

Using the following 12 practical suggestions will help your small group stay focused as its member's help each other grow in the Spirit.

How to Lead a Small-Group Bible Study Effectively

Effective, lively small groups are usually the result of three key components: the leader, the group, and the study materials. If you understand each of these components and how they function best, you can be confident that your group will start eagerly and stay that way.

The success of any small group starts with the leader. Effective leaders are not teachers or lecturers. They are facilitators and catalysts whose primary job is to get people to interact with each other. Knowing this should be a relief to many leaders. Not everyone has gifts of teaching, but almost anyone can lead a dynamic discussion by following certain guidelines:

1. **Come to the study prepared.** Ask God to help you understand and apply the passage to your own life. Unless that happens, you will not be ready to lead others.

How much time should you spend in preparation? That depends. If you are using a good study guide, it will probably take you about an hour to read the passage, work through each question in the guide and become familiar with the leader's notes. If you decide to write the study yourself -- a practice I don't recommend for most people -- your preparation will take much longer. It takes at least four to five hours to write an effective study.

2. **Pray for the members of your group before the study.** If the Bible is to have an impact on their lives, the Holy Spirit must be at work in their hearts before, during, and after the study. That's what makes a Bible study different from any other type of discussion. Jesus said in [John 15:5](#), "You cannot do anything without me."
3. **Begin the study on time.** If people understand that the study begins on schedule, they will work harder to get to the meeting on time. But if you get into the habit of waiting for those who are late, they will assume that the discussion begins whenever they arrive.
4. **At the beginning of your first time together, explain to the group that the studies are meant to be discussions, not lectures.** Encourage everyone to participate, but realize that some may be hesitant to speak during the first few sessions.
5. **Encourage more than one answer to each question.** A good question should have more than one possible answer, and each person in the group has his or her own unique perspective. So be sure to ask, "What do the rest of you think?" or "Anyone else?" until several people have had a chance to respond. When you sense that people are ready to move on, ask the next question.
6. **Try to affirm people's answers whenever possible.** People are often reluctant to speak up at first, but if they know you appreciate their insights they will warm up much more quickly. Simple words of affirmation such as "That's a great insight," "Good response," "Excellent idea," or "I hadn't thought of that before" are enough to show people that you value their comments.
7. **Don't be afraid of silence.** It usually seems longer to you than to the other members of the group. People may simply need time to think before they respond.

8. **If the silence persists, resist the temptation to answer your own question.** Instead, try rephrasing the question until you are confident that the group understands what you are asking. Remember that even an eager group will quickly become passive and silent if they think you will do most of the talking. Of course, after everyone has had a chance to respond, you can share your own insights if you wish. But be careful not to dominate the discussion.
9. **Never reject an answer, even if you think it is wrong.** When you reject people's answers, it is easy for them to feel rejected as well, and they may decide that it is too risky to give their opinion again. A better response would be to ask them, "Which verse led you to that conclusion?" Or let the group handle the problem by asking them what they think about the question.
10. **Avoid going off on tangents.** If people wander off course, gently bring them back to the passage and question being considered.
11. **Be conscious of the pace of the study.** Try to avoid the extremes of being too rushed or spending too much time on any one question. The ideal is to move through the passage and the questions at a comfortable pace so that you finish at the end of the allotted time.

Some leaders don't worry about the pace of the study, assuming that they can simply stop in the middle and resume next week. Usually, however, that approach does not work well. Most good studies are designed to be completed within one session so that people can have a sense of completion and closure. Also, certain members of the group may not be able to attend next time, and others may have missed the first half of the study.

12. **End the study on time.** If the group is committed to spending 45 minutes in Bible study, try to honor that commitment. A healthy small group will do more than study the Bible together, so you must leave enough time for other important activities, such as sharing and prayer. If these other activities are merely tacked on at the end, the health of the group will suffer.

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