

BAND OF BROTHERS

How to Lead a Men's Bible Study

Guys—for all our supposed independence and isolation—do a lot of things together. We hike or ride bikes together. We compete on the basketball court. We tell each other the jokes we like. We watch sports together, offering our commentary along the way. We fix malfunctioning appliances, car engines, or software together. In the business world, we work at building stronger companies that will make more money. In other words, we're not the "lone rangers" many women think we are.

And men all across the nation are finding value in opening the Bible together on a regular basis. After all, it's clearly a "guy book," with males taking up at least 90 percent of the spotlight, from Adam to Noah to Moses to Samson to David to Daniel to Jesus, Peter, and Paul. It speaks to the real issues that guys face in our contemporary world. When men bring those issues into a small group of friends they can trust, great things happen.

If you'd like to form such a band of brothers, here are the practical steps to take:

Recruiting and Organizing

Write a list of possible participants. Go through the Contacts list in your phone or on your computer; think about guys you've met on the job, in the community, at church—and imagine what would happen if you said, "Hey, I'm thinking about getting a group together to dig into *Every Man's Bible* and see how it can help us be better Christ-followers. Would you be interested in giving it a try?" Then start making phone calls.

Don't be discouraged by "Yeah, well, but I'm awfully busy" (which may or may not be the real reason for staying away). Take what you can get. As few as three recruits (plus yourself) is enough to move forward.

Settle the logistics—time, place, frequency, and duration. Ask everyone for input: What day of the week would work best? What time of day—early morning? Over lunch? An evening or a weekend afternoon? Can you make this happen on a weekly basis (the best option), or would it have to be biweekly?

Where's a good place to meet—a coffee shop? Somebody's office or lunchroom? Somebody's home? Even outdoors?

What about a trial period of, say, six meetings, so guys don't feel pressure to commit to "forever"? You can evaluate at the end of the period and see if your group wants to keep going.

Set the first meeting time (with adequate advance notice). Be prepared that not everyone who sounded positive will actually show up. It will take a few weeks for the group to sort itself out and settle into a committed core.

Opening Minutes

When guys come together, there's a social dimension but also a task (or purpose) dimension to pursue. The first minutes will no doubt be social in nature, along the lines of "Hey, what's up?" . . . "How 'bout them Cowboys (or Steelers, or Broncos)?" . . . "How was your business trip last week?" This is fine as a way to get comfortable with one another—so long as it doesn't consume a major chunk of time. Your group is intended for more than just "hanging out."

Soon enough, it's time for you as the leader to say, "Okay, let's dig into our topic for today, which is _____."

The Main Content

In the following pages you'll find ten sample sessions that draw upon the resources of this Bible. Each kicks off with a warm-up question to set the stage. Then you'll proceed to what the Word of God actually says, with illumination from the extra *Every Man's Bible* features.

Five of the sessions are keyed to "Someone You Should Know" features, profiles of intriguing *personalities* from both the Old and New Testaments whose lives demonstrate valuable lessons for us. The other five are about *issues* men face, drawn from the "Men, Women, & God" feature boxes in the text. (By the way, these ten sessions are printed here in no particular order. Feel free to pick and choose as you wish.)

The Fine Art of Asking Questions

This group is not a place for you to do all the talking. Each session includes suggested questions to draw out the thinking of your group members. The questions have been carefully crafted to elicit responses; they are neither too easy nor too difficult. Use them as written, unless you're sure you have a better idea.

Then, once you ask the question, wait for answers. Don't be afraid of silence. It often means people are deep in thought. If they observe that you quickly get antsy and jump in to answer your own question, they will sit back and let you continue to do so.

Time Control

A leader must exercise gentle but intentional control of the clock. While you don't want to cut somebody off in the middle of expressing his sincere thoughts, you cannot allow rambling. If you sense the frustration level building in the group, go ahead and intervene: "That's good, Jim—let me just add something here that relates to the next area we want to consider . . ." And quickly move to regain direction.

Also, be careful about ending the meeting on time, or as close to it as possible. It's always better to have people wishing the session were longer than for them to be dreading how long it will drag on.

What about Food?

Yes, snacks are a good way to build camaraderie in a group, provided that they don't take up an inordinate amount of time. If you decide to have food

at the beginning of a meeting, be diligent in starting the actual study without too much delay. If you eat at the end of a meeting, of course, members can linger as long as they wish.

Praying Together

Regardless of a meeting's official topic, people often arrive with a distracting personal problem or concern. That's why it is good to offer an opportunity to hear these, so you can pray together at the end. This is not "off the subject." This is ministering to one another as you journey together. Use whatever format your members find most comfortable.

Other Options

Here are two additional components that you might choose to build into the mix, time permitting:

- Feedback on the previous session: How did it actually go as you all lived out the lessons during the week? If, for example, your group had talked about dealing with our desire for quick gratification (the Esau session), you can ask in the following week, "So how did that work out for you? What did you learn about yourself?"
- Some kind of *action* that guys enjoy—whether for pure fun (a sport) or for ministry (taking up a project for needy kids or a single-parent family, or perhaps something at church). When guys use their hands, it often loosens up their thoughts and helps them to express themselves.

Someone You Should Know: Esau

Warm-up Question: “Today’s marketing is very good at telling us we need a certain product or service ‘Right Now!’ . . . ‘For a Limited Time Only!’ . . . ‘Don’t Wait!’ What are some examples you’ve seen or heard recently?”

After hearing a few responses from your group, continue with: “And did you respond? Did you do what the ad-makers wanted you to do?”

Meet Esau: Read aloud (either you or one of the group members) the story of a critical day in Esau’s life, as told in Genesis 25:27-34.

Then get a fuller picture of this rugged man by having everyone turn to the profile on page 43 entitled “The Poster Child for Instant Gratification.” It will develop what’s really going on here, including an explanation about the birthright and what it meant. You’ll probably want to have everyone read this page silently, although you could take time for an oral reading if you prefer.

Talk About It:

- Why do a lot of guys make snap decisions without looking down the road to the consequences?
- Is there sometimes a physical angle to all this, such as fatigue, lack of sleep, messed-up eating habits (Esau was starved), or other factors? Like what?
- Anybody want to tell a story about themselves? (Maybe, maybe not!)
- What are some wise ways to prevent this kind of misstep in our lives?
- What kind of siren call is tempting *you* this very week?
- Read aloud the New Testament summary about Esau in Hebrews 12:16-17; then discuss: Why would the Bible call this man “godless”?
- Notice the bottom line of the profile on page 43, entitled “The Point.” It says: “We gain nothing by choosing the immediate over the significant.” What does that mean to you? How would you phrase that in your own words?

Pray About It: Close your meeting with some honest prayers about resisting the lure of instant gratification. Don’t embarrass anyone, but try to be specific before God. Ask him to help each of you live a life without future regrets.

Of Houses and Kids

Warm-up Question: “How many kids are represented by the guys in this group? Let’s add up the total. How many boys, how many girls?”

“Now a second question: In how many different *places* have we all sheltered those kids over the years? How many different houses/apartments?”

“And where were you the most crowded?”

Main Content: Read Psalm 127. Then say, “This psalm may seem at first glance to be jumping from one topic to another—from real estate to job intensity to fathering. Maybe we should look at the feature box on page 818 entitled ‘Houses and Children.’ Somebody please read just the first paragraph, which relates to verse 1.”

- This seems to interpret the verse in larger terms than just carpentry. It talks about the overall environment of our homes. What’s one strong element of the environment at your house?
- What’s one aspect that could use some improvement?
- Do you ever feel like your work as a husband and dad is “wasted,” or as another translation says, you “labor in vain”? What does that look like?
- How can we bring God into this situation?

Now have someone read the second paragraph in the feature box. Afterward:

- At what times do you feel that your kids are indeed “a gift . . . a reward”?
- At what times do you definitely *not* feel that way?
- So is verse 3 true or not? How so?
- Verses 4-5 draw an analogy from archery. In what ways might your children turn out to be like arrows sent out from your hands?
- Will they fly straight, or might they veer off into the bushes?

Finally, read the last paragraph of the feature box, which talks about sequence.

- What’s the wisdom in taking things in the order suggested here?
- If you’ve “gotten it backwards” up to now, can you recoup the situation? By doing what?

Pray About It: For your prayer time this week, suggest that each man pray for his own children *one at a time*, using their actual names. In other words, don’t generalize into “Lord, bless my kids.” Instead, say things such as “I’m thinking about Jeremy now, Lord. What he needs is . . . and help me provide the leadership that he craves,” or whatever the specific case may be.

This can be a special experience of honest conversation with God about the boys and girls, young men and women who mean the most to each of us.