



# CGOM

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## How To Run A Bible Study

**Have you ever thought about having bible Studies in your own local church? It is not difficult for virtually anyone who has been with the church of God for a reasonable time to lead a Bible Study. It may take a fair amount of preparation, but the benefits for all those who participate are well worth it.**

by Michael Young

### Planning

First of all, you need to decide what you are going to study. This could either be a particular book of the Bible or a particular Biblical subject. It is probably best to start initially with a given book. The letter of James has proved to be an excellent book with which to begin, as it is so full of practical Christian living principles. This could then be followed up with the letters of Peter, and then the remaining "General Epistles" of John and Jude. You will need to decide well in advance of your first study what should be covered.

The next step is to select someone to lead the study. Volunteers may not always be forthcoming, so this step may need plenty of encouragement! Someone with previous speaking ability may be the best choice for the first session, but everyone should be encouraged to take part eventually. It should be stressed that leading a study is not so much of teaching role as that of leading a discussion in which everyone can and should contribute. It should be the intention of the leader to encourage everyone to get involved, and the whole group should be prepared to help each other to bring out the meaning and intent of the passages which are being studied. There is even a correcting role involved here if it becomes apparent that someone might be misapplying scripture, so the intention is then to arrive at the full intended meaning of God's Word.

### Preparation

Once the date for the study has been determined and the leader selected, he should be provided with all the necessary study aids to help him prepare. Most participants will have various study aids such as commentaries, dictionaries, and handbooks, and it may be possible for these to be lent to the leader on the understanding that they are returned after the study itself. The preparation is largely a matter for the leader himself, but he should bear in mind that the overall purpose of the study is to understand what the Bible is saying, and that his own ideas are not to be forced upon everyone.

Some useful guidelines in preparation are:

- Determine useful background information to the book or topic under study, e.g. When was it written? To whom was it written? Who wrote it? Why was it written? When was it written? Was it written just for church or group, or was it meant to be understood more generally? What are the main themes of the book? This background will provide a good framework for the start of the study
- Use study aids as aids and not as crutches. Remember that it is the Bible itself being studied and not some person's opinions of the Bible (II Peter 1:20-21). It is better to use aids to try to clarify uncertain meanings of particular words or phrases within the text, (although even here some caution should be used), rather than to use them to interpret the Scriptures themselves
- When preparing for the discussion on the text itself, note the various topics which are being addressed by the author, and divide the text into appropriate sections accordingly. The New King James version is particularly useful here, as various headings are given within the text
- Try not to get bogged down in too much detail. It is better to consider several verses together, rather than trying to get too involved in particular word meanings in the original Greek or Hebrew. The overall intent of the passage is often much clearer if whole sections are considered at once rather than individual verses
- Concentrate on the key verses within each passage. These can often be used to summarize the author's intended meaning for the whole of the passage in question
- Find some everyday examples of how the passage should be applied to our lives today, and alternative ways of using outmoded phraseology. Sometimes conditions and customs change over periods of time

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e.g. in I Peter the phrase “gird up your loins” could probably better be translated as “roll up your sleeves” in today’s parlance

- Avoid, but also try to foresee, where there might be controversy in the study itself. If a passage or verse is not clear to you, it may or may not be clear to others. Be prepared to “put it on the shelf” until the Study itself, and then to ask for further input from the rest of the group. This is far better than trying to propose rather dubious meanings to others yourself

### Leading the Study

We finally come to the study itself. Start by opening the meeting in prayer. It is important to ask for God’s help and guidance in helping everyone to fully understand what He is trying to say to each of us through His Work, otherwise the whole exercise is completely pointless. The leader should then introduce the study with the relevant background information to the book being studied, pointing out relevant references within the book to support his points, as well as information from historical and other sources. This may result in some questions which people may have, and possibly some useful background information of their own.

Once it is time to discuss the book itself, it may be appropriate for one of the group to read aloud each of the sections which the leader has determined in advance to contain related material.

A few general comments by the leader as to the meaning of the intended passage should then be given, but these should quickly lead into questions and discussion from everyone. It is from this point onwards that the study becomes essentially a session where everyone can have an input, with all participants being encouraged to contribute. The leader should ensure that the discussion is directed, and does not get out of hand or become a free-for-all.

The following are useful guidelines for the leader which can help to ensure this.

- Encourage the application of the passage to the everyday life of the Christian today, rather than concentrating too deeply on doctrinal issues. Various group members may have their own experiences at work or at home which they can use to illustrate how the passage has been applied (or misapplied) by either themselves or others
- When doctrinal issues do arise, try to relate them to known church teachings and beliefs. Remember that others have spent years coming to conclusions on doctrinal matters, so it is unlikely that anyone else will

come to different conclusions in a few minutes

- When the particular meaning of a word or phrase is unclear, ask for input from everyone before trying to come to a conclusion. Such issues may reflect on church doctrines, and these may call to mind various booklets and articles which have recently been read by different people. For example, much discussion could occur from a study of I Peter 1:4 and 23, as to whether a word should have been translated “born” or “begotten”. Although a consensus may not be reached, it should still be possible for everyone to agree that the intended meaning of the passage is that the Christian should lead a new life in Christ, and this is better than continuing with fruitless arguments
- If there is genuine disagreement about the meaning of a passage, encourage everyone to study further at home, and possibly to arrange for a minister to give a sermon or sermonette on a related subject. Often, disagreements can then be clarified by reference to other published church materials
- Don’t get bogged down on a particular verse or section. It is important to know when to move on, and when to continue to extract deeper meaning from a passage. Once a general conclusion has been adopted, or arguments start to get heated, it is normally time to move on
- Set a time for the study to end. Although a study format ensures that no-one is allowed to go to sleep because they are continually alert as to a relevant point that they could make to the discussion, if the study drags on too long, then people can easily lose concentration and get too tired to contribute any further useful ideas. This applies especially to the leader!

Although the exact way in which Bible Studies are conducted will depend upon factors such as the size of the group, and the interests of those involved, it is often worthwhile to consider a change from the usual taped (or even live) type of preaching service, and our own experiences in the church in London have shown that this is a much welcomed new method of conducting our Sabbath meeting.

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