area where your group needs to grow spiritually? Answering these questions is extremely important for you to be able to lead your group in Bible studies that will stimulate *discipleship, fellowship, worship, evangelism, and ministry*. So do not try to answer these questions by yourself. *First*, ask God for his guidance. *Second*, consult with your encourager and other mature Christians who can give you godly counsel and guidance. Finally, as you deal with these issues you

may want to consult the list of *Scriptures for Small Groups* at the end of unit to assist you in planning for future lessons.

The third step in preparation for leading a Bible study is *preparing the lesson*. Once you have determined which passage of Scripture you will use, do a personal study of the questions using the *basic Bible study* questions.

1. *Literal Meaning*: As you read the passage, use the following questions to try to understand its basic meaning.

Who was involved?

What happened? What *ideas* are expressed? What are the *results*?

Where did it take place?

When did it take place?

Why did it happen?

How are things accomplished?

2. *Spiritual Significance*: Now read the passage again along with your notes from the first section. Use this information to answer the following questions.

What does this passage say about *God*?

What does this passage say about *human beings*?

What does this passage say about the *relationship* between God and human beings?

3. It is not enough to learn the literal meaning and spiritual significance of the passage. For God's Word to change you, you must be able to apply it to your life.

Use the following questions to help you determine the practical application of the passage.

Is there a *sin* for me to *avoid*?

Is there a *sin* for me to *turn away from*?

Is there a *promise* for me to claim?

Is there a *praise* to give?

Is there a *prayer* to pray?

Is there an *example* for me to follow?

Is there a *command* for me to obey?

Next, answer the following questions. This will give you a more complete understanding of the passage and how to teach it to your small group.

1. Are there *other passages in the Bible* that help to more clearly understand or explain this passage?

2. Are there *stories from everyday life* that illustrate the truth of this passage?

3. How can I *apply* the truth of this passage to *my own daily life*? Here you will want to apply insights from the practical application section above.

Finally, answer the question, "*What points in this passage relates to the spiritual needs of my small group?*" One passage in the Bible may teach many truths about God, human beings, and the relationship between God and human beings. The passage may have many possible practical applications. One of the most common mistakes made by Bible study leaders is to try to say too much. If you do this your group members will be a like

person who asked for a glass of water and was given the Pacific Ocean. If you try to explain everything that a passage is saying, your group members will become drowned in the details. So you must choose the insights that relate to the present spiritual needs of your small group. This will enable your Bible study to have the greatest impact and to bring about the greatest growth.

Application

Using the guidelines provided in session one, prepare a Bible study for your small group on James 3:1-18.

SESSION TWO LEADING A BIBLE STUDY

In session one you learned about preparation for leading a Bible study. This begins with your own spiritual preparation, moves on to mental preparation, and then preparation of the lesson itself. Preparation is the hard part of being a Bible study leader. If you take the task of preparation seriously, you will come to your small group meetings with confidence that you have followed God's leadership and can guide your group through the Bible study. This does not mean that everything will be perfect every time. You may make mistakes, there may be misunderstandings, and your group may struggle together to understand and apply difficult passages of Scripture.

In this session you will learn about how to lead a small group Bible study. The session is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the attitude that you should have as a Bible study leader. The second part provides some hints on how to lead a Bible study. Following these instructions may help you to lead your group to develop a Bible study which will involve everyone in discussion and which will result in *discipleship*.

Attitudes of a Bible Study Leader

Read James 3:13-18

Since you have assumed the role of Bible study leader, you may assume that when you come to small group meetings you should have the appearance of a Bible scholar. You may want to give other people in the group the impression that you know everything about the passage that you are studying together and that you know the answer to every question. *You should not do this.* One reason is that you do not know all of the answers. Even Bible scholars who have devoted many years to the study of the Bible still do not know everything. The meaning of God's Word is so deep and rich that no human being can understand it fully. You can go back to the same passage again and again for the rest of your life and always find new insights into God and his will for your life. A second reason that you should not appear like you know everything is that this will discourage other group members from participating in discussion. If you look like you know everything, they will begin to feel like they do not know anything and so they will say nothing. As a result, your group may not hear about valuable insights that God is teaching other group members through his Word.

According James 3:13-16, wisdom and understanding come about as a result of "*good deeds of humility.*" Bitter envy, selfish ambition, and boasting actually deny the truth of God's Word. This is because envy and ambition come are "earthly, unspiritual, of the devil." Moreover, these attitudes result in "disorder and every evil practice."

James 3:17 describes the "wisdom from heaven" as "pure, peace-loving, considerate, merciful, impartial, and sincere." For members of the group to realize the impact of this heavenly wisdom, they must not only hear about it in their Bible study time, they must also see it in their Bible study leader. In other words, they must see the power of God's

word in your life. God's truth must take root in you and begin to bear fruit. As James 3:18 says, "*Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.*" As Bible study leader, you need to become a peacemaker through whom God can work to produce his righteousness in your small group.

Think about your own character. Are you characterized by envy, ambition and boasting? Or are you pure, peace-loving, considerate, merciful, impartial, and sincere? Ask God to forgive your faults and to help you to become a "peacemaker" who will "raise a harvest of righteousness."

In order to develop the attitudes of a leader described in James 3:13-18, you should incorporate the four following *actions* into your Bible teaching method. These are actions that are done before, during, after, and in between the times that you are leading your small group Bible study. These are actions that are essential if your Bible study is to result in the *discipleship* of you and the other members of your small group.

(1) *Prayer*—Pray that God will guide you and the other participants in the Bible study. Pray that he will lead each person to spiritual maturity through *discipleship*.

(2) *Love*—Be concerned about the needs of the other people in your small group. You must be willing to give yourself in order to care for the needs of the other people.

(3) *Service*—Do not think that you are superior to other people because you know more. Rather, think of leading the Bible study as an opportunity that God has given to you for *ministry*.

(4) *Faith*—Trust God to guide you and the other people in your small group. When you are leading the Bible study, emphasize your own faith in God. Also encourage others to trust God.

Hints for Leading a Bible Study

1. The goal of Bible study is not only knowledge, but also that those who participate will meet God. So develop a good environment for Bible study by including singing, praise, and prayer. The emphasis here is on worship rather than on the quality of the singing.
2. Teach through a book of the Bible or a part of a book of the Bible rather than jumping from place to place. This helps the Bible study participants to understand how the Bible and its teachings fit together.
3. During the Bible study time emphasize one or two main points rather than trying to explain everything in the passage. It is better to teach a little to people so that they can understand and apply it. If you try to teach too much no one can understand and remember what you are talking about.
4. Use objective questions to help the participants to understand the basic meaning of the passage.
5. Do not be afraid of silence. It gives group members time to think and respond.
6. Encourage the participants to seek the answer to the three basic questions regarding God, human beings, and the relationship between God and human beings. This will help them to learn to study the Bible for themselves. Remember, faith in Christ and a desire to serve God come before complete understanding.

7. Share your own experiences related to the passage that you are studying together. Also, encourage other participants to talk about their experiences. These may be either examples or personal application. As a result:

- (1) The Bible study will become more interesting and meaningful, so everyone will be encouraged to participate in the Bible study.
- (2) By hearing the impressions of the participants, you will be able to evaluate how well they are able to understand the passage and apply it to their own lives.
- (3) You may be able to learn more about the needs of members of your small group. This will help you to prepare and lead the Bible study more effectively in the future.

Watch Video 2, *The Prepared Bible Study Leader*

Application

- 1. Lead your small group in the Bible study that you prepared on James 3:1-18.**
- 2. Meet with your encourager to talk about what happened in the small group Bible study. Talk about both what went well and the problems that you experienced. Conclude your meeting with a time of prayer for you as a Bible study leader.**

Reflection

- 1. What have you learned about preparing and leading a small group Bible study?**
- 2. What questions do you still have about preparing and leading a small group Bible study?**
- 3. What is your plan to share the insights that you have learned about planning and leading a small group Bible study with someone else? How do you plan to help them implement these insights into their own life?**
- 4. Choose one Scripture from the following list of *Scriptures for Small Groups* which addresses the current spiritual needs of your small group. Prepare and lead your small group in a series of Bible studies based on this Scripture.**

Scriptures for Small Groups

Genesis 1-11—the beginning: creation, sin, God's desire to have a relationship with Human beings

Mark or Luke—who Jesus is (basic)

Matthew 5-7—basic Christian ethics

John—who Jesus is (advanced)

Acts—what the church is and does

Romans 1-8—sin and salvation

Galatians—relationship between faith and actions

Ephesians—Christian life

1 John—characteristics of a growing Christian

Hebrews—relationship of the Old Testament and the New Testament

Ruth, Esther, or Proverbs 31:10-31—how to be a woman of faith

