

Bible Study Resources for Bible Study Leaders

By Gary Eugene Howell

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Dear Bible study leader: Here are a few tips on how to conduct a good Bible study that will foster spiritual growth in those attending.

First: Prepare for your Bible study by spending quality time in prayer in the days or week ahead of the study. Seek not to rely upon your own strengths and abilities, but instead rely upon the Lord.

Second: Begin your group bible study by taking prayer requests. If you have less than 25 people in your group, be bold by asking every individual, by name, what they would like prayer for. Then ask the group members to pray for one another. (You can ask, “who would like to pray for John?” or you can ask that everyone pray for the person on their left), however you choose to organize it is fine. Make sure you take notes on what people are asking prayer for. Then, before you begin the group prayer, ask if anyone needs a reminder of who and what they are praying for. If your group spends the whole hour praying and you never get to discuss the bible study, that’s perfectly fine.

Third: Don’t turn your Bible study into a sermon. Your attendees can hear a sermon on Sunday. Instead, aim to be the one who speaks the least during the session. When you ask the group a question, be comfortable with several seconds of silence while people gather their thoughts. If no one responds after a long pause, try rephrasing the question and ask it again in a different way. Then give everyone time to reflect and respond.

Fourth: Many Bible study sessions end up being shallow. This often happens when the leader asks simple questions that require only one- or two-word answers. Your goal, however, is to guide your attendees deeper into God’s Word. Lead the group in examining the context and meaning of the passage being studied. Then move on to application; but remember, the Bible is not a self-help book for behavior modification. It is the story of Jesus; what He has done for us, what He is doing in us, and how He saves us.

Fifth: Hopefully, two or three attendees will help carry the discussion; those who are eager to talk about the Word of God. However, be prepared in advance for the possibility that one person may try to dominate the conversation. If someone performs a five-to-six-minute monologue without allowing others to contribute, you’ll need to find a kind and respectful way to gently redirect the discussion and keep the conversations balanced.

Sixth: It’s perfectly okay if you don’t get to all the questions presented in this bible study. If you ask the first question and your group spends the remainder of the hour discussing it, your job is done. You had a successful bible study. Don’t be concerned that you didn’t get to the rest of the questions. The goal is for people to have had their faith encouraged.

Matthew 8

Bible Study

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Verses 1-3

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 8:1-3.

Critical Thinking:

Today via the internet, we may often see videos in

which people claim that Jesus never said He was God. We know, however, that on multiple occasions he did make that claim. But in these verses, we're now examining, ask yourself: What was one of the purposes of Jesus's healings and of raising people from dead?

Ask for a volunteer to flip to and read aloud Matthew 11:2-6

Meanwhile John heard in prison about the works of Christ, and he sent his disciples to ask Him, "Are You the One who was to come, or should we look for someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the one who does not fall away on account of Me."

One of the purposes of Jesus performing miracles was to show the Israelites, and by extension, us today as we read these accounts in God's word, that Jesus is the Messiah, and that He is far more than merely a good man or a good teacher.

Note to Bible study leader: This is an opportunity to present the gospel message.

Discussion:

If Jesus can heal lepers with only a touch of his hand, and can raise the dead by merely speaking to them, do you believe that Jesus can save you and give you eternal life?

Do you believe that Jesus is Lord? If so, what caused you to believe? If you haven't yet believed, what is preventing you?

Follow up note to Bible study leader: You might be leading a group of "mature" Christians and feel that the questions above don't need to be asked because everyone in your group is saved. However, it's important to remember that many will come to Jesus in the last days only to hear that He never knew them. We cannot see into a person's heart; we can only observe what's on the outside. On Judgment Day, we may be surprised to discover who isn't going to heaven. There are some Christians who have a lot of biblical knowledge and can give correct answers when asked certain questions, but still have yet to put their faith in Christ. Therefore, at the very

least, asking these questions can serve as a good review and stimulate meaningful discussion. At best, you might plant a seed of faith you didn't know needed planting.

Verse 4

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 8:4.

Properly dividing the Word of God:

To properly understand Matthew 8:4, ask for a volunteer to flip to and read aloud Mark 1:40-45

Then a leper came to Jesus, begging on his knees: "If You are willing, You can make me clean." Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. "I am willing," He said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him, and the man was cleansed. Jesus promptly sent him away with a stern warning: "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and present the offering Moses prescribed for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." But the man went out and openly began to proclaim and spread the news. Consequently, Jesus could no longer enter a town in plain view, but He stayed out in solitary places. Yet people came to Him from every quarter.

Consider:

It's very likely that this man told other lepers that Jesus had healed his leprosy. As a result, dozens, perhaps hundreds of lepers, along with people suffering from all kinds of diseases were perhaps desperately pursuing Jesus, hoping to be healed. This may be the reason he could no longer enter a town. Lepers were social outcasts because their disease was contagious and no one wanted lepers coming into their towns.

Discussion:

Some people seek Jesus only because they want something from him. They want what Jesus can give them without actually wanting a relationship with Him. It's good to present all of our cares and concerns to the Lord, but what is the difference between the prosperity gospel (receiving health and wealth) and wanting to genuinely follow Jesus?

Hint: If you love Me, you will keep My commandments (John 14:15). The healed leper was unwilling to do what Jesus commanded.

Do you pursue Jesus for spiritual transformation? Are you willing to follow Jesus, even if bad things happen to you, such as persecution?

Verses 5-13

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 8:5-9

Discussion:

The centurion believed in Jesus's power and authority and he trusted Jesus without needing to see visible proof.

Thomas replied, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:28-29)

"Oh, Lord GOD! You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too difficult for You! (Jeremiah 32:17)

How does this understanding of Jesus's power impact your faith in daily life?

Verses 10-13

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 8:10-13

Commentary

Those who come from the east and west are the Gentiles (non-Jewish believers). Through faith, we will share the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

The sons of the kingdom are the Israelites. Rather than worshipping God by faith, they assumed they belonged to the kingdom of heaven because they were descendants of Abraham. From the time they left Egypt to the time of Jesus, they repeatedly failed to trust God and ultimately rejected Christ as their Messiah.

Discussion:

What are some differences between religious rules and faith?

Hint: All other religions try to earn salvation, which is ultimately based on pride.

Verses 14-15

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 8:14-15

Observation: Through her healing, Jesus gave Peter's mother-in-law the ability to serve him.

Discussion:

Jesus also gives us the ability to serve him. There should never be a time in which we say to ourselves "I've got this", when it comes to serving in the church, serving our family at home, raising children to be Christians, seeking out ways to earn more money, trying to start and grow a business, etc....In everything we do, we should be looking to Jesus to give us the ability to serve him.

This is especially difficult when you have done something hundreds of times before, or have been doing it for years and years. Abundant experience almost always leads to self-reliance. We don't care if you've been doing "X" for 50 years. It is God who give you the ability to do that. The moment we start relying upon our own talents and experience, we begin entering into pride.

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverbs 16:18)

Verses 16-17

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 8:16-17

Observation: Jesus drove out spirits with a word.

Now ask for a volunteer to flip to and read aloud John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made, and without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Now ask for a volunteer to flip to and read aloud Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it pierces even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Discussion: What value should we place on reading God's Word? All other books in the world are merely words on paper telling stories or conveying information. God's Word, however, is living and active, and its effect on the reader is more than the accumulation of knowledge.

How consistent is your personal habit of reading the Bible?

What distractions compete for your time in reading scripture?

What habits would help you to spend more time in God's Word?

Verses 18-20

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 8:18-20

Context: Jesus is informing this specific scribe that He doesn't have a home. If the scribe is going to follow him, Jesus is letting him know that he'll be wandering from place to place with Jesus around Israel.

But this event was included in God's word for a reason, and therefore it must have a deeper meaning than merely informing this unnamed scribe that Jesus lacks a mailing address.

Discussion:

Are there circumstances in which following Jesus requires sacrifice?

Consider discipleship: What if it includes some discomfort, instability or loss of security? How will you feel then about following Jesus?

What if there are situations in which we are called to places that are not comfortable? Are you willing to follow Christ wherever He leads? If so, why?

Addendum: These verses should not be interpreted as Jesus being against home ownership or that all Christians are expected to become homeless.

Verses 21-22

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 8:21-22

Now ask for a volunteer to flip to and read aloud Exodus 20:12

Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Context: Clearly, we can recognize and agree that in Matthew 8:21-22, Jesus was not advocating for dishonoring the young man's father. Thus, that would not be a correct interpretation. Instead, we should interpret this verse in light of what's written in Psalm 95

Ask for a volunteer to flip to and read aloud Psalm 95:7-9

For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture, the sheep under His care. **Today, if you hear His voice**, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, in the day at Massah in the wilderness, where your fathers tested and tried Me, though they had seen My work.

Discussion:

It may be tempting for a young person in their teens or twenties to think that salvation is something they won't need until they're old.

Why is it important to come to Jesus today? And what might happen to those who try to put it off for a later time and in so doing harden their hearts against Jesus?

Verses 23-27

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 8:23-27

Critical Thinking: Throughout history, hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, of people have died in disasters at sea when their ships sank. The Titanic is a famous example. If a ship fills with water, it's going to sink regardless of whether or not the crew and passengers have faith. Remember that Paul was in a shipwreck in Acts 27.

The reason Jesus says, "You of little faith," to the disciples regarding their fear of the boat sinking and their drowning at sea is that, for several months, He had been teaching them about who He was. If they had trusted and believed His teachings, they would have understood that the Messiah was never destined to die accidentally by drowning in the Sea of Galilee before accomplishing His Father's will.

Discussion:

Do you believe that the Word of God is true? And do you trust God's Word enough to walk in his truths? If so, why?

Always be prepared to give a defense to everyone who asks you the reason for the hope that is in you. (1 Peter 3:15b)

Verses 28-34

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Matthew 8:28-34

Observation: These demons were so violent that no one could pass by them, yet when Jesus arrives, they are the ones begging Him not to hurt them.

Discussion:

What does this tell us about the power Jesus possesses? Why don't we ever see dramatic displays of that power? Granted, Jesus heals the sick, raises the dead, and calms a storm. But if this were a Hollywood-style superhero movie, He might shoot glowing energy from His hands and knock these violent demons to the ground. But that's not what Jesus does.

Why is Jesus's display of power always so different from the way people expect power to be displayed?

The demons had to ask permission. This shows us that Jesus is infinitely greater than demonic power. What does this teach us about spiritual warfare? Who should we rely upon? How do we rely upon Jesus during spiritual warfare, and what does that reliance look like in action?