A SHORT BIBLE STUDY

Leading a Small Group

Short Studies for the Christian Life



A simple guide for studying the Bible together

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Trinfinity Enterprises

Leading a Small Group

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

> *and let us consider one another for stirring up of love and of good works, not forsaking the assembling together of ourselves, as **is the** custom of some, but encouraging **one another**, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near.*
>
> Hebrews 10:24-25 (SLB)

Maybe your pastor asked you to lead a group. Maybe a few friends want to study the Bible together and looked at you. Maybe you have been thinking about starting one for a long time and haven't known where to begin. Whatever brought you here, thank you. Small groups are one of the best places for believers to grow.

I have led many Bible study groups over the years. People rarely open up when the leader acts like a lecturer with all the answers. Groups grow when the leader listens well, is honest about his own struggles and keeps everyone in the Bible. I wrote this guide to give you practical steps that work when real people sit down around God's Word.

I have written a lot of free Bible studies. Every one of them ends each chapter with study questions, because I believe God's Word is meant to be studied together as well as alone. This little book is the leader's guide I wished I had when I started. It is short on purpose. You don't need to be a Bible scholar or a natural speaker to lead a group. You need to love God, love His Word, love people, and be willing to learn.

How This Book Works

The first two chapters look at why small groups matter and what a leader is (and isn’t). The middle chapters cover the practical side: getting started, leading a good discussion, and caring for one another in prayer. The last chapter deals with hard moments, from a disagreement to a person in crisis. At the back you will find a checklist for each meeting and a guide to choosing a study.

One note before we begin. If you are part of a local church, lead your group under the care of your pastor and elders. Tell them what you are doing, ask for their counsel, and let them know if something comes up you can’t handle. A small group works best as part of a church, not apart from it.

Chapter 1: Why Small Groups Matter

> *And they were steadfastly continuing in the teaching of the apostles and in the fellowship, and in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers.*
>
> Acts 2:42 (SLB)

Right after the church began on the day of Pentecost, Luke tells us what the first believers did. They gave themselves to four things: the apostles' teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. They met in the temple courts, and they also met "from house to house" (Acts 2:46). The early church had large gatherings and small ones from the very start.

On May 29, 2020, my wife took me to my first 12-step meeting and waited in the truck. I went in drunk and sat there weeping as people told the truth about their lives. For years I had hidden my struggles while looking fine on the outside. Being in a group where people told the truth broke my isolation and helped me heal. A good small group gives people a safe place to drop the mask (Hebrews 10:24-25).

What a Small Group Gives

Sunday worship is vital, and a small group is not a replacement for it. But a small group gives some things a large service usually can't.

- **A place to ask questions.** In a sermon, you listen. In a group, you can ask, "What does that mean?" and get an answer.

- **A place to be known.** It's easy to slip in and out of a large church without anyone knowing how you are really doing. In a group of eight or ten, people notice when you are missing or hurting.
- **A place to practice "one another."** The New Testament tells believers dozens of times to do things for one another: love, encourage, serve, forgive, bear burdens, pray. You can only do that with people you know.
- **A place to grow by talking.** Many of us understand something better once we have put it into our own words.

> *Iron grows sharp by iron, and a man sharpens the face of his neighbor.* (Proverbs 27:17)

Stirring One Another Up

Look again at the verse at the start of the introduction. The writer of Hebrews tells us to "consider one another for stirring up of love and of good works." To consider means to think carefully about. A small group is a place to think about each other: Who is struggling? Who needs encouragement? Who needs a gentle push? And he says to keep meeting together, "so much the more as you see the day drawing near." The closer we get to Christ's return, the more we need each other.

The Word at the Center

A small group can drift into just a social time, or a support group with little of God's Word in it. Fellowship and support are good, but the first thing Luke lists is "the teaching of the apostles." The Word of God should be at the center. Paul told the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing yourselves" (Colossians 3:16). When the

Word is at the center, the fellowship, the care, and the prayer have something solid to grow from.

Study Questions

1. Read Acts 2:42-47. What four things did the early church devote themselves to?
2. What can a small group give that a Sunday service usually can’t?
3. What does it mean to “consider one another” (Hebrews 10:24)?
4. Why is it important to keep God’s Word at the center of a group?
5. Think of a time you grew through a small group or a close friend. What made the difference?

Chapter 2: What a Leader Is and Is Not

> *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life **as** a ransom for many.*
>
> Mark 10:45 (SLB)

When people hear “leader,” many picture the person at the front who has all the answers. That’s not what a small group leader is. Jesus showed us a different kind of leadership.

> *But Jesus, having called them to **Him**, says to them, “You know that those being accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and their great **ones** exercise authority over them. But it will not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you will be your servant; and whoever of you desires to become first will be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life **as** a ransom for many.”* (Mark 10:42-45)

A Servant

The first thing a group leader is, is a servant. You set up chairs, send the reminder text, make the coffee, and pray for each person by name. You show up prepared. You notice who is missing and check on them. Leadership in Christ’s kingdom is measured by service, not by position.

Peter, writing to the elders of the churches, said the same thing.

> *shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion but willingly, nor*

> *for shameful gain but eagerly; nor as exercising lordship over the portions* ***allotted to you****, but becoming examples to the flock.* (1 Peter 5:2-3)

You are probably not an elder, but the principle carries over. Lead "willingly," "eagerly," and as an example, not by "exercising lordship." People will learn more from how you live than from anything you say.

A Guide, Not a Lecturer

Your job is to guide a discussion, not to preach a sermon. A good leader talks less than anyone expects. You ask a question, wait, listen, and ask another. You help the group see what the passage says. If you find yourself talking for ten minutes straight, stop and ask a question.

That doesn't mean you have nothing to say. Sometimes the group needs you to explain something or correct a wrong idea. But your aim is to get the group into the Bible, not to show how much you know.

A Learner

You don't have to have all the answers. You need to be one step ahead, having studied the passage before the meeting, and willing to say, "I don't know. Let me find out and get back to you." That is honest, and it shows the group that we are all learning together under God's Word. Then do what you said. Look it up, ask your pastor, and bring the answer next week.

What a Leader Is Not

- **Not a counselor.** You can listen, pray, and point people to God's Word. But when someone is dealing with deep trauma, abuse, addiction, or thoughts of suicide, they need more help than a group leader can

give. Your job is to help them get it. Chapter 6 says more.

- **Not the pastor.** You serve alongside your church's leaders, not in place of them.
- **Not the Holy Spirit.** You can't change anyone's heart. You can open the Word, ask good questions, and pray. God does the changing.

Qualified by Character

The Bible's standards for elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9) focus mostly on character: self-control, faithfulness at home, gentleness, not quarrelsome, a good reputation, holding firmly to the truth. A small group leader isn't holding those offices, but those same qualities make a good leader. If you are struggling with a sin that would hurt the group or dishonor Christ, deal with that first. Talk to your pastor. Leadership flows out of your own walk with God.

Study Questions

1. Read Mark 10:42-45. How is leadership in God's kingdom different from the world's idea of leadership?
2. What does it look like for a small group leader to serve?
3. Why should a leader talk less than people expect?
4. Why is it all right for a leader to say, "I don't know"?
5. Which of the three things a leader is not do you most need to remember?

Chapter 3: Getting Started

> *Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to **the** glory of God.*
>
> Romans 15:7 (SLB)

Starting a group can feel bigger than it is. Here are the basic decisions, with what has worked for many groups.

Choose What to Study

Pick a study that fits your group. New believers might start with a short book like Mark or Philippians, or one of my mini book collections, such as *Starting Out with Christ*. A group that has been together for a while might take on a longer book study. My free studies cover every book of the Bible, and each chapter has study questions at the end. There is a guide at the back of this book to help you choose.

Plan for a set number of weeks, such as eight or ten, with a clear start and end. People are more willing to join something with an end date. When it ends, the group can decide whether to keep going with another study.

Size, Time, and Place

- **Size.** Six to twelve people works well. Fewer than that and a missed week leaves just a couple of people. More than that and quieter people stop talking. If your group grows past twelve, think about splitting into two, with a new leader for the second group.
- **Time.** Most groups meet weekly for about ninety minutes. Start on time and end on time. People will

come back more readily if they know you respect their schedules.

- **Place.** A home is warm and personal. A room at the church works too. Choose somewhere quiet and comfortable, where everyone can see each other. A circle is better than rows.

Invite People

Ask people personally. An announcement in the bulletin helps, but a face-to-face invitation works far better. Tell them what you will study, when, where, and for how long. Make it clear that they don't need to know much about the Bible to come, and they will never be put on the spot.

A Sample Meeting

Here is a simple pattern for a ninety-minute meeting.

Time	What Happens
10 minutes	Welcome, coffee, and a little catching up
5 minutes	Opening prayer
45 minutes	Read the passage out loud and discuss the questions
20 minutes	Share prayer requests and pray for each other
10 minutes	Wrap up: what's next week, and any needs in the group

The First Meeting

At the first meeting, keep the study short. Spend extra time getting to know each other. Ask a simple question everyone can answer, such as, "Where did you grow up?" or "How did you come to this church?" Then go over a few ground rules together:

- What is shared in the group stays in the group.
- Everyone gets a chance to talk, and no one has to.
- We look to the Bible for answers, not just to opinions.
- We come prepared when we can, and we come anyway when we can’t.
- We pray for each other during the week.

Ask the group if they want to add anything. Agreeing together makes everyone own the group.

Study Questions

1. What kind of study would fit the people you hope to gather?
2. Why does a clear start and end date help people commit?
3. Who could you personally invite?
4. Look at the sample meeting. What would you change for your group?
5. Which of the ground rules do you think matters most? Why?

Chapter 4: Leading a Good Discussion

> *So then, my beloved brothers, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger*
>
> James 1:19 (SLB)

The heart of most small group meetings is the discussion. A good discussion isn't an accident. It comes from preparation, good questions, and a leader who listens.

Prepare Ahead

Study the passage yourself during the week, using the observe, interpret, and apply method. (My mini book *How to Study the Bible for Yourself* explains it.) Read the questions in the study and answer them yourself. Mark the one or two questions you think matter most, in case time runs short. Pray for the meeting and for each person by name.

Read the Passage Out Loud

Always read the Bible passage aloud before you talk about it. Ask for a volunteer, or read it yourself. Never call on someone to read without asking first. Some people struggle with reading aloud, and being put on the spot can keep them from coming back.

Ask Good Questions

There are three kinds of questions, and they follow the three steps of Bible study.

- **What does it say?** These questions help the group see the passage. “What does Jesus tell the disciples to do in verse 5?”
- **What does it mean?** These help the group understand. “Why do you think Jesus said it that way?”
- **How do we live it?** These help the group apply it. “Where do you need to trust God like that this week?”

Avoid questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no” if you want a discussion. “Was Peter afraid?” ends the conversation. “Why do you think Peter was afraid?” opens it.

Get Comfortable With Silence

When you ask a question, people need time to think. Silence feels long to the leader, but it’s usually only a few seconds. Count to ten in your head before you rephrase the question or answer it yourself. If you always fill the silence, the group will learn to wait for you.

Listen

“Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak.” Proverbs adds, “He who returns a word before he hears, it is folly to him and shame” (Proverbs 18:13). Listen to the whole answer. Look at the person. Thank them for sharing. Then, if it helps, ask a follow-up question: “Can you say more about that?” or “Where do you see that in the passage?”

The Quiet and the Talkative

Every group has people who rarely speak and people who could talk all night. Both need care.

For the quiet ones, ask easy questions that anyone can answer. Look their way when you ask. Never force them. Sometimes a quiet person will talk more after the meeting, one on one.

For the talkers, thank them and gently redirect. “That’s a good point. Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t spoken yet.” If it keeps happening, talk with them privately. Many talkative people don’t realize it, and some can become a real help by drawing others out.

When Someone Gets It Wrong

Sometimes a person will say something that isn’t what the passage teaches. Don’t embarrass them. Thank them, then turn back to the text. “Let’s look at verse 4 again. What does it say?” Often the group will see it together. If needed, explain gently.

> *And a slave of **the** Lord must not quarrel, but be gentle toward all, able to teach, patient when wronged, in meekness disciplining those who oppose, if perhaps God may give them repentance to **the** full knowledge of **the** truth, and they may return to soberness out of the snare of the devil, having been captured by him for the will of that one.* (2 Timothy 2:24-26)

Paul’s words to Timothy are a good guide for any leader. Not quarrelsome. Gentle. Patient. Able to teach. Correction in a group should always aim to help someone see the truth, never to win.

Study Questions

1. What are the three kinds of questions, and why are all three needed?

2. Turn “Did Jesus love Martha?” into a question that opens a discussion.
3. Why is silence after a question a good thing?
4. How can a leader help a quiet person join in? How can a leader handle someone who talks too much?
5. Read 2 Timothy 2:24-26. How should a leader correct someone who gets something wrong?

Chapter 5: Praying and Caring Together

> *Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*
>
> Galatians 6:2 (SLB)

A small group is more than a Bible class. It is a family of believers who care for each other. Prayer and care are where that shows.

Praying Together

Some people are nervous about praying out loud. Make it easy. Explain that prayer is simply talking to God, and nobody needs fancy words. Never call on someone to pray without asking first. Short prayers are fine. A sentence or two is plenty.

Here are a few ways to pray as a group:

- **Popcorn prayer.** After sharing requests, anyone who wants to pray says a short prayer, in no set order, until all the requests are covered. Then the leader closes.
- **Prayer partners.** Split into pairs or threes and pray for each other. This often helps quieter people.
- **Praying the passage.** Turn the Bible passage you studied into prayer. If you studied Psalm 23, thank God for being your Shepherd.

Keep a simple list of requests and how God answered. Over time it becomes a record of His faithfulness.

Watch the Time

Prayer requests can take over a meeting. Ask people to share briefly. If someone has a big need, it may be better

to pray for them right then and talk more after the meeting. Keep enough time for actual prayer, not just talking about prayer.

Keeping Confidences

What is shared in a group should stay in the group, unless someone is in danger. Gossip can destroy a group faster than anything.

> *He who goes about **as** a slanderer reveals a secret, and one faithful of spirit conceals a matter.* (Proverbs 11:13)

Sometimes gossip hides inside a prayer request. “Please pray for Bob, because I heard he’s drinking again.” If it isn’t your story to tell, don’t tell it. Encourage people to share their own requests, not other people’s.

Caring Between Meetings

The best care often happens between meetings. A text on the day of someone’s surgery. A meal when a baby is born. A phone call when someone misses two weeks in a row. You don’t have to do it all yourself. Encourage the whole group to look out for one another, and share the load.

Confess and Pray

> *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous **man**, being at work, prevails much.* (James 5:16)

As trust grows, people may begin to share their struggles with sin. That is good and healthy, but it should be done wisely. Men should usually share deeply personal struggles with other men, and women with

women. Not everything needs to be said to the whole group. A leader can help by suggesting smaller groups of two or three for that kind of sharing.

Study Questions

1. How can you help people who are nervous about praying out loud?
2. Which way of praying together would work best in your group?
3. Why is keeping confidences so important? How can gossip hide inside a prayer request?
4. What are some simple ways a group can care for each other between meetings?
5. Read James 5:16. How can a group make room for confession wisely?

Chapter 6: Hard Topics and Hard Moments

> *Now receive the one who is weak in the faith,*
> *not for disputes over reasonings.*
>
> Romans 14:1 (SLB)

Sooner or later, every group faces a hard moment. Someone disagrees strongly. Someone shares something painful. Someone asks a question no one can answer. Here is how to handle some of the most common ones.

Disagreements

Not every disagreement is a problem. Some of the best discussions come from honest differences. But it helps to know what kind of disagreement it is.

Some things are at the heart of the faith: who God is, who Jesus is, His death and resurrection, salvation by grace through faith, the authority of Scripture. On those, a group must stand on what the Bible clearly says.

Other things are matters where faithful believers have disagreed. Paul's words in Romans 14 apply here: "receive the one who is weak in the faith, not for disputes over reasonings." Let people share their views, point everyone back to the text, and move on. My own books teach that the rapture comes before the tribulation, and I believe that is what the Bible teaches. But I would not let a difference over that question split a group of believers.

If you aren't sure which kind of disagreement you're facing, ask your pastor.

False Teaching

Sometimes someone brings in teaching that is truly against the gospel. If it is said in the group, gently and clearly point back to the Bible. If it continues, talk with the person privately, and if needed, bring in your pastor or elders. Paul said church leaders must be able “both to exhort in the sound teaching and to reprove those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). Protecting the group is part of caring for it.

Conflict Between Members

If two people in the group have a conflict, don’t let it be fought out in the meeting. Jesus gave a clear pattern.

> *And if your brother sins against you, go and reprove him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*
> (Matthew 18:15)

Encourage them to talk privately, aiming to win their brother or sister, not the argument. If you are part of the conflict, go to the person yourself. If it doesn’t resolve, involve your pastor.

Someone in Crisis

Sometimes a person shares something serious: abuse, thoughts of suicide, addiction, a marriage falling apart. Here is what to do.

1. Listen and thank them for trusting you.
2. Pray with them.
3. If anyone is in danger, act now. Call 911. If someone is thinking about suicide, help them call or text 988 (the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in the United States), and stay with them.

4. If a child or a vulnerable adult is being abused, it must be reported to the authorities. Many states require it by law. Tell your pastor, but don't wait on him to make the report if a child is in danger. Keeping a group confidence never covers hiding abuse.
5. Help them connect with your pastor, a trained counselor, or other help, and keep checking on them.

You are not expected to fix everything. You are expected to care, to pray, and to help them get the help they need.

Questions You Can't Answer

Say, "That's a good question. I don't know, but I'll find out." Then do it. It's also fine to say that some questions don't have full answers this side of heaven. "The hidden things belong to the LORD our God, and the revealed things belong to us" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

When the Group Struggles

Some weeks hardly anyone will come. Some studies will fall flat. Don't give up. Ask for feedback, pray, adjust, and keep going. God uses faithful, ordinary leaders more than gifted ones who quit.

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between a disagreement over the heart of the faith and one over a secondary matter?
2. How would you handle someone who keeps bringing false teaching into the group?
3. Read Matthew 18:15. Why should conflicts be handled privately first?

4. What steps should a leader take if someone shares that they are in danger?
5. What encourages you to keep going when a group is struggling?

A Closing Word

> *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord.*
>
> Colossians 3:16 (SLB)

Leading a small group is a quiet kind of ministry. Most of it happens in living rooms, around kitchen tables, and in text messages nobody else sees. But it matters. Some of the most important growth in a believer's life happens in a small circle of people who open God's Word together and pray for each other.

You don't have to be perfect. You need to be faithful. Pray for your people. Prepare the passage. Ask good questions and listen. Point everyone to Christ. And trust God to do what only He can do.

If someone in your group has never trusted Jesus Christ, my free book *The Road Home* explains the gospel in plain words. You may want to give them a copy or study it together.

Meeting Checklist

- ☐ Pray for each person in the group by name this week.
- ☐ Study the passage myself: observe, interpret, apply.
- ☐ Answer the study questions and mark the most important ones.
- ☐ Send a reminder with the time, place, and passage.
- ☐ Set up the room: chairs in a circle, Bibles, coffee.
- ☐ Start on time with prayer.
- ☐ Read the passage out loud.
- ☐ Leave room for silence and for every voice.
- ☐ Keep time for prayer.
- ☐ End on time.
- ☐ Follow up with anyone who was missing or hurting.

Choosing a Study

All of these are free at trinfinityenterprises.com, and every chapter ends with study questions.

If your group is…	Try…
New believers or people exploring the faith	The mini book collection *Starting Out with Christ*; *The Road Home*; the Gospel of Mark or John study
Wanting to grow in prayer and the Word	The mini book collection *Growing Closer to God*; *How to Study the Bible for Yourself*
Couples, families, or workers	The mini book collection *Living It Out*; *Money, Giving and Enough*
Going through hard times	The mini book collection *Hope That Holds*; *When Worry Will Not Let Go*
Men	*Plumb Line*
Ready for a full book of the Bible	Any verse-by-verse study, such as Philippians, James, Ephesians, or Romans
Curious about the end times	The Revelation and Daniel studies; *Daniel and Revelation Side by Side*

About This Book

Leading a Small Group is a short, practical guide for anyone who leads, or wants to lead, a small group Bible study.

It looks at why small groups matter, what kind of leader Jesus calls us to be, how to get a group started, how to lead a good discussion, how to pray and care for one another, and how to handle hard moments, from disagreements to a person in crisis.

Each chapter ends with questions that a group of leaders can talk through together. At the back are a checklist for each meeting and a guide to choosing a free study for your group.

All Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible, which is free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.