

“Building Community through Bible Study”

Breakout session with Madelon Maupin

Many find that gathering with friends to study the Scriptures is a holy experience, filled with both learning and fellowship. "I rejoice at thy word", writes the Psalmist (119:162), and what joy it gives as we explore God's Word more deeply. Here are some ideas that may be helpful:

1. How many should be involved?

Think about starting with a small group, maybe 6 - 8. You might want to 'find your footing' before opening it to people of all denominations in your community. One of the challenges is learning how to delve into the text and let it teach us, describing what we read in our own or Biblical language vs. using the often more familiar denominational language that newcomers might find puzzling. As groups become more proficient at using Biblical language or their own, free of denominational 'speak', opening to others can be a great blessing for all.

2. Where do we meet?

Some groups meet in participants' homes, others at a more public location like their Reading Room or Sunday School. The main thing is that it doesn't have any smacking of exclusiveness for other church members and visitors, if you begin with your immediate church congregation. Also parking is a consideration in some localities and a neighborhood may not be conducive to growth as word spreads on what a great experience Bible Study is! The exception would be if you have a "Men's Bible Study", as some churches host, or vice versa. One would want to honor the wishes of the group in such a case.

3. How often do you meet?

It depends on people's availability and there are many variations. Some groups find that starting with once a month meetings, perhaps 2 hours at a time, is about right. Others find that is too infrequent and go to a bi-weekly model. Others welcome this study so much that they meet weekly. Whichever is right for you, you may want to start less frequently and scale UP rather than back, if modifications need to be made.

4. How much of the Bible do we cover at each meeting?

Many have found that about a chapter an hour is as fast as they want to go. Much faster and you're unable to plumb the depths of a verse - each one so rich that you want to

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really delve into it. A number of groups find that two hours, or two chapters per meeting, is just about right.

5. How do we best prepare?

The groups that start and continue, seem to find the most successful model is underscoring the role of the facilitator. This can start out to be a single individual but then rotate as the group finds its footing. The facilitator may simply lead the discussion during the session, being sure that some don't dominate and that all get an opportunity to contribute. Their role might also be to keep the session focused on the Bible and not the writings of Mary Baker Eddy, or the session can wander into a discussion of Christian Science only.

Other groups ask more of their facilitators: to lead but also prepare a bit of background for the chapters being studied and/or prepare study questions to send out via email ahead of the session. No more than about 5 is helpful as participants read and think through major themes, characters, setting and historical context as well as application to today. Participants can then print out their questions, answering them by hand or on their computer. Creating a workbook with tabs is a good way to keep one organized. Rotating the facilitator's role among participants is also a way to keep any single individual from feeling burdened or over-extended.

6. How do we actually conduct our Bible Study session?

One of the advantages of community Bible Study is learning the resources others find helpful and sharing those. Many will gravitate toward a certain contemporary translation (NRSV, NLT, NIV, New KJV, The Message, etc.). As you go through the chapters, each one can read several verses, noting which translation they're using. Then the facilitator might ask what people gleaned from those verses, or other questions pertinent to the topic.

Using Mary Baker Eddy's statement as a guide, we bring "reason, revelation and demonstration" to our Bible Study. We're relying on prayer to illumine these texts but the Bible study is often just to help people understand the context and background for each book, and that helps us penetrate the spiritual meaning of the verses.

7. What should be the focus of our Study?

This depends, again, on the group's choice but many find it helpful to start with the New Testament, perhaps with the teaching Gospel of Matthew, so loved by the early Church that it was placed first in the Canon. If undertaking a study of Paul and his

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letters, it might be helpful to go in the chronological order of his letters, not the order in which they appear in our New Testament (in descending order of length, ie with Romans first).

Others prefer to study a topic that might run throughout the Bible, ie ‘light’, or ‘prophesy’. These are somewhat more difficult to tackle because some background is needed in order to know where to dig.

8. Are there resources to help me lead or sponsor a Bible Study? (I.e. Where would I find study questions if I don't have time or interest in writing my own?)

There are a number of Bible Study guides produced by Christian organizations, although many contain a theological viewpoint at odds with the teachings of Christian Science. But two groups of Christian Scientists currently produce Bible Study workbooks for Bible Study groups, including both background and study questions.

One is Bible Study Seminars that produces a series of booklets called “Foundation Stones”. Topics currently include: An Overview of the Old and New Testaments, Amos, Acts (ch. 1-8), and Acts (ch. 9 - 28), John, the Letters of John, Mark and Proverbs. For further information: <http://store.biblestudyseminars.com/SearchResults.asp?Cat=21>

The other is Madelon Maupin Inc. These workbooks are for Bible Study groups that want background and study questions for each chapter. This is a helpful way to find out the context around verses and stories. Current workbooks include: Isaiah, Daniel, Matthew and Romans. Ready in the Fall of 2013 are: Acts, Galatians, Ephesians and Hebrews. Some groups also like to listen to an accompanying CD that provides further background. <http://www.madelonmaupin.com/products.html>

Summary:

Nothing is more special than meeting a Bible figure or story in the Bible Lesson Sermon you have studied in depth in your Bible Study group and feel is now ‘an old friend’. The more we ‘search the Scriptures’, the more we want to. And what can be better than going to the source of our Leader’s discovery of the Science of Christianity.

If you have any questions about how to proceed with, please feel free to email me at Madelon@MadelonMaupin.com. Happy searching!