

APPENDIX B

How to Lead Small Group Bible Studies

The following is adapted from A Navigator Guide, *“How to Lead Small Group Bible Studies,”* 1974, and is used by permission of NavPress. Also included is a short section which provides some ideas for building creativity into your meeting.

I. Asking Effective Questions

A. Questions: The Key to Good Discussion

A good leader helps the members of the group discover biblical truths for themselves. Therefore, he must cultivate the ability to ask the right questions. These questions become a springboard for discussion and will help the group members make new discoveries about what they’ve already studied on their own.

“You start a question,” Robert Louis Stevenson said, “and it’s like starting a stone. You sit quietly on the top of the hill; and away the stone goes, starting others.” Good questions are valuable because:

- They help you as a leader evaluate the group members’ understanding of the Bible.
- They cause the group members to think.
- They prevent the group leader from becoming an authority figure.
- They allow the group members to discover spiritual truth for themselves.

The Bible discussion leader asks questions to help the others become “discoverers.” The leader is not a teacher. He is a guide and a participant himself. He uses questions that help the group discover, understand, and apply biblical truths.

He does this by:

- Launching the discussion
- Guiding the discussion
- Summarizing the discussion
- Helping the group members apply what they have learned

A good launching question is one that simply asks the group members what they have discovered on their own in a particular section or question in their Bible study preparation. This means using phrases such as “What did you learn in this section about...?” “What did you discover in this passage about...?” “What did you observe in this question about...?” “In this verse, what impressed you about...?”

To guide the discussion means keeping it moving and drawing out the principle thought the group is sharing. You can ask questions like these: “Who else would like to comment on that?” “What does someone else see in this verse?” “Does anyone else want to add something?”

When the discussion wanders away from the Bible, you may need to get the group back on track by saying, “What we’re discussing is interesting, but we’ve left our topic. Perhaps we could discuss this more at a different time.” Then you could present a thought-provoking question that draws the group back to the biblical issues you were discussing.

Often during the discussion someone will ask, “What does it mean?” Discussing together an answer to this question should be valuable because you know the group is discussing their concerns. But don’t let the discussion go off on a tangent.

So we see that the first two important parts of your job as a discussion group leader—to launch and guide the discussion—are done almost entirely with questions.

The other two parts of your job—summarizing the discussion and helping the group members apply what they have learned—may take less of your total discussion time and depend less on questions.

Summarize the discussion frequently throughout the group’s time together each week. Your summary of what the group has been talking about in the last few minutes can serve as a transition to another topic. You can simply ask another launching question about the new topic, and you’re off.

In summarizing, remember to review what the group has discussed, rather than your own insights. Don’t preach.

To carry out the fourth part of your job—helping the group members apply what they have learned—you can ask questions or state reminders to help them put biblical truth into practice in their lives. Help them remember such things as important doctrines, God’s attributes, God’s promises, and verses on the authority of God’s word. Secondly, help them do something. Figure out what steps of action you and they can take to conform your lives to God’s standards. A third way of helping them make application is to discuss how each of you can use what you have learned to help someone else grow spiritually.

In asking questions, use discretion in directing a personal question to a particular individual. Only ask an individual about his personal application when you are sure it would benefit the group present.

One way to encourage personal application of what your group is discovering in the Scriptures is to have everyone write out an intended application at the end of your discussion time. Then they can share the results of this application plan at your meeting the following week. This pattern encourages writing short-range applications and expecting God to help everyone apply what he has brought to their personal attention.

The importance of applying God’s word to our everyday lives cannot be overly emphasized, but too often it is easily avoided. Two questions should be in the heart of every believer as he

looks into the Scriptures: Do I have the desire to know God's word? and Do I have the desire to do God's word? The Bible was not given to us merely to satisfy our curiosity, but to change and redirect our lives. God gave us his word to reveal Himself to us and to evoke a response from us according to what is revealed.

B. How Do I Ask Questions?

Asking questions is a powerful method for stimulating thought. Therefore, the more you plan and evaluate the questions you ask in a Bible study group, the greater will be your effectiveness as a leader. One of the main reasons for asking questions is to help people understand biblical principles. Your questions can help them grasp the basic issue in any particular passage.

Once the group has identified this biblical principle, you can ask a follow-up question that ties in this principle to a specific situation such as, "How could this teaching by Jesus on riches be related to how we spend our money?" This can be a real-life situation or a hypothetical one, but it should help the group realize how the principle can be practically applied and how the Scriptures can actually change our lives.

When you ask a question, look around the group until someone answers it. Then you can ask, "What did others of you find?" or "What did someone else discover?" (These are both guiding questions.) Again, look around the entire group, watching for anyone who wants to speak instead of pointing out a specific individual.

To begin with, the group members will probably look directly at you as they give their replies. But if you patiently persist with good guiding questions, the members will begin responding to the group instead of to the leader. Thus, true discussion will begin. Rather than being leader-centered, they will become group-centered.

The best way to learn these methods is to have your discussion questions written out beforehand.

C. What Questions Stimulate the Best Discussion?

The easiest rule to remember in promoting discussion is to never ask questions that can be answered simply yes or no. Questions like these rarely stimulate active thought or discussion. An example: "Do you agree with that?"

Another kind of question to avoid is a limiting question such as "What are the three great truths in this passage?" Your group members will tend to answer such a question by telling you what they think you think. Everyone realizes you're thinking of a specific answer, so instead of stimulating discussion, you start a mind-reading contest.

Much better are open-ended questions, each of which could have a countless variety of answers: "Why do you think this is true?" "How is this important?" "What does this truth mean for our lives today?" "Who do you think should be involved in this?" "How can we learn from this?" "Who does this apply to?"

D. How Our Questions Relate To Bible Study Preparation

Each member of your group should have completed his study before coming to the meeting. Encourage your group to follow these essential practices in their study: observation, interpretation, and application.

Observation is his effort to see exactly what the Scripture says—simply and clearly.

Interpretation is the step of determining what Scripture means—clarifying the meaning of a verse or passage so he can understand why the Holy Spirit included it in the Scripture.

Application is his attempt to understand how to put God's word into practice—recognizing the voice of the Lord speaking personally to him and responding accordingly in obedience.

Your launching questions will focus on helping the group talk about their observations: "What did you discover in this passage about...?" "What did you observe in this section on...?"

Your guiding questions will often help the group focus on their interpretation of the Scriptures: "What did you think this means?" "What do others of you think about that?"

Your summary and application questions and reminders will help the group members move toward practicing the Scriptures in their lives as you review the most important concepts you have talked about and how they relate to each person present.

Each member of the group will have gained personal satisfaction by investigating the Scriptures on his own during the preparation time. That process makes spoon-feeding them unnecessary. You won't need to lecture or teach, which could only cool their desire to learn more from the Scriptures. Instead, allow the discussion to reveal and build on what each person has already discovered on his own.

E. Common Errors in Asking Questions

Try to avoid the following:

- Asking questions that do not sound conversational. Even though you prepare and write out your questions beforehand, speak them in a conversational tone. And use your own natural vocabulary.
- Being afraid of silence after asking a question. Don't be impatient or nervous. Give everyone time to think. Waiting demonstrates your real interest and concern. Remember also to be attentive to second thoughts. Often a person will think of more to say on an issue or be able to clarify his position only after he makes his first statement. It's common to think of something else you should have said. If you sense someone is thinking this way, be alert enough to ask for more ideas: "Do you have more thoughts on that? Would you like to add something else?"

- Limiting yourself only to asking questions. The leader is also a participant in the group. Share freely your answers and observations, but don't dominate the discussion.
- Combining two questions in one. Ask one question at a time.
- Asking a question that can be answered yes or no. This type of question hinders discussion—"Did Jesus die on the cross to save us?" Or, "Do you think that Jesus should be the Lord of your life?" Better questions on these subjects would be "Why do you think Jesus died on the cross?" and "In what ways do you feel Jesus should be the Lord of your life?" Starting questions with words like can, do, and should usually create close-ended questions. Open-ended questions often begin with why, what, or how.
- Asking questions that are too complex. State each question simply and clearly.

F. Preparing Good Questions

There is an art to asking questions. Anyone who wants to can learn the skill of asking good questions.

Here are three criteria for good questions:

- Good questions are clear.
- Good questions are relevant.
- Good questions stimulate discussion.

These criteria will help you formulate and evaluate your questions. Once you've prepared questions, think about how people in your study would respond to them. Then revise your questions if necessary.

The launching questions you prepare should be carefully selected because they initiate meaningful discussion on a topic. They will determine to a large extent both what you will discuss and the response you will receive. Since you are trying to stimulate discussion, ask general questions that have several possible answers. For example, don't say, "What did God create?" This limits the response of the group. If you ask, "What did you learn about creation from your study this week?" the responses will include a variety of personal observations.

These launching questions should be simple and short. Avoid using and or but. These words usually introduce a second question.

Also, be sure your launching questions relate to the study preparation done during the previous week.

Your guiding questions will help open up, deepen, illustrate, or clarify the discussion started by the launching questions. These questions encourage the group members to go beyond their initial observations. One of your goals is to help the group understand more fully the meaning of the truths discovered. Ask yourself what words or phrases or ideas in the study passages may not be clearly understood and think of questions that will help clarify their meaning.

Application questions are hard to formulate, but they can be the link between Bible study and daily living. All group members need to really live with the passages they are studying and to ask God to reveal how they should be applied in everyday living.

Consider these examples of application questions:

- What can you do in the coming week to better glorify God as part of His creation?
- What assurance do you have that you are part of God's family?
- What difference should your assurance of salvation make in your life today?
- How can you follow Jesus Christ's example of servanthood in the way you respond and help other members of your family this week?

Clarity

To evaluate your prepared written questions for clarity, use these standards:

- Can the question be understood?
- Can it be easily remembered?
- Does it generally avoid the words and and but?

Relevance

Use these standards to evaluate the relevance of your prepared questions:

- What is the underlying purpose of the question?
- What answer does it expect or suggest?
- To whom is it directed?
- Does it relate to truth already known?
- Does the group have enough information to answer it?
- Does it focus attention on the main point?
- Does it call for a possible and practical response?
- Will it lead to a clear understanding of the passage?

Stimulating Discussion

Use these standards to help you evaluate how well your written questions can promote discussion:

- Does the question get the group's attention?
- Does it lead to personal involvement?
- Does it leave room for individual creative expression?
- Does it give everyone an opportunity to respond?
- Is it aimed at the group's personal understanding?
- Does it avoid embarrassing any of the group members?

Involvement and Urgency

Notice in Mark 8:27-29 how Jesus helped His disciples to think first objectively (without being personally involved) and only then subjectively (being personally involved) about the important matter of who He was. In verse 27 He asked them, “Who do people say I am?” Then, after they answered, He asked them, “Who do you say I am?” In the following list of questions, notice the increasing degree of involvement from one to the next:

“What should people do about this?”

“What should people in our church do about this?”

“What should we do about this?”

“What will we do about this?”

The last question reflects not only personal involvement but also urgency. For increased urgency you could ask, “What will we do about this now?”

Examples of Prepared Questions

Here is a list of sample questions you may want to look over to further stimulate your thinking as you plan your questions for your next Bible study group meeting. Most of these are guiding and launching questions written for various chapters in the *Design for Discipleship Bible Study* series from NavPress.

- What one aspect of Jesus’ life impresses you most?
- Why can’t God ignore our sin?
- What impressed you most from this prayer of Jesus?
- Why do we need the Holy Spirit in our lives?
- How is love important in our relationship with God?
- How do you know the Bible is God’s word?
- What do you think it means to let the word of Christ dwell richly in us?
- What does it mean to pray in Jesus’ name?
- How do we grow in grace?
- What is involved in surrendering to Christ’s lordship?
- When do you keep cares and worries to yourself instead of casting them on the Lord?
- What promises from God are you claiming for your life?
- How does the Holy Spirit guide us?
- How would you explain this passage to someone else?
- What effect does impurity have on your relationship with God?
- What are some of the kinds of suffering we may have to endure?
- Who does God say He is?
- Which of God’s attributes do you feel you know the most about?
- What can we learn from Jesus’ encounter with Satan?

Choose three or four of these sample questions and imagine what kind of discussion they could lead to in your Bible study group.

Never Tell When You Can Ask

Remember that as the leader you do not have to be a walking biblical encyclopedia with all the answers. Leading means guiding the group in such a way that each person, including you, amplifies and clarifies the personal insights gained through individual study. Giving the group time to talk and get acquainted will help create an environment where each member

can freely share his discoveries, questions, comments, and feelings. Your job as a discussion group leader is to help members discover truth for themselves. Don't tell them something they could conclude for themselves if you were to ask them the right questions. Never tell when you can ask. Have good questions prepared that will allow the group to draw their own conclusions.

G. More About Questions

Christian educator H. H. Horne wrote in *Jesus: The Master Teacher* (1920) that Jesus "came not to answer questions, but to ask them; not to settle men's souls, but to provoke them." Questions make up the heart of Jesus Christ's teaching method.

From His example we can learn that our job as discussion group leaders is to help others discover truth for themselves. The following guidelines will help you accomplish this.

Use questions that deal with feelings as well as facts.

Facts will tell you what a person knows. His feelings will tell you how he really feels. Convictions are formed internally as people learn to express verbally how they feel about certain issues.

Ask questions such as, "How do you respond inwardly to these claims Jesus makes?" "How do you feel about these teachings on love?" "What do you think about that?" "How do you react to that?"

Deal with people's true interests.

Questions that come closest to people's true interests will get the best answers. Learn how to identify a person's frame of reference. Find out not only what he wants to talk about, but how he wants to talk about it. Take something from his answer to formulate your next question to the group. Use his own words. People appreciate hearing their own thoughts being used.

Answer questions with questions.

Often people may ask the leader a question when their real desire is to tell you what they think. "Don't you think that . . . ?" and "Do you think that . . . ?" are examples of this. A good way to avoid a premature answer is to respond by saying, "What do you think?" This is what they really want—an opportunity to express their views.

Sometimes people will try to force you to defend yourself. Their purpose is to show you that they disagree with you. By responding with "What do you think?" you can allow them to fully express themselves without your having to take a controversial position.

Learn how to use direct questions.

A direct question—"Bill, is Christ the Lord of your life?"—asks a person to take an open stand and declare a position. Be careful not to use such questions too soon in your relationships with the group members, or they may become offended. Gain their confidence first. Use impersonal and indirect questions: "How can you tell that Jesus is Lord of someone's life?"

Avoid questions that assume an answer.

Don't ever suggest answers in your questions. Lead and direct your group toward answers, but don't drag the group into them. Rhetorical questions with obvious answers fall into this category: "The purpose of evangelism is to reach the unsaved, isn't it?" Better would be, "What do you think the purpose of evangelism is?" Use questions that focus on a specific item.

Use words and phrases in your questions that cause one's mind to focus on only one key idea. "What was the most interesting thing you learned from this passage?" is better than "What did you learn from this passage?"

Keep the discussion going.

Short guiding questions such as "What else did you notice?" or "What do you mean by that?" can keep the discussion moving by drawing additional responses from the group. Other examples: "What else can you add to that?" "Could you explain that more fully?" "Could you rephrase that statement?" "Would you explain that?" "What reason can you give for that?" Sometimes these questions can redirect the group's attention to a different individual: "Mary, what do you think about that?"

II. Responding to Discussion Distractions

A. Roles People Play

In the following list, Professor Howard Hendricks of Dallas Theological Seminary describes some of the roles people play in a group situation. You may find these helpful in evaluating your group. You can read the lists aloud to your group and then discuss their responses to them. This evaluation can help all of you see yourselves in a new light.

Immature Roles

- The Onlooker - Content to be a silent spectator. Only nods, smiles, and frowns. Other than this, he is a passenger instead of a crew member.
- The Monopolizer - Brother Chatty. He rambles roughshod over the rest of the conversation with his verbal dexterity. He tenaciously clings to his right to say what he thinks-even without thinking.
- The Belittler - Mr. Gloom. He minimizes the contributions of others. He usually has three good reasons why some opinion is wrong.
- The Wisecrack - Feels called to a ministry of humor. Mister Cheerio spends his time as the group playboy. Indifferent to the subject at hand, he is always ready with a clever remark.
- The Hitchhiker - Never had an original thought in his life. Unwilling to commit himself, he sits on the sidelines until others reach a conclusion, then jumps on the bandwagon.

- The Pleader - Chronically afflicted with obsessions. He always pleads for some cause or action. He feels led to share this burden frequently from his one-track mind.
- The Sulker - Lives with a resentful mood. The group won't always agree entirely with his view, so he sulks.

Mature Roles

- The Proposer - Initiates ideas and action. He keeps things moving.
- The Encourager - Brings others into the discussion. He encourages others to contribute and emphasizes the value of their suggestions and comments. He stimulates others to greater activity by approval and recognition.
- The Clarifier - Has the ability to step in when confusion, chaos, and conflict occur. He defines the problem concisely and points out the issues clearly.
- The Analyzer - Examines the issues closely. He weighs suggestions carefully and never accepts anything without first thinking it through.
- The Explorer - Always moves into new and different areas. He probes relentlessly and is never satisfied with the obvious or the traditional viewpoints.
- The Mediator - Promotes harmony between members-especially those who have trouble agreeing. He seeks to find conclusions acceptable to all.
- The Synthesizer - Puts the pieces together from different ideas and viewpoints.

B. Turning Obstacles Into Opportunities

Any discussion group will have its problems. But they can be turned into opportunities with proper understanding and handling.

How to Control Talkative Members

When one or two group members seem to be monopolizing the discussion, calling for contributions from others often helps: "What do the rest of you think?" or "Jack, what ideas do you have about this?"

In some situations you may have to take control of the discussion more strongly, and you may have to talk privately with the "talker," explaining the necessity of group participation. You may be able to enlist him to help you draw others in. This will help him become more sensitive to the contributions of other people.

How to Get Back on Track

A verbal recognition of the fact that the discussion has gotten too far off on a tangent can usually help you get back to more relevant topics. You could say, "This is interesting. However, we've left our topic. Perhaps we could discuss this further after we talk more about . . ." Or you may present a thought-provoking question to draw the discussion back to the initial topic. At times, you can suggest tabling the tangent until after the discussion, when

those who want to can talk about it further. Having an accepting attitude toward the tangent is important. Maintain respect for each member's opinions.

How to Handle “Wrong” Answers

Never tell a group member he is wrong. If someone says something that you are quite sure is inaccurate or unbiblical, you may want to solicit a viewpoint from someone else: “Okay, what do others think?” or “Does anyone know other Scripture passages that may help us here?” You may want to restate the issue or ask another question that would help clarify or stimulate further thought. Always keep others from losing “face” or becoming embarrassed because of a wrong answer.

How to Handle Silence

Don't be afraid of pauses or try to fill in silent moments. If you give the group time to think, they will bring up good points and ask good questions as the discussion progresses. By being patient, you may be surprised with the number of excellent thoughts the group comes up with. These silent times may seem uncomfortable, but don't be embarrassed or feel as if you must say something.

How to Handle Difficult Questions

Don't be afraid of saying “I don't know” when a difficult question is asked. If you don't know the answer, don't pretend to. You can always look for the answer later or ask someone else in the group to research it. There is no merit in being thought of as a “know-it-all.”

Getting Through All the Study Material

Make a determined effort to cover in your discussion as much as possible of the assigned study material. Continually getting bogged down in minor details and tangents can have a demoralizing effect on the group. Moving ahead, however, gives a feeling of accomplishment and success. If you have trouble getting through everything you want to in the discussion meeting, you may need to cut back on the amount of assigned preparation each week.

How to Live Up a Dull Group

Your group will respond to your own attitude. Pray for your own sincere enthusiasm. If you want them to be enthusiastic, you must be energized too. The right source for this excitement is a desire to know God Himself, a desire for His word, and a sincere commitment to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. You, as the leader, must demonstrate these convictions. Don't expect them from others if you don't have them yourself. If your group seems to be lethargic, ask yourself whether you are demonstrating a true devotion for God and His Word and a strong belief in the relevance of God's Word to our lives today. Think through these issues carefully. What can you do to give more glory to God in the way you lead this group?

How to Help Your Group Apply the Scriptures to Their Lives

Expect God to speak through His word to each person in your group. The Holy Spirit will bring the Scriptures to bear upon their consciences and their lives. Try to help the group see the specific relevance of God's Word for their everyday lives. Learn to ask effective application questions, beginning with “What does this mean to you?” and “Is there anything we can do about this in our lives today?” Learn how to share your own application plans with honesty and humility. Openness on your part will help them feel more responsive.

Learn to Show Positive Reinforcement

Acknowledge individual responses frequently with positive comments such as “That’s good,” or “That’s a very thoughtful answer.” It’s best not to overdo positive comments, but most discussion leaders probably err on the side of not saying them enough.

Help Increase Listening Ability

Some members of your group may tend to think more about what they want to say rather than about what others are saying. They become preoccupied with their own thoughts. One way to help them get rid of these lapses in listening is to occasionally have a group member summarize what has just been said by the previous person. Before initiating this practice, you may want to explain to the group the value of this exercise in helping the group become better listeners.

C. Constructive Group Tension

In most discussion groups, controversy and tension are avoided like the plague. Many associate conflict with dissension and strife; therefore, they try to steer any trace of disagreement down a deserted alley or off a steep cliff. Some disagreements, it is true, are caused by misguided opinions, petty issues, and false doctrines. But not all disagreements are bad, wrong, or un-Christian. The group that sails along with its members always giving the “right” answers may be the group that isn’t thinking about truly important issues.

Discussing a controversial issue may be well worth the time it takes. Profitable discussions can take place after a question causes tense disagreement. The group leader can point the members to God’s Word instead of traditional or “logical” thinking as the final authority.

Three Stages

Healthy group tension is best when it occurs in three stages: personalization, confrontation, and clarification.

1. Before you deliberately introduce a controversial subject, it’s best to develop a relaxed atmosphere—the **personalization stage**. This safety should have been accomplished once your group has been meeting for some time and all the members have been well acquainted with and accepting of each other.
2. The **confrontation stage** begins when you introduce the possibility of tension. You do this by asking questions that lead the group members down the “streets of the unknown response” to the eventual goal of agreement based on the Scriptures.

You can create a difference of opinion in a variety of ways. Having each member respond in turn to a controversial question, staging a debate, or intentionally taking the opposite view on an issue can create the kind of unsettledness that forces the group into the Bible to find true answers.

Here are examples of the kinds of questions that can generate confrontation:

- Questions that require a decision—"Which is better, to do what is right when you don't feel like it, or to wait to act until you have the right motive and desires?"
- Questions that imply something that isn't true—"Why do we need to avoid contact with non-Christians as much as possible?"
- Questions about difficult or questionable topics—"Why does God allow suffering? Is there a biblical basis for the women's liberation movement? Should a Christian go to war?"

3. In the clarification state, the leader takes control and directs the group toward biblical conclusions. His goal is to get the group into the Scriptures to find truths and principles that address the controversial issue. (Sometimes resolution occurs when the group realizes that the Bible does not give a specific answer but allows room for several opinions.)

Be ready with summary questions and a summary statement to put into focus the biblical conclusions the group has found. From there you can apply the conclusions in various ways to your lives.

Be Cautious

You must, of course, be careful with confrontation questions that cause tension. Animosity, division, and strife can sometimes be caused by group tension, as the apostle Paul warned: *"Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels."* (2 Timothy 2:23, NIV) Keep this verse in mind as your group considers controversial issues.

Aim toward love and unity. *"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."* (Ephesians 4:2-3, NIV) However, don't feel you must avoid group tension at all costs, for it can lead to a more diligent search for biblical truth.

III. Aids to Creativity

Our goal should be to lead meetings which are filled with excitement and relevance motivating a person to not want to miss one. Imagination and creativity are often the difference in a good meeting and a great meeting. Using a variety of approaches in leading your group can add zest to your discussions.

What can you do to learn scriptural truth more creatively? Many familiar objects become teaching tools when used properly. A drop of dye in a jar of water can be used to illustrate the spread of the gospel throughout the world. A model of a picture of the human body might stimulate discussion on the role of the Church as Christ's body. A horse's bridle can help illustrate the principle from James 3 about the importance of our speech. Newspaper cartoons often illustrate a biblical principle and add a bit of humor at the same time. Articles clipped from newspapers or magazines can also illustrate truth.

A map of Bible lands will help the group visualize action in various passages from throughout the Bible. You can also use charts, posters, puppets, models, photographs, or photographic slides. Taped messages by Christian pastors and teachers can add variety and lead to good discussion.

Other ideas to consider:

- Games organized around biblical principles.
- Field trips—churches, various mission offices, biblical conferences, etc.
- Ministry trips for service to the poor or evangelism
- Dramatizations—portray biblical characters or modern-day people struggling to apply biblical truth in today's culture
- Helpful charts, graphs, and diagrams
- Debates
- Brainstorming session on certain ideas or principles

Sources for ideas include your church library, community library, and Christian bookstore. You can also write to a publisher for a listing of visual aids. Ask for catalogs and listing of films, slides, overhead transparencies, and so on.

When developing visual aids and teaching tools, be sure to keep them simple and clear. They should include only the essentials, and they need to be relevant to your group's interests and needs.

Ask various group members occasionally to come up with teaching tools and visual aids. They'll enjoy the opportunity to play a special part in group meetings.

Visual aids and teaching tools can accentuate and strengthen learning in these ways:

- They catch the group's interest. They get attention and bring needs and curiosity to the surface.
- They stimulate talking, listening, and learning.
- They clarify words and concepts in easy-to-remember ways.

In addition to using creative ideas and visual aids to communicate the specific truth of your lesson, you can also vary the format of your discussion times. Here are some specific ideas:

- Divide the group into study groups of four. After 15 minutes re-form the group and have each smaller group share their insights.
- Divide the group into study groups of men and women. Re-form the group after 15 minutes and have each group share its insights.
- Separate the lesson into 2 or 3 sections. Divide the group into 2 or 3 groups (maximum of 4 per group one group per section), and have them answer the questions in their section. Bring the groups back together after 15 minutes and have them report their answers.
- Have each member bring to the group meeting a newspaper article which is relevant to the evening's study.

- Have every member bring and explain a “show-and-tell” article that relates to the subject of the study for that evening.
- Set up “role playing” situations that deal with the study. Enlist role players. Have the entire group discuss the situation.
- Use a large pad on an easel to list important points in study.
- Using a large pad on an easel, have each person draw something that pertains to the study and explain their picture and how it relates.
- Have each person share the major observations, illustrations, or questions they have from the study. After each person shares and questions are answered, move on to the Application section of the study.

As you build creativity into your plan, remember some general principles:

- Spend at least one-third of the allowed “Bible Discussion” time on application.
- Your creative ideas should strengthen the overall objectives of your meeting, not overshadow them or become ends themselves.
- Don’t use the same plan every week! “VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE!”
- Be alert to any opportunity to make Bible study and discussion more fun and more imaginative.