

DISCIPLEMAKER TIPS

Tip #1: Sanctification 101

The Bible uses the word sanctification to describe the process of spiritual growth in the life of a believer. The Greek word (*hagiazō*) means "to set apart and dedicate a person or thing for the service of God and to dedicate it as a sacrifice." But how is sinful transformed into a dedicated servant of God?

Nothing less than the power of God's Word and the convicting power of the Holy Spirit is needed. Jesus said, "Sanctify (set them apart) *them* (believers) *by* (means of) *Your Truth. Your word is truth.*" (John 17:17, parentheses added). **The process of sanctification in the believers' life is directly related to his relationship to God's word.** The believer must expose himself to God's word and then humbly submit to what the Word says. The Bible says, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17)

If you are seeking to influence others for Christ, are you allowing yourself to be transformed by God's Word every day? And, as a discipleship leader, is God's Word the focus of your group time with those you are trying to move forward in Christ? If not, we can't expect them to become living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, which is every believer's reasonable service to God.

Tip #2: How to Start a Discipleship Bible Study

One of the most common questions I am asked when I lead a discipleship seminar is, "How do I start a discipleship Bible Study?"

Many Christians are intrigued that we are able to start so many Bible Studies. First of all, the goal is not to start endless Bible Studies. I learned the hard way to not disciple non-disciples. It is a waste of time. If you are a pastor who wants to lead by example in personal disciple-making, look for God to use your preaching of God's Word to change believers who begin to manifest the characteristics of a convicted disciple. Like Jesus, invite them into a closer personal spiritual relationship with you or another spiritual leader.

Here are the steps I have found used to start discipleship Bible Studies:

1. Know the four characteristics of a convicted disciple (John 8:31; Luke 14:26-33) and be able to recognize them in the lives of believers. For a more thorough explanation of the four characteristics of a convicted disciple, see The Vol. IV, Issue 1.
2. When you observe one or more of these four spiritual characteristics in the life of a believer, offer to get together with him for breakfast or lunch (men with men, women with women). At that meeting, inquire about his spiritual life and ask if he would like to grow more in Christ.
3. If he indicates that he would like to grow, offer to meet with him again to explore the possibility of meeting on a weekly basis. If not, or his weekly schedule doesn't allow him to meet, move on.
4. At the second meeting, talk specifics.
 - a. Will he make a firm commitment to getting together each week?
 - b. What are some biblical topics he is interested in studying?
 - c. How many weeks are you planning to meet? It is best to have an ending date for this first study.
 - d. Ask him if he knows of others who might be interested in joining you each week or if he minds if they do.
5. Begin meeting, watch lives change before your eyes, see the group get excited, and expect the group to grow in God's time.

Tip #3: How to Choose the First Study

"If I was going to start a Lamplighters Bible Study, which one should I start with?" Before you choose the right Bible Study for your group (to me, a group is 2-10), the discipleship leader needs to answer some key questions:

1. Are the individuals who are thinking of joining the Bible Study believers or non-believers?
2. If there are non-believers, do they have a church background or are they mostly biblically-illiterate?
3. What is the present level of biblical knowledge and understanding of the remaining individuals?
4. What is the religious background (i.e., their church background) of the individuals who may be joining the group?
5. What are some of the spiritual interests of the group members?

When you've answered these questions, you are ready to help your group choose the best study. Someone may suggest reading through a Christian book, but you should encourage the group to study the Bible. Remember, faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Here are my recommendations:

1. Recommend 2-3 shorter New Testament books to study (e.g., James, 2 Timothy, Philippians). The NT books don't require as much background knowledge to complete the studies.
2. Have a current copy of the Lamplighters resource catalog so you can read the actual course descriptions to help the group decide which study to do.
3. Have sample lesson print-outs of each Lamplighters study for each group member to review to help them decide. Sample lessons are available on the Lamplighters' website: www.LamplightersInternational.org
4. Let the group make the final decision regarding the book of the Bible. There will be a greater level of commitment if they choose the study instead of you choosing for them.
5. If the group is divided in their choice of studies, help them decide, and recommend that the group do the second choice as a follow-up study.

Tip #4: Seeing Yourself as a Bus Driver

A friend of mine became the pastor of a church that had been led for many years by the same man. Shortly after he took over the new pastorate, some people left the church. Disheartened, my friend sought the counsel and encouragement of a Bible college professor. The professor encouraged him to see himself as a bus driver who was transporting believers on a journey toward spiritual maturity. The professor said that as a pastor he would be making stops along the way and some people (believers) would be getting on and off to catch other buses to continue their journeys. Occasionally, someone would get on the wrong bus and get mad at the driver. Rather than taking offense, the bus driver (the pastor in the analogy) must simply assure the irate passenger that he will gladly let the person off at the next stop.

As a Bible Study leader, you are a spiritual bus driver. You are helping believers on their spiritual journey. Please let people off your spiritual bus graciously and always be looking to pick up new riders. Remember, if you only let people off and don't pick up other riders (Bible Study participants) you will soon be driving an empty bus! You will need to slow down to let someone get on (getting them up to speed on how the study is done), but you must stay on schedule (finish the lesson each week) so all the riders get to their destinations on time.

Tip #5: Avoiding the 'Holy Huddle' Syndrome

Several years ago, I encouraged the men in a Bible Study to invite other guys to our study. I was surprised when they resisted my suggestion and wanted the group to stay the way it was. Essentially,

they wanted the group to be a closed group – one that focused on the personal spiritual growth within the lives of those who were already attending.

When should a Bible study be closed and when should it be open to new people joining? Personally, I believe the only time a group should be closed is when they covenant together to deal with highly personal issues in their lives that no else should know about. **Most of the time a Bible study should be open and enthusiastically welcome others into the group at any time.** If someone joins the group in the middle of a study, the individual will benefit from the healthy interaction of the group members and be encouraged by the sincere desire of believers to understand God's Word and His will for their lives. The new person will likely be willing to begin doing the lessons within a week or two.

As believers, we are commanded to make disciples of all nations. Don't fall prey to the "Holy Huddle," or the "Us Four, No More" trap.

Tip #6: How to Establish the Culture

It has been said that it is easier to train a child (in the ways of the Lord) than to repair an adult. In the same way, it is easier to establish a healthy Bible Study group than it is to correct group problems that will naturally develop later on. Perhaps the best way to establish a healthy culture is to offer weekly reminders of the expectations for the group until a productive culture is firmly established. Each week take a few seconds to emphasize a single house rule until the culture is established. By being proactive, you preclude many of the problems that will inevitably arise. Then periodically remind the group members of the house rules if you see the group departing from a healthy culture.

Here are some of the reminders I use to maintain a healthy Bible Study environment.

1. "Let's remember to have only one person speaking at a time. That way we can hear what everyone has to say. I know you guys (girls) have good insights and I don't want anyone to miss something that could benefit everyone else."
2. "Just a reminder to bring your Bibles each week. We always start by reading the Text and I want everyone to be able to see how we got the answers to the questions right from the Bible."
3. "Just a reminder to make it a priority to complete your lessons each week. We can all learn from each other when we meet together. If you don't complete your lesson, we still want you to come, but we will miss the spiritual insights you could add if you work hard on the weekly lessons."
4. "Just a reminder that we need to start right at ____ am/pm. We operate on the 59-59 rule – fifty-nine minutes and fifty-nine seconds, we start on time and we finish in time. That way everyone can plan their schedules. We need the entire time to complete the lesson and to hear what everyone has to say. Let's make a disciplined effort to all be here, ok?"
5. "Just a reminder you may have forgotten. We avoid talking about denominations and political parties. I know some of you have strong feelings, but let's just focus on studying the Bible together."

When you help the discipleship group establish a healthy culture, the group members will get more out of the study and appreciate your leadership. Remember that God has placed you in the position, so lead.

Tip #7: The Final Exam

Bible teacher Chuck Swindoll said, *"The longer I am a pastor, the more convinced I am that there are more people in our evangelical churches who are unsaved."* Shallow, unscriptural "pray-this-prayer-and-you-will-be-saved" presentations of the Gospel have left thousands of people with quasi-testimonies that fall short of true conversion to Jesus Christ.

The Lamplighters' Final Exam is included in our Bible Studies to give you an easy, yet accurate, presentation of the Gospel to those who may be religious but lost. During the last week of your discipleship Bible Study, simply inform your group members that you would like to go over the Final Exam the following week and you would like everyone to be present. During the next week, pray that God would use The Final Exam Gospel presentation to help those who are not saved to see their need for salvation.

We have found that there are at least three distinct benefits of going through The Final Exam with a study group.

1. God uses The Final Exam Gospel presentation to lead religious, but lost, people to Christ.
2. God uses the clear presentation of the Gospel to provide believers with assurance of their salvation (assurance of salvation is foundational to effective personal evangelism).
3. God uses the presentation to equip group members with a simple (yet thorough) method of presenting the Gospel to their family and friends. Many believers have gone home and shared The Final Exam Gospel presentation with their families.

Everyone will eventually stand before God in judgment – the final exam. Let's love Jesus Christ and our fellowman enough to present the true Gospel to them and equip them to share it with others.

Tip #8: Non-denominational vs. Inter-denominational

Often, I'm asked if the Lamplighters International ministry promotes a particular church or denomination. Others ask, "*Are the Lamplighters Bible Studies inter-denominational?*" My answer to both questions is no. The Lamplighters Bible Studies are non-denominational, but they are not inter-denominational. Is there a difference? **Yes, and it's a big one.**

Many Christians believe the terms "non-denominational" and "inter-denominational" are synonyms. When referring to Christian educational materials, the phrase "non-denominational" refers to an absence of the promotion of a particular denomination. But don't assume this naturally means an unwillingness to proclaim the truth. A more, uncommon phrase, "non-sectarian", is also used to refer to non-denominational discipleship materials.

On the other hand, inter-denominational refers to Christian educational resources that endeavor to minister across denominational lines – materials that often avoid doctrinal issues that could cause theological controversy (e.g., Calvinism/Arminianism, end-times prophecy, mode and meaning of baptism, the security of the believer, spiritual gifts, etc.). Inter-denominationalism tends to address only those Biblical doctrines that find common acceptance among broad, evangelical audiences.

Lamplighters Bible Studies are non-denominational, but they are not inter-denominational. **The goal of the Lamplighters ministry (including the discipleship training seminars) is spiritual transformation, not Christian Education market share.** We endeavor to publish discipleship resources that are theologically accurate and teach the Biblical Text as it is written - and present it in a genuine spirit of love. The Apostle Paul told the leaders of the Ephesian church "*For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God*" - Acts 20:27 and "*...speaking the truth in love*" - Eph. 4:15). May God give us (the Lamplighters ministry and you) the courage and grace to speak (whole) truth in a spirit of love (Eph. 4:15). Only then will God use us to see countless lives changed into the image of Jesus Christ.

Tip #9: Balancing the Discussion Time

A common mistake some discipleship leaders make is to allocate an equal amount of time for each question in the study. The discipleship leader should move quickly from one objective, factual question to another (as long as the correct answer is given) without wasting precious time required for application questions. For example, if the question is asked, "*Who is God's only begotten Son?*" you

don't need to say, "Does anyone have another answer?" By leading the class discussion in this manner, you leave more time for a healthy, fruitful, life-changing discussion on how Biblical truths should be incorporated into their lives.

Why is this so important? One of the most famous Old Testament passages answers our question. Deuteronomy 6:4-6 says. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and *shall talk of them* when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." The fathers were to teach their children how the commands and promises of God applied to the everyday lives of their children. Today many of the people we minister to have not been raised in Christian homes or they were not taught how to apply God's Word to their lives.

You help the group members to grow in both grace and knowledge when you balance the discussion time by helping them answer the objective questions accurately and then leading them into a rich personal application of the truths they are learning.

Tip#10: How To Prepare

The way you lead your small group Bible Study will have a great impact on the spiritual progress and enjoyment of the rest of the group. For this reason, you should thoroughly prepare every time you lead. Being prepared physically, emotionally, and spiritually will help you lead the group effectively.

Begin early in the week to lead effectively by doing your weekly lesson as a student. When you have completed the lesson, look at the answers in the back carefully, comparing your answers with the Leader's Guide. Write in your weekly lesson any portion of the Leader's Guide answer you missed. You need to know all the answers for each question thoroughly so you can listen to the class and know (by just listening) if they really all get the right answers. **Don't let them get only the obvious answers. It is your job to help them get the ones they missed.** It is often the answers that are not obvious that will change their lives and deepen their commitment to study God's Word.

Tip #11: The Next Step

Are you leading a small group Bible Study (complete with group members) or are you leading individuals within a small group Bible Study? Your answer to this question will make a big difference to the spiritual growth of those within your group.

Each person within your group is at a different level of spiritual development. You need to recognize this and prayerfully help each person in the group to take the next step in their spiritual journey. For a new believer, it may be to answer a simple question in the Study or volunteer to read the Bible passage. For those who are more mature, you may encourage them to branch out and start a new Bible Study. **There is a next step for each group member and one of your main leadership responsibilities is helping them take that step.** An effective leader sees individuals within the group (rather than a group comprised of individuals) and, like Jesus with His disciples, helps them take their next step in their spiritual development.

This week ask God to reveal the next step for each class member in your group. Then trust God to use you to see lives changed for His glory.

Tip #12: Location, Location, Location

In the real estate business location is often the difference between success and failure. A business located in a busy commercial district with easy access and lots of traffic will have a greater chance of

success than one located in a lonely poorly-lit and sparsely populated neighborhood. In baseball, a professional pitcher can often get by with a mediocre fastball if he can *locate* his pitches.

Where you meet can have a big impact on your Bible Study group. Meeting in the center of a restaurant may be a witness for Christ, but it may be noisy and some participants may not want to order breakfast or lunch just to be part of the Bible Study. Meeting in a home with small children who need attention may not be the best place either. However, meeting in a back or side room of a restaurant with the understanding (and agreement of the restaurant's management) that some group members may not be ordering may be a great place to meet. Meeting in a home that is free from distractions can be a great place to meet.

If I am discipling someone one-on-one, I like to meet in a coffee shop or restaurant in a quiet area. If I am meeting with a group, I like to meet in a lunchroom (be sensitive to employees), a conference room or a quiet restaurant. Meeting at a church building may be okay, but it can be an avoidable obstacle when inviting new people to the group.

Location, location, location. Always choose the best place to meet – one free of distractions and free of an abundance of background noise. If you don't feel your present location is working for you, ask the group members what they think. If they agree with you, ask them for suggestions, check out the location(s) personally, recommend the best one to the group, decide as a group and move – it is that easy. Don't wait.

Tip #13: Avoiding the Mishnah

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) Jesus repeatedly made statements such as, *"You have heard it said, but I say to you..."* *"Again, you have heard it said..."* (cf. Matt. 5:21, 27, 33, 43, et al). During Jesus' day, the religious leaders focused their spiritual attention on the writings of the eminent rabbis (commonly known as the Mishnah and Gemara). Jesus wisely pointed the people back to God's Word. *"The people were astonished at His teaching for He taught as one having authority, not as the scribes."* (Matt. 7:28-29)

You can teach or lead with authority if you focus on teaching God's Word. Unfortunately, the church today often repeats the error the scribes committed 2000 years ago. Rather than studying God's Word (and helping believers understand His Word), we can be tempted to study endless Christian books.

The Lamplighters International discipleship ministry draws people into the Bible, rather than away from it. If you are leading a Bible Study, remember to begin each meeting by reading the Bible together and studying it together. Only God's Word has the power to change lives for His glory every time you meet.

Tip#14: The Cannon Principle

Did you know there is an old military rule-of-thumb that says a cannon must weigh 100 times more than the weight of the shot it is firing? The reason: If the cannon doesn't weigh 100 times more than the shot, the firing of the ball will cause excessive recoil that will push the shot off target.

As a Bible Study leader your Christian character will affect your group members' willingness to accept your leadership and respond to what is taught in your group. While you are not a Bible teacher in the traditional sense of the term, you are more than a group moderator and your character counts. God has chosen you to lead others to spiritual maturity in Christ. What an awesome privilege ... what an awesome responsibility. As you lead your group, remember the cannon principle.

Tip #15: Finding General Grant

Do you know that President Abraham Lincoln was largely ineffective as the commander-in-chief during the Civil War until he found General Grant? Grant's predecessors such as George B. McClellan were

great tacticians but wouldn't follow Lincoln's orders. Lincoln became so frustrated with General McClellan that he once said, *"If General McClellan does not want to use the army, I would like to borrow it for a time."*

A good Bible Study leader leads the Bible Study group effectively and trains new leaders to start and lead new Bible Study groups. An effective Bible Study leader should be on the constant lookout for "General Grants" within the Bible Study group. General Grants are those individuals who have their lessons completed each week, make a valuable contribution to the group time by offering valuable spiritual insight, and show future leadership capabilities.

When I start a new Bible Study group, I immediately look for one or more believers who can be trained to lead other Bible Studies. As soon as I identify a potential leader, I meet with them personally to thank them for being such a good example and for contributing to the spiritual development of others within the small group. I inquire if they would be willing to lead the group sometime in the future. If they show some interest, I begin to train them to become effective Bible Study leaders.

Tip #16: Disagreeing vs. Disagreeable

Can you disagree with another believer on a theological issue without becoming disagreeable? To be a good Bible Study leader, you need to develop the ability to handle disagreement within the group without feeling threatened or thinking you have to resolve every Bible question every time you meet. The godly way by which you respond to those who challenge you can be a powerful example for them to learn from. We can disagree, but we should never become disagreeable.

God reveals truth to His people progressively (John 14:21) and no believer understands everything about God and His Word. As a Bible Study leader, it is not your job to resolve every theological question during the weekly Bible Studies. In fact, it can actually be good for them to have some Bible question that haunts them and leads them to the study of God's Word on their own.

Remember, you can disagree, but don't be disagreeable.

Tip #17: Dogs and Tricks

Howard Hendricks is a distinguished professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and a great communicator of God's Word. In one of his seminars on how to teach the Bible effectively, an elderly Christian man (who taught an adult Sunday School class) approached him after one of his sessions and said, *"Dr. Hendricks, what you are teaching us is all very good, but you can't teach old dogs new tricks."* Dr. Hendricks replied, *"Sir, we are not teaching dogs and we are not teaching tricks. We are teaching God's eternal truth."*

Every time you lead a Bible Study you have an amazing opportunity to help others understand God and His Word. And, the spiritual truths they learn during the Bible Study may eventually be shared with their families and others – for generations to come. Don't take this tremendous responsibility and privilege lightly.

If you were planning to meet someone for an important business meeting, wouldn't you prepare thoroughly and do the best you can to make your best presentation? If we are teaching God's life-changing truth, shouldn't we do the same – or even more?

Remember – we are not teaching dogs and we are not teaching tricks! We are teaching God's inspired Word, and nothing is more important. Be prepared, be clean (from unconfessed sin), and be ready to let God use you and His Word to change lives forever for His glory.

Tip #18: Clock Management

If you are an avid football fan you hear a lot about the clock management skills of the coaches. They are trained to manage the game clock so their team can run the clock down and the other team doesn't have time to score. Occasionally a coach will blow it by calling an untimely time out or by letting the game clock run out before his team can run the last play. Or, he may make the mistake of leaving too much time and the other team drives the ball down the field and wins the game.

As a discipleship Bible Study leader, you must *learn* to manage the game (Bible Study) clock properly. This is easier said than done. Below are some tips for effective clock management:

1. After you have completed your personal lesson preparation and checked the answer key, write (in pencil) the exact time you think the group should spend on each question. For example, let's say the Bible Study starts at 7:00 am. Question #1 is simple and should take a maximum of two minutes so write 7:00 am in the left margin next to Q#1. Next to Q#2 (a question of medium difficulty) write 7:02. Perhaps you estimate the group will need 5 minutes for Q#2 so in the margin next to Q#3 write 7:07, which is the time you should begin Q#3. Work through the entire lesson, allocating the time you think the group needs to answer every question appropriately. You may need to rework your time allocations. Do you see now why you should use a pencil?
2. Before the Bible Study starts, locate the wall clock (if there is one) and sit directly opposite it. Even sitting at a modest angle can be a distraction if you look up at the clock while someone is speaking. If there is not a wall clock, remove your wrist watch and set it in front of you.
3. Start the Bible Study on time every time. This lets the class members know that you are serious, sets the tone for the Bible Study, and lets latecomers know that you are not waiting for them to begin.
4. Work through the lesson, keeping pace with the times you have written in the left margin of your study. Be prepared, if necessary, to change the pace of the Bible Study to complete the entire lesson.
5. Move through the shorter, factual questions quickly. If the question is, "What is the name of God's Son?" and someone answers, "Jesus", you don't need to ask if anyone else has another answer. By doing this you save precious minutes for the group to wrestle with the discussion questions.

A good discipleship Bible Study leader doesn't rush through the lesson, rejoicing that he (or she) has finished ten minutes early. On the other hand, he doesn't let the clock run out before all the questions are answered. Clock management is important in the NFL, but it is even more important when you are a discipleship Bible Study leader who is helping others learn God's Word.

Tip #19: Who Are You?

Do you see your leadership role as a small group moderator, a Bible teacher, or a small group discipleship leader? How you see your leadership role will affect both your lesson preparation and leadership of the group. If you see yourself merely as a class moderator, your dominant goal will likely be giving everyone equal time to share. Unity of the group, rather than really understanding the truth, is often the leader's objective when he sees himself as a class moderator. On the other hand, the leader who sees himself as a Bible teacher will often dominate the class discussion, fail to complete the weekly lessons, and inadvertently discourage the class members from participating in the discussion time.

Ted Turner, owner (and atheist) of the Atlanta Braves baseball team and founder of CNN, made this important statement, "Lead, follow, or get out of the way." As a Lamplighters leader, you are a leader, a discipleship Bible Study leader. You are not a traditional Bible teacher so don't monopolize the discussion time. But you are more than a class moderator who simply facilitates a class discussion where truth is often determined by majority opinion.

So what do you do ...?

1. Truly accept God's call for your life and lead your group with confidence. The reason you are leading is because God has chosen you to serve Him in this ministry. You don't need a Bible college or seminary degree – we have done the theological work for you.
2. Study your weekly lesson thoroughly and let God speak to your heart through His Word.
3. Learn the Leader's Guide so well that you really understand the truth(s) that are being taught. Knowledge (of God's Word) breeds confidence (to speak God's Word). You don't have to be a Bible scholar.
4. Lead (don't moderate) your group confidently to spiritual victory, knowing God has chosen you to serve Him in this ministry.

Remember: Lead, follow, or get out of the way.

Tip #20: Would someone please volunteer ...?

As a discipleship leader, it may seem unnecessary (and even awkward) to consistently ask for volunteers to read or pray, but you should ask for a volunteer every time. Don't presume upon someone's reading skills or reading comfort level. Unknown to you, a group member may have dyslexia or may feel uncomfortable reading out loud in front of others. By asking for a volunteer to read or pray, you show grace to the group members and eliminate an avoidable, embarrassing situation.

There is another important reason for always asking for a volunteer to read or pray. As a discipleship leader, you want your group members to invite new people. Suppose one of the group members invites a new person to the group who had only attended church infrequently in the past and was now showing some spiritual interest. He has never been part of a small group before and is curious about what happens when the group meets each week. The group member summarizes the group meetings by saying, *"Well, we meet in the backroom of a restaurant and we always start promptly at 7:00 am so we can complete the entire lesson by 8:00 am."* (Sounds good so far, doesn't it?). But then he makes a fatal mistake. He says, *"The leader usually asks one of us to pray for our time together and then picks someone else to read the Bible passage before we start the lesson."* Ouch!

What is this potential new member thinking? He is likely thinking he may be asked to pray or read the Bible if he ever attends the group. He says to himself, *"No way, I am not ready for that. I would like to check out the group, but not if I am going to be embarrassed."* So, he graciously declines the group member's invitation and a great outreach opportunity is lost. The discipleship leader should always ask for volunteers to pray or read the Bible for two important reasons: 1) He doesn't put anyone on the spot and, 2) He eliminates a major obstacle when group members invite new people to the group.

Tip #21: We'll pick up next week ...

"Let's pick up next week where we left off", the inexperienced leader said as he brought the group discussion to a close. Although the lesson wasn't completed (again), he was confident that the class had gone well - the discussion was healthy and only one guy, Joe, was absent. The leader rationalized that not finishing the lesson wasn't a problem as long as the group members really got into the lesson.

Meanwhile, Joe, away on a business trip, smiled as he thought about the guys meeting and his growing bond with the other men. With a couple hours free before his next appointment, he even contemplated doing next week's lesson. Then he remembered the last time he came to class after missing a week only to realize the group hadn't finished the previous week's lesson. No, this time he would pass on doing the lesson and just come to next week's meeting with his lesson incomplete.

Where did the leader fail in one of the keys to an effective, life-changing discipleship Bible Study? By not faithfully completing the weekly lesson every time, the leader discourages the group members

(especially those who are absent) from completing their weekly lessons. How does an effective Bible Study leader avoid this leadership pitfall?

1. At the beginning of each study, the group members should take a couple minutes to write the specific dates that the group will be meeting and the specific lessons they will be discussing. The group members should evaluate their calendars to see if there are any holiday weeks that may affect their meeting schedule.
2. The leader should encourage the group members to do their lessons every week - even if they are away for business or pleasure.
3. The leader should commit to the group that he will lead the group effectively by completing the weekly lesson every week – no exceptions.

Tip #22: Setting the Tone

Gifted speakers know the first two minutes is the most important part of their speech. The speaker either catches the audience's attention within the first two minutes or their attention is lost and it's usually hard to get it back.

The same principle is true for the discipleship Bible Study leader. If a Bible Study leader manifests a *laissez faire* approach (French from *laisse faire* – to let [people] do [as they please]), doesn't start on time, and doesn't get into the lesson right away, he (or she) is speaking volumes to the group members. Unfortunately, the leader is sending the wrong message.

The leader should 1) greet everyone warmly, 2) ask for someone to open in prayer, 3) ask for one or more volunteers read the Bible passage and, 4) begin the lesson. By approaching the Bible Study in this way, the leader emphasizes the importance and seriousness of studying God's Word and lets the group members know that he wants to hear what each person has learned in their personal study time. The leader who wastes 5-10 minutes at the beginning of the study (yes, the right word is *waste*) actually robs the class members of precious time they could use to learn spiritual truths that could change their lives forever.

The primary goal of a discipleship Bible Study is building (disciples for Jesus Christ), not bonding. As a discipleship leader set the tone early in the discussion time by starting on time and moving right into the lesson. God will use His Word in a powerful way to change lives (building) and the fellowship of learning (binding) will be a precious by-product of seeing lives transformed for His glory.

Tip #23: How to Deal with Personal Questions

Some Bible Study leaders feel awkward when they have to present the personal questions in the lessons? Do you skip over them so no one offers personal information about themselves that they will later regret? Or, do you read the question and wait for several seconds of awkward silence until someone nervously says, "I'm guilty of this."

The personal questions aren't designed to squeeze a grudging confession out of the group members. The "**How to lead a Lamplighters Bible Study**" tutorial at the beginning of the Bible study books says, "*Occasionally, some of the study questions require introspection and a personal response. Answer these questions for your benefit; they help you compare your present spiritual maturity to the biblical principles presented in the lesson. If you're part of a study group, you will not be asked to share any personal answers or information with the group.*"

So how do you help the group members apply the biblical truths taught in the Lamplighters' lesson to their personal lives without embarrassing anyone or hurrying past, avoiding the question, and missing a poignant spiritual application?

1. In your pre-class preparation, decide in advance how you are going to handle the personal question(s).
2. During the group meeting, remind the students how important these questions are and encourage them to do their best to answer them.
3. When you come to a personal question, consider saying something like this. "When I got to this question, I was tempted to skip it and go onto the next question. But I really want my study of God's Word to impact my life, so I thought about it for a while."
4. You could also invite the group members to join you in a time (15-30 seconds) of silent prayer and ask God to reveal areas that need to change – areas of our lives that need to be brought into alignment with His Word. Tell the group that you will close in prayer. Then simply move onto the next question.

Don't forfeit these great opportunities to help the group members apply God's Word to their lives. Remember, it is not about biblical information. It's about spiritual transformation into the image of Jesus Christ. Help them, by your effective leadership, to understand that.

Tip #24: Keeping the Bible Study on Track

Many Christians are fearful of starting a discipleship Bible Study because they think someone may ask them a Bible question they can't answer. Worse yet, they think some group members may have a secret spiritual agenda and cause division within the group. If you are considering becoming a discipleship Bible Study leader you don't need to worry about this. Here's how to handle it.

Remember the 59-59 rule - meaning the Bible Study meets to study for 59 minutes and 59 seconds (really one hour). The group starts on time and finishes on time. Well, there is more to the 59-59 rule than just rigorous time management. The rule was designed to keep the Bible Study on course and it provides lay Bible Study leaders with an excellent tool to avoid spiritual rabbit trails. The Bible Study Leader establishes the 59-59 rule at the beginning of the study and then implements it during the first few weeks of the Bible Study. The 59-59 rule keeps the Bible Study discussion group on track and gives the leader a simple (but extremely effective) means of avoiding potentially destructive side tracks. If the leader perceives the group discussion is going off base, he simply informs the group they need to move onto the next question. It works wonderfully.

Don't be afraid to step out and start a Discipleship Bible Study. The Apostle Paul told Timothy (2 Timothy 2:2), "*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*"

Tip #25: Not-So-Subtle Differences

Many Christians are intrigued by the Lamplighters' discipleship ministry. They ask me why the Lamplighters' small groups are inclined to grow and multiply when their groups often struggle to exist. The answer to this question is found in understanding the not-so-subtle differences between a small group Bible Study and a Discipleship Bible Study. *The primary differences between a typical small group Bible Study and a discipleship Bible Study are **purpose, focus, and intentionality.***

The primary purpose of a normal small group Bible study is usually spiritual growth in the lives of the Bible Study participants through the systematic study of God's Word. Sometimes it is just Bible knowledge. The focus is on God's Word or selected books written by respected Christian leaders. There is no intentional plan to reach other people and assimilate them into the group or train new leaders who the Holy Spirit might prompt to start new groups.

On the other hand, a Discipleship Bible Study's primary purpose is to equip lay believers to become effective disciple-making Christians. The focus of the Lamplighters discipleship Bible Study group is on

God's Word (and the systematic study of it), but there is also a co-focus on training group members for effective ministry to their families, within their churches, and to the world. While the group is working through the weekly Bible Study, future leaders are being trained to become effective disciple-making leaders. Outreach and assimilation of new people into the small group is deliberate and intentional as compared to accidental for a typical small group.

If you are struggling to reach new people and assimilate them into the group, it may not be the curriculum you are using. It may be that you are leading small groups Bible Studies when you should consider taking them to another level – discipleship Bible Studies.

If you have additional questions about how to do this, contact the Lamplighters' office (800.507.9516) and we can help you.

Tip #26: Choosing The Right Study

One of the most common questions I get asked is, "*What Lamplighters' Bible Study should we do for our first study?*" The selection of the first study, or any study, is important and should be taken seriously.

For the first study, consider a shorter, practical study (Ruth, Proverbs 1-9, Jonah/Habakkuk, Philippians, 2 Timothy, Titus/Philemon, James). You should generally avoid studies that are deeper in theological content (Romans, Galatians) and ones that are longer (Nehemiah, Joshua, Judges, Acts). Once the group has completed the first study and is thoroughly established in the Lamplighters' Bible Study format, let the group members decide together what study they want to do next. This gives them a sense of ownership and they will often be more enthusiastic if they chose the study themselves.

If the group asks you for recommendations, suggest they consider alternating between the Old Testament and New Testament studies. Doing both Old and New Testament studies helps the group members develop a greater appreciation for the unity and practicality of all of God's Word.

May God bless you as you seek to fulfill the Great Commission and see lives transformed into the image of Jesus Christ.

Tip # 27: One Blind Eye, One Deaf Ear

An elderly pastor once gave me some great advice when he said, "*Every pastor ought to have one blind eye and one deaf ear.*" At that time, I was a young pastor who wanted to solve every problem and meet every need in the church.

As I thought about what he said, his words of wisdom make perfect sense. God wanted me to shepherd the people, not become their spiritual babysitter. If I did, people would learn to depend more on me than on the Lord.

As a Bible Study leader or discipleship trainer, God wants you to shepherd the people in your group into a closer relationship with *Him*. Your ministry is to guide them to a greater faith in God – not greater dependence on you. You can do this by being personally involved in the lives of the people in your group and counseling them to see their circumstances, both trials and blessings, from God's perspective.

Tip # 28: How to Develop New Leaders

At the start of Lamplighters discipleship ministry, I had difficulty developing new leaders. The men's groups were growing so rapidly, but we needed more leaders than I could develop. No one seemed willing to be trained as a new leader. Good, godly group participants kept telling me they couldn't do what I was doing.

I was bewildered until I realized what I was doing wrong. I was leading the groups in a way that no one could follow my leadership approach. I went back to the fundamental leadership principles that God had led me to understand at the beginning. I deliberately placed my watch on the table so the students could see that I was going to be careful to finish the lesson. I also became intentional in every aspect of group leadership. Before long, several new leaders emerged.

As a Bible Study leader, are you leading in a way that no one can follow, or are you leading in a way that others could say, *"I could do that."* Remember: Your goal is not just to lead an effective small group Bible Study. **You are training the next generation of disciple-makers!**

Tip # 29: 20-20 Spiritual Vision

Do you have 20:20 vision? I'm not referring to your physical eyesight. I am referring to your spiritual eyesight. In Acts 20:20 the Apostle Paul said the Ephesian believers, *"how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house."* In this verse we see that Paul used both a large-group setting (open air public forum) and a smaller setting (the homes of the believers).

But more than that, the Apostle Paul was committed to teaching the whole counsel of God. The Lamplighters discipleship ministry is also committed to teaching the entire truth of God's Word in a biblical spirit of love. As a spiritual leader, don't be afraid to present the Lamplighters lessons the way they are written even if there is someone in your group who might take exception. Be loving and gracious in your manner and presentation but be courageous as a leader and present the whole truth of God's Word – holding back nothing (Acts 20:20). God will use His Word to change lives for His glory.

The next time someone asks you about your eyesight, just tell them you have 20:20 vision – Acts 20:20 vision!

Tip # 30: This Magic Moment

In 1962 four teenage boys formed a band in a garage in Brooklyn, New York that became known as Jay and the Americans. The group became a sensation with 12 hit records. Jay Black, the lead singer, thrilled the hearts of adoring fans with songs such as There Goes My Baby, Come A Little Bit Closer, Cara Mia, and their signature hit, This Magic Moment.

As a Bible Study Leader, you should be alert to the magic moments in your small group when the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to deeply impress a life-changing truth upon one of more of the group members. Your ability to discern these magic moments could help transform someone's life forever, bring glory to God, and impact countless lives for the cause of Christ for years to come.

When this happens, resist the temptation to say too much. Let the truth of God's Word penetrate the person's soul and then affirm the truth. Let the person share what he or she has just learned with the group and then move on with the lesson. But don't get lost in the moment and not finish the lesson. The individual may be still reveling in his or her new spiritual discovery, but the truth will be lost to the individual if you move onto the next question. When the lesson is done, reengage the individual again.

Don't miss those magic moments when God reveals life-changing truths!

Tip #31: How to Become a Better Leader

You just finished a Bible Study and the group went well. Or did it? How can you tell? It's likely that none of the class members will tell you how bad you did. Most dissatisfied small group members just stop attending the group.

As a disciple of others, you should constantly strive to become a better leader. The best way to improve as a Bible Study leader is to ask yourself three diagnostic questions immediately after the study is done. This will help evaluate your weekly performance and become a better disciple-maker.

1. *How do I think I did as a leader this week?* This first question is designed to provide an overall self-evaluation of the Bible Study you just led. The question is not, "Did the group members enjoy the lesson?" or "Is the group generally going well?" The question is about your leadership during that lesson.
2. *What did I do right?* Now reflect on the Lamplighters' leadership principles (the Lamplighters 10 Commandments). Which ones of the ten leadership principles did I do well?
3. *If I had it to do over again, what would I do differently?* Now identify the things you could have done better. Think about how and why you missed them and how you are going to remember them next time. Write them down and reflect on this during the next week and make sure you do them.

If you follow this simple procedure, you will continue to improve and become a more effective disciple-maker.

Tip # 32: Finishing too Early

Three of the Lamplighters' ten leadership principles address the importance of starting and finishing the study properly. *Lombardi Time*, the *59-59 Rule*, and the *Balance Principle* all remind the leader to start the weekly study right and finish strong.

But what about finishing early? Is it a problem? Wouldn't it be a good opportunity to take prayer requests and to become more connected with the group members?

Occasionally a leader may finish early due to a shorter lesson or a quieter group, but this should be the exception, not the rule. If you find yourself often finishing the lessons early, you aren't balancing the lesson properly, or you are not helping the group members get all the answers to the questions. Most experienced leaders find their greatest challenge is to finish the lessons on time – not too soon.

If you are having trouble with finishing too soon, determine the number of minutes you would like to spend on each question and write the times in the left margin of your study book next to the specific questions. Try to keep the group on pace with your time notations until you are able to balance the lessons more effectively.

Tip #33: I am of Paul, I am of Cephas ...

Man is innately prone to hero-worship. Millions worship movie stars, musical entertainers, athletes, and politicians. Even as believers in Jesus Christ, many of us have had spiritual leaders we adored to the point of taking our spiritual focus off Christ.

The Apostle Paul addressed the question of spiritual hero worship in his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:10-15). The apostle wrote, *Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?* (1 Cor. 1:12, 13).

Many believers hang on every word of some gifted Bible teacher but don't read their Bibles. As a spiritual leader you should be aware of this human tendency and encourage those you lead to keep their eyes on Christ. As the Apostle Paul said, *What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task* (1 Cor. 3:5).

Tip #34: A Bible Study or a Christian Book Club?

Are you leading a Bible Study or leading a Christian book club? Unfortunately, a great number of Bible Studies are not Bible Studies at all. They are men's, women's, and mixed Christian small groups that read a steady diet of Christian books and discuss them in a small group environment. This sounds like a book club to me.

Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying there's something wrong with reading Christian books or even discussing them with others. I have been helped tremendously by the writings of gifted Christian leaders. But a Bible Study is when you study the Bible.

There are at least four compelling reasons we should study the Bible and help others do the same.

1. Only the Bible is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16) and possesses life-changing power (Heb. 4:12).
2. Spiritual growth comes from reading and studying God's Word (Romans 10:16).
3. The Bible teaches the *priesthood of the believer*, which means that every true believer is priest before God. As believers we can go directly to God to gain wisdom and understanding directly from God's Word.
4. Christians gain confidence when they learn to discover spiritual truths from their personal study of God's Word.
5. Christians learn how to verbalize their faith when they study God's Word together with other believers

Remember: A Bible study is when you study the Bible, not when you discuss a Christian book.

Tip # 35: The Two-Minute Warning

If you are football fan you know the importance of the two-minute warning. If the game is close, the losing team must gain possession of the ball and make every second count if they expect to win. Quarterbacks have become legendary by working the clock and orchestrating heart-stopping comebacks.

As a Bible Study leader or discipleship trainer, the two-minute warning comes at the beginning of the lesson – not at the end! How you start the group will largely determine how well the class goes and how effective you lead the weekly lesson. For this reason, you need to be very deliberate during the first two minutes of each study. Here are some recommendations.

1. Be prepared – Remember Lombardi Time. Be there early and pray for your leadership and the group's participation.
2. Greet everyone personally. It only takes a minute to connect with them emotionally.
3. Start on time – this shows the group members that you value their time and it sets the stage for a good study.
4. Offer a clear call to spiritual attention such as, *"Good morning. Let's jump into the study. I'm anxious for us all to learn from one another."*
5. Give a brief, deliberate opening prayer such as, *"Lord, thank you for this time together. Please help us to learn from Your word and each other. Give us open minds and hearts to receive what You want to teach us here this morning. Amen."*
6. **Briefly** remind the group of one or two of the Lamplighters Ten Commandments to keep the culture and the group on track. Mention them, but don't explain them.
7. A clear directive to open their Bibles to a specific passage to read and an invitation for volunteer(s) to read.

The Lamplighters Bible Study Leader's Two-Minute Warning. Don't drop the ball!

Tip # 36: How to Respond to Wrong Answers

How do you respond when someone offers a wrong, or worse yet, an off-the-wall answer to a Lamplighters Bible Study question? If you don't have an automatic response, you might be tempted to say something that may offend someone, damage your Christian testimony, and hinder your ability to lead the group in the future.

A carefully-prepared standardized reply lets the individual and the group members know that the answer was not correct, but it does it in a way that doesn't devalue or belittle the person. Saying something 'funny' to a group member such as, "*Wow, where did you come up with a bizarre answer like that? Were you asleep when you did the lesson?*" may get a laugh from the group, but it could be hurtful to the person and keep other group members from answering questions in the future.

A careful reply lets the class members know that the original answer was incorrect, and it also alerts them to offer another (albeit different) answer. Prepare a standard reply such as, "*Thank you. Does someone else have another answer?*" Not one will be confused by what you mean, but that's ok. You can legitimately thank the person for offering their answer even though their answer was incorrect. By handling it this way, you are demonstrating graciousness and you are also "mining for gospel gold."

One last thing: never endorse a wrong answer by saying, "*That was a good answer. Does someone else have something to add?*" If you do this, the group members may think the wrong answer was correct and you are merely looking for a more complete answer. ***Don't confuse the group members by endorsing error!***

Tip # 37: Lamplighters' Five Distinguishing Characteristics

Many people have encouraged us with notes and emails that let us know how the Lamplighters Bible studies have influenced their lives. Some have gained a greater love for God and other have found answers to difficult questions in their lives.

Sometimes they inquire about why the series was written and if we plan to add to the series. They also ask us about the theological perspective that undergirds the series, so I thought it would be a good idea to share with you the five distinguishing characteristics of the Lamplighters Bible series.

1. All Lamplighters materials have been written from the perspective that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Lamplighters materials are free of secular psychology, liberalism, humanism, and scientific speculations that contradict the plain truth of the Bible.
2. All Lamplighters materials address the so-called difficult Biblical passages within the particular books of the Bible because we believe they are an important part of God's Word and should be studied thoroughly. We endeavor to present questions and answers that are well-researched and theologically accurate.
3. All Lamplighters materials are Christ-centered. We believe the central theme of all Scripture is God, not man. We have sought to emphasize this important truth without forcing the Text to say something it does not say.
4. All Lamplighters materials seek to honor the local church ministry. Believers are encouraged to seek out a Bible-believing church so that can be built up in the faith.
5. All Lamplighters materials are evangelistic. Students are encouraged to examine their relationship to Christ. Many of the Bible studies include a thorough explanation of the plan of salvation.

If the Lamplighters Bible Studies have been a blessing to you, your small group, or your church, we would love to hear from you.

Tip #38: The Answer has to be Jesus.

A few years I met with the discipleship pastor of a large church to introduce the Lamplighters ministry. He was familiar with the Lamplighters Bible Study series and complimented me on the depth of questions and insightful answers.

The pastor told me a funny story that reminded me of the need for in-depth discipleship resources. He said, "A Sunday School teacher, teaching a group of fifth grade boys, asked the class, 'What is about 18 inches high, has big brown eyes, floppy ears, a cute nose and a long bushy tail?' The boys quietly pondered the question until one boy said, 'Teacher, it sounds like a rabbit, but the answer has to be Jesus.'"

The pastor's point was this: Much of our Christian curriculum is so simplistic that the answer to most questions has to be Jesus. When this happens believers' minds aren't challenged to ponder the deep things of God. They look at Christianity as simplistic and the Bible as nothing more a collection of sentimental stories. Nothing could be further from the truth.

As a Bible Study leader or Discipleship Trainer don't worry if one or more of the members of your group have trouble getting some of the answers to the Lamplighters Bible Study questions. Their struggle will cause them to think more deeply about the truths of God's Word and come to the group with a greater sense of spiritual anticipation. As their leader you can help them see the answer from the Scriptures.

The answer to life is Jesus, but the answer to every bible study question doesn't have to be!

Tip #39: Open or Closed Bible Studies

Should a Bible Study be open or closed to others who want to join the group? And, if the Bible Study group is open, should the group be open at all times or only at certain entry points such as the beginning of the next study? Answers to these and related questions are essential to the harmony of a group and should be discussed at the beginning of the group's formation.

Before these questions can be answered intelligently, you must ask yourself, "What kind of group do you want?" If the group is an *affinity group* – one with the members joining to meet and specific need or champion a particular cause – you should give serious consideration to the answer. For example, members of a men's (sexual) purity accountability group may feel uncomfortable revealing personal information about themselves with one-time visitors. On the other hand, a *fellowship group* (one whose goals is getting to know other people) may welcome newcomers at any time.

Lamplighters' discipleship study groups are always open groups. The Bible Study should encourage group members to invite newcomers at any time, foster a warm, welcoming atmosphere within the group, and the group leader should have extra Bible studies available for newcomers to use. Existing members should be willing to meet with those new to the inductive Bible Study format until the newcomer feels comfortable on his or her own.

Should a small group be open? That depends on the type of group it is. Should a Lamplighters' Bible study group be open? Always!

Tip #40: Bi-Weekly Studies – Good or Bad?

Occasionally a new Lamplighters Bible Study group forms and decides to meet every other week. The leader and the original members believe that a weekly commitment is too much, or the group will be more appealing to newcomers if it meets every other week.

There may be some situations when this is a good idea (group participants must travel a long distance), but experience has shown that this is rarely a good idea. Most bi-weekly groups struggle to gain the spiritual traction they need and usually produce mediocre results.

There are at least five reasons why a weekly Bible Studies is usually the best approach:

1. The commitment level of the group members is greater, and this influences the ongoing effectiveness of the group.
2. A weekly study is easier to schedule. Group members get into a routine and they don't have to ask themselves, "Are we meeting this week?"
3. Two weeks between meetings is often so long a time period that group member can forget the spiritual truths of the previous study.
4. Group members can become bored with the Bible Study and lose interest as the study drags on.
5. Most resource materials are designed for 8-12 lessons. If the group meets bi-weekly, this means the group meets from 16-24 weeks. This is often too long for many people for one Bible Study.

If you are planning to start a new small group Bible Study, encourage the group members to make the commitment to meet every week. All of you will benefit from making the commitment to do it this way.

Tip # 41: Christian Euphemisms

I grew up in a home where God's name was used regularly, but not in a reverent way. It is not that my parents were bad people. On the contrary my father was a respectable hard-working farmer and my mother was a dedicated public school teacher who dearly loved her family. Both were highly-regarded in the community. They just regularly invoked the name of God to punctuate sentences and emphasize a point and I learned to do the same.

When I became a Christian at 26 years old, my crude and irreverent speech was one of the first things God addressed in my life. Even when I tried to use milder forms of well-known swear words (darn, heck, gol-darn-it, etc.), I knew what I was saying was wrong and no one was confused by what I meant. My listeners easily made the mental transfer. I knew what I was planting a Christianized version of common swearwords (known as euphemisms) in my hearers' minds and it had to stop.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a euphemism as *the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant*. Most Christians realize their need to refrain from the use of profanity and using the Lord's name in an irreverent manner. But how about using Christianized swear words? Aren't they just as bad if the hearer naturally makes the mental transfer in his or her mind?

The Bible says, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." (Eph. 4:29). **Whether you are a bible study leader or serving the lord some other way, don't use corrupt speech and encourage others to do the same.**

Tip #42: Commitment

Several years ago, some Christian businessmen in Dallas, Texas asked Dr. Howard Hendricks, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, to lead them in a weekly Bible Study. At first Dr. Hendricks balked because of his busy teaching schedule, but the businessmen persisted, knowing they had much to learn from him. Howard agreed to consider their request.

Shortly afterwards Dr. Hendricks told the group members that he would meet with them on one condition. He would make a commitment to meet with them weekly, if they had to do the same. If he was going to make room in his schedule to meet with them, they would have to make meeting with him a priority. If they were out of town for work, he expected them to fly back the night before so they could meet with the Bible Study group. If they weren't willing to make that kind of commitment, he wouldn't meet with them.

The best time to determine the commitment level of group members is at the beginning of a study. Ask them if they are willing to make meet weekly a priority in their schedules. Ask them if they are willing to consider the weekly study a definite appointment and not allow anything to invade that space?

If they aren't willing to make a solid commitment to meet, then you should reconsider whether you should invest your time in people who are not as committed as you are.

Tip #43: Is There a Word from the Lord?

King Zedekiah had little regard for the word of God (Jer. 37:2). During his reign the prophet Jeremiah boldly proclaimed the truth regardless of the king's reaction or the personal consequences he faced. Jeremiah's fearless preaching landed him in a dungeon (Jer. 37:17)

While Jeremiah was in the dungeon King Zedekiah came secretly to the prophet and asked an ageless question; *"Is there a word from the Lord?"* (Jer. 37:17). Zedekiah, facing a difficult military situation, had a moment of spiritual lucidity when he (essentially) asked, *"Does God's Word have anything to say about my personal circumstances?"*

The king's question is on the hearts of many people today. They want to know if God's Word has anything to say about their loves – their trials and circumstances. And Jeremiah's answer (*"There is."*) should be the immediate response of every committed disciple-making Christian when he or she is asked a similar question. You can always say, "Yes, there is ... a word from the Lord."

The next time someone asks you if God's Word has anything to say to their situation, say "Yes, there is." Then lovingly point them to the truth of God's Word.

There is ... always a word from the Lord!

Tip #44: But my Bible says ... The Translation Issue

What do you do when someone in the group says, *"My Bible reads differently in verse so-and-so. Why is that?"* Your response will either answer their question and increase their confidence in the English Bible, or it will add to their confusion and undermine their confidence in their Bible.

Questions like these highlights the need to understand the various approach to Bible translation. There are four approaches to Bible translation and they are listed below.

1. **The Literal translation approach.** The approach seeks to translate literally the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek words into English as closely as possible the original Text. Since sentence structure of the Hebrew and Greek is often different than we find in English, this type of translation is awkward. There are no common English versions of the Bible that use this translation approach.
2. **The Modified Literal translation approach.** This translation style use with a word-for-word approach but incorporates word order changes (not meaning changes) to make the English versions of the Bible more readable. Translations that use this approach are the King James Version (KJV), the New American Standard Version (NASB), the New King James version (NKJV), the English Standard Version (ESV) and the old Revised Standard version (RSV).
3. **The Dynamic Equivalence translation approach.** This translation style attempts to capture the true meaning of the Text by using an equivalent meaning of the original Scriptures with the goal of making the English Version more readable without changing the meaning. Not as much emphasis is placed in the individual words. The NIV incorporates this translations style.
4. **The Paraphrase translation approach.** This translation style is more of a loose translation and seeks to capture the essence of the meaning of the original Text. It is less concerned with the actual words of the original Text. The NLT (New Living Translation) and Phillips translations are examples of this translation approach.

Most of the questions you will be asked about the specific differences in English translations are a result of the different approaches to translations. Being knowledgeable of them will help you assuage any concerns your group members have and equip you to lead more effectively.

Tip # 45: The 70-25-5 Rule

One of the biggest concerns or fears of believers who are thinking of leading a Bible Study is how to keep the small group on track. Like all things in life: it's one thing to start strong – it's quite another thing to finish strong. Most Christians have heard stories about small group Bible Studies unraveling into conflict and discord.

If you are considering starting a small group Bible study or are currently leading one, you don't need to worry about your becoming embroiled in conflict. Here are some simple things you can do to keep the group on track.

1. Establish the Lamplighters' Ten Commandments (the 10 essential leadership principles for small group Bible Studies) as soon as possible. We estimate that 70% of small group problems are solved when the proper culture is established at the beginning of the small group.
2. The leader should also periodically remind the group about the Lamplighters' Ten Commandments. This is best done by mentioning one or two of the leadership principles at the beginning of the weekly meeting. An additional 25% of small group problems are solved when the group leader periodically regularly reminds the group members of the rules.
3. The remaining 5% of small group problems (if you are counting, that's 100%) are solved when the group leader personally addresses a problem with an individual who is causing trouble. Often the individual didn't realize his or her action was causing a problem. If, however, the person does realize that their actions are causing a problem and is unwilling to change, then the group leader needs to ask the person to leave the group.

The 70-25-5 rule. Follow it and you and the people in the group will be blessed.

Tip # 46: The Dangers of Allegorical Interpretation

A well-known Bible teacher told a story about spending an entire day trying to learn the spiritual meaning of the disciples catching 153 fish (John 21:11). The Apostle Peter and six other disciples had gone fishing but had caught nothing until, at Christ's bidding, they moved their nets to the other side of the boat where he caught 153 fish. The Bible teacher's conclusion: There was no hidden spiritual meaning in the number 153. It was simply the number of fish the disciples caught when they obeyed Jesus' command.

This story illustrates the error of allegorical interpretation. An *allegory* (from Greek *allos* – other + *egorein* – to speak publicly [agora]) is an expression by means of symbolic fictional figures and actions of truths or generalizations about human existence (Webster's dictionary). Allegorical interpretation (also known as spiritualizing) is a faulty method of interpreting the Bible that leads the student to assign an arbitrary (erroneous) meaning to the Text – an interpretation that is unsubstantiated by proper methods of hermeneutics (the principles of interpretation).

Two familiar sayings will help you and those you lead in the Bible Studies avoid this error. "*If the plain sense (of Scripture) makes common sense, seek no other sense.*" The second is: "*He who spiritualizes, tell spiritual lies, because he has no spiritual eyes.*"

The Apostle Paul gave the Corinthian believers some great advice when he wrote, "*For we are not writing any other thing to you than what you read and understand.*" (2 Cor. 1:13). In other words, don't read into the Text something that is not there.

Great advice – then and now! Let's do the same.

Tip #47: Mysticism

A seminary professor told our class the following story to illustrate the errors of mysticism. He was invited to debate a Bible doctrine with a professor from another theological perspective. The debate was to be held at a Bible college where a group of young students were eagerly awaiting the intellectual discourse.

During the debate each professor attempted to prove his perspective from Scripture until the other professor said, *"Look, I know I can't prove my position. But I prayed about it and I know in my heart that I am right."*

One of our class members asked, *"What did you say?"* At that our professor said, *"There is nothing I could say. He changed the rules for a theological debate based upon the authority of Scripture to his live experience"*. Mysticism is the belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through live experience such as intuition or insight (Webster's Dictionary). Mysticism is common in many other world religions (Animism, Judaism [Kaballah], folk Islam, Shintoism, and New Age) as well as Christianity. In Christianity it manifests itself by believing that spiritual truth comes directly from God apart from the Word of God or even contrary to God's Word.

As a disciple-maker, continue to point others back to the authority of God's Word. If someone says they believe a certain truth about God, ask them politely where in Scripture they first learned that. By pointing others back to God and His Word, you will help them grow in their faith and avoid the errors of mysticism.

Tip #48: It's a Bible Study

A man who attended one our Bible studies asked me, *"Do the Lamplighters Bible Studies have an extended prayer time?"* "No." I answered. *"Do the Lamplighters Bible Studies have an extended fellowship time – a time where group members can share life experiences and encourage on another?"* Again I answered, "No." Sensing the man's disappointment, I went on to say, *"We meet to focus entirely on studying the Bible together for one hour a week. There is a brief prayer at the beginning and the end and fellowship usually happens before or after the group meets."* The man was not satisfied with my answer and never returned to our group.

The Lamplighters Bible Studies are focused discipleship Bible Studies. The goal of the Lamplighters International discipleship ministry is making disciple-makers for God's glory and local church ministry. We attempt to do this by following a deliberate process of leading effective Bible Studies and training qualified individuals within the groups to become new leaders. We stay focused to accomplish our ministry objective.

We have no intention of trying to replace the local church – to become a "church without walls," or a "virtual church." God has ordained the local church ministry and we want to honor His plan and to be the church's extension into the marketplace and neighborhoods of the world.

Tip # 49: You Search the Scriptures but ...

Many Christians attend Bible-believing churches, serve the Lord faithfully, and live moral lives, but they don't have a passion for the Lord or those he came to save. Something's missing, but what is it?

In John 5:39 Jesus is addressing the Jews who are seeking to destroy Him. He makes this important statement that may answer the question why so many Christians are cold and passion-less for Christ. He says, *"You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and they are they that testify of Me."*

The Jews thought their diligent adherence to the Law of Moses would earn them eternal life. But there is something more here. Jesus said the Scriptures were more than a list of religious prohibitions and promises. The Scriptures reveal a Person – Jesus Christ.

If your relationship with God is nothing more than understanding His prohibition and promises, you are missing the point. The Scriptures point us past the words on a page to reveal the person of Jesus Christ. Your relationship with God must become more than an academic study of Jesus Christ. It must become a passion pursuit of a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is through God's Word that we learn about God's infinite love for us in Christ and it is through His Word that we learn how to love Him more.

Tip # 50: How to Read Difficult Bible Names

What do you do as a Bible Study leader when you come to a Bible passage that is filled with difficult Hebrew and Greek names? You ask for volunteers, but no one offers to read because they don't want to stumble over names. So, as a gallant leader, you struggle through the Hebrew and Greek names, knowing that you could have done a better job.

There is a better way. BibleGateway.com has a great tool for Bible Study leaders. In addition to offering an on-line concordance and other Bible research tools, it offers several audio Bible readers.

To hear how to read difficult Bible names, go to *BibleGateway.com*, choose the *Passage Lookup* feature, enter the Bible reference, access the *Additional Resources* tab on the left, scroll down to *Audio Bible*, and click on the Audio Bible link. The reader will begin automatically. Listen to the audio reader until you can pronounce the words correctly.

You won't sound like James Earl Jones when you read the Bible, but you will learn how to pronounce those difficult Hebrew and Greek names.

Tip #51: Is New Age New?

In 1990, CNN released a poll that estimated 35% of all Americans believed in reincarnation – a major tenet of the New Age movement. The term New Age refers to the Aquarian Age which is the age to come. According to astrologers, the Age of Aquarius will replace the present Pieces Age. The Aquarian Age will be a utopia on earth and New Age followers promote peace and love to usher in this New Age.

If you are leading a Bible study, you've have likely experienced some evidence of New Age thinking in your small group whether you realize it or not. New Age thinking has been growing in public education (values clarification, celebration of Earth Day), media (Oprah Winfrey), business (Tony Robbins), and medicine (Bernie Siegel, Deepak Chopra) and politics (Robert Muller of the United Nations).

Knowing the core beliefs of the New Age religion (basic beliefs come from Hinduism and Buddhism) will help you become a more effective and make you more sensitive to the theological confusion in our culture. Below are their key beliefs:

1. Man. Humanity suffers from ignorance of their true nature which is divine. Christianity believes that man's problem is sin which separates him from a holy God.
2. God. It is a divine Oneness, an essential Reality, a supreme Mind. Christianity teaches that God is a Personal Being who is perfect in every way.
3. Relationship to God. According to New Ager beliefs we are like individual streams that flow from an infinite lake. There is nothing that can sever the connection between us and the divine Oneness. Christianity teaches that man is sinful and separated from God.
4. Mind. New Age thinking teaches that the mind has power to create reality. Dreams and visualization have the power to alter reality. Christianity teaches that man's mind is blinded by his own sinfulness (2 Cor. 4:4) and in need of regeneration.

5. Life Purpose. Many New Agers believe that the ultimate goal is the perfection of our ability to love. Christianity teaches man's ultimate objective is to glorify God.
6. Connection with the divine. New Agers have a difficult time with direct communication with the divine Oneness because they see it as immaterial. Therefore, they communicate through channeling and spirit guides. Christianity teaches that believers have direct access to God through Jesus Christ who died for their sins and serve as their perfect mediator (1 Tim. 2:5).

As you become more alert to New Age thinking, you will be able to guide those you minister to back to the truth of God's Word and help them become rooted and grounded in the truth.

Tip #52: The Four Major Food Groups

From 1956 to 1992 the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommended its Basic Four Food Groups: 1) meats (including poultry, fish and other protein sources), 2) dairy products, 3) grains, and 4) fruits and vegetables. Millions of Americans remember the USDA's Four Major Food Groups charts in school and other places. It wasn't until 1992 that the USDA adopted the Harvard School of Public Health Food Guide Pyramid to better reflect the nutritional needs of a changing society.

The Bible identifies four spiritual food groups for spiritual healthy. After the Apostle Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost and 3,000 were saved, these new believers devoted themselves to 1) the apostle's doctrine, 2) fellowship, 3) the breaking of bread, and 4) prayers (Acts 2:42). Acts 2:42 is more than a simple historical statement – it's also God's formula for spiritual growth. The apostles' doctrine refers to Biblical teaching, fellowship is the volunteer gathering of believers for encouragement and edification, the breaking of bread (Greek- literally, the breaking of the bread) is likely a reference to participation in the Lord's Supper (worship), and prayers is the believer's expression of different kinds of direct communication with God.

The Bible says the early church turned the world upside down with the Gospel (Acts 17:6). How? ***They devoted themselves to the four major spiritual food groups.*** Let's do the same.

Tip #53: Getting Buy-in From the Get-Go

Howard Hendricks is a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary who has had a great spiritual influence in countless lives, including Chuck Swindoll's. Several years ago, Dr. Hendricks was asked by a group of prominent business men in Dallas if he would be willing to lead them in a weekly Bible study. These men – all business leaders – wanted Howie (as he likes to be called) to invest in their lives like he was investing in the lives of seminary students and pastors.

Howie's initial response was his busy seminary teaching schedule and extensive outside speaking schedule precluded him from meeting with them, but he said he would pray about their request. When he got back to the men, he said he would be willing to clear his schedule to meet with them one hour a week on one condition. Each man would also have to clear his work schedule and make meeting every week for the Bible Study a top priority. If they were out of town on business the day before the Bible Study, they would need to take a late-night flight back, so they could meet the next morning. They were also expected to not schedule other meetings during the Bible study. If they were willing to make this kind of commitment, Howie would meet with them. The men made the commitment and the Bible Study was a success.

When you are thinking of beginning a new Bible Study, press those who are thinking of joining the group to make the weekly Bible Study a high priority. There may be times when emergency meetings come up or a work or personal responsibility must take priority, but it is important for a leader to get *buy-in from the get-go*.