

HOW TO LEAD A DISCIPLESHIP BIBLE STUDY

A Lamplighters Discipleship Bible Study is more than a small group Bible study. It is the next step in Bible study. A Discipleship Bible Study is designed to reach out to the unsaved and provide believers with an opportunity to be trained as disciple-makers so they can be competent and confident to fulfill the Great Commission.

THE FOUR KEY COMPONENTS:

- 1) Dual objective – To engage people with God and His Word and equip believers to be disciple-makers.
- 2) Specific content – The Bible studies have insightful questions and answers. The answers are included in the back of the Bible study books.
- 3) Consistent Process – The first week of a Discipleship Bible Study is an Open House. This is followed by the weekly studies as you work through the Bible study book. After you and the group have completed all the lessons in the Bible study book, you meet to go through the Final Exam, which is a clear presentation of the gospel.
- 4) Leadership Development – Participants in a Discipleship Bible Study have the opportunity to be trained as a disciple-maker. There is a clear leadership development process that they can choose to pursue. It is entirely voluntary, and they can be trained to lead a Discipleship Bible Study and learn how to start, lead, and oversee multiple groups if they feel led. Again, this is entirely voluntary, and no one is pressured to do so.

THE TEN LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES

1. THE EARLY BIRD PRINCIPLE. This principle reminds the leader or leaders of a Discipleship Bible Study to be at the location of the meeting 10-15 minutes before the Bible study starts. Many of the Bible studies are located in a public setting such as a conference room, a private room in a restaurant or coffee shop, or a church.

There are three reasons to arrive early:

- a. The leader or an assistant needs to prepare the room and arrange the table and chairs to provide the best possible environment for the meeting.
- b. The leader or leaders can welcome everyone personally. It is always nice when the leader of a meeting greets each participant individually. Just by greeting the participants, the leader can gain valuable insights into the emotional temperature of those in the group which will help him or her minister to them more effectively.
- c. The leader has time to prepare him or herself by praying and asking for guidance, wisdom, and God's blessing on the study.

One more thing about the Early Bird Leadership Principle. A Discipleship Bible Study starts on time – not five minutes late, not eight minutes late! It starts when it is supposed to start. Let's assume that you have six people in your study and only three people plus you are there

at the start. Go ahead and start studying with whoever is present at the time the Bible study is scheduled to start. The latecomers will soon learn that you will not be waiting for them. You need the entire hour to gain all you can from the lesson so start the lesson on time and the participants, including the latecomers, will soon learn to appreciate your leadership.

2. THE “ZIP-IT” PRINCIPLE. A Discipleship Bible Study is evangelistic and outreach-focused. Visitors are always welcome and group members are encouraged to invite new people to the group at any time. As a result, various individuals eventually become part of the group. This might include those who possess very little knowledge of God and God’s Word, as well as those who have walked with the Lord for a long time and have a great deal of Bible knowledge. In addition, your group might include people from different denominations. The group members must know that they can disagree with one another, but the focus must be on what the Bible teaches. No one should become overly aggressive or belligerent. We are not asking anyone to not stand up for the truth, but we are asking everyone to **“speak the truth in love”** (Ephesians 4:15).

3. THE VOLUNTEER PRINCIPLE. Before a newcomer decides to visit a group or class for the first time, it is vitally important that he or she knows that they will NOT be called upon to do any one of the following if they decide to visit the group: 1) be asked to read the Bible out loud, 2) be called on to answer a question or, 3) be asked to pray out loud. A Discipleship Bible Study always follows the Volunteer Principle for all Bible studies – not just for those visiting the group, but for everyone.

4. THE “59:59” PRINCIPLE. A Discipleship Bible Study meets for one hour. This is called the “59:59” Principle and it is a memorable way to remember that the Bible study meets for one hour. This principle seems counter-intuitive at first, but there are good reasons for it. If you do not marshal the time and put a limit on the length of the study, the Bible study discussion will tend to wander and one or two people will likely dominate the discussion much to the frustration of other members in the group. Moreover, if you have a morning study and participants need to get on with their day, you will have a difficult time attracting those who work off a set schedule. In addition, you will find that your discussion will not be as rich. There are several other reasons why you should limit your study to 1 hour, but you get the point. The “59:59” Principle. Use it and stick to it. The group members will appreciate it. Finally, you can schedule fellowship time before or after the study for those who have extra time.

5. THE FOCUS PRINCIPLE. The Focus Principle reminds everyone that a Discipleship Bible Study is a Bible study – not a Christian book club. The group participants answer the questions in the study guides from the Bible, the group reads the Bible passage at the beginning of the group meeting, and the group members discuss the questions in the study guides from the perspective of what the Bible is saying in the verse or passage. The focus in a Discipleship Bible Study is on the Bible and what it says, not on the participants’ opinions.

6. THE DRAWING PRINCIPLE. The Drawing Principle reminds the leader to draw all participants into the discussion of the Bible over a period of time. You may be wondering how to accomplish the Drawing Principle without violating the Volunteer Principle which means the leaders cannot call on participants to read the Bible, pray, or answer the questions.
 - a. At the beginning of the lessons, the leader can invite everyone to participate in the group discussion as the Lord leads them so the group members can learn from each other. This serves as a subtle invitation for each member to participate in the discussion.
 - b. At a point in a lesson where the next question or two offers a suitable entry point for a person who does not regularly talk, the leader might say something like this, "We are having a good study this morning. If you have not had a chance to weigh in on any of the questions so far, the next couple of questions would be a good place to do so." You are not calling on them directly, but they will likely get the not-so-subtle hint and answer.
 - c. If that doesn't work, the leaders should talk with the individual apart from the group study time and encourage him or her to join in on the discussion. The leader should tell the individual that he or she thinks the rest of the group would benefit from hearing some of their answers. Often this is all the leader has to do to accomplish the Drawing Principle. We want everyone to learn how to participate in the studies because it will help them grow spiritually.

7. THE "GOSPEL GOLD" PRINCIPLE. The Gospel Gold Principle means the leader goes for the gold by helping the group get all the answers to the questions in the lessons, not just the surface or easy ones. To do this effectively, the leader needs to choose a Bible study curriculum that includes the answers. If the curriculum includes the answers the leaders should review the Leader's Guide answers before the group meets, but the group participants should not look at the Leader's Guide until the group has met. During the Bible study, the leader listens to the answers being given by the group members and makes sure they get all the answers to the questions. If the group does not answer the question completely, the leader continues to encourage the group to continue to dig for "Gospel Gold."

8. THE BALANCE PRINCIPLE. The Balance Principle reminds the leader to balance the group discussion so he or she completes the Bible study within one hour (the "59:59" Leadership Principle). To do this the leader needs to estimate the amount of time that he or she will plan to spend on each question and watch the clock during the group discussion. The Bible study will not go exactly as the leader planned, but he or she needs to lead the discussion so that all the questions are discussed, and the Bible study is completed in one hour. The leader should never say, *"We had a good discussion, and we got a bit off track, but we will pick up next week where we left off."*

9. THE NO-TRESPASSING PRINCIPLE. A Discipleship Bible Study is not just open to newcomers, it is welcoming to newcomers. John 12:32 tells us that God draws people to Himself and He draws people into Discipleship Bible Studies from all walks of life, from various

denominations, and some with very little knowledge of God. To help newcomers feel welcome and not threatened, the Bible study needs to stick to the No-Trespassing Principle. The leader and the group participants refrain from talking about three things in the study – 1) political parties, 2) church denominations, and 3) Bible translations. Some people have very strong feelings about these three topics but adhering to the No-Trespassing Principle keeps the group away from unnecessary conflict. This does not mean that group members must refrain from sharing their feelings on these topics at other times in more private conversations. It just means that during the Bible study, the participants always respect the No-Trespassing Principle.

10. THE TRANSFORMATION PRINCIPLE. One of the potential weaknesses of group Bible study is participants are tempted to seek spiritual information rather than spiritual transformation. Jesus said to the religious leaders of His day, **“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me”** (John 5:39). Studying God’s Word is wonderful, but it should not stop with merely acquiring more Bible knowledge. It should lead to a transformed life – a life that conforms to the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. Both the leader and the group members should strive for transformation in their lives as they study God’s Word, both individually when they do their lessons, and together, when they meet to review the lesson.

These are the Ten Leadership Principles to help you lead life-changing Discipleship Bible Studies. I hope this training has been helpful to you. If you would like to learn more about Discipleship Bible Study, including how to prepare a Discipleship Bible Study, how to solve all small group problems, how to train disciples-makers, and how to start a Discipleship Bible Study ministry, you can contact Lamplighters or go to the website at LamplightersUSA.org/training to learn more.