5.3

LEADING A TRANSFORMATIVE BIBLE STUDY



Optional *Lectio Divina* Prayer

1. Read Psalm 1:1–6.
2. Meditate on the words.
3. Speak to Christ about this passage.
4. Rest and listen in God's presence.
5. Discuss together.

God's Word is powerful.

Notes

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword.

— Hebrews 4:12

When Anthony was about eighteen years old, he lost both of his parents and inherited a considerable amount of wealth. He was walking by a church one day and decided to go in to pray. As he entered, he heard the Gospel for Mass being read: "If you wish to be perfect, go and sell everything you possess and give it to the poor and come, follow me and you will have treasure in heaven" (Mt 19:21). The words from Scripture struck him to the heart: Anthony immediately decided to sell everything he had inherited, give it to the poor, and pursue a life totally dedicated to God. This man who said yes to the Holy Spirit's prompting through God's Word in Scripture went on to become the founder of Desert monasticism, and he is now known as St. Anthony of the Desert.

God's inspired Word in Scripture has the power to change lives. Though not all people will have an encounter with the Bible as dramatic as St. Anthony did that day, every ordinary Christian should be challenged, encouraged, and guided by the sacred words of Scripture in their daily lives. In these sacred books, we encounter not merely the words of men from a long time ago, but the words of God, speaking to us today through those human words.

This is one reason why small-group Bible studies can make a significant impact on people's lives. We gather to read not any ordinary book, but rather the inspired Word of God, speaking to us today. As Scripture itself attests, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12). As they did for St. Anthony, the Scriptures have an incredible ability to open hearts and impact those who read them, even today.

But that's not all. Participants in a Bible study not only encounter God in his Word, but they also encounter God in their fellowship with each other as they consider how God's Word can be applied to

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their lives today. Hearing how others are applying Scripture to their lives can be very encouraging, reminding us that we're not alone in our faith journey; there are others striving to live the Christian life as well. Hearing about their struggles, trials, joys, and triumphs in applying God's Word to their lives can inspire us to go deeper in our faith.

DISCUSS

Have you experienced the power of Scripture in your own life? Why is it significant that Scripture still has the power to transform us today, thousands of years after it was written?

GOALS FOR BIBLE STUDY

Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.

— St. Jerome

Lots of things can be accomplished within a Bible study. That's why, as you begin to lead one, you need to know your goals. What exactly are you trying to accomplish? We encourage you to focus on these three goals: divine intimacy, authentic friendship, and clarity and conviction for the Little Way of Evangelization.

- ***Divine Intimacy:*** The purpose of a Bible study is not simply to learn information or be part of a club, but to facilitate a deeper encounter with God that changes people's lives.

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- ***Authentic Friendship:*** Your participants can learn about God's Word by themselves. The power of a small group is the experience of learning from one another. The friendships formed within a Bible study are crucial for transformation and accountability, and the insights shared between participants can uncover even deeper understanding.

- ***The Little Way of Evangelization:*** Bible studies also provide a setting to guide others to become missionary disciples themselves. As good as it is to form friendships and grow closer to God, don't let your study stop there; be on the lookout for others whom God may be calling you to form as missionary disciples who will go on to evangelize and lead other small groups of their own.

Keep in mind, you don't have to be a Scripture scholar or have an electric personality to be an effective Bible study leader. Anyone who is following Jesus in divine intimacy, who is willing to build authentic friendships, and who is committed to Christ's method of winning, building, and sending can be effective.

DISCUSS

What has been your experience of small groups or Bible studies? Did your group live out any of these habits well? In what ways? As you prepare to lead a study, how can you keep these three goals in mind?

THREE ASPECTS OF LEADING A GREAT STUDY

Now that you know why you should lead a study and what your primary goals are, let's turn to the other three aspects of leading a great Bible study: preparation, skills, and personal investment.

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For in the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets His children with great love and speaks with them.

— Dei Verbum

PREPARATION

You won't be able to lead a good discussion if you haven't taken the time to properly prepare for your study. Here are some tips for preparing well:

- ***Pick Out the Right Study:*** Choose a study that meets the needs of your group. FOCUS resources can be found at focusequip.org. For those new to Bible study, we recommend starting with "The Crux" and "The Story of Salvation."

- ***Pray and Share from Your Own Encounter with God's Word:*** Just reading the materials and Leader's Guide ahead of time is not enough. Prayerfully ponder how the biblical passages challenge you or encourage you personally. Your Bible study will be more authentic the more you share from your own encounter with God's word. Remember, this is God's work; leading a Bible study is an invitation to rely on the Holy Spirit, not simply your own ability.

- ***Prepare Questions for Encounter:*** Look at the discussion questions and select questions that will be meaningful for your group. Adjust or rephrase questions, if necessary. Ask yourself, "What questions will have the greatest impact on my group?"

- ***Select a Few Main Truths to Emphasize:*** As you read through the study you are about to lead, determine one to three key truths you want to share with your group. Keep your focus on those points. Whatever else happens in the study, make sure you focus on these key truths and don't get lost in too many details, side conversations, or tangents. Always bring things back to the big ideas you want everyone to come away with.

DISCUSS

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What would it look like for you to prepare well each week for Bible study? Are you willing to make the sacrifices necessary — particularly with your time — to prepare well?

SKILLS

Various skills are also necessary for leading transformative Bible studies. Let's look at a few key skills that will allow you to lead well.

- ***Hospitality:*** Making sure everyone feels comfortable and welcome will make a huge difference for your Bible study, especially in the beginning before everyone knows each other. Here are some tips for great hospitality:

  - Find an accessible and informal location that can be used or reserved each week. Ask yourself, "What is the easiest location for my group to access? Where will they feel most comfortable?"

  - Provide food and refreshments, especially during the first few weeks. People love food! It also gives the participants something natural to do as they begin to arrive and chat with one another. As your group grows, consider getting others more involved by rotating this responsibility. The more others are engaged, the better.

  - Consider using your first night of study just to get to know one another, begin to form friendships and briefly preview what you'll be studying. Make this night fun and lighthearted, since this will encourage your members to come back!

  - Build up relationships in your study. Ask good questions that allow your members to share their lives. Use your

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knowledge of various members to connect them with one another and to uncover common interests.

- Finally, find a length of time for your study that works and stick to it. Some Bible study members will fall off if you aren't consistent. Begin and end on time. Even if you have to start late, respect your group's time by ending on time.

Facilitating an Encounter, Not Teaching: As the leader of a Bible study, you aren't primarily a teacher, lecturing or explaining everything about the study each week. You should not be doing all the talking. Remember, the goal is to allow your participants to encounter God's Word in the Scriptures and in each other. What can you do to facilitate conversation well? Here are some tips:

- Use great questions to draw out the conversation. How can you use questions that lead the group to reflect on their own experiences and on what the Scriptures are revealing?

- Allow other members of the group to answer questions. Just because someone asks a question doesn't mean you need to be the one to answer it. Present the question to the entire group, and allow several people to contribute to an answer. Afterward, you can clarify, if necessary.

Generating an Engaging Conversation — Three Roles: Within your study, you have three key roles for developing a great

discussion: the trail guide, the traffic cop, and the cheerleader:

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- **Trail Guide:** If you've ever gone hiking, you know how helpful it can be to have a guide who has been on the trail before. They know which way to go, when to stop, and where all the good views are. With your Bible study, you need to be a trail guide — someone who has been through the material before and who knows where to go to make the discussion great.

- **Traffic Cop:** Have you ever watched a traffic cop in action? Their ability is almost an art form as they smoothly direct people and cars with just the power of their hands and a whistle. Numerous obstacles and traffic jams can prevent your study from flowing properly. Like a traffic cop, you may need to stop certain discussions or tangents. At the same time, you may need to encourage shy members of the group to speak up and share. Be mindful of the conversation to make sure everyone is participating and direct the discussion toward topics that will build up your group.

- **Cheerleader:** Even when their team is struggling, a great cheerleader watches the games, cheers loudly, and wears their team's gear. As the leader of a Bible study, you need to cheer on your study. Smile, encourage participation and create an environment where people know you are supportive of them and interested in what they have to say. Give some positive affirmation when someone contributes, even if their comments are not perfectly on point. When people know they are cared about and appreciated, they are more likely to engage in the discussion.

You can know you are facilitating a study well when your study looks like a good volleyball game: The conversation should go back and forth "over the net," involving a variety of participants. As the leader, you serve the ball by asking a good question. Then someone answers, setting the ball up for someone else in the group to

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comment, who then passes it along to another. When the volley is over, you serve up another question.

Also, if you struggle with facilitating a dynamic Bible study, don't be afraid to learn from someone else. Go to another leader's study and observe what makes their study successful.

DISCUSS

What skills do you need to grow in as a Bible study leader? How can you grow in these skills? Where might you need help from someone else?

PERSONAL INVESTMENT

For full transformation and conversion of heart, relational investment inside and outside of Bible study is crucial. You are forming people, not simply conducting a regular meeting. Here are some tips for great investment in your Bible study members:

- Spend some time with them outside of study. Jesus didn't spend time with his disciples only once a week in a class or during moments of formal teaching; he shared life with them through his interest in them and the time he spent with them during everyday moments of life.
- Make invitations to other events and activities. How else can you spend time with your participants? What other activities will help them grow?
- Witness a life well-lived. Ask yourself, "Am I reinforcing the truths I am teaching in Bible study by the way I live?" As leaders, our lives should reflect what we are teaching. If we don't witness to the truths we are teaching, the members of our Bible study likely won't accept what is being taught. We need to live the truths we are teaching.

DISCUSS

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How can you make a deeper investment in the members (or potential members) of your Bible study?

TAKE ACTION

Now it's time to begin your Bible study. Here are some tips for getting started:

- First, pray that the Lord leads you to the people he wants for your study.
- Brainstorm potential members of your Bible study, being careful not to limit yourself. Whom does God want you to invite?
- Pray that God would open the hearts of these people to attend the study.
- Make time to invite each person personally. When Jesus invited the disciples to follow him, he didn't post a scroll in the town square or leave messages at their houses. Instead, he approached each one individually and invited them personally.
- Follow up with everyone and make sure they have all the details for the first study.
- Take time to prayerfully prepare your study material or the activities you will use to get to know one another. Intercede for the members of your group.
- Send reminders to everyone on the day of your study or the day before. People forget sometimes. Don't let that get in the way of a great study.

> *Encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.*
>
> *— 1 Thessalonians 5:11*

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- Especially for the first study, take extra time to allow the group to get to know each other. Forming these bonds is a critical component for keeping people interested.

- Finally, be persistent. A great study may require several invitations or an additional investment of time and energy. Put in the extra work to make your study great. Keep praying, keep making invitations, and keep working on your Bible study skills.

DISCUSS

Do you have any fears about leading a Bible study? What would help you overcome those fears? What steps do you need to take to develop a great Bible study?

KEY CONCEPTS

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Inspiration of Scripture: The Bible is inspired by God. When we read Scripture, we encounter God's Word speaking to us today, his divine Word communicating through the human words of the sacred writers.

God's Word is powerful: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

The three goals of a Bible study: Divine Intimacy, Authentic Friendship and the Little Way of Evangelization

The three roles to play while leading: Trail Guide, Traffic Cop, and Cheerleader