

## “What Have I Gotten Myself Into?”

### Leading a Bible Study for RUF

#### Introduction

Story: “Facial Paralysis and Overblown Fears”

*John 1:19-20: And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” (It is God’s work, not my own!)*

What we want most for ourselves and for those we love, Jesus alone can make happen.

#### What Is Supposed To Happen?

What makes for a “good” Bible study?

*Acts 2:42-47: And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Learning, Loving, Worshipping, Sharing – the collision of the ordinary means of grace.

WSC #88

- Q. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption?
- A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

What does the “normal” Christian life look like? What does God call us to “after Pentecost”?

The life of the Church in its weekly corporate worship should flow into the life of the Church in its daily communal and personal worship.

“And after a long time to come he’d have reason to evoke the recollection of those smiles and to reflect upon the good will which provoked them for it had the power to protect and to confer honor and to strengthen resolve and it had the power to heal men and to bring them to safety long after all other resources were exhausted.” (Cormac McCarthy, *All the Pretty Horses*)

### **What Is My Role As A Leader?**

“There is really some excuse for the man who said, ‘I wish they’d remember that the charge to Peter was Feed my sheep not Try experiments on my rats, or even, Teach my performing dogs new tricks.’” (C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*)

Ministry is like farming, not manufacturing.... Faithfulness over innovation; wisdom over procedure.

Prepare: Spend time in prayer and study organizing your time together. Think about each of the means of grace, and how to wisely arrange them together.

Practical Suggestion: It takes an hour or so to prepare for a one-hour meeting, sometimes longer.

Pursue: Call and invite students to your Bible study. Meet with your students outside of Bible study. Listen to their questions and concerns, and encourage them in their faith.

Practical Suggestion: Try to meet alone with every student in your study at least twice a semester. With two leaders per study, that’s about 1 meeting (coffee/ lunch/ dessert) a month.

Model: Live before your students with integrity and the virtues given to you in the Gospel. Show them what it means to follow Christ at SMU.

Practical Suggestion: Invite your students to church, RUF, and to other things you do on campus.

“The instruments through which God works in the church are human beings. If our hearts and minds are not properly transformed, we are like musicians playing untuned instruments, or engineers working with broken and ill-programmed computers. The attunement of the heart is essential to the outflow of grace. This is not to emphasize faith and experience over works, thought and social action. We must aim at building the structures of God’s kingdom but recognize that we will only create these through the transformation of our experience. Concentration on reformation without revival leads to skins without wine; concentration on revival without reformation soon loses the wine for want of skins.” (Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*)

### **Details, Details, Details...**

### How should I arrange a Bible study?

I typically arrange the actual Bible study portion around 6-10 main questions. The questions are of three kinds:

- (1) Observation Questions: What does the passage say? *In Ephesians 2:8-9, how many times does Paul tell us that we are not saved by our own merits or performance?*
- (2) Interpretation Questions: What does the passage mean? *In Ephesians 2:8-10, how do faith and works relate to one another? What does Paul expect the grace of God to do in the people of God?*
- (3) Application Questions: How does the passage matter? *In what ways do we often get this passage backwards? What is the result? How does it completely change our relationship with God?*

Here's some other tips on avoiding bad questions:

Avoid "Yes" or "No" questions.

Avoid long, wordy questions that don't require mental gymnastics to remember and answer.

Avoid double negatives: "Doesn't it make sense not to..."

Avoid questions within a question: "Which characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit do you have the hardest time expressing, and why, and what can you do about it?"

Avoid either-or questions.

Try to figure out what "one thing" you want the group to understand at they walk away. What's the big idea of the passage, and how should they apply it. You can build your questions around the central theme.

Often, I'll do some sort of introduction and conclusion as well – a related illustration or story to begin, and a summary statement at the end to conclude.

Also I try to build in 10-15 minutes at the end to pray for one another as well.

### What time should we meet? Where should we meet?

There's no magic answer to this, but you need to know that this matters greatly to people, whether they know it or not. Be wise and consider the options you have.

### How do I avoid awkwardness?

You can't avoid awkwardness altogether, but you can do some things to mitigate against it. The best thing I think to do is to confront potential awkwardness with the group at the beginning: "Hey. I know we don't all know each other well, and sometimes I'm going to ask a question that no one

will want to answer, and there will be some painfully long pauses, but we're going to roll with it and after a while things will become more comfortable. It's all part of the experience!" Embracing the initial awkwardness as normative is better than acting surprised by it.

### **What typically causes a Bible study to go wrong?**

**Expectations.** This is probably the greatest cause of disappointment and desertion. The number of expectations for a bible study can be as varied as the number of people in the group: learning, sharing, closeness, commitment, personal growth, casual and fun, serious, etc. Most people will import past small group experiences into this new environment without knowing it. Your group will often be judged on the basis of a totally different past experience.

I think it's helpful to be up front about this as well – A bible study will not be all things to all people! Nor should it try to be. A particular format will have strengths and weaknesses unique to it.

Set the precedent for open communication regarding expectations and goals early on. Carve out time for evaluation. And encourage your students to enjoy the particular blessings of this group and this study instead of obsessing about what it lacks and their own personal frustrations.

**Leadership.** Poor leadership is often a problem as well. Of course, we are all deeply flawed. We are all insufficient to the task of gospel ministry. I am not saying that all of our weaknesses must be cleared out of the way before we can begin ministry. But there are certain virtues that will make us better or worse leaders: Preparedness versus procrastination; gentleness versus overbearing; confidence versus cowardice; humility versus arrogance. We must honestly look at ourselves and ask the Lord to grow His character in us, always ready to know more gospel joy through gospel repentance.

**"That guy."** Students in your bible study will present their own unique challenges. Here is a list of stereotypes that you'll probably run into if you spend much time in a small group:

"The funny guy" – always wants to lighten the mood with a joke or sarcastic comment, preventing serious discussion or sharing; really just comes to feed his social appetite.

"The nerd" – just wants to "dig into Scripture"; has questions about the smallest grammatical details; frustrated by any ambiguity, and if Bible study is anything but serious study.

"The listener" – comes faithfully, but never talks or shares; wants to take everything in while being left alone.

"The super-spiritual" – always has a comment, but rarely practical or well-organized; quick with spiritual clichés and biblical platitudes; no problems or struggles except that others are trailing behind spiritually;

the group needs to focus more on heavenly things as opposed to the earthly.

“The self-absorbed” – “how does this apply to me,” is her constant question; any discussion is quickly turned into a personal counseling session or an opportunity to get something off her chest; bored by actually studying the bible.

“The theological guru” – knows it all, and often thinks his role is to help the leader be more clear, i.e., “I think what Chad was trying to say was...”; quick to pick a fight and prove his debating skills.

“The miserable” – she never looks like she wants to be at bible study and probably doesn’t, attending because she feel forced by a guilty conscience or some other ulterior motive; she’s never really “there” and has no expectations other than getting out on time and crossing this off her list.

## Conclusion

Luke 13:6-9: *And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”*

What does God want from us? How does he get it?

- He wants us to be fruitful.
- He does this through Jesus.