

Sermon-Based Bible Studies



Sermon-based Bible studies are one of the most effective ways to make sure the sermon is more than an outline completed, a series of “Aha!” moments experienced, and/or a responsibility authenticated. Sermon-based Bible studies are one of the only Bible study formats through which a preacher or pastor can be certain that the work he has done in preparing and proclaiming the sermon is transformational. This is true because the primary goal of a sermon-based Bible study is to lead each group member to not just know the Word but embrace and do the Word. The greatest spiritual transformation takes place when hearers of the truth go and live the truth they have heard. It is in doing the Word, not in just knowing the Word, that spiritual growth occurs.

What are sermon-based Bible studies?

Sermon-based Bible studies are conversational Bible studies based and built on the biblical truths unearthed during the pastor’s weekly sermon. These studies are written weekly by the pastor, a church staff member, or a layman. Because the studies are written in-house, they are customized experiences for each specific congregation.

Why sermon-based Bible studies?

Sermon-based Bible studies are positive and effective for multiple, important reasons.

- The church doesn’t have to be concerned about false teaching as the church’s pastor is the one who has taught the lesson.
- The church can be confident that the theology discussed is consistent with the church’s theology since the it is the same as what the pastor unearthed during his sermon.
- Because biblical truths have already been established, more time can be given to prayer, relationships, and the needs of group members.
- Because biblical truths have already been established, the amount of time the group meets can be shortened.
- Because sermon-based Bible studies are conversational, they engage every group member, keeping the experience from becoming boring and burdensome.
- Because sermon-based Bible studies are customized, the church’s mission and core values can be integrated into the Bible study experience and, in so doing, be more deeply established into the hearts and minds of the church membership.
- The primary goal of a sermon-based Bible study is to lead group members to apply the Bible to real life.

The Sermon-Based Bible Study Meeting

Sermon-based Bible studies are easily led and simple in format for any group experience. In fact, many churches utilizing this format call them sermon-based discussions rather than sermon-based Bible studies. This is due to the fact that sermon-based Bible studies are truly discussion-oriented and a simple format.

Step 1: Welcome by the Group Leader

Step 2: Group Ice-Breaker (optional but important)

Step 3: Prayer Requesting God Speak Through His Word and the Conversation

Step 4: Reading of Scripture

Step 5: Bible Study Discussion

1. Head
2. Heart
3. Hands

Step 6: Prayer Time

Step 7: Dismiss

About Each Element of the Sermon-Based Bible Study Meeting:

Step 1: Welcome by the Group Leader

When leading a sermon-based Bible study, it's important that the leader make sure those in attendance feel special, honored, and welcomed appropriately. This is especially important if there are new people in attendance. A welcome from the group leader should include the following: 1) Words of welcome, 2) Gratefulness that people have chosen to be part of the group meeting, 3) Introduction of those who are new to the group, 4) Asking those who are in the group to introduce themselves to those who are new, and 5) Creating an environment of anticipation.

A group welcome might go something like this. "Hello everyone. I'm so glad you're here today. I'm thrilled that _____ and _____ are with us for the first time. Would each of you introduce yourselves to _____ and _____? We'll start with the person to my left and go around the circle."

After everyone has introduced themselves...

"I'm really excited about our conversation tonight. The pastor's sermon Sunday was really helpful to me, and there are some things that I'm hoping you can clarify for me and some things maybe you're curious about. Before we start our Bible study time, let's do an ice-breaker. In case you've never been involved in one of our groups, an ice-breaker is just a silly question each person answers that helps us get to know them better."

Step 2: Group Ice-Breaker (optional but important)

An ice-breaker is a simple question, often unrelated to the Bible study, that each person in the group answers. Each person can answer without needing any level of knowledge and is almost always related to group members' past experiences.

The goal of the ice-breaker is to create a conversational environment. After everyone gives their responses, the leader of the group should verbally thank them for their answers and let them know that they look forward to hearing from them during the Bible study time. The following is an example: “Thanks for answering that question. I really look forward to your input when we start discussing the Bible.”

Many group members don't like ice-breaker questions, so many groups don't do them. This is a mistake as group leaders need to create a conversational environment early in the meeting, so everyone in the group engages in the Bible study discussion.

Illustrations of Good Ice-breaker Questions:

- Name something in your house you'd like to get rid of but can't. (Family members don't count.)
- What was your favorite road trip or vacation? Who went with you?
- If you could eat only one food the rest of your life, what would that be?
- What is the story behind the time you went the longest without sleep?
- What is one of your biggest pet peeves?

The above ice-breakers are taken from a blog post by Julie David, “50 Icebreaker Questions of Church Small Groups.”

Step 3: Prayer Requesting God Speak Through His Word and the Conversation

This prayer can be voiced by the group leader or any group member. It might sound something like this: “Father, we come here tonight to grow to be more like you. We long for you to speak through Your Word and for the Holy Spirit to enlighten us as we discuss Sunday's sermon. Thank you for revealing Your truths to us. Amen.”

Step 4: Reading of Scripture

The leader should assign someone the responsibility of reading the passage of scripture that will be discussed. A few things to keep in mind: 1) The leader should ask permission of the person they would like to read. Some people aren't comfortable reading aloud. This should be done before the group meeting begins, 2) The passage read should be the passage the pastor utilized in the sermon, and 3) The passage should be read with passion and clarity.

Step 5: Bible Study Discussion

The Bible study is question-oriented and discussion strong. The leader is not the teacher; he or she must take on the role of facilitator. The leader facilitates a conversation by asking compelling and probing questions, not teaching the group a lesson. An effective group leader/facilitator talks less than 25% of the time.

The three segments of a transformational sermon-based Bible study are: 1) Head, 2) Heart, and 3) Hands. The primary role of the leader/facilitator is to ask appropriate and effective questions.

Broadly speaking, there are two types of questions, closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions clarify facts and are most often used during the Head segment of the Bible study. You'll know if you have asked a closed-ended question as most often there is only one right response and the question doesn't create ongoing discussion. Open-ended questions lead to further conversation and are most often used when discussing the Heart and Hand segments of the Bible study.

For instance, if a group discusses John 3:16, a closed-ended question might be, "Who did God send to die for our sins?" The only right answer is Jesus, God's Son. This question clarifies the fact and doesn't open the door for further discussion.

On the other hand, when discussing John 3:16 an open-ended question might be, "How has knowing Jesus personally changed our lives and how would you describe your relationship with Jesus today?"

About the three Bible study segments:

Head (the Intellectual Level):

During this part of the conversation, the leader/facilitator has one goal in mind: to be certain the group knows what the Bible says. The questions the leader asks will almost always be closed-ended questions. Since the pastor has already explained the scriptures, the responses should come easily.

Heart (the Personal Level):

During this part of the conversation, the questions lead group members to be honest about their own journey. The questions the leader asks will almost always be open-ended questions focused on the inner person. Group members begin to dig deep within themselves to understand their actions, motives, and feelings. Group members may be self-aware enough to evaluate what past experiences the enemy is using to create shame and guilt in them. They may realize what causes them to rebel against God's perfect will and expectations and may realize their need to repent. People may become emotional or share openly those things that have been hidden for years or decades. This is positive and should be honored by the leader.

Hands (the Behavioral Level):

During this part of the conversation, the questions lead group members to make commitments. The questions in this segment are almost always closed-ended questions that lead to short answers. At this point, the leader/facilitator should not open the conversation for more ongoing conversation. The goal is simply to give group members a chance to voice aloud the commitments they're making based on the expectations God has revealed to them through the scripture or the group conversation.

Step 6: Prayer Time

During this time of prayer, group members should pray for one another and those in need. It is strongly suggested that prayer requests are limited to family members and close friends.

Step 7: Dismiss

The leader reminds the group when and where the next meeting will be and what time the group meeting begins.

OPTIONAL AND IMPORTANT:

If meeting face-to-face, it's always good to add about 20 minutes to the experience and ask group members to take turns bringing snacks and drinks. This is always a win and is best done at the beginning or the end of the group meeting. If done at the beginning of the group meeting, it relaxes people and gets them talking. If done at the end of the group meeting, members often continue the conversation with one another on a more personal level.

How to Write a Sermon-Based Bible Study

Writing sermon-based Bible studies is not as difficult as you might imagine. In time, it comes naturally. Below is a step-by-step guide.

Step 1: Read or listen to the sermon. Take notes as you go. Take special note of the pastor's primary points, the theological and doctrinal truths he establishes, and what he asks the congregation to do (application points) based on the passage he teaches.

Step 2: Make a list of each of the following:

- The pastor's primary points
- The theological and doctrinal truths he wants to plant in his congregants' minds and hearts
- The application points he asks of the congregation

Step 3: Choose an ice-breaker. There are a few blogs and webpages that will give you more than you'll ever need. They are listed below.

50 Ice-Breaker Questions for Church Small Groups

<https://www.signupgenius.com/church/church-icebreaker-questions-for-small-groups.cfm>

75 Icebreaker Questions for Church Small Groups

<https://factsandtrends.net/2020/02/19/75-icebreaker-questions-for-church-small-groups/>

Here are the Best Small Group Icebreakers

<https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/help-others-grow/leading-small-groups/small-group-icebreakers.html>

40 Icebreakers for Small Groups

https://insight.typepad.co.uk/40_icebreakers_for_small_groups.pdf

Small Group Icebreakers

<https://www.dougbrittonbooks.com/onlinebiblestudies-smallgroupsandcellgroups/icebreakerquestionsforsmallgroups-sampleicebreakers/>

Step 4: Create Bible study questions for each of the three Bible study segments.

At this point, review the notes taken during the pastor's sermon. Through the questions asked, your goal is to establish the truths the pastor verbalized, leading group members to take note of their own hearts and then apply the unearthed biblical expectations.

Remember that each segment of the discussion has a very specific goal and utilizes either open-ended questions or closed-ended questions.

Head:

Goal - Be certain the group knows what the Bible says.

Question Type – Closed-ended questions

Heart:

Goal - Group members dig deep within themselves and understand their actions, motives, and feelings.

Question Type – Open-ended questions

Hands:

Goal - Group members make commitments, repent of past sins, and do the Word.

Question Type - Almost always closed-ended questions that lead to short answers

Below is a template you may use when writing sermon-based Bible studies.

Step 1: Welcome

Step 2: Ice-Breaker

Step 3: Prayer for the Holy Spirit to Speak Truth

Step 4: Scripture

Step 5: Sermon-Based Bible Study Discussion

1. Head – Closed-ended questions
2. Heart – Open-ended questions
3. Hands – Closed-ended questions

Step 6: Prayer Time

Step 7: Dismiss

Leading an Effective Sermon-Based Bible Study Group

Facilitating Discussion

Facilitating a conversational Bible study requires the leader of the group to keep a few essentials in mind.

1. You are facilitating a conversation, not teaching. A great conversational Bible study leader talks less than 25% of the time. Utilize the questions to create a conversation.
2. A few suggestions: 1) Prior to the meeting, review in your mind the makeup of the group. You may find that some questions are more appropriate for your group than are others. 2) Pray that God leads you to the best questions for your group. 3) Prior to the meeting, become very aware of the questions. As the meeting progresses, utilize the question that continues the thought process of the group at that time. This may mean skipping questions or jumping from question to question without following the progression of the study.
3. Utilize the ice-breaker question. Some group members may question answering the ice-breaker question. These questions may seem trite or unnecessary to them. It is vital that you do this question. The goal of this question is to get everyone to see where they stand in light of the topic being discussed. People who talk early and feel heard will almost always talk later. Be sure everyone answers, and then, following their comment, encourage them with phrases like, "Thanks for that, I'll look forward to hearing more of your wisdom later," "Thanks for sharing. I always enjoy hearing what you have to say," or, "I appreciate your honesty. I really look forward to hearing what you have to say when we get into deeper discussions later tonight."
4. Engage those who remain silent. Some group members may try to hide in the shadows and put the burden of conversation on the rest of the group. If you have someone like this in your group, graciously invite them into the conversation by directing a question to them after calling them by name. Be very wise about this though, as you don't want to drive someone out of the group.
5. Don't allow any one person to dominate the conversation. Sometimes a group member talks too much, keeping others from being part of the discussion. These persons also keep a conversation from ever having a natural flow. In this instance, direct questions to someone else

purposefully. Another option is to thank the overly talkative group member for his/her input but say something like, "Let's see what someone else has to say this time." Or, if it gets really out of hand, speak with the over-aggressive talker between meetings, helping them to understand that it's important everyone in attendance is heard.

Between Gatherings

What happens between meetings is as important as what happens during meetings. It's important that you do a few things between meetings.

1. Continue to spend time with God on a daily basis. Spend time in Bible study and prayer.
2. Pray for each group member daily.
3. Get the group together to hang out and have fun. Remember this: the amount of conversation that takes place during meetings is directly related to the amount of conversation that takes place between meetings.
4. Spend time reviewing the scripture and questions that will be discussed during the weekly group gathering. You needn't memorize it, but knowing the material well allows you the freedom to follow the Holy Spirit's direction much more easily.
5. If a group member is struggling with a personal issue or a truth that has been unveiled, get with them between meetings to answer any questions and/or pray for them.