

# LEADING BIBLE STUDIES

# 101



*THE INS AND OUTS OF  
LEADING A BIBLE STUDY*



**RED**  **STICK**  
**CATHOLICS**

YOUTH MINISTRY  
THE DIOCESE OF BATON ROUGE

# WELL CATECHIZED BUT POORLY EVANGELIZED



What is “intentional discipleship”? Is an intentional disciple even possible now a days, especially with virtual youth ministry becoming the new norm? How do you lead a bible study?

These questions (and more just like it) have been coming up more and more in our weekly Youth Minister Check-Ins. Because our focus has been on this lately, The Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry wanted to give you a resource that answers your questions and provides you with tools to foster discipleship within your parish.

As it has been established in our meetings, most teens who have gone through Catholic schools or PSR programs and understand the basics of being Catholic. These catechetical resources are powerful, yet there is a downfall from all of these years of learning their Catholic faith in a classroom setting – they associate the Catholic faith *with* a classroom. Think about it: For teens who see formation as “going through the system,” there is always a grade or reception of a sacrament for completing these forms of catechesis. When were these teens ever treated like disciples instead of students?

Bible studies are an answer to de-stigmatizing the Catholic faith. Instead of being like a class, bible studies are adventures with the goal of discovering something more. Once a week, teens have a place to learn more about God and grow in relationship with Him. They can ask questions without feeling judged. They have a place to call their own and build a community. It is here that they have the ability to realize they aren’t Catholic for a grade but to form an intimate relationship with God, make lifelong friends and recognize that each one of them is called to be a saint.

## NOTE:

*For almost six years, I have been participating in and leading bible studies. I have been in high school studies, college studies, co-ed studies and all-girl studies - you can say I have experience in this realm of ministry. If I have learned anything in my time participating and leading studies, it that bible studies are not only powerful tools to teach about God, but also a platform to grow an intentional community of disciples who are on mission for Christ and continually seeking ways to grow deeper.*

*Additionally, many of the notes in this document come from Hilary Drafz talk at SLS2019 entitled: The Power of Small Groups: How to Lead a Transformative Bible Study. I would highly recommend watching it as a supplemental resource.*

# GOING BEFORE THEM:

## GETTING IN THE MINDSET TO LEAD A BIBLE STUDY

*"WHEN HE HAS DRIVEN OUT ALL HIS OWN, HE WALKS AHEAD OF THEM, AND THE SHEEP FOLLOW HIM, BECAUSE THEY RECOGNIZE HIS VOICE."*

**JOHN 10:4**



John 10:4 says, "When he has driven out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice." As a leader of a bible study, you are called to LEAD the study, but before you can lead, you must prepare.

Sure, everyone wants his or her bible study to be successful (people participate, there's enough food, someone prayed), but the goal of a bible study isn't to be successful... it's to be **fruitful**, to make so much of an impact it changes minds and hearts to deeper conversion and spills out into all parts of life. Most veteran bible study leaders would agree preparation, or "prep," is key for a bible study to bear abundant fruit.

Hilary (from the recommended video in the introduction) makes the analogy of bible study leaders being compared to trail guides on a nature hike. You are the pro, and you are the one who is in charge of the group. If you spent your hike worrying about getting to the top of the mountain, you wouldn't be able to spend quality time with your group or point out little things to them along the way that will make the hike more special. Similarly, it is your job to help those participating in your bible study grow deeper in their relationship with Christ and notice things along the way without having to worry about the little intricacies of the study. **Your job is not to talk, or chime in to give your opinion; it is to ask questions and steer conversation so the participants can make realizations on their own.**

Here's another analogy: If you've ever been to Antelope Canyon in Arizona, it is a beautiful canyon that has been kept intact for years by the Native Americans who watch over the land. You can only access the canyon from one place and there are certain things you can and can't do to ensure the canyon is not damaged by frequent tourists visiting it. But, each tour guide, all of Native American descent, know so much about the canyon – especially where tourists like to take pictures. At first glance, you are just looking at rocks that have been weathered by thousands of years of erosion, but the tour guide would say "tilt your phone this way and stand here" and you have a photo of the rocks forming a heart above you. They take something that you might just walk past or overlook and make it more beautiful and meaningful. This is your job as a bible study leader! You create an environment and questions that allow for the participants to see the Bible, and ultimately God, in a beautiful and more meaningful way.





# THE CLASSIC DISCIPLESHIP MODEL-WITH A TWIST

**Win-Build-Send** is the classic model of discipleship and, in this case, a bible study. The **“Win”** stage of discipleship is all about winning over people’s hearts to be open to receive and accept the call to build an intentional relationship with God. For a bible study, this would be someone committing to coming each week and making it a priority in their life. Then there is the **“Build”** stage. Leaders will start to build someone up to feel confident in their knowledge of the faith and encourage a deepening of the desire to grow in relationship with Christ (similar to mentor/mentee roles). Finally, there is the **“Send”** stage, which is where the person is sent to be a leader and spread the Gospel to others (i.e. spiritual multiplication).

But, after looking more and more into this model, I believe there is one thing that should be added to make it even more comprehensive – **INVEST**. It is important to invest in something or someone, even before something begins. This is done through prayer and preparation. Pray for the study and those attending that they will grow in a desire to become intentional disciples. Prepare for the study so you can spend less time worrying about questions and more time building relationships with participants.

## THE LOGISTICS OF PREP

Now that we have established the importance of prep, it is time to get our hands dirty and look at the logistics. The first thing you need to do is consider what kind of study you would want to do:

### OPTION 1: A PRE-MADE STUDY

Pre-made studies are easier to prep with because all of the research and deep diving has already been done by someone else. The major fallback for these studies is that people sometimes don’t feel like they need to prep as much since everything is already laid out for them.

If you choose this type of study: Prep with the materials that are a part of the pre-made study but allow yourself the space to change it up and add/ take away questions that may or may not be useful. Also make sure to give yourself enough time to prep.

### OPTION 2: A SUNDAY GOSPEL STUDY

Sunday Gospel studies require a bit more prep since there are no pre-made questions or research done for you. This can also be seen as a benefit because you can allow your prayer to guide how the study will be and make it personalized to the group.

If you choose this type of study: Make sure you schedule time to prep with the material and do your research.



## OPTION 3: MAKING YOUR OWN STUDY

This is by far the most labor intensive of the studies you could choose to do. It requires your time, in addition to knowing where you want the bible study to go (overarching goals and themes) and what Scriptures you plan to use. The greatest benefit is that it can be tailor made for your group, focusing on what you believe they need most.

If you choose this type of study: Make sure you have enough time to commit to building your own curriculum. It could take days or even weeks.



Once you have decided what type of study you would like to do, schedule time to prep into your calendar. I would recommend scheduling at least an hour to formally prep (researching, planning, writing questions) 2-3 days before the study and at least 30 minutes of Lectio Divina the day of the study. It is important to choose a good place to prep as well because it will create a setting that helps you dive into Scripture better. I personally like to prep with all of my resources close by in a quiet room (or even chapel).

## NOTE:

*Consider prepping with someone else. If you are a youth minister, find another youth minister who would be interested in leading a bible study in his or her parish and ask them to do it with you. You can prep by yourself and then chat with them about your plans. It could be hard to coordinate but consulting with someone else and seeing how they interpret Scripture can bear even more fruit.*



# GATHERING RESOURCES



Resources are extremely important for a bible study because without them there is no study! It is suggested to have these things on hand to prep and to have present when leading:

## A BIBLE

It is the Source and Living Word of God. Plain and simple.

## THE PRE-MADE STUDY'S LEADER GUIDE

*\*if applicable\**

If you are leading a pre-made study, you're going to need the leader guide to prep. There are plenty of notes, commentaries and questions in there that will help you in planning and prepping.

## FOOTNOTES AND COMMENTARY

The footnotes of Bibles are a treasure trove while leading a bible study. Not only do they contain notes about context and translations, some also connect passages to show their correlation.

Consider also having another bible translated differently – sometimes they can shed light on different words and phrases.

## THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Catechism of the Catholic Church answers a lot of questions one might have about all matters within the Church. Having this one hand is especially important if you are covering a topic that could be controversial or needs to be fleshed out more (i.e. The Eucharist, The Trinity, The Ascension, etc.)

## GOOGLE

The Internet really is a great tool if you can't find the answer you are looking for anywhere else. Just make sure you are looking at legitimate sites!



# #BIBLESTUDYGOALS



In order to give the full effect of how to lead a bible study, we are going to prep with one right now! If you have your Bible with you, please turn to Luke 5:1-11 (The Call of Peter).

Now we have come to the point where it is actually time to prep for the bible study. Get in your comfy spot, have your materials on hand, light a prayer candle and say a quick prayer for the Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind in your heart – *Come, Holy Spirit!*

Read Luke 5:1-11 and take some notes.

*\*Don't start thinking of questions yet. Just allow yourself to be brought into Scripture. Do this as many times as you need before moving on.*

First, before writing questions and coming up with conversation starters, you should be thinking about a **goal** for this study. This overarching goal will be something for you to guide your research, questions, etc. Ask yourself the question, *"What do you want the people in my study to get out of this hour together?"* and *"What is the nugget of gold your group will be digging to find?"*

After reading it a few times, you can see that there are a few key things that can be taken away from this Gospel passage that can become goals for your study – what you want your group to get out of the study above all else. Make sure you keep your teens in mind – *How does this Gospel passage relate to a teenager? What are they struggling with?*

Here are a few examples of goals that came to mind:

**Goal 1:** *I want them to realize Jesus desires a relationship with each one of them. He wants them, even if they feel shame from sin like Peter and don't feel like they're good enough. They are enough for Him.*

**Goal 2:** *I want them to know that when they let Jesus into their life, crazy and amazing things happen that never could have happened before. He makes miracles happen.*





# WHAT'S IN A QUESTION?



No question should just be there to be there. Everything about your bible study is *intentional*, and your questions are no different. Just like there is an overarching goal for each study, *there is a desired outcome of each question that will get the group closer to realizing the overarching goal*. There are **four** kinds of questions you can have in your bible study: Participatory, Stage-Setting/Contextual, Thought-Provoking and Application.

Here we will go through all four and include examples.

## PARTICIPATORY QUESTIONS

These questions are usually reserved for the beginning of the study. The sole purpose is to get people to participate. They shouldn't be difficult and are just to ensure people are participating in the study.

**Some examples include:**

- "What word or phrase stuck out to you?"
- "Can someone summarize what happened?"

## STAGE SETTING/CONTEXTUAL QUESTIONS

These questions are where a lot of your research will come into play. You don't know who is coming to your study, which means you can't assume people know all of the little details that set up the context for any given passage in the Bible. Some of the bible study members might read the Bible often while others might not even know who Peter is. By giving context to the passage through questions, this shows the group that the stories in the Bible aren't just bedtime stories with holy messages – these are the moments that built the Church that we are still a part of today. It is the hope that in doing this, they will be able to start pondering deeper concepts which will come in handy later in the study.

Stage-setting and contextual questions set the stage and add context to the passage that is being studied. It is important to know what happened before this passage in the Bible and to know what we are being told about the scene through context clues. The time of day, location and actions of people within the passage are important to understanding the deeper meaning. For example, a passage taking place in Galilee automatically has a different meaning compared to if it takes place in Jerusalem or Samaria.

**Some examples include:**

- "Why do you think a crowd was drawing near to Jesus?"

*This question allows the group to understand that the Bible is a compilation of stories and events, not exclusive short stories – there is context. John the Baptist was preaching about him, his baptism was miraculous, he is performing private miracles and gaining popularity – You can tell by previous chapter titles. Shows contrast between Jesus' followers and Peter, a man who wasn't a part of the crowd pressing in on Him.*

- **“Why do you think that it is so important for the Gospel writer to include that Peter, Andrew, James and John were fishermen?”**

*This question gives the group a chance to discuss the role of fishermen in ancient Jewish society – there was a stereotype that fishermen were dirty, gamblers and drunks, etc.*

- **“Why do you think Peter didn’t stop cleaning his nets to listen to Jesus?”**

*This question gives the group an opportunity to realize Peter put more focus on his work than on the Messiah. He was not yet pursuing a relationship Jesus.*

- **“What is the importance of Peter mentioning that he fished all night after Jesus tells him to try one more time?”**

*This question could lead into multiple conversations. Peter, who is a professional fisherman caught nothing, yet this man who is obviously not a fisherman wants to tell him what to do. Peter has been fishing all night and is tired and irritated.*

## THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUESTIONS

These questions are the ones that really make group members think and put themselves into the shoes of the people within the Scripture passage. They have already set the scene and stated the obvious, now it is time for them to dive a little deeper. The answers are less academic and textbook and more thought-provoking (hence the name).

**Some examples include:**

- **“Why do you think Jesus gets into Peter’s boat?”**

*The desired answer that you want them to come to is: He desires a close relationship with Peter. He knows that Peter is a fisherman, yet He still wants to be close to him and grow in relationship with him.*

- **“Re-read Luke 5:8. Why do you think Peter reacted this way?”**

*The desired answer that you want them to come to is: Peter doesn’t feel worthy of Jesus’ love and mercy. It is also important to realize Jesus loves Peter in his mess and because of his mess, not because he is this perfect man.*

- **“What does it mean to be a fisher of men? What is Jesus asking of Peter, Andrew, James and John?”**

*The desired answer that you want them to come to is: Jesus wants these men to devote their lives to “catching” and gathering people and making disciples, just like devoted their life to catching fish for a living.*

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

These are the BIG questions - the practical application questions. These are the questions that show the people in your study that the Bible can and does still apply to their personal lives. This is how they are practically going to live out the Gospel and come to a point of self-realization. These questions have the power to bear abundant fruit. This is also the point where the goal comes to fruition - return back to your goals for these questions!



**Goal 1: I want them to realize Jesus desires a relationship with each one of them. He wants them, even if they feel shame from sin like Peter and don't feel like they're good enough. They are enough for Him.**

- *"Put yourself in Peter's shoes. If Jesus came up to you, knowing who he was and what people are saying about him – and He calls you, a rotten fisherman, to be his follower, how do you think you would react?"*
- *"Jesus calls Peter into a deeper relationship with Him by asking him to be His follower. How is Jesus trying to call you into a deeper relationship with Him?"*

**Goal 2: I want them to know that when they let Jesus into their life, crazy and amazing things happen that never could have happened before. He makes miracles happen.**

- *How can you let Jesus into your boat this week so He will have the opportunity to perform miracles?"*

## LAGNIAPPE

Congratulations! You made it through prepping for the bible study! We know it's a lot, but I promise it will become second nature once you do it a few times.

Before you go and lead your awesome study, we have a few more tips and tricks we want to leave you with.

1. **Hospitality** is super important to a bible study and should be established from the beginning – even if the study is virtual. People won't want to come back if they don't feel as if they are welcome or getting anything out of it. Here are a few tips for establishing a hospitable environment:

- Start the bible study with enough time to socialize and get the wiggles out early.
- If the study is running from 6:30 – 8 p.m., start at 6:30 with time to eat (dinner or a snack) and hangout. Around 7:00, transition to a time where people can talk about their highs and lows from the week (also known as Rose and Thorns, Pows and Wows, Happies and Crappies, etc.) This should only be 15 minutes. Open your study in prayer at 7:15 and continue until 8, where you can also close in prayer.
- Be respectful of people's time and don't let it run over too long after you said it would end.

2. **Accompaniment** is important! Don't let the application questions from the study die once they answer them! Hold them accountable and accompany them. Challenge them and answer their questions after the study is over if they have any.

3. **Create Phone – Free Zones!** Get the distractions away from the group members. Allow them to see the good that can happen to them when they aren't attached to their phones. This allows them to be more open.





# WHEN THE PLANS DON'T GO AS PLANNED

If I have learned anything from working in the Church, it is that NOTHING EVER GOES TO PLAN. You can plan, have a backup plan and plan some more and something will still go wrong or get off schedule. You can have questions ready about anything and everything covered in the Bible ... but invoking the name of the Holy Spirit does some powerful things – including completely derailing where you expect the bible study to go.

I once did a study on the passage where Peter walks on water and the goal of the study was to help my girls know the importance of keeping their gazes fixed on God. Forty-five minutes into my hour-long study went buy, and we never even talked about Peter taking his gaze off of Jesus. All they seemed to want to talk about was the courage of Peter had to get out of the boat in the first place. I felt like a failure during the study because I had so many questions to ask them, and I didn't get to one of them. But then I realized how much fruit came from talking about the courage it took for Peter to even get out of the boat. We talked about faith and trust and little did I know, it was something all of them were struggling with! *There was abundant fruit, even when it wasn't what I planned.*

But what happens if the bible study does get completely derailed?

It can sometimes be difficult to stop an off-topic conversation, especially if all of the group members want to talk about it. The best thing to do would be to steer them back to the study and invite them to continue the conversation after the study is over.

Another thing that can derail bible studies is if someone shares too much and dives into personal problems and issues that they are currently facing that are not appropriate for others in the group to hear. Of course, as a bible study leader, you would like your group to be open and honest with how they are feeling with their relationship with Christ and with one another – but some personal topics are not appropriate for group sharing and discussion. Two major examples of this would be abuse and self-harm/ mental health issues – think back to things you learned about when getting certified for Child Protection. If someone begins sharing something that you believe could lead to his or her disclosing a personal matter (such as the ones listed above) with the group, tell the person that you would like to talk with them after the study is over and take proper Child Protection measures to ensure they receive the proper assistance needed.

# WHO'S WHO

The final thing to discuss before your study is how to determine the different personas group members might take and how to handle them. When you can determine a person's persona, you will be better equipped in knowing how to handle them during the study.

## THE QUIET ONES

### **Common Characteristics:**

- Shy
- Not talkative or chatty
- Tendency to morph into the background
- Passive
- Might not be confident in their knowledge of the Bible

### **Potential Issue(s) to Address:**

- Doesn't want to share because they are too shy

### **How to Address Issue:**

- Invite them to share their opinions (This gives them a chance to participate. In addition, one of the reasons they might not be sharing is because they don't want to interrupt.)
- "\_\_\_\_, do you have anything you'd like to say about this?"
- *It is important to never force someone to talk about something if they aren't comfortable or ready, but always show these types of group members that you are interested in what they have to say.*

## THE TALKATIVE ONES

### **Common Characteristics:**

- Talks a lot (obviously), Extraverted
- Tendency to overshare
- Doesn't like silence after question and wants to fill it
- Sometimes just talks to talk

### **Potential Issue(s) to Address:**

- Dominating the conversation/study
- Goes off topic

### **How to Address Issue:**

- Politely shut them down so other people have a chance to speak. It will be valuable for them to understand silence is good and allows time to internally process.
- "Thanks \_\_\_, does anyone else have anything to say about that?"
- *Hilary, from the video, discusses this and gives pointers.*

# THE FUTURE DOCTORS OF THE CHURCH

## **Common Characteristics:**

- Seems to know more about the Bible and the Church than you
- Comes from a really religious family
- Comes prepared – if possible

## **Potential Issue(s) to Address:**

- They know a lot of things about the Bible and the Church and they want to share, and in some cases - *teach*. They are cousins to The Talkative Ones.
- Believes there is a "right answer" to every question, even for personal questions
- Could come off as intimidating to others in the group

## **How to Address Issue:**

- Talk to them privately and tell them to let others have a turn to answer. If other members aren't given a chance to think through the question and formulate their own answers, they have the potential to not get as much from the study because all the answers are being given to them.
- "Hey \_\_\_\_, thanks for always sharing such great insight on the Bible passages. I was wondering, could you help me at the next study? Instead of answering a question, could you encourage others to answer and keep discussions going?"
- A lot of them are focused on the knowledge and theology part of the study but not so much on the side dedicated to deepening a relationship with God. Help them to readjust their focus.
- *These are most likely the group members of your study who will be most interested in becoming disciples and taking on leadership roles within the group. Take note of them!*

# THE ONES THAT LEAVE YOU SCRATCHING YOUR HEAD

## **Common Characteristics:**

- Seems bored and starts side conversations
- Struggles with phone-free zones
- Might be forced to be there by a parent

## **Potential Issue(s) to Address:**

- Lack of interest in the study and unwillingness to participate

## **How to Address Issue:**

- Again, if they are engaging in side conversations, nip this in the bud early. It can be a serious distraction to all of those in attendance.
- Invite them to answer questions so they can begin taking ownership in the study.
- Begin building an intentional relationship with them. Before the study or after the study, chat with them about how they are doing. At first, they might come off as reserved and uninterested, but they will see that you are being intentional with them and might open up more.



# BE NOT AFRAID!



As you can see, a bible study is more than just a small group with questions and answers. There are so many different components that all come together to create an environment that forms disciples who are seeking an intentional relationship with Christ.

Don't get me wrong, it is tough in the beginning. It takes a lot of time and practice to get the hang of things, and an even longer time to determine a method that is right for you. Just as Jesus said time and time again, "BE NOT AFRAID!" Be not afraid of rejection. Be not afraid of the time it takes to prep. Be not afraid if only a few people come to your study. You are doing the Lord's work, and as long as you entrust this study to Him, it cannot possibly go wrong.

*IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT LEADING A STUDY OR WOULD LIKE SOME ADVICE, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO REACH OUT TO THE OFFICE OF YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY.*

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