

YOUTHWORKER HANDBOOK



A GUIDE FOR THOSE WHO TEACH THE BIBLE TO YOUTH

Youthworker Handbook

*Basics • Goals • Hindrances
Four Kinds of Meetings • Teaching Methods*

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Youthworker Handbook

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BEFORE WE BEGIN

Acknowledgments

I once heard a speaker open his talk with, “I’ve never had an original thought.” With that single sentence he absolved himself of plagiarism once and for all, because every word that followed was, by his own admission, something someone had said before.

The same is true of this book. Over the years I have watched and learned from many people who teach youth. I have served on staff with pastors and with youth pastors. I have served as a lay pastor, a helper, and a Sunday school teacher. I have read many books on youth ministry, teaching, and organization. I took an Education of Youth course at Multnomah School of the Bible, where I had the opportunity to hear some of the leading youth ministers of the day. And I spent three years being trained for youth ministry by an experienced youth pastor.

Much of what is in these pages I learned from Rev. Bill Trenkmann during those three years of discipleship. Bill trained me while I was responsible for our junior high youth meetings. Many others shaped this work as well. In no particular order, they include:

- ♦ Rev. Earl Johnson, who showed me what a pastor’s job is really about
- ♦ Professor Muir and Professor Salisbury, who taught me about youth
- ♦ Doug Freitas, my first Sunday school superintendent
- ♦ Rev. Larry Glazner, who taught me the Read and Repeat method
- ♦ countless others

My wife, Sharon, has worked alongside me for 43 years. She has given me many insights into the nuances of human relationships, and without her encouragement I would probably have given up.

— Ron Whittam

CHAPTER 1

The Basics

To know Him and make Him known

Be Like Jesus

The key to youth ministry is simple to say and takes a lifetime to live: be like Jesus. Our motto is “To know Him and make Him known.”

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

PHILIPPIANS 2:5 (NKJV)

“Mind” here means attitude, our approach or mental state. Paul’s ambition is the believer’s ambition: “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings” (Philippians 3:10–12).

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

LUKE 2:52 (NKJV)

Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me.”

JEREMIAH 9:23–24 (NKJV)

Four Areas of Growth

Together these passages give us four areas for youth development:

1. WISDOM	Growth in wise behavior
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2. ABILITIES	Growth in stature
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3. OCCUPATION	Favor with people
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4. KNOWING GOD	Favor with God
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We encourage godly growth in all four areas, but the most important is understanding and knowing God. To be sure we accomplish this, we urge youth to work on three things:

A. Knowing God = Real Living

John 17:3; Colossians 1:10

B. Following Jesus = Good Behavior

1 John 2:6; Colossians 3:12–14

C. Sharing Jesus = Worthwhile Work

Matthew 28:18–20; Colossians 4:2–6

Following Jesus and sharing Him will take students beyond knowing toward understanding, as they sense God working through them. Keep these three areas in front of your students in every lesson you teach.

CHAPTER 2

Goals

What we want established in every graduating student

A Biblical Basis

Colossians 1:28–29 and Ephesians 4:11–13 give the biblical basis for our goals. Paul wrote to the Christians at Colosse:

“Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.”

COLOSSIANS 1:28–29 (NKJV)

These verses make several things about ministry clear. **First**, the ministry must focus on Jesus and His teaching. **Second**, it may include confrontation and warning. The teaching will not always present popular ideas that youth accept readily, and counsel will often not be what a student wanted to hear. Once a young person responded to counsel by saying, “So you’re saying it’s my fault...” In that situation the right answer was “Yes.” **Third**, teaching and counsel must be given with grace, patience, gentleness, and everything else that goes with wisdom. **Fourth**, our goal is to help each person toward completeness in their walk with God as they become more like Christ. **Finally**, youth work is hard work. It can be a lot of fun, but ultimately it is work, and God gives the strength to do it.

Paul reminded the Christians at Ephesus:

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

EPHESIANS 4:11–13 (NKJV)

As pastors and teachers we need to consider the end product. These verses name the essentials of any ministry: works of service, encouragement, faith, knowing God, and maturity. They must be built into every program we use with youth. So we ask: at the end of a student’s high school years, after the time spent in our youth program, what has been established in those graduating? The answer can be summed up in seven goals.

- 1 A heart for God
- 2 A love for His Word
- 3 Christ-like behavior
- 4 A lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship
- 5 Strong moral convictions
- 6 The ability to think
- 7 Positive thought patterns

1 A Heart for God

We want young people after God’s own heart: people who feel and respond to their surroundings the way Jesus would, whose attention is so focused on God and what He desires that they can hardly tell the difference between their own wishes and His. The goal is to give them time to learn about God first-hand, through leaders’ shared ex-

periences, answered prayer, and seeing God work in their own lives. Developing a consistent quiet time, or morning watch, goes a long way toward this goal.

2 A Love for His Word

We want people who know the benefits of knowing God and who love to read or listen to the Bible. To many youth the Bible is a boring book of outdated stories with moral lessons. I have found something to be true: if people read the Bible and never share what they learn, they soon become bored with it. But if they consistently share what they learn, they get more and more excited about it. I often challenge the group to read through the Bible over summer vacation, offering a prize to those who finish. They must write a brief comment, three sentences, on each chapter. Not everyone takes the challenge, but those who do invariably find something they did not know was there. More than once I have watched a student share that the Passover lamb in Exodus is a picture of Jesus. Most of us would say, “Sure, I knew that.” But these students are discovering it for themselves. The goal is to get them both to read and to share what they learn.

3 Christ-like Behavior

This is not performance-based acceptance, but a deep understanding of how Jesus would respond to the needs of the people around them: unselfish compassion, walking as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6). The goal here is for each leader to model this behavior before the youth. It is hard to develop values and behavior without first seeing them practiced in real life.

4 A Lifestyle of Evangelism and Discipleship

Christianity is not just a Sunday morning or Wednesday night event. It is a lifelong experience of getting to know God and sharing Him with others: leading people to a relationship with the Savior and

helping Christians grow in that relationship. We give youth responsibility to learn and to teach as they grow. We provide opportunities for them to share with each other, and we help them become competent to counsel and teach by giving them the tools and confidence they need. The goal is to encourage them to start their own prayer fellowships and study groups with others their age at school and in their neighborhoods.

5 Strong Moral Convictions

We want youth to develop godly moral convictions, with the confidence to hold and defend them regardless of the earthly consequences: young people who stand against sex before marriage, who oppose lying, and who keep integrity and honesty in all their personal and business dealings. Our objective is to discover what convictions they already hold and to help them understand God's position on specific moral issues. The goal is to have discussions that test their convictions and help them evaluate the various sides of an issue, understanding both sides while holding to their beliefs.

6 The Ability to Think

This goal often raises eyebrows. Yet many educational systems train young people to remember rather than to think. The ability to evaluate, examine, and come to conclusions on their own is important. Too often youth know the right answers and the right way to do things, but have no idea why they are right. When I was younger I went to a library looking for a how-to book on building birdhouses. I have never forgotten the librarian's response: "I wish they wrote why-to books instead of how-to books, because if you knew why something worked, you could easily figure out how." So true. The goal of this youth work is not to show students how to live the Christian life but why. Once they know why, they will figure out how. It is a personal thing.

7 Positive Thought Patterns

This is not “positive thinking,” which is something quite different. Positive thought patterns are constructive rather than destructive ways of resolving problems. Destructive methods often focus on the other person’s inability to change; positive thought patterns focus on the solution. I was once the team leader of a study at work charged with finding an innovative solution to a problem. After a frustrating meeting I confided to a co-worker, “I will never get this figured out.” He answered, “That’s the wrong approach. Assume you will figure it out and proceed accordingly.” Within two days I presented a workable proposal. As long as I focused on not being able to do it, nothing got done; as soon as I focused on doing it, I found solutions. The goal is for youth to learn how their attitude, their approach to a situation, affects the outcome. They should approach problems the way Jesus approached His day-to-day life: knowing that God is in control, and that if God says to do something, it can be done.

CHAPTER 3

Hindrances

What keeps youth from reaching the goals

We are interested in the development of the whole person: spiritually, socially, and physically, at home, at school, and at church. This comes from our desire to present every young person “perfect in Christ Jesus” (Colossians 1:28). But we must also consider what keeps them from reaching these goals and deal with those hindrances. Experience shows that, although many things hinder personal growth, they can generally be boiled down to eleven.

- 1 Poor self-image or sense of worth
- 2 Inconsistent quiet time
- 3 Deceived by “the Lie” (humanism, evolutionism, lack of discernment)
- 4 Improper friendships
- 5 Unbiblical dating standards
- 6 Ingrained sin (bitterness, guilt, lying, and the like)
- 7 Afraid to stand alone; unable to defend their beliefs
- 8 Undeveloped skills due to lack of encouragement
- 9 Unresolved, unspoken questions and doubt
- 10 Lack of biblical knowledge or application
- 11 Lack of spiritual intensity

1 Poor Self-Image or Sense of Worth

Because our culture does not value human life the way God does, youth often do not value their own lives as God does. Avoiding comparison while accepting themselves as God accepts them is crucial. Psalm 139:14 says we are “fearfully and wonderfully made,” and Ephesians 2:10 says “we are His workmanship.” A healthy self-image and sense of worth come both from understanding God’s view of people and from viewing others with that same worth. We love others because we understand God’s love for us, and in the process we learn our own worth. This is love. The youth group, leaders and students alike, must provide an atmosphere of acceptance and love.

2 Inconsistent Quiet Time

If Christians are to develop a mature walk with God, they must learn to spend time alone with Him. Inconsistency here will greatly hamper their growth.

3 Deceived by “the Lie”

We are deluged with talk of pride and personal importance. In a world driven by performance-based values, hate, and the defense of personal rights, it is difficult to follow the sacrificial, others-first values of God’s Word. The world seems to believe two opposite things at once: that humans can become better, even god-like, and that humans are here only by chance, unable to change who they are. Together these ideas form the basis of much of the world’s thinking, and the conflict between them breeds frustration, fear, hate, and despair. Only the truth found in Jesus will set young people free (John 8:32).

4 Improper Friendships

“Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’” (1 Corinthians 15:33). We choose our friends, and the people we spend time with shape our personalities; the more time we spend with them, the deeper their influence. Learning to build friendships that encourage Christian growth is not easy, but once it is done, the move toward maturity becomes possible.

5 Unbiblical Dating Standards

In a world of sex appeal and promiscuity, choosing biblical dating standards often means choosing not to date. That alone makes it hard for youth to make godly choices in this vital area of maturity. Your effort here is never too much. We strive to teach not only abstinence but sexual purity.

6 Ingrained Sin

Every young person must overcome the inability to admit and deal with personal, private sin. It is hard to admit that the things we tend to do are wrong. This tendency is inherited: lying, bitterness, sexual sin, drunkenness, stealing, disobeying parents, and the rest all come from an inborn problem called sin. Current thinking treats this tendency as fate, the way we are meant to be, and claims that changing it denies our human nature. But Jesus came into the world and calls us to deny ourselves and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Christianity does not merely suggest change; being changed is the nature of the Christian experience (2 Corinthians 5:17).

7 Afraid to Stand Alone

This describes the average young person. The need for acceptance and love tends to overshadow the need to be right. It can be overcome by knowing there are others, the youth group, who will love and accept them when they stand alone for what is right. Most youth

also fear looking foolish in the face of questions they cannot answer. The apparent confidence of those who oppose their beliefs intimidates them, and the fear of saying the wrong thing or looking silly in front of friends keeps them from standing on their convictions. This is overcome by information: learning how to answer, being “ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15).

8 Undeveloped Skills Due to Lack of Encouragement

Personal confidence can be bolstered by physical accomplishment. You will find that many adults are naysayers about young people’s abilities, and youth often fear failure so much that they never start. When I was in fourth grade, a sixth-grade friend encouraged me to enter a junior race at a city track meet. I did. Halfway around the track, after about ten runners had passed me, I gave up; I thought I was far behind. I stopped running and walked off the track. Then nearly a hundred kids ran past. I had been well in the lead, but because of my fear of defeat I quit. Encourage youth to develop the skills they are interested in.

9 Unresolved, Unspoken Questions and Doubt

This is probably the most difficult hindrance to overcome, because unspoken questions and doubts are often never revealed. Voicing doubt makes a young person feel weak or wrong. They think they are supposed to believe, but they have trouble resolving some issues. Drawing them out and helping them voice these questions in an atmosphere of acceptance and love is not easy. But it must be done.

10 Lack of Biblical Knowledge or Application

Bottom line: many Christians do not live in obedience to Jesus and His Word because they do not know what it says, or, if they do, they do not understand how to put it into practice. Adults have often

used the Bible as a tool for punishment or a way to make children do what they want. Youth who grow up in that threatening environment find it hard to understand that every command in God's Word is for their protection and benefit.

11 Lack of Spiritual Intensity

To many people, and in much of the media, the spiritual realm is fantasy or imagination. The physical and psychological overshadow, even eclipse, the real world of the spirit. One child, asked what faith meant, answered, "When you believe in something you know isn't true." That assumption sits quietly in the minds of many youth we meet. We need to show that the spiritual world is real, that we are part of it, and that we communicate with God there. Once this becomes real to young people, they will agree with Steven Curtis Chapman that following Christ is "the great adventure."

CHAPTER 4

How to Run a Bible Class

Hook, Book, Look, Took

Using This Method

What follows is a guide, not a script. Each teacher brings his or her own style and methods, and many will find Scripture references beyond those you plan to use. Notice that every teaching point begins with its Scripture. This is subtle, but the order is critical. We do not want to appear to teach an opinion first and then look for a verse to support it. We want to read Scripture, discover truth, and teach application.

The Four-Step Process

1. HOOK

Make a statement, tell a short story, or use an illustration that grabs attention and focuses the group on what you will teach. To get attention you must engage both their emotions and their minds.

2. BOOK

Read the passage and help students understand it in its context: within the passage, the book, and the letter. We must never “proof-text,” taking a verse out of context to support an opinion.

3. LOOK

Focus on the teaching of Scripture. Help students discover the truth, then point it out or ask them to describe it. Genuinely preach: encourage and exhort with patience and careful instruction (2 Timothy 4:2).

4. TOOK

Discuss specific tasks or thoughts for students to carry out so they use the truth they are learning. They should always leave with something to take with them that they can share with someone else.

Repeat this process for each point in the outline. You may cover only one or two points in a meeting, and that is fine. Build each lesson as one complete Hook, Book, Look, Took cycle that fits a 45-minute meeting, and when a group is discovering a lot, feel free to take two weeks on a lesson.

A Course of Study That Repeats

Plan your teaching as a course of study that repeats. Students who stay through high school will cover the core lessons at least twice, and the second time through they help teach in the discovery and discussion.

WHAT COMES NEXT

A Bible class is only one of the meetings in a healthy youth ministry. The next three chapters describe the others: the weekly meeting that gathers everyone for worship, prayer, and the Word; the Student Accountability Group where a few students keep each other growing; and the Rap session where the youth work out the answers themselves. Chapter 8 then explains the teaching methods that run through all of them.

CHAPTER 5

How to Run a Weekly Meeting

Activity, worship, prayer, and the Word

Purpose

The purpose of this meeting is experiencing practical Christianity. Worship and singing, prayer, and Bible reading are all essential parts of the Christian life, and they are the parts of this meeting.

The Agenda

The whole evening runs one hour and forty-five minutes: a half hour of activity and getting settled, then an hour and fifteen minutes in the youth room.

TIME	LENGTH	WHAT HAPPENS
6:30	25 min	Ice-breaker activity in the gym
6:55	5 min	Move to the youth room
7:00	15 min	Creative worship
7:15	20 min	Group prayer
7:35	40 min	Bible reading
8:15		Dismiss

Ice-Breaker Activity

Plan a fun, interactive activity that helps the youth get to know each other better while having fun. Many books offer short games and activities that promote acceptance and help youth express themselves. We try to avoid games that “poke fun” or have the potential to embarrass or humiliate someone. I have found that many youth games have exactly that goal in mind. It is my opinion that this is neither beneficial, encouraging, nor group building. Use games and activities that build and encourage, or that are just plain fun to do as a group.

Creative Worship

We use the guitar, and any musical instrument the youth bring, to accompany songs that praise God. The youth also plan unique, creative worship activities to give an outlet for original worship, making this time more personal and real for them.

Worship celebrates the presence of God in our lives. We believe that worship is a personal expression of love for God, done privately or in a group, and we encourage the youth to use their abilities to worship Him. We have a drum set, electric guitars, a keyboard, a 12-string guitar, and other instruments. Some students pick out the songs and handle the projector. Others learn to sign songs or come up with motions.

Group Prayer

The prayer time is simple, too. I ask whether the youth have any concern they would like the group to pray about with them. As a person shares a request, it is assigned to whoever raises a hand to pray for it. Requests can be as general as “all the missionaries in China” or as specific as “I’m having problems keeping my temper with _____.”

After all the requests are shared (including answers to prayer and praises to thank God for), we pray in a circle. Each person prays in turn around the circle. If a youth does not want to pray out loud, or not at all, they simply say “Amen” so the next person knows it is their turn. Most times we pray where we sit, but other times we stand and hold hands, kneel, or just stand.

Bible Reading

Focus on the Word. We generally use the Read and Repeat method, explained in Chapter 8. We read through the letters of Paul, Peter, James, and John, and as we read we talk about how to apply what we learn to our own lives. We read through whole books, which sometimes takes months. My goal is not to go quickly through a book, but to teach proper reading and study techniques.

At the end of the meeting I pick one application and encourage the youth to carry it out in some specific way during the week. Sometimes we get only one or two verses read in the time we have, yet a great deal is learned anyway.

CHAPTER 6

How to Run a SAG Meeting

Student Accountability Groups

SAG

Student Accountability Group. A *disciple* is a pupil or adherent of another; a follower of another's ideas or example. For us, a disciple is a follower of Jesus.

Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to develop men and women who are sincere and faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, and to give them the means to teach others:

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”

2 TIMOTHY 2:2 (NKJV)

The method of Jesus and His teaching is our guideline: it is the means by which we teach a disciple to follow Jesus.

Accountability to Each Other

Each member is accountable to every other member. Meet in small groups of five youth or fewer to help and encourage one another. Meeting at least once a week, encourage each other to have a private time alone with God every day. The purpose of these meetings is

true fellowship. Fellowship happens when each member is known, cared for, held accountable, and encouraged in their spiritual journey. Here are four things to do:

- 1 Read one section of Psalm 119 (eight verses each) at the beginning of your meeting.
 - 2 Encourage members to read and pray daily, using “The Daily Bread,” the “Prayer Guide,” the chapter of Proverbs that matches the day of the month, or another quiet-time tool.
 - 3 Encourage members to take notes during their private reading time, so they can refer to them when they share what they are learning.
 - 4 Share personal and specific prayer requests for developing Christ-like behavior and values.
-

Daily Bible Reading

Provide materials for daily Bible reading. Spend a brief time listening to what each member has learned, and have them keep personal notes on their reading. Do not rush through this material. Steady and consistent is the key. Here are four reading tracks:

A. SALVATION TEACHING

Need for Faith, Romans 4
 Means of Faith, Romans 5
 Accounting of Faith, Romans 6
 Commitment of Faith, Romans 7
 Power of Faith, Romans 8

B. ACCEPTABLE TO GOD

Righteousness:
 The qualities of success, Matthew 5
 Love versus contempt, Matthew 5
 Obedience, Matthew 6
 Wisdom, Matthew 7

C. IMPORTANT THINGS

The role of a disciple, John 13
 The role of the Spirit, John 14
 The role of the Son, John 15
 The role of the Father, John 16
 The Lord's Prayer, John 17

**D. READ THROUGH
OTHER BOOKS**

Mark and John
 Proverbs and James
 The letters of Paul
 Any other book of the Bible

FOR YOUNG BEGINNERS

For some, this may be too much. They are young and need milk. We have found that a devotional such as "The Daily Bread" really helps get the habit of spending time with God each day started. The youth can read the printed verse and the devotional, or read the passage in a Bible along with the devotional. If they want to do more, they can follow a Read the Bible in a Year track. Some Bibles, like the Student Bible, also have reading tracks for youth, and some have two-week topical studies. These are useful too.

CHAPTER 7

How to Run a Rap Session

Let the youth find the answer

What It Is

This is a weekly meeting where the young people may suggest a topic by:

- 1 Asking a question,
 - 2 Describing a problem, or
 - 3 Describing a set of circumstances.
-

In this meeting the youth come up with the answer through group discussion, prompted by the youth pastor's questions and comments.

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to make it the hub of the entire youth program: to blend and apply, tying together all the teaching the youth have received. It is the place where every young person can express himself or herself and try out what he or she knows. It also serves as an evaluation of the teaching in the rest of the youth program and the pulpit ministry. Finally, it increases the communication skills of the youth and promotes leadership, teaching them to stand up for the answers they express.

Guidelines for the Leader

The key to a successful Rap is the youth pastor. These are the basic guidelines to follow:

- 1 Once the question is asked, clarify it and restate it, making sure it is understood by all.
 - 2 Ask the young people, “What do you think?” This gives them an opportunity to express their thoughts even though it may not be the answer you are looking for.
 - 3 Thank each person in turn for an answer and, if at all possible, praise them for it.
 - 4 Clarify the answer if necessary.
 - 5 If possible, encourage the young people to come up with biblical support, particularly if it is an area of truth recently covered in another youth meeting or from the pulpit.
 - 6 Move on to the next person and repeat the process, continuing around the circle as hands are raised. Do this even if the first person answers correctly, so that all can express themselves, bring up different points of view, and show whether the first person will stick to an answer or be “wishy-washy.” It also allows young people who disagree with the correct answer to say so, and then it can be discussed. Remember, you asked, “What do you think?” There is no wrong answer to that question.
 - 7 Do not allow the young people to talk among themselves, even about their own answers, while someone else is giving an answer.
 - 8 An attitude of acceptance must prevail. There is no such thing as a dumb question or answer.
-

-
- 9 As time goes on, become more specific in your questions, asking, “What does the Bible say about _____?” or “What is God’s heart regarding _____?”
 - 10 If the group seems to be moving away from the original question and its answer, redirect them.
 - 11 As time draws to a close, summarize the discussion and clarify the answer through the use of Scripture.
 - 12 Finally, encourage the young people, if at all possible, to apply the truth to their own lives.
-

ONE FINAL THOUGHT

It may take young people a while to learn to discuss, but it will happen when the right questions are asked with the right attitudes, keeping the discussion moving from one person to another without allowing anyone to monopolize.

Rap method source: Rev. Bill Trenkmann

CHAPTER 8

Teaching Methods

Interaction, Application, Read and Repeat, and Bible Study Methods

Interaction

It is a fact: through healthy discussion, people become thinkers. We like to paraphrase James 1:19, “Be quick to think, slow to speak, and slow to anger.” People who are willing to think will develop a strong Christian walk and be able to reproduce healthy believers.

What matters is not how much material we teach, but how much truth is applied in young people’s lives. We avoid the Bible school or seminary lecture approach. A lecture transfers a great deal of information, but only a percentage of it is applied and becomes part of a person’s thinking and doing. Young people who are encouraged to think may want to explore several possible answers. We teach them not to accept blindly what they hear, at school, at church, or at home, but to test it by 1 Timothy 6:3: does it agree with “wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and... the doctrine which accords with godliness”? (“Sound” or “wholesome” teaching means healthy teaching.)

Healthy discussion requires an atmosphere of openness and acceptance, developed by teaching people to honor one another. Questions will come up outside the passage being studied. We try to anticipate them, and even ask them ourselves if no one else does. We never give pat answers. We keep asking questions until people are

stretched in their thinking; we answer pat answers, and even questions, with more questions. We often ask, “What do the rest of you think?” And we praise every serious attempt at an answer.

Application

The purpose of teaching is expressed in John 8:31–32:

“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

JOHN 8:31–32 (NKJV)

A strong, consistent emphasis on God’s Word gives people an understanding of truth and a love for it. They become able to recognize and reject the world’s “do your own thing” and “be number one.” They learn to evaluate the foundation of the world’s philosophies, which is the lie described in Romans 1:25: they “exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.”

We focus on the Word. We encourage everyone to own an accurate translation they enjoy reading, to bring it to every meeting, and to use it: underlining key verses and making notes in the margins. When someone offers an answer, we ask them or someone else to tie it to Scripture by finding and reading the verse they have in mind, often with a hint like “It’s in the book we studied last quarter.” As the group works through a passage, we let them tell us what it says and what it is for. We allow them the joy of discovering what the passage really says.

We clarify truth as needed, drawing in other passages, especially those studied recently. Once truth is established, we encourage people to become men and women of faith by putting it into action, for faith is action based on knowledge. We determine ways to apply it by asking for their specific suggestions, often illustrating with real-life examples or role-play. As a group or one-on-one, we hold them

accountable for the applications we discussed and ask whether they have found new ones. (This is why each meeting begins by checking last week's Took.)

Read and Repeat

The Read and Repeat method promotes interactive discussion. Each person in the group reads a verse in turn and then repeats it in his or her own words. Some are shy and some don't read well, but we have found that this teaches the group to listen to, honor, and respect the reader. No one has to be perfect to join the discussion. It builds the reader's sense of worth and gives everyone a chance to share ideas, rather than letting one well-read person become the "answer man." I rarely answer a question directly; I usually show students how to find the answer themselves. I don't accept pat answers or guesses. Even when a person is right, I ask if they are sure, and if they aren't, I tell them to keep looking. This takes practice and care, because people can become frustrated if they don't understand the method.

The purpose of this method is observation. It teaches people to read with understanding on their own, thinking about what the writer wrote and how the first readers understood it. One person reads the verse and paraphrases it, which sometimes sparks discussion. We keep the focus on observation rather than interpretation or application at this stage, asking who is speaking, to whom, and how they would have understood it. We encourage students to look up words they are unsure of and to compare translations. Then the next person reads the next verse.

At various points we stop and sum up the passage. Here we discuss interpretation, compare it with other biblical teaching, and look for how to apply it. Then, as time permits, we go on. Our goal is not to move quickly through a book but to teach good reading and study

habits; sometimes we read only one or two verses in 45 minutes, yet a great deal is learned. At the end of each meeting we choose one application and encourage students to carry it out during the week.

Reading the Bible as a Group

Read and Repeat is the heart of the method. Here is the full pattern a leader can follow when a group reads a passage together. The first letters of the seven steps spell **PRECEPT**.

- P Pray for guidance.** Ask God to help you understand Him better. The prayer can be silent, the leader's own, or spoken aloud by the leader or by someone else the leader asks to lead the group.
 - R Read the Scripture passage.** Read a verse, paragraph, or chapter out loud, and notice key words.
 - E Examine the text.** Have someone repeat what was read in his or her own words. Find the answers to Who? What? When? Where? How? in the text itself, and avoid "opinions" in favor of the facts. Bible handbooks such as Halley's can help you review the cultural background in advance. Move between observation and interpretation as you talk, and be sure conclusions are based on biblical teaching. Conclusions will come; just be sure no one jumps to them before the facts have been reviewed.
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- C Compare.** Interpret the significance and meaning of the text by comparing its context, usage, forms of speech, and culture, along with other Bible verses that help explain what the author means. *Definitions:* look up words you do not understand, or words so common they might not mean what everybody thinks. *Other verses:* the leader may need to prepare these in advance. *Other ideas:* for example, creation versus evolution, or individualism versus cooperation. Bible dictionaries are helpful, but they often give a “theological composite” rather than a simple definition, so also use an English dictionary. The writers of the Bible used everyday language to communicate God’s truth.
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- R Examine your SPACE.** What do you think about the facts you just learned? What opinions have you formed? What concept or conduct has the Holy Spirit pointed out? Is there a in to confess, a promise to claim, an action to avoid, a command to obey, or an example to follow?
-
- P Pray for help.** Ask God to strengthen your inner person and help you to do good, specifically to do what you found in the passage.
-
- T Take it with you.** Summarize one thought or idea the group can remember and take with them.
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Always suggest that students bring their own Bibles so they can underline and make notes to help them remember what they learn. A notebook or note paper is good, too.

Bible Study Methods: The Inductive Approach

Our method of Bible study is inductive, one of the most effective and stimulating ways to study. It puts the accent on direct, personal discovery of what the Bible means. The leader does not state the answers, but asks questions about the facts students observe and analyze in a given passage, and that leads them to form a conclusion. For

many, the Bible becomes alive and meaningful. What a person discovers personally is always more his or her own than what is taught in a lecture or handed over by a teacher. The questions are drawn from the passage itself, letting it speak for itself. In an inductive study they fall into three categories:

1. OBSERVATION	What does it say?	Content
2. INTERPRETA-TION	What does it mean?	Context
3. APPLICATION	What does it mean to me?	Conduct

The teacher must be familiar enough with the material, and prepared well enough, to steer the discussion. The answers should always center on the Word. The meaning of the passage leads to knowing the way God wants us to think and the way He expects us to live. The Bereans set the example:

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

ACTS 17:11 (NKJV)

The Art of Observation

Seeing what is really there. The reality of something is often hidden by our preconceived ideas, impressions, and experiences. You can look right at it and not see it, and readers do the same. We often miss the most obvious thing by jumping to conclusions before we understand the facts. Read and Repeat helps: paraphrasing a verse or sentence often reveals what we see, and helps us see what is really there. Two exercises make the point.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: THE DOT

Make a small but obvious dot on a plain white sheet of paper. Hold it up and ask, “What do you see?” If the answer is “a black dot,” they missed the biggest part: a white sheet of paper with a black dot.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: THE PENCIL

Put a pencil on a white sheet of paper in the center of the room. Without touching the pencil, have everyone write down everything they can observe about it. Then sort the list into observations and conclusions or speculation. “You can write with it” is speculation, not observation, because no one saw it being written with.

The Discipline of Interpretation

Understanding the context. The meaning of a word is found in its definition, usage, culture, and context, not in the word itself. The same is true of phrases.

THE WORD “SAVE”

“Jesus came to save” means to be rescued from sin. “Save yourself” means to protect yourself from injury.

THE PHRASE “LOOK OUT THERE”

In a lumberjack camp it is a warning to get out of the way. At a scenic overlook it is an invitation to view the landscape.

The Quality of Application

Preparing for biblical change. Paul wrote that every passage, understood in context, will do one of four things for you:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16–17 (NKJV)

In other words, it will **teach** you what and how to think (doctrine), **rebuke** your behavior (reproof), **correct** your behavior, or **train** you in the conduct of a righteous person. Once you understand the meaning of a passage, prepare your life for a change of thought or action, because truth affects behavior.

Reading Technique

Read through the entire paragraph or chapter to get a feel for the context. Then take one verse or sentence at a time. Have the reader repeat it in his or her own words, let others offer what they observed, and move on to the next verse or sentence. When you have observed the entire passage, interpret it. When you reach a conclusion (without jumping to it), discuss how to apply it, always referring back to God's Word for direction.

The Three Kinds of Questions

Observation questions

Six categories: Who? What? When? Where? How? Why (for what reason)?

Interpretation questions

What does it mean, and why does it matter?

Application questions

How am I to change, or keep doing something, in my life?

Observation. The teacher doesn't just ask "Who?" but a who-or-whom question, such as "To whom does the word 'I' refer in this passage?" The same goes for what, when, where, how, and why: "For what reason (why) did the chariot stop?" The answers must come from the information in the text. Just the facts.

Interpretation. These questions deal with meaning and significance. What does a word mean? How is it used: literally, as a simile, an example, a metaphor, or another form of speech? What other verses use it in the same or a different way? Why did the author choose this method? How does it relate to the rest of the chapter? What is the cultural context of the idea? Then ask, in a sentence or two: *What is the main point of this passage?*

As we draw conclusions and form opinions about the text, we must be sure they rest on the facts we observed and not on outside opinions we already hold. One reason we study the Bible is to smash opinions and ideas that are not founded on God's principles. Such outside opinions may be part of the "patterns of this world" we are to stop following, even if we are sure another Christian, or even a pastor, told us so (see Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Colossians 2:8).

Application. These questions grow out of the meaning found in the interpretation. To remember good ones, use S.P.A.C.E.:

S	Sin	<i>Did the Holy Spirit show you a sin to confess?</i>
P	Promise	<i>Did you find a promise to claim that applies to your situation?</i>
A	Action	<i>Did you discover an action to avoid?</i>
C	Command	<i>Did you find a command to obey?</i>
E	Example	<i>Does the passage reveal an example to follow?</i>

Finally, ask: *How did this passage help me understand God better?*

CHAPTER 9

Putting It Together

Choosing the meeting and planning the lesson

Choosing the Right Meeting

Each kind of meeting does a different job. A healthy youth ministry uses all four, and each one reinforces the others.

MEETING	WHO AND WHEN	WHAT IT DOES
BIBLE CLASS	Whole group, 45 min	Teaches a passage through Hook, Book, Look, Took
WEEKLY MEETING	Whole group, 1 hr 45 min	Activity, worship, prayer, and Bible reading together
SAG	Five or fewer, weekly	Accountability, daily Bible reading, and prayer
RAP SESSION	Whole group, weekly	Youth work out answers to their own questions

Planning the 45-Minute Bible Class

Here is how the concepts from the previous chapters come together in a Bible class. Use this plan so that you can open the Bible, prepare, and teach.

STEP	TIME	WHAT HAPPENS	CONCEPT
1 HOOK	5 min	Check last week's Took. Open with a question, object lesson, or story that engages mind and emotions.	How to Run a Bible Class; Interaction
2 BOOK	10 min	Read and Repeat the key verses. Observe: who is speaking, to whom, and what it says.	Read and Repeat; Love for His Word
3 LOOK	20 min	Teaching points, each starting with Scripture. Show where we see Jesus. Talk it over: "What do the rest of you think?"	Application; Ability to Think; Interaction
4 TOOK	10 min	One specific task to do and share this week. Memory verse. Close in prayer.	Application; Goals; Hindrances

Planning Your Lesson

KEY VERSE	The verse at the center of the lesson. Read it aloud together at the start and the end.
BIG IDEA	The one sentence every student should be able to say on the way out the door.

GOAL • HINDRANCE • AREA	Which of the seven goals the lesson aims at, which of the eleven hindrances it confronts, and which area of growth it builds: Knowing God, Following Jesus, or Sharing Jesus.
HOOK	An opening question, object lesson, or story. Begin by asking two or three students how last week's Took went.
BOOK	The verses for Read and Repeat, with observation questions. Students read, paraphrase, and observe.
LOOK	Teaching points, each starting with its Scripture, followed by where we see Jesus and questions that get the group talking.
TOOK	This week's specific task and the memory verse.
BACKGROUND	Historical and cultural notes to read before class.

Before, During, and After Class

BEFORE	Read the lesson and the passage on your own. Pray for each student by name, and think about which hindrances your students are facing.
DURING	Keep Bibles open. Let students read and discover. Ask, "What do the rest of you think?" Resist the urge to lecture. Protect an atmosphere of acceptance.
AFTER	Follow up one-on-one on the Took. Note unspoken questions that surfaced and come back to them.

QUICK REFERENCE

The Handbook at a Glance

OUR MOTTO

“To know Him and make Him known.” Be like Jesus. Grow in wisdom, abilities, favor with people, and favor with God (Luke 2:52).

HOOK

Grab attention; engage heart and mind

BOOK

Read it in context; never proof-text

LOOK

Discover the truth in Scripture

TOOK

Leave with something to do and share

BIBLE CLASS

Whole group; teach a passage in 45 min

WEEKLY MEETING

Activity, worship, prayer, the Word

SAG

Five or fewer; accountability and daily reading

RAP

Youth find the answers together

Seven Goals

- 1. A heart for God
- 2. A love for His Word
- 3. Christ-like behavior
- 4. A lifestyle of evangelism and discipleship
- 5. Strong moral convictions
- 6. The ability to think
- 7. Positive thought patterns

Eleven Hindrances

- 1. Poor self-image
- 2. Inconsistent quiet time
- 3. Deceived by “the Lie”
- 4. Improper friendships
- 5. Unbiblical dating standards
- 6. Ingrained sin
- 7. Afraid to stand alone
- 8. Undeveloped skills
- 9. Unspoken questions and doubt
- 10. Lack of biblical knowledge or application
- 11. Lack of spiritual intensity

