

# Training Leaders

There seems to be a wide diversity of effort in training Bible study leaders. I've had some very good teaching and some very ordinary teaching. Probably the best way is to seek out good teaching for yourself rather than rely on your church<sup>1</sup> to provide it. This website was written partly to fill the gaps left open by churches in their training of Bible study leaders.

In Colin Marshall's book Growth Groups he has written a chapter called "Selecting, training and shepherding leaders" (chapter 14). He defends the mediocre training given by some ministers by saying "The paid minister of a church is pulled in a multitude of directions. Everyone thinks they own the minister. There is a constant tension between his priorities and goals, and the demands being placed on him. Training for leadership seems like just one more good thing to do." (Page 121.)

Karen and Rod Morris in Leading Better Bible Studies say (page 191) "There are many ideas about training as leaders in order to equip people for a new role, but it is a struggle to know what to do once we are competent, experienced and performing well. In addition, it is often frustrating to be expected to attend training and read books designed to teach what we already know. Often experienced leaders do not attend leader's meetings, and are critical of attempts to train them."

One minister told me that new Bible study leaders learn by watching existing Bible study leaders. There is some truth in that but the Bible study leaders you are watching may not be very good ones and you may learn their bad habits as well as anything they are good at.

Karen and Rod Morris say that supervision is the key to training Bible study leaders and they stress the importance of finding a good supervisor. "The basic rule in finding the right supervisor is to look for someone who is competent as a Bible study group leader and committed to this form of ministry. He or she must be someone with whom you can communicate easily, someone you trust enough to talk to honestly, and someone you respect enough to listen to and value his or her opinion. You need someone who is willing to commit and be available to meet with you, and you need someone who will maintain the confidentiality of what is discussed.

Our first suggestion would be your minister, but it may be that he or she lacks the necessary skills or credibility. It may even be that your minister lacks the conviction that Bible study groups are a worthwhile endeavour. In this case, find someone else." Leading Better Bible Studies (page 191).

The Morris' supervision model suggests regular meetings with these goals in mind: gain support and encouragement, prayer, discuss difficulties, enable accountability, assess if goals are being met, improving the group, focusing the group, and improving the leader.

Marshall has 10 training sessions for apprentice leaders of Bible study groups (Growth Groups pp133-164). His sessions work through Colossians while looking at aspects like the ice-breaker activity, the goals of the group, preparing a study, the discussion method, different types of questions, leading a prayer time, evangelism, leadership, growth, problem people, the health of a group, and starting a group. Trainees are required to access their peers as they have a go at leading studies.

Larry Osborne has a chapter on training leaders (chapter 17) in his book Sticky Church. He is sympathetic with leaders who have full time jobs and are pressed for the time to fit in training sessions. He cancelled his monthly leaders' meetings and broke his teaching down into bite-sized chunks which could be listened to while multi-tasking e.g. while driving to work or exercising or walking the dog.

"Another way we've made the training process more accessible is by shifting it to a time when our leaders are already at the church.

I have to admit that this wasn't my idea. In fact, I didn't like it at first. Once our staff bought into the concept of cutting down on the number of meetings, I thought they went way overboard. They wanted to start training our small group leaders during our worship services – in a separate meeting, during my sermon! . . .

. . . they could still hear the sermon. All we had to do was provide them with a CD of the message at the end of their meeting." (Sticky Church pp 136-137.)

Osborne's topics for new leaders consist of learning to listen, asking good questions, how to run a meeting, prayer, preparation, problem solving, and dealing with problem people. For experienced leaders he teaches about avoiding burnout, motivation, listening versus talking, spiritual gifts, growth, time management, community service, helpful tools, handling a crisis, social skills, and handling sickness or death in the group. (Sticky Church pp 176-177.)

In the 80's I was studying at Hawkesbury Agricultural College and involved in the student Christian group. The Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (A.F.E.S.) were very helpful assisting students in Christian leadership roles. This included training to lead Bible study groups. The best training I had was on a one to one basis with wise and mature Christians. Not specifically to help me be a better Bible study leader but as friends talking to one another on anything that came up.

1. What I mean by church is that organisation you go to, usually on a Sunday, where you sing hymns or songs, someone reads from the Bible, someone preaches for about 30 mins, someone prays etc. – you get the idea. If "church" is a gathering of Christians (= *ekklesia*) then what we do in a Bible study group is also church but in common language it's not described that way. For the purpose of this document I will make the distinction by using "church" and "Bible study group" as completely different things.