

SO YOU WANT TO START A BIBLE STUDY GROUP...

by Jan Turrentine

Has your Bible study or Sunday school class been canceled? If you're unable to meet in a group or even in person, you can still organize your own gathering. Forming your own Bible study group is a wonderful way to learn about and study the Bible, sure, but it's also a way to connect with your faith community. You don't need a church hall or classroom to start. You don't even need to meet in person. You can host a Bible study group anywhere: in your home, your assisted living facility, your apartment building, or online. Many in-person groups are now using Facebook Live or other streaming services to take their group study virtual.

If you are unsure what resource to use, Abingdon Press is offering a number of free studies online, which are wonderful resources for small group

study. A full Bible lesson appears on every blog post at www.matureyears.wordpress.com. *Adult Bible Studies* offers a free Current Events Supplement for each weekly Bible lesson, which includes discussion questions: www.adultbiblestudies.com/study/adult-bible-studies-spring.

Ok. So you have your group, and you have your resource. What now? What's the first thing you do? Panic? Feel regret? Try to back out of it?

What if you begin with this divine promise instead: "I will instruct you and teach you about the direction you should go. I'll advise you and keep my eye on you" (Psalm 32:8).

It's right there, straight from the heart of God. God is with you. You are not alone. You're in this together. Begin in this posture, and you will do just fine. Then consider these next steps:



- Ask a trusted friend to commit to pray for you each week. Knowing that someone is praying for you and your group equips you with the calm confidence you need.

- While your role or title may be “leader,” it does not suggest that you need to know more than those in your group. Think of yourself as a fellow learner who guides the group’s discussion. It’s okay to acknowledge that you don’t know everything. In fact, doing so will make you an even more approachable leader and guide.

- Set realistic goals for personal study and preparation. You know how busy you are and what other commitments you have, and you know what time you have available to devote to preparation. Avoid comparing yourself to other leaders or feeling guilty if you can’t spend as much time preparing as they do. Everyone’s circumstances are different.

- Get to know the people in your group. What are their life circumstances? What are their expectations? Is this a newly-formed group, or does it have a history? Find out all you can about those who will learn with you.

- Commit to creating a welcoming, safe space where individuals feel accepted and affirmed in who they are and comfortable asking any questions they might have.

- Avoid the temptation to “teach a lesson.” Always remember that we teach *people*. Embrace the opportunity you have to lead people to think biblically and theologically by asking open-ended questions. Challenge people to move beyond learning Bible facts. Guide them to engage fully with the Word of God so that they come to better know, love, and serve the God of the Word.

- Create space for silence. Neither you nor anyone in your group needs to fill every second with words, ideas, and answers. Many people need



time to think and process in order to come to new understandings. Often the quick response is the easy and expected one, but it’s not the only or best one. By allowing quiet time for people to think, you challenge them to go deeper than surface level.

- Consider more than just what you think those in your group should *know*. Think about what you want them to *feel* and *do* as a result of engaging with a particular Scripture text.

- Be yourself. Be genuine. Share personal stories, insights, and examples. Admit the questions you personally have and the things you do not understand. Ask the group to grapple together with the things you want to understand better. Chances are, if you have questions about something, many of them will, too.

- Don’t expect people to always agree about everything when it comes to the Bible. They won’t, and that’s okay. Encourage discussion and even debate, but expect civility, patience, and understanding.

Remember: God is with you. You are not alone. “God is our refuge and strength, a help always near” (Psalm 46).

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