

# Choosing and Evaluating Bible Studies Assessment Pack



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## Leader's Guide

*How to use "Choosing and Evaluating Bible Studies," by SMALLGROUPS.COM, in your regularly scheduled meetings.*

Welcome to SMALLGROUPS.COM: Inspiring life-changing community. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you equip and direct the leaders of your small-groups ministry. The material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders, and has been selected by the editors of LEADERSHIP Resources at Christianity Today International.

An "Assessment Pack" is a collection of tools that can be used individually or with a leadership team. Each tool in this packet has been designed to help evaluate Bible study and curriculum options for churches and small groups. These tools have been split into two sections: 1) Choosing a Bible study and 2) Evaluating Bible studies on several different factors.

For example, to get a good sense of what your group leaders are hoping to study, use the re-printable survey called "What Should We Study Next?" (p. 5). To evaluate the discussion questions within a study before using it, check out Terry Powell's "Assessing Bible Study Questions" on pages 10–11. And Sam O'Neal has written two post-study evaluations to help determine whether a study was successful. The evaluation for group members is on pages 14–15, and the one for group leaders in on pages 16–17.

We hope you benefit from this resource as you select and evaluate Bible studies for your church and small groups.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at [www.SmallGroups.com](http://www.SmallGroups.com).

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## What Makes a Good Bible Study?

*The answer may not be what you think.*

By JoHannah Reardon

Henry (not his real name) tried really hard. He wanted to become a regular Bible study writer, so he sent me a rather impressive résumé of his theological training and experience. I happened to need a writer at that moment, so I gave him a trial assignment.

What I got back showed a good grasp of the subject matter and Bible text that it was based on. He obviously knew what he was talking about. In fact, he knew more than the average Bible-study member would be able to decipher. He wrote in theological language that you needed a PhD to understand. He also had no idea how to put the subject matter into a form to discuss. He was a teacher and was used to imparting information, not creating conversation.

That experience with Henry sums up why it is so difficult to find a really good Bible study. Everyone wants the study to increase their knowledge, but they also want it to create a lively group experience that's applicable. Finding all those things in one study can be tricky. So look for a study that includes each of these elements.

### Increase Your Knowledge

Nothing is worse than an overly simplistic Bible study. What makes us want to study the Bible in the first place is its complexity. That doesn't mean it's impossible to understand, but it does mean that it should get us beyond surface level. For example, a study on the Ten Commandments should include more than a simple recitation of all ten commandments. If we are studying those commandments, we want to understand what they are truly saying and how they apply to our lives today. Otherwise we could just list them and be done with it.

But many Bible studies today do the equivalent of just that. They direct us to a Bible text and then ask us to parrot back the exact words written there. This can be useful to set the context, but it can never move us beyond a simple observation to understanding the meaning and applying it to our lives. And it's an absolute discussion killer. All a person can do is answer the question and move onto the next one. There are no opinions expressed or deeper meanings gleaned.

Then again, we don't want to fall into Henry's problem of making the text so complicated that we have no idea what it is saying.

So what's the answer? Look for a study that is theologically sound but not difficult to understand. Try to find a study that includes solid passages of Scripture. If the study just throws in a verse here and there to support a point, you won't be getting into the meat of the Word. Instead, look for studies that put longer passages of Scripture into context. If someone just uses a snippet, they may be trying to bend the Scripture to prove their point, rather than the other way around. So if the study is talking about forgiveness, it should use a section of Scripture where forgiveness is the topic—not a random verse where something is mentioned in passing.

Also look for a study that is not afraid to admit that there are things we aren't sure about. It should let readers know that, for some issues, there is no definitive opinion and that the best of Christians disagree.

### Create a Lively Group Experience

Most Bible studies are written for a group experience. And if it's going to be a good group experience, it should include great open-ended questions that require a thoughtful answer. Avoid Bible studies that include only yes or no questions, or ones that simply parrot back the information in the text. Instead, the questions should require a thoughtful answer.

For example, for a study on the Trinity, if the questions are along the line of, "Do you believe in a triune God?"—that requires only a yes or no answer and kills discussion. Instead it should ask something like, "What difference do you think it makes that God is triune?" or "How would you explain the Trinity?"

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If a study does ask a yes or no question, it should always ask for an expansion. For a study on forgiveness, if a question asks, “Do you struggle with forgiveness?” Then it should follow it up with, “Share your story.” Knowing that can help you turn less than ideal questions into ones that will create a better group experience.

A great study should also have engaging, excellent writing. In fact, Bible studies should be as engaging to read as any article or book. Here are some examples of great writing in a Bible study. It’s from a study called “Pulling Weeds in the Church Yard”:

Christian faith has been used to justify acts as violent as the Crusades, the lynching of blacks in America, and the bombing of abortion clinics. And maybe not as violent—but certainly as vicious—can be the rhetoric Christians use in public political and moral debates. However, faith requires Christ followers to put ourselves under the Word of God, not the other way around, to fit our agendas.

Doesn’t that intrigue you and make you want to know more of what the study is about? It certainly sets the stage for a lively discussion. Here’s another example from a study called “Can I Trust My Bible?”

The Bible is not an arbitrary collection of cute, nice, or even wise writings that simply amassed themselves together in some dusty corner of a Jewish rabbi’s personal library; it is a set of literary creations built on the foundation of God speaking words of covenant relationship.

That makes me want to know everything I can about the Bible and to know this God who wants to have a relationship with me.

### **Make Sure It’s Applicable**

Finally, make sure the study is practical. Remember that the point of all Bible study should not be to simply impart knowledge. It should produce change. The study should present the Word of God as the living, active thing it is. It should help us to savor the Word of God as a precious morsel and allow it to ask questions of us, rather than we simply asking questions of it.

For example, if a study approaches the story of the rich, young man whom Jesus tells to sell all his possessions and follow him, it shouldn’t make up an analytical interpretation to explain this away. It should force us to listen to Jesus’ words as if they are directed to us and consider what that means for our lives. In other words, it should avoid making God in our own image and let him make us in his.

Look for a Bible study that digs into the meaning of the text but also provides a way to apply it. We can study the Ten Commandments until we’ve completely dissected them, but if we don’t figure out how to obey them, that will be meaningless. We can debate all day what it means to “honor your father and mother,” but unless we figure out how to do that, it’s not going to do us any good. So keep in mind the highest form of knowledge is wisdom. As you are looking at curriculum, decide whether it is merely imparting information or moving you beyond that into wisdom.

Of course, the best Bible study in the world can fall flat. So pray that God will give you and your group a thirst that is never quenched in a mere hour a week, but that each person will want to know more because they can’t get enough of it.

— JOHANNAH REARDON is managing editor of [www.ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://www.ChristianBibleStudies.com).



## What Should We Study Next?

*Use a simple survey to answer what is often a complicated question.*

By Len Woods

There are lots of ways to decide which Bible study your group should tackle next. But sometimes the simplest way is best. Use the survey below to get a feel for where your group members are struggling or are hungry to grow.

**What I want to study next (check the five topics that interest you most):**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Handling finances</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The creation/evolution debate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The basics of accountability</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How to pray</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with emotions (guilt, anger, shame, etc.)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Building better friendships</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Apologetics (tough questions about the faith)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Prophecy and the end times</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How to have a quiet time/devotional life</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Outreach and evangelism</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Building a stronger marriage</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Raising and disciplining children</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Parenting adolescents</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Addressing racism and discrimination</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Understanding world religions</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How to know God's will</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Recovering from divorce</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Setting healthy boundaries in relationships</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Calling and career (being a Christian in my job)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The life of Christ</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Success in time management</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Addressing gender issues</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Holiday material (Christmas, Easter, etc.)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Studying a specific book of the Bible:</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> What it means to live for Christ</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The character of God</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A crash course in church history</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Winning the war with depression</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Developing a life of integrity</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Learning to worship God</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Tackling sin</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Becoming a better parent</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Becoming a better wife/husband</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with grief/disappointment</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Facing death</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Making an impact on my world</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Basic theology</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The fruits of the Spirit</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Understanding God's global plan</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Old Testament survey</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> New Testament survey</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Understanding (and using) my spiritual gifts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Becoming "missional"</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ethical issues of the current culture</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual disciplines</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Learning to study the Bible for myself</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The Christian and the arts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How to do basic Christian counseling</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) _____</li> </ul>
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## CHOOSING AND EVALUATING BIBLE STUDIES

**Next Steps**

- **Be realistic.** Understand that you *won't* get a consensus for just one topic. Instead, you'll likely uncover a real hunger for several topics. That's a good thing, because it will help you make a longer-term schedule. Take the top three or four subjects one and tackle them one at a time.
- **Find material.** Each of the topics in the survey above corresponds to Bible studies featured on [www.SmallGroups.com](http://www.SmallGroups.com). All you need to do is type the highest-ranking subjects into the search bar on the website. You can also talk with someone knowledgeable about "in print" study materials on the market (i.e. a bookstore owner, your church librarian, your pastor, Education Director, or Small-Groups Minister).
- **Make a decision.** You will discover a number of downloadable study guides and/or Christian books dealing with each of the subjects above. Borrow samples (if you can) and take them to your next small-group meeting so that members can and look them over. At that same meeting, decide as a group which direction you will go for your next study.

— LEN WOODS; Copyright ©2003 by the author and Christianity Today International. Originally appeared on [SmallGroups.com](http://SmallGroups.com).

**Discuss:**

1. What topics would I like to add to this survey? What topics would I take away?
2. What is the best way to get this feedback from your group? (Examples include: Take group time to fill out the survey, send it out by email, develop a tool using your church's website, and so on.)
3. What will you do if there are no clear patterns in your group members' responses?



## How to Select a Great Study Guide

*An in-depth evaluation for choosing the best material.*

By Pat J. Sikora

One major challenge for many small-group leaders is selecting an appropriate study guide for their group. Sure, there are a multitude of study guides on the market, and many churches write their own material. But if you've been a leader for very long, you know that not all study guides are created equal. In fact, some are downright awful.

So how do you make the choice? How do you know if a study guide is both biblically sound *and* relevant to your group? I always start with the second question first. If it isn't right for *my* group, it doesn't matter to me if it's good in general.

Here are some questions to ask about any study guide you consider for your church or small group:

<b>Is the material relevant to my group?</b>	<b>This study guide is great.</b>	<b>Pretty good</b>	<b>Pretty weak</b>	<b>This study guide is awful.</b>
The material is appropriate for my group's demographic (age, sex, marital status, and life stage).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is written at an intellectual and experiential level appropriate for my group. (If your group includes seekers, be particularly alert to this.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The length is appropriate for my group. (Number of lessons as well as questions per chapter).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It addresses both the real and felt needs of my group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The material brings the text to life through practical examples and meaningful application.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It will contribute to meaningful spiritual and personal growth for my group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It will be interesting to my group.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Is the material biblically sound and theologically accurate?</b>				
The material uses good inductive Bible study techniques.  <i>(Inductive Bible study is a reasoning process that proceeds from basic facts to conclusions. This is the way people normally solve problems and study new ideas. The alternative is <i>deductive reasoning</i>, which begins with a hypothesis that the student wants to prove. This can be dangerous in Bible study.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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	This study guide is great.	Pretty good	Pretty weak	This study guide is awful.
Uses the “grammatico-historical” technique of hermeneutics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Grammatico.</i> Helps the reader understand the simple, direct, plain, ordinary, and literal sense of the written words, phrases, clauses, and sentences rather than seeking “hidden” or “secret” knowledge. Word studies or discussions of the original languages are an asset.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Historical.</i> Includes information on and consideration of the time and circumstances in which the author wrote, and the specific meaning of author’s words in that historical context and background.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Considers the context of the rest of this biblical book, all of Scripture, and the canon of theology generally accepted by the Christian church (rather than taking a verse or passage out of context to prove a point).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The material discusses or acknowledges the variety of theological approaches to controversial passages (rather than dictating one position).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is consistent with (or at least not against) the doctrinal positions of our church or denomination.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If the study guide is based on a book other than the Bible, it is biblically based and requires some Bible study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The material offers good footnotes or endnotes and a bibliography.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is published by a known Christian publisher or writer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Is the material well-written?</b>				
The material creates or maintains interest, holding the attention and curiosity of the participant.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It offers accurate commentary on the biblical passages, historical context, and theme of the study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It asks thoughtful questions of the participant rather than providing easy answers.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The material uses a consistent format and flow from chapter to chapter.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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	This study guide is great.	Pretty good	Pretty weak	This study guide is awful.
It encourages enthusiastic discussion through an interesting variety of questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It avoids a sing-song feeling by varying the types of questions and commentary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The material avoids wordiness. It is tightly written and edited.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The chapters are of a length that is manageable in one session, or can easily be divided.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The layout is attractive and easy to follow.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
There is adequate room to write responses, notes, and prayer requests.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Are the questions well-written?</b>				
The material offers a good balance of Objective (30–40%), Interpretive (30–40%), and Application (30–40%) questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Objective</i> questions seek information that contributes to the flow and understanding of the study (rather than random information). Objective questions ask, “What does the text <i>say</i> ?” They usually have a single right answer that is clear from the passage.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Interpretive</i> questions are creatively written and seek information that will contribute to an interesting and meaningful group discussion and a deeper understanding of the text. Interpretive questions ask, “What does the text mean?” They may not have a single right answer and require some study skills.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Application</i> questions are pertinent to my group and will result in meaningful, measurable growth. Application questions ask, “Who cares?” or “What I must do about it?” The answer may be implied from the text, but it requires the participant to get personal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Application questions are scattered throughout the study rather than being tacked on to the end of the chapter.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The material avoids questions that can be answered in one word (especially “yes” or “no”).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The questions (especially Objective questions) respect the participants’ intelligence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The questions and commentary move the participant to from one question or concept to the next. Transitions are clear and each question keeps the reader asking for more.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>This study</b>	<b>Pretty</b>	<b>Pretty</b>	<b>This</b>

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	guide is great.	good	weak	study guide is awful.
The questions will help the leader manage a targeted and effective discussion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Is the Leader's Guide available and useful?</b>				
The Leader's Guide is included in the study guide or readily available at no additional charge.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It offers help for leading a good discussion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It provides answers or direction for Interpretive and Application questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It provides additional questions or directions for discussion beyond those in the participant manual.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It provides resources and help for further study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Pat J. Sikora is founder and President of Mighty Oak Ministries and author of [Why Didn't You Warn Me?](#)*

— PAT J. SIKORA; © 2009 by Christianity Today International and Mighty Oak Ministries.

**Discuss**

1. Which of the categories above is most important for the study material in our church and small groups?
2. What level of study guides does our church expect? (Is “pretty good” acceptable, or will our church hold out for material that is “great”?)
3. How important is it to me that studies have a Leader's Guide?



## Finding a Full-Bodied Bible Study

*Not all curricula are designed with group dynamics in mind.*

By Dan Lentz

A good small group agenda will include the five W's: Welcome, Worship, Word, Witness, and Works. These five areas allow group members to relate to Jesus and each other as they apply the Word of God to their lives, while also being challenged and held accountable to serve and share Jesus with their friends. Use the following evaluation to determine whether a study guide is full-bodied or will need some additional work.

Does your study guide include these components? (You should not expect all of these items to be present each week, but you will want to include all of them in your group over the life of the study.)

### Components of a Small-Group Study Guide

	It's in there and ready to go.	I can make it work with a little tweaking.	I'm going to have to come up with this on my own.
<b>Welcome—Relationship building</b>			
An icebreaker activity or open icebreaker question for each session	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A recommendation for snacks or meals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Worship—Opening ourselves to God.</b>			
A worship reading, activity, or song suggestion for each session	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time set aside for group members to share what God is doing in their lives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time set aside to share and pray for pressing concerns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Word—Hearing from God and responding in obedience</b>			
Study material that has its foundation in Scripture (including the reading of actual verses)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Three or four open-ended questions per session that encourage application and transparent sharing (if the questions are good and relevant, you will not need more than three or four)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning activities or creative ideas that help people connect emotionally with the text (and help engage more than one learning style)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Works—Serving others</b>			
Application questions that specifically address how individuals can take action to make a difference in someone's life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

CHOOSING AND EVALUATING BIBLE STUDIES

	It's in there and ready to go.	I can make it work with a little tweaking.	I'm going to have to come up with this on my own.
A service idea or project that the group can do together	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time set aside to share how group members have served (and been served) recently, and what was learned	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Witness—Sharing our life and story with others</b>			
A question or prompt that helps group members remain aware of lost and hurting people in the broader world	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time set aside to pray specifically for those in the group's sphere of influence that need Jesus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

— DAN LENTZ; Copyright © 2009 by the author and Christianity Today International.

**Discuss**

1. If our study guide does not include many of these components, can we develop missing pieces on our own or do we need to find supplemental resources?
2. If we don't have time to cover all 5 W's each time we meet, then how can we keep a balance over the course of multiple group meetings?
3. If we can only do a portion of the activities or questions suggested in the study guide, which questions would provide the most impact for our group?



## Assessing Bible-Study Questions

*Make sure the core element of any study guide is solid.*

By Terry Powell

Education professor Maryellen Weimer had the following to say about asking good questions: “Questioning may be the most common, widely used, and universally accepted instruction strategy. And therein lies the problem. It is much too taken for granted and too much used without insight or conscious awareness. Some ways of using questions are more effective than others.” This is especially true when it comes to small groups.

You don’t need a seminary degree to be an excellent discussion leader, but it is vital that you have effective Bible-study questions to work with. Use the criteria that follow to evaluate the questions you find in study guides and small-group curriculum.

### Good Questions Are Clear

Plain, easy-to-grasp language is the first feature of questions that pry open the human mind. As you review a potential Bible study, inspect questions for ambiguity. Recite them aloud. Test them on your spouse or friend to see if the intent is clear.

#### 1. Does this study use clear language for its questions?

Very unclear					Very clear	
1	2	3	4	5		

As you evaluate the study, be on the lookout for the following foes of clarity:

**“What about...” questions.** Starting a Bible study questions with “What about...” always drops a dark veil over group members’ thinking. When participants hear such a question, they shrug their shoulders and think, “Well, what about it?”

#### 2. Does this study use “what about...” questions?

Several					None	
1	2	3	4	5		

**Long-winded questions.** Questions that are too long are another nemesis of clarity. Here’s an example of a long-winded question: “Looking at the devil in action tempting Jesus in the wilderness, what specific qualities and strategies of spiritual warfare does he demonstrate that he will also use against us?”

#### 3. Does this study use long-winded questions?

Several					None	
1	2	3	4	5		

## CHOOSING AND EVALUATING BIBLE STUDIES

**Compound questions.** Make sure the study guide does not want you to fling back-to-back questions at your group without waiting for a reply to the first one. One question at a time! Either they will be confused about which question to answer first, or they will forget the first question by the time you finish the second one.

*4. Does this study use compound questions?*

Several					None
1	2	3	4	5	

### Good Questions Are Accurate

What group members conclude about a Bible passage should match its God-intended meaning. I've encountered three adversaries to accuracy that can crop up in the wording of questions.

**Speculative questions.** These questions seek information not disclosed in a Bible text, and seek to satisfy a curiosity about a fact that God figured we didn't need to know. They promote conjecture about the Bible rather than investigation and analysis. Here's an example: "If Jesus had listened to Satan and jumped off the pinnacle of the temple, what do you think would have happened?"

*5. Does this study use speculative questions?*

Several					None
1	2	3	4	5	

**Irrelevant questions.** This type of question "majors on minors." It dissects a word, phrase, or name in a verse without consideration of the passage's larger context or governing theme. Or it focuses on irrelevant details that are insignificant to the primary truths in the text. For example: "Jesus fasted for forty days and nights. What are some other occasions in the Bible when forty days are mentioned?"

*6. Does this study use irrelevant questions?*

Several					None
1	2	3	4	5	

**Subjective questions.** Unintentionally, some leaders transfer the authority from God's Word to group members by instructing them to look inward for meaning rather than investigating the text. For example: "What does verse 11 mean to you?"

*7. Does this study use subjective questions?*

Several					None
1	2	3	4	5	

*8. Does this study use accurate questions?*

Few questions are accurate			Most questions are accurate	
1	2	3	4	5

## CHOOSING AND EVALUATING BIBLE STUDIES

**Good Questions Are Thought-Provoking**

Your group members' enthusiasm during a discussion will depend on questions that stimulate thought. As you evaluate potential Bible studies, be aware of the following kinds of questions that drench motivation.

**Yes/no questions.** You'll want to avoid questions that begin with Do, Did, Was, Were, Is, Are—anything that calls for a mere “yes” or “no” response.

*9. Does this study use yes/no questions?*

Several				None
1	2	3	4	5

**Obvious questions.** Another way to douse the fire of your group's enthusiasm is to ask questions that search for obvious information. Who wants to respond when the answer is clear to everyone?

*10. Does this study use questions with obvious answers?*

Several				None
1	2	3	4	5

*11. Does this study use thought-provoking questions?*

Few questions are thought-provoking				Most questions are thought-provoking
1	2	3	4	5

**Finishing Your Evaluation**

Add up the numbers you have circled for each question. This evaluation includes 11 questions on a scale of 1 to 5. That means you can use the following scale to grade each Bible study you consider:

**11–22 = Poor.** The questions in this study are below average and would need almost total re-writing in order to make the study work.

**23–36 = Average.** The questions in this study are serviceable, but still have a lot of improvement. You would need to do significant re-writing in order to make this study work.

**37–45 = Above average.** The questions in this study will benefit your group members and contribute to a healthy discussion with only a few tweaks.

**46–55 = Excellent.** This study has been expertly prepared with a great selection of discussion questions.

— TERRY POWELL is a professor at Columbia International University and author of [Now That's a Good Question!](#)



## Post-Study Evaluation: Group Member

*Let your group tell you whether or not the recent study was a success.*

By Sam O'Neal

Please take a moment to evaluate our recent Bible study by answering the following questions:

### The Main Topic

1. *Before you began the study, how interested were you in the main topic it covered?*

Not interested								Very interested	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2. *After completing the study, has your interest in that topic increased or decreased?*

Decreased significantly					Increased significantly				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

3. *To what degree does the main topic of the Bible study connect with your life?*

Does not connect							Connects Deeply		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

### The Material

4. *Did you find the Bible-study material to be clear and easy to understand?*

Not clear							Very clear		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

5. *Was the study material effective in holding your interest—both during a group meeting and from week to week?*

I was bored							I was very interested		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

6. *Was your group able to think deeply about the topics being discussed?*

The discussions were shallow							The discussions were deep		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

CHOOSING AND EVALUATING BIBLE STUDIES

7. *Has your knowledge and understanding increased as a result of this study?*

I learned very little

I learned a lot

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

**Growth**

8. *To what degree did the weekly study material intersect with your attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors?*

No connection

Significant connection

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

9. *To what degree have your attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors changed as a result of this study?*

No change

Significant change

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

10. *Would you recommend this study to a friend as a method of spiritual growth?*

Definitely not

Definitely

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

— SAM O’NEAL is managing editor of [www.SmallGroups.com](http://www.SmallGroups.com).



## Post-Study Evaluation: Group Leader

*Take a moment to assess the effectiveness of your recent study material.*

By Sam O'Neal

Please take a moment to evaluate your most-recent Bible study and its affect on your small group:

Study Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Publisher: \_\_\_\_\_

### The Main Topic

*1. Before you began the study, how much excitement did it generate within the group?*

Not excited					Very excited				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

*2. Did the group's excitement for the study topic increase or decrease over the course of the study?*

Decreased significantly					Increased significantly				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

### The Material

*3. Was the Bible-study material clear and easy to understand?*

Not clear					Very clear				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

*4. Were you able to use the discussion questions included with the material, or did you have to write your own?*

The questions were not useful					The questions were very useful				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

*5. Did the study material hold the interest of your group members—both during a each meeting and from week to week?*

They were bored					They were engaged				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

## CHOOSING AND EVALUATING BIBLE STUDIES

6. *Did the weekly discussions stay on the surface of the issues being covered, or did group members go deeper?*

The discussions were shallow					The discussions were deep				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

7. *Did your group members' knowledge and understanding increase as a result of this study?*

They learned very little					They learned a lot				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

## Growth

8. *To what degree did the weekly study material intersect with the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of your group members?*

No connection					Significant connection				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

9. *To what degree have your group members changed their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors as a result of this study?*

No change					Significant change				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

10. *Would you recommend this study to a fellow small-group leader as a tool for spiritual growth?*

Definitely not					Definitely				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

**Total Score:** \_\_\_\_\_

— SAM O'NEAL is managing editor of [www.SmallGroups.com](http://www.SmallGroups.com).



## Evaluating Group Discussions

*How well do you practice these principles of small-group discussions?*

By JoHannah Reardon

The first small-group discussion I led took approximately 15 minutes. No one had explained to me how to get a discussion going. Instead I was handed a list of questions and Scriptures to look up. My goal was to get through all of it as quickly as possible so that we could have our snacks and go home.

Since then I've learned a few principles about how to lead a good discussion, several of which are listed below. Use this assessment to get a sense of your strengths and weaknesses as a discussion leader.

### Good Questions Trump Information

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I use open-ended questions that require more than a "yes or no" answer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I almost never answer my own question.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't assume that my interpretation of a text is the correct one.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I usually wait until the end of a discussion to offer my opinion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Restate a Question that Doesn't Work at First

When I ask a question, I allow enough time for the group to process their answers and speak.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't skip a question when it doesn't seem to be working.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If a question isn't generating discussion, I can restate it to help the group try again.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Communicate Love, Not Judgment

I never make light of or ridicule a group member's answer to a question.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When a group member offers an opinion that is an obvious heresy, I don't avoid the issue.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel confident in my ability to bring doctrinal discussions back to the root of Scripture.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When encountering a heretical or disruptive group member, I offer to continue the conversation later so that the group is not derailed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Keep the Discussion on Track

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I understand the fine line between allowing discussion to flow and degenerating into tangents or useless banter.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When I identify a statement or opinion that is off the subject, I am able to steer the discussion back on track.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I bathe our group's discussion times in a lot of prayer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

— JOHANNAH REARDON; copyright 2006 by BuildingSmallGroups.com/Christianity Today International.

**Discuss:**

1. What kind of feedback tells me that a discussion is going well?
2. How much silence am I comfortable with in a group discussion? How much should I be comfortable with?
3. Which of the discussion principles above do you need to learn more about? Which do you practice well?



## Is Our Strategy Working?

*How well are your curriculum choices working over time?*

By Dan Lentz

One of the dangers of small-group ministry occurs when a group begins to identify “finishing” curriculum as its primary focus—when we value the idea of what is being studied over whether or not life-change has actually occurred. An antidote to this method of thinking is the “one another” commands in Scripture. These are commands spread throughout the New Testament that describe how Christ-followers should relate to one another, and they give small groups a benchmark for evaluating whether their community experiences are actually transforming people into mature disciples of Christ.

So, looking back over your group’s recent experience with different Bible studies, answer these questions to help determine whether the curriculum you have chosen is really doing its job..

	Definitely	Probably	Probably not	Definitely not
Is our group finding a good balance between learning, service, outreach, worship, fun, fellowship, and rest?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are we finding healthy balances between life stories and Bible truth?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are we finding healthy balances between care and discipleship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are we finding healthy balances between kindness and confrontation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are we finding healthy balances between openness and intimacy?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are we encouraging one another daily?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are we admonishing one another?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are we emphasizing forgiveness over grumbling?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are we serving one another in love?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are we bearing each other’s burdens in a real and practical way?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are we being patient, bearing with one another in love?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are we forgiving one another and confessing our sins to one another?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are we praying for one another daily?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

— DAN LENTZ; copyright 2007 by the author and Christianity Today International. Originally appeared on [Smallgroups.com](http://Smallgroups.com).

## CHOOSING AND EVALUATING BIBLE STUDIES

**Discuss:**

1. Have our Bible-study choices helped group members grow spiritually in recent months?
2. If our current Bible study is not supporting the mission of making disciples within our group, are we willing to stop in order to move on with our mission? What steps would we need to take?
3. As we select our next Bible study, what “one another” should we consider emphasizing that currently needs support?