

Choosing Bible Study Materials

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By CHUCK GARTMAN – GoTo Youth Ministry and Howard Payne University

1. Decide whether the study will be for an **OPEN Group** or a **CLOSED Group**.
 - a. The **OPEN Group** is for anyone to come. It can take place at any time and can be for Christians or non-Christians. A student does not have to have attended the week before and attend the week after to experience a quality Bible Study. If the group is OPEN, then here are some Strategic Principles that should be included or at least acknowledged.
 - i. **Foundational Evangelism** – the study will not be your only strategy for evangelism, but it ought to be a major player in trying to win youth to Christ.
 - ii. **Foundational Discipleship** – although this type of study is not meant for in depth discipleship, some discipleship principles must be introduced to help those who attend to grow in their faint. Other opportunities for deepened discipleship will be offered in a balanced Youth ministry.
 - iii. **Family Responsibility** – an effort will be put forth to partner with parents in the spiritual development of teenagers. The study ought to include opportunities to connect the church with the family.
 - iv. **Spiritual Transformation** – while this type of study will not insure the spiritual transformation of teenagers, it will always have at its heart the emphasis for teenagers to allow God’s Spirit to too so control their lives that they will be transformed in to the likeness of Christ.
 - v. **Biblical Leadership** – we cannot hope for the students to be transformed spiritually simply by using a certain kind of material. There must be leaders who are in the process of allowing God’s Spirit to change them. God uses leaders who are changed by His Spirit. The Leader becomes the lesson so to speak.
 - b. The **CLOSED group** does not mean that it is exclusive. It simply means that the group has a certain time frame with certain materials to be completed before the class starts. Each session builds on the other and after a designated period of time, it may be too difficult for a new member to get caught up. The ultimate purpose of a CLOSED Group is to deepen the commitment of the attenders.

2. Understand the Term, “Curriculum.”

Many folks often equate the terms, “curriculum” and “materials.” Actually, the materials are part of a much larger picture. The term for race in Hebrews 12:1 has the same root as the one for curriculum. Thus, curriculum denotes a long race (a marathon, if you will). Materials may be connected to a sprint.

Curriculum may be seen as an equation. It contains many elements, including 1) **the leader** – there must be something spiritual going on in the leader if spiritual transformation will ever take place. He/she leads the students toward maturity as Christians; 2) **the learner** – there must be some receptivity on the part of the student. No material can make a student receptive; 3) **the environment** – all that impacts a student like home, family, school, society, the youth culture (music, movies, TV, computer internet, magazines, etc) are part of that environment. As youth leaders we cannot allow ourselves to think that a student checks these things at the door when he/she comes into our Bible Study classes; 4) **the Bible** – it is our text (the materials are NOT our text – God’s written Word is); 5) **the Holy Spirit** – only

as He is involved in the process can spiritual transformation ever take place; and 6) **the Materials** – these are only the tools that a leader uses to guide students in Bible Study. There is absolutely nothing magic about any material. No material by itself has the power to transform lives. They are only to be used as “jumping off” points in the study of God’s Word.

3. Ways to Choose Materials.

a. Inadequate Approaches

- i. **Bookstore Approach** – a leader goes into the local bookstore and sees what looks good and makes his/her choice based on a brief perusal of material that looks good.
- ii. **Best Friend Approach** – just because a person’s best friend uses a certain kind of material does not mean that material is best for a local church.
- iii. **Big Church Approach** – just because a larger church uses a certain kind of material does not mean it is best for your setting.
- iv. **Big Publisher Approach** – just because a large Christian publisher says that a specific kind of material is best for your church does not make it so.

b. Today’s Youth Minister will need to become a **Resource Broker** because there is a lot of material out there from which to choose. He/she will need to know the following in order to make intelligent decisions about materials he/she will use in a local church Bible Study setting.

- i. **What kind of material is out there?** The youth Bible Study market is huge. There are many publishers whose resources are very good. A resource broker will need to know what is available for her/him to use.
- ii. **What needs are you trying to meet?** Every youth leader has responsibility to know the needs of his/her youth. There are many common spiritual needs, but there are some that are specific to each local situation. The needs in a local setting must be considered when Bible Study materials are being chosen.
- iii. **What can your church afford to buy?** No church of which I am aware has an unlimited budget, so when choosing Bible study materials as you leader must be aware of what his/her budget for materials is.

4. Other Important Factors in making your choice.

- a. **Balance** – Does material you are choosing to use for your Bible study have a balanced approach to studying both the New and Old Testaments? If there is an over-abundance of one or the other, then perhaps a closer evaluation needs to take place.
- b. **Comprehensive** – Many Youth leaders tend to choose materials that emphasize topics that they personally like, instead of choosing materials that will cover comprehensively the whole Christian life. Just because a youth leader does not particularly “like” an emphasis of the Christian life is not an adequate reason to avoid materials that have that emphasis.
- c. **Sequence** – the order in which your study goes is important, so having a proper sequence is important in your choice of materials.

5. Remember the **Elements of Effective Bible Study**. As was mentioned earlier, curriculum is like a long marathon race. In thinking of effective Bible study these elements are long-term in their scope. All of these will not take place in any given Bible Study experience nor will they always be in the same order.

- a. **Acknowledge Authority** – who will ultimately be in charge? Will God or will we as human beings? Only when God is acknowledged as the authority will Bible Study be effective.
 - b. **Search for Truth** – Look in Scripture for the Truth. Remember that Jesus said that He was the Truth, so we are looking for Him.
 - c. **Discover the Truth** – When a youth discovers the Truth for himself/herself they are more likely to put it into practice than if they are simply told the Truth.
 - d. **Personalize the Truth** – youth must come to a point of making the Truths in Scripture personal for themselves. Then the Scripture will have more meaning for them.
 - e. **Struggle with the Truth** – There are no simple answers in the Scripture. Sometimes a student must agonize over what the Scripture is telling them to do, believe, or what kind of attitude to have.
 - f. **Believe the Truth** – In order for a Bible Study to be an effective, there will come a point that a student will have to believe that what the Bible says is true.
 - g. **Obey the Truth** – If we only stop with believing the truth, Bible Study will not be effective. Youth must put the truths of Scripture into practice.
6. Conduct Bible Study using the **Three Essentials for Transformational Bible Study**. This is a process that must be repeated over a long period of time in consistent Bible Study.
- a. **Prepare** – the leader must be spiritually prepared for the lesson by doing personal Bible Study and by participating in corporate and personal worship experiences. Additionally, the leader must prepare for the lesson practically. Having a teaching plan is the reference here. “Winging it” will not be appropriate if we are to guide students in the direction of spiritual maturity.
 - b. **Encounter** – this is the actual Bible Study experience. Included in the session will be motivating students to study the Bible, examining the Bible passage, and starting the application of the Scriptural truths.
 - i. **Connect**—Most students need to get connected to the study before it will have any meaning in any given time of study.
 - ii. **Explore**—We must delve into the scripture using a variety of learning approaches and teaching methods, taking into account the adolescent developmental issues of the group that we are addressing.
 - iii. **Transform**—We must begin the application process during the Bible Study time. We will not complete the application in that time period, but we must at least begin the process.
 - c. **Continue** – students whose lives are being spiritually transformed are continuing their study of Scripture beyond the initial study. In fact, only as the continue portion of this process is emphasized and done will teens’ lives be changed.
7. **Developmental issues** of the students need to also be considered in choosing materials for Bible Study. Sometimes, youth leaders assume that younger youth are ready to study at the same level as older youth, but because of the various developmental stages of a youth’s life, this is not a good practice.
8. One final factor necessary is choosing Bible Study materials. Understanding the various **learning approaches** will aid the youth leader greatly in communicating the message of God’s Word. Every person has at least one preferred learning approach. Often the youth leader will teach, using methods with which he/she is comfortable, and it will not be connecting with the

students/ Students deserve to be taught and to learn with approaches that are appropriate to them. Based on Gardner's Intelligences, there are 8 approaches. A simple listing appears here:

- a. **Relational**
- b. **Musical**
- c. **Logical**
- d. **Natural**
- e. **Physical**
- f. **Reflective**
- g. **Visual**
- h. **Verbal**

In choosing or developing Bible Study materials for youth, all these factors need to be considered. It is not a simple or easy process, but the result of intelligent, well-thought out, prayed-through choices will be youth who are in the process of maturing as Christians.