

HOW TO START A

# Bible Study

*A Simple Guide for Small Group Leaders  
& Anyone Ready to Take the First Step*

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## You Don't Need to Have It All Figured Out

I never set out to lead a Bible study. I was just a woman who had found something real in God's Word — something that had held me together through depression as a teenager, through being diagnosed with Crohn's disease at 27, and then cancer at 44 — and I wanted other women to have that same anchor.

So I said yes to leading a group before I felt ready. And that's actually the best advice I can give you: say yes before you feel ready.

Bible study groups don't need a perfect leader. They need a willing one. Someone who loves God, loves people, and is honest enough to say 'I don't know — let's find out together.'

This guide will walk you through everything you need to start a Bible study from scratch — from finding your group to leading your first session. It's practical, it's simple, and it's written for real people with real lives.

Let's get started.

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## Part 1: Before You Begin

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### 1. Get Clear on Your Why

Before you invite anyone to join a study, ask yourself one question: Why do I want to do this? Your answer doesn't have to be complicated. It might be 'I want to go deeper in my own faith.' Or 'I have a few friends who are new to Christianity, and I want to walk alongside them.' Or simply, 'I feel called to do this, and I can't shake it.'

Your why will sustain you when attendance drops, when someone asks a question you can't answer, or when life gets busy and you wonder why you signed up for one more thing. Write it down somewhere. Come back to it.

### 2. Choose the Right Study

A good Bible study for your group should match three things: the spiritual maturity of your members, the time you have available, and a topic that genuinely interests them.

For new believers or mixed groups, look for studies that:

- Explain biblical context without assuming prior knowledge
- Include a mix of reading, comparison, and personal application
- Are structured enough to guide discussion but flexible enough for real conversation
- Are written by someone whose theology you trust

#### A note on Greater: A Study of Hebrews

*This study was written specifically for new believers and for groups that include people at different stages of faith. It uses a READ / COMPARE / APPLY format that makes each session easy to lead — even if you've never led a group before. It works well for groups of 4–12 people meeting weekly.*

### 3. Decide on Format

There's no single right way to structure a Bible study. Here are the most common formats to consider:

- **Weekly meetings** — The most common model. Works well for groups that want consistency and community.
- **Bi-weekly** — Good for busy seasons or groups with demanding schedules.
- **Online / hybrid** — Zoom or video calls make it possible to include people who can't meet in person. Many groups have found that online studies create surprising depth.
- **One-on-one discipleship** — Just you and one other person, meeting for coffee and working through a study together. This is one of the most powerful formats of all.

## Part 2: Building Your Group

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### 4. Start Smaller Than You Think

Three people who are genuinely committed is better than twelve who show up inconsistently. When you're starting out, resist the urge to cast a wide net. Instead, think of two or three people who you know are ready — spiritually hungry, dependable, and safe to be honest with.

Groups grow naturally when the experience is good. Start small, build trust, and let word of mouth do the rest.

### 5. Who to Invite

The best groups are made up of people who are at roughly similar life stages or who share a common need or interest. A few natural starting points:

- **New believers** — Friends or family who have recently come to faith and want to learn more.
- **Seekers** — People who are curious about Christianity but not yet committed. Bible studies are often where seekers make their decision.
- **Life-stage peers** — Young mothers, empty nesters, college students, working women — shared context builds connection quickly.
- **Coworkers or neighbors** — People you already see regularly are the easiest to stay consistent with.

### 6. Set Expectations Upfront

Before your first meeting, be clear about three things: how long each session will last, what commitment you're asking for, and what kind of space you want to create.

A simple message to send when inviting someone:

#### Sample invite message

*"I'm starting a small Bible study and I'd love for you to join us. We'll meet [day/time] for about 90 minutes. It's a [X]-week study and there's some studying to do each week at home. No experience needed — just come curious and open. Can I send you more details?"*

## Part 3: Leading Your First Session

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### 7. You Are a Facilitator, Not a Professor

This is the most important mindset shift for new leaders: your job is not to have all the answers. Your job is to create a space where people feel safe enough to ask their questions and honest enough to share where they actually are.

The best Bible study leaders ask more questions than they answer. They say 'What do you all think?' and mean it. They are comfortable with silence. They don't panic when a question comes up that they can't answer — they say 'That's a great question. Let's look at that together,' and then actually look.

### 8. A Simple Session Structure

This basic structure works for most groups and most studies. Adjust timing based on your group's needs.

#### 90-Minute Session Outline

*Opening (10 min): Welcome, prayer, and a simple check in with how each participant is doing. You can also ask for prayer requests. Review (15 min): What did everyone take away from their homework or reading this week? Any questions? Group Discussion (50 min): Work through the study questions together. Don't rush. The best moments usually happen when you slow down. Application (10 min): How does what we studied today apply to our actual lives right now? Closing Prayer (5 min): Pray together. Keep it simple. Encourage anyone who feels comfortable to pray aloud.*

### 9. Handling Hard Questions

At some point someone will ask something you don't know how to answer. That's not a problem — it's an opportunity.

- **Say so honestly** — "I don't know the answer to that, but I want to find out." People respect honesty far more than a confident wrong answer.
- **Look it up together** — Use a Bible concordance, Blue Letter Bible (free online), or a trusted commentary. Modeling how to search Scripture is one of the most valuable things you can teach.
- **Take it offline** — "Let me do some research on that and bring it back next week." Then actually do it.
- **Sit with the mystery** — Some questions don't have easy answers. It's okay to say, 'I think this is one of those things we hold with open hands.'

## Part 4: Creating a Safe Space

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### 10. Confidentiality is the Foundation of Trust

What's shared in the group stays in the group. Say this out loud in your first session, and reinforce it whenever something vulnerable is shared. Trust is built slowly and broken quickly. Protect it fiercely.

In the study I wrote on Hebrews, I put it this way, 'Sharing with a group needs to be done in a safe space. If you feel uncomfortable, you are free to pass on answering the questions until trust is built.' Give people permission to go at their own pace.

### 11. Make Room for Different Levels of Openness

Not everyone will share at the same depth. Some people need several weeks before they feel safe enough to be honest. Others will open up immediately. Both are fine.

A few practices that help:

- **Never pressure someone to share** — Always give people the option to pass.
- **Model vulnerability yourself** — When you're willing to be honest about your own struggles, it gives others permission to do the same.
- **Affirm contributions without judgment** — A simple 'Thank you for sharing that' goes a long way.
- **Follow up outside the group** — A text or coffee after a session deepens connection faster than anything that happens in the room.

### 12. When Someone Is Going Through Something Hard

Bible study groups often become the place where people bring their most difficult seasons — illness, grief, broken relationships, doubt. This is a gift, not a burden.

You don't need to fix anything. You need to listen well, pray genuinely, and follow up. Sometimes the most powerful thing a group can do for someone is simply show up and say, 'We're with you.'

## Part 5: Keeping It Going

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### 13. Consistency Builds Community

The groups that last are the ones that show up even when life is busy, even when attendance is low, even when the discussion falls flat one week. Consistency sends a signal: this matters. We are committed to each other.

A few things that help groups stay consistent:

- **Protect the time** — Put it on the calendar as a non-negotiable, not a 'when I have time.'
- **Communicate between sessions** — A group chat where people share prayer requests keeps connection alive between meetings.
- **Celebrate milestones** — Finishing a study together is worth celebrating. Mark it. Acknowledge the growth.

### 14. What to Do When Someone Stops Coming

It will happen. Life gets busy. People drift. When someone misses a few sessions, reach out personally — not to guilt them, but to let them know they're missed. A simple 'Hey, we miss you — no pressure, just wanted you to know' matters more than you think.

### 15. Knowing When to End or Transition

Most studies have a natural end — when you finish the book. Use that moment intentionally. Celebrate what God did in your group. Then decide together: Do we take a break? Do we start a new study? Does the group need to restructure?

Some of the best groups have been running for years through a series of studies. Others complete one study and naturally conclude. Both outcomes are good. The goal was never perpetual meetings — it was growth, community, and encounter with God.

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## One Last Thing

Being part of women's Bible studies has been one of the greatest gifts of my life. It's where I've found sisters who prayed for me through cancer, who showed me what mature faith looks like, who held me accountable, and who made me laugh until I cried.

That kind of community doesn't happen by accident. It happens because someone said yes to leading, even before they felt ready.

You can be that person. Start small. Start imperfect. Start now.

*With love and encouragement,*

**Tonya**

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### Ready to lead your first study?

Greater: A Study of Hebrews is designed for exactly this —  
accessible for new believers, rich enough for mature ones,  
and structured to make leading easy.

*[www.tonyalcruz.com](http://www.tonyalcruz.com)*