

LEADING AN INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

What is it?

Inductive Bible Study is a discussion oriented Bible study session in which the leader encourages participation of everybody in the group through their involvement in discussing a series of key questions that are aimed at exposing and discovering the truth from God's word

Why is it Important?

As a tool, Inductive Bible Study helps the group to discover what God has said in the passage. Inductive Bible Study helps to reduce or eliminate a common human tendency in which a leader imposes on the text his or her feelings, beliefs or what he or she think is the interpretation of the passage. Instead, Inductive Bible Study encourages people to think for themselves and examine their hearts. In the process, each member of the group is allowed to process, personalize and retain the truth of the scripture that is specific to his or her life.

It should be noted that there are a variety of valid methods of studying the Scriptures. Vineyard Columbus prefers to use Inductive Bible study method because we believe it is consistent with our mission to develop a community of passionate, mature, reproducing disciple of Christ.

How is it done?

The key to a successful Inductive Bible Study session is the ability of a leader to formulate and ask questions that will encourage everyone in the group to Observe the facts and significant characteristics of the passage, Interpret the intended meaning for the original audience, and Apply the truth of scriptures to each of their lives.

Prepare

The primary aim of a Bible study session is to invite the Lord to talk to his people (us) through his scriptures. As you prepare for an Inductive Bible Study, ask for God's wisdom (James 1:5) and direction regarding what you or your group needs to be fed in order to grow and mature into Christ's likeness (Col. 1:28).

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, select a book of the Bible, chapter, character, topic, etc. and study the text on your own first.

Pray for understanding from the one whose words you're studying.

Read through the passage several times and try to get a sense of it in its entirety; that is, in its context.

Note: Study guides, commentaries and Bible study tools are very helpful with overviews, historical details and original intent. However, your decision to not read them first will help you avoid the undue influence of the author's findings and insights.

Observe

Observe the facts and significant characteristics of the passage by seeking answers who, what, where and when. What form of Biblical literature is this (Narrative, history, gospel, parable, law, prophesy, poem/song, collection of wise sayings, or apocalyptic literature)? The answer to this question will help us understand the purpose of the passage for its readers.

Some examples to consider could be:

Who is mentioned in this passage?

What was his or her position in his or her community?

What is happening?

Where is the action taking place?

What is the scenery?

What sounds, smell, weather, or other characteristics can be noticed?

What natural or supernatural forces are referred to?

When (past, present, future) or what time of the day, year, etc.?

What words, ideas or phrases are repeated?

What grammatical clues are present (symbols, irony etc.)?

What things are compared or contrasted?

If there are words you don't know or understand LOOK them up! Refer to a Bible dictionary or commentary for help with unfamiliar ideas, places, and customs.

If the passage is not divided, divide the passage into paragraphs. Try to give each paragraph a brief title that helps reflect the content.

Write down some of your observation questions to use in your group.

Interpret

Interpret the passage. Ask "Why?"; "Why not?"; and "How?" of the scripture.

Is there a common idea running through the passage? What is important in this passage for the original audience to understand? What significance does the message have for you?

Write a one sentence theme for the entire passage that captures the main idea the Holy Spirit has shown you. Write down some of your interpretation questions to use in your group.

Apply

Apply the biblical truth to you and your small group. What truth does God want us to believe? What lies does God want to expose in our beliefs? What action do we need to take? (Praise, repent, pray, thank, wait, serve, give, reach out, etc.)

Write down the outcome God desires for you and/or your group.

Write down some of your application questions to use in your group.

Prepare a brief introduction to your study. Include background information to help set the scene. In general, create interest in the main topic or theme of the passage you are using.

Doing the Inductive Bible Study with your group

You can plan a list of primary questions ahead of your group meeting, but secondary questions have to come in response to whatever the group does. That is at the time when the Bible study is taking place. Your success in doing this (coming up with secondary questions) does depend to a large extent on your ability to relax and genuinely listen to what other people in the group are saying. In fact there may be no more valuable skill to an Inductive Bible Study leader than to listen.

Nervousness and concerns about our performance as leaders is often the primary cause of our failure to listen. It is easy to focus all of our attention on questions we would like to ask when we get nervous and anxious. Remember – It is all about Jesus! Jesus was never worried about his performance, never concerned about the follow up question. He listened carefully to answers someone gave and his secondary questions occurred naturally. As a leader, it is important to learn and practice listening to other people's opinions - concentrating on their answers and relaxing. With relaxation and genuine attention to what others are saying, follow up questions will come naturally.

Tip: You may find it helpful to practice a pause between someone's answer and your follow up question. Often this technique will allow you to concentrate on listening when someone is talking and for you to think of your follow up question only after he or she is done talking. Often our success in leading a discussion session will spill over to boost our leadership ability, and help shift our focus from how we look and how we perform, to what our group needs.

Things to avoid

Do NOT give a test: As a leader you are more likely to have spent more time on the passage than the others in your group. It will be more of a blessing if you set up your questions to seek people's thought rather than testing their knowledge.

Avoid leading questions.

Ask one question at a time

Make your questions accessible to everyone.

Avoid vagueness. Ask what you really mean to ask.

Give more options than "Yes" and "No".

Helpful resources: The most important resource in Bible study preparation is a modern version of the Bible (we use the NIV a lot) and an English language dictionary. It is helpful to avoid using bible study notes and commentaries that prevent the joy of discovery with personal assistance of the Holy Spirit in seeing what the text reveals of Jesus. Don't be intimidated by the text. An excellent one-volume commentary for reference is InterVarsity's The New Bible Commentary and the one volume IV dictionary, The New Bible Dictionary. There are also Inductive Bible Study guides; especially those published by Vineyard at the bookstore. If you are really unfamiliar with navigating the Bible, try reading a good overview called How To Read The Bible For All Its Worth. By Gordon D. Fee and, Douglas Stuart.

We do not expect you to have to write inductive bible studies every week for your group. Use the website and our resource catalog to access bible study materials. We would also recommend InterVarsity's book, Search The Scriptures, which uses an inductive study method for daily devotional use. These can be adapted for groups.

Suggestions for leading a small group discussion

Leading a group discussion is truly more of an art than a technique. It is best learned by practice and experience than from a book. So much depends on the personality of the leader and the make-up of the group that specific methods are usually unhelpful. There are a few guidelines though that can help a group discussion work better:

1. Be the leader! Many people don't like group discussions because no one seems to be in charge and the discussions wander aimlessly and pointlessly till the meeting is over. When that happens, it is because the leader is not leading. You need to keep an eye on where the discussion is going and when it gets too far off course, you need to interject comments and direct people back to the topic. People won't be interested if they feel it is a waste of time, so as the leader make sure the discussions are on track and heading somewhere. At first, you may have to take a more dominant role, and get people "stirred up" until they get use to participating. But as people get more comfortable with the format, they should enter in to the discussion quite readily and begin responding to each other and not just to you.

2. Be a good listener. People will want to share when they feel they'll be heard. Make sure you use common courtesy and listen to what is being said! Give eye contact and lots of affirmation for sharing. Respond to what was said so people know you really are listening (and are not just thinking about what you are going to say next). When appropriate, refer back to what someone said earlier so people know what they say is important enough to remember. All of these things will encourage good discussion.

3. Be sensitive. For many people, talking in a group is a big risk! They will watch how you as the leader respond to them and to others when they contribute to the discussion. They want to know it is "safe." They don't want to be judged or ignored or to be told they are wrong in front of others. Be gentle and affirming. Make it clear to your group that it is safe to share thoughts and ideas; that no one will be reprimanded for a "wrong" answer, and that everyone is learning together.

4. Be on time. People will quickly tire of group discussions if they take over the entire group, leaving no time for anything else. And this is so easy to have this happen! So watch the clock and be sure to limit discussion, no matter how good it is getting. Better to have them go away hungry because then they'll come back for more!

5. Be aware of potential problems. Many people dislike group discussions because of all the problems that are possible. It is helpful to be aware of the pitfalls ahead of time and have some idea how to handle them when they pop up.

The problem of the rabbit trail. There is a delicate balance between keeping the discussion on track and allowing people the freedom to share. It's up to you to determine where that balance is and to gently but firmly bring the discussion back to the topic at hand. Some rabbit trails are worth exploring and people will appreciate the consideration you give them by addressing some of these trails from time to time. But an entire meeting of them can feel like a waste of time. So be alert!

The problem of the filibuster. Invariably, each group has one: someone who just plain talks too much! (By the way, make sure that it isn't you!) It will help if once you know who they are, to sit next to them in the room rather than across from them. This will cut down on eye contact and

discourage a lot of talking. Also, without being rude, you need to pass the discussion on to another group member with some deliberation. "Why don't we hear from someone else now? What do you think about what we've been discussing, Sue?" Remember, that when one person is too dominating in the group, other members will lose interest.

The problem of the shrinking violet. There are usually more than one of these in a group, but these are the people who are very shy and very afraid of speaking in front of others. They need lots of encouragement and much affirmation. If you have a lot of these in your group, cut down on any joking around, as shrinking violets may fear being teased in front of others. (Some joking, however, can have the affect of lightening the tension in the room. Discernment is key.) Whatever you do, you want your group to feel extremely safe. Talk with these folks before the meeting. Ask them to read passages out loud. Without being intimidating or putting them on the spot, ask them a question directly. Make it your goal to get your shrinking violets fully participating in the discussions.

The problem of the difference of opinion. Not everyone is going to agree about everything all the time in your group. Disagreements are inevitable but in a group, little disagreements can become full-blown arguments without the people involved intending for that to happen. And arguments "in public" are embarrassing and sometimes hard to recover from. What is often sacrificed in the process of all this is the truth. Here is where it is important for you to be both well prepared and extremely tactful. Try to understand what the issues in the passages are ahead of time and anticipate potential disagreements. Gently but firmly maintain what you believe to be truth while at the same time make allowances for gray areas where there is legitimate room for disagreement. And when you're not really sure, admit it and agree to find out some answers for the next meeting.

The problem of too personal/impersonal sharing. Here again is an area where people differ on what they prefer. Some people will feel that group discussion is not successful unless sharing gets to an intensely intimate level and people are sharing personal secrets and everyone is crying. Others will feel very uncomfortable with sharing at this level and instead prefer the discussion to remain at a very theoretical and impersonal level. Both extremes will be unhelpful for your group. There are things that really are too personal for group discussion and bringing them up is just plain inappropriate. When this happens, show compassion, but indicate that you would like to talk with the person some more about it after the meeting alone. (Of course, if your group has been together a long time and they know each other intimately already, this doesn't apply!) The other extreme is not good either, because small groups are where we care for each other. There's got to be some measure of personal disclosure for care to happen and relationships to grow. There are personal type questions in each study in order to give people the permission to share personally in the group. Be patient with those who are resistant to personal disclosure but set an example yourself. Often the tone for sharing in a group is set out by the leader. If the leader can be personal, the rest of the group can be personal as well. Three ground rules for sharing are:

Share in the first person, I
Keep it short
Avoid giving advice

Communicate these at the start of the group and repeat every 3-6 months for to set general ground rules for discussions and prayer ministry time to help create and atmosphere of openness and avoid misunderstanding.

Have fun! Group discussions can be a lot more fun for the leader because all the pressure is off to “perform” and make it happen. You can actually enjoy yourself and you might learn something in the process! God’s word is so rich that you will no doubt learn something new each week from what someone else shares. So have a good time!