

Looking for information on choosing a Bible study? Need advice on how to lead a study? Let these trusted Bible teachers and authors offer their expertise.



Kay Arthur is known around the world as an international Bible teacher, author, conference speaker, and host of the national radio and television programs *Precepts for Life*, which reaches a worldwide viewing audience of over 94 million. A four-time God Medallion Award-winning author, Kay has authored more than 100 books and Bible studies. She currently serves with her husband, Jack, as co-CEO of Precept Ministries International, the organization they founded together more than forty years ago and which today operates in 150 countries in 70 languages. Kay and Jack live in Chattanooga, Tennessee.



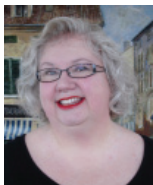
Lisa Harper is known for combining solid biblical teaching with comedic wit and masterful storytelling. A popular Bible teacher, Lisa speaks nationwide at retreats and conferences including *Women of Faith* and is a frequent guest on radio and television programs. The author of several books, including *A Perfect Mess*, Lisa holds a master of theological studies degree from Covenant Theological Seminary. She lives near Nashville, Tennessee.



Kenny Luck is president and founder of Every Man Ministries and coauthor of the best-selling *Every Man, God's Man*. He is now the area leader for men's ministry, as well as a member of the teaching staff of Saddleback Valley Community Church in Lake Forest, California.



Mark Batterson serves as lead pastor of National Community Church (www.theaterchurch.com) in Washington, D.C. NCC was recognized as one of the most innovative and influential churches in America by *Outreach Magazine* in 2008. One church with ten services in six locations, NCC meets in movie theaters at metro stops throughout the D.C. area. NCC also owns and operates the largest coffeehouse on Capitol Hill, *Ebenezers*, which was recently recognized as the #1 coffeehouse in the metro D.C. area by *AOL CityGuide*. He is a daily blogger at www.markbatterson.com and the author of the bestselling *In a Pit with a Lion on a Snowy Day*, *Wild Goose Chase*, and *Primal: A Quest for the Lost Soul of Christianity*. Mark and his wife, Lora, live on Capitol Hill with their three children.



Liz Curtis Higgs is a popular conference speaker and the author of nearly 30 books, with more than 3 million copies in print, including her best-selling nonfiction series, *Bad Girls of the Bible*, *Really Bad Girls of the Bible*, *Unveiling Mary Magdalene*, and *Slightly Bad Girls of the Bible*, and her award-winning Scottish historical novels inspired by the biblical book of Ruth, *Here Burns My Candle* and *Mine Is the Night*, a *New York Times* bestseller. Liz and her family live in Louisville, Kentucky.

1. Why is it important for Christians to be involved in Bible studies?



Kay Arthur: If you are going to be a true disciple, a follower of Jesus Christ, you must study the Word of God. The Bible is the Word of God—every word, every truth, every precept you and I need in order to live through any situation of life in a way that is pleasing to God is in His book, in His Words. Therefore we need to honor them accordingly.

Studying the Bible, discovering truth for yourself, is not an option, but an imperative. Jesus said it Himself: “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the *mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4). Spiritually, the people who profess Jesus Christ in the United States of America look like malnourished starving children that we see in third world countries! It breaks my heart—for there is an abundant supply of Bibles, but we are too busy too entangled to eat what could save our lives.



Lisa Harper: Bible studies are an effective way to grow in our faith and understanding of God, as well as to connect with a group of other believers. Bible studies can and should be like “Cheers” for Christians (and hopefully, non-Christians too)—a safe place, where everybody knows your name!



Kenny Luck: A Christ follower not connected to a Bible study with other Christians is an oxymoron. God’s Word and God’s people are central to the spiritual health of a believer and each is accelerated by the other. The Bible is clear when it commands us to connect to other believers, and when we connect, an important part of that time is to be devoted to the study of Scripture.



Mark Batterson: I think Bible studies are important for a few reasons. First of all, the dialogue is invaluable. There is something about a group of diverse Christians talking about the Bible that can lead to new insights you would have never thought of yourself. I also think Bible studies force you to dig a little deeper and study the Word for yourself. It helps you develop good habits.



Liz Curtis Higgs: Gathering with other believers deepens our relationships and builds community. And, it’s *fun*. Studying God’s Word strengthens our hearts and grows our faith. Plus, it’s *life-changing*. By studying the Bible in small group settings, at home or at church, we can accomplish both those important goals at the same time.

Scripture changes us at the cellular level. It touches our hearts, renews our minds, and ultimately transforms our behavior. “The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it” (Deuteronomy 30:14). That’s the value of Bible study: we’re made new from the inside out.

2. What should I look for when picking a Bible study?



Kay Arthur: I urge you to look for a Bible study that takes you to the text of God’s Word and teaches you how to discover truth for yourself. Look for Bible studies that are true to the whole counsel of God, that do not twist and distort the Scriptures but keep them in context and that take you to the text itself rather than give you opinions about the text. If they are ‘sermons’ or a lot written about a subject or a book of the Bible, and you are going to use them, make sure you

read the Bible text for yourself. Context rules over interpretation! Remember it's the Word of God and He never contradicts Himself, so check out the whole counsel of God. You are able to do this when you study the Bible the way God wrote it—book by book!



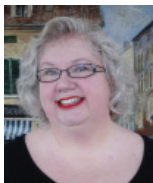
Lisa Harper: Look for a curriculum that acknowledges the veracity and validity of God's Word, a teacher who captures your attention, and a group of authentic people you can share your heart with.



Kenny Luck: Meaningful issues you are facing are always a good way of selecting a study. Just ask yourself: *What issues do I have that are either impacting my relationships with God or people?* Then get God's mind on that subject by searching for a topical Bible study. You'll pay attention more and be more eager to connect with the Word and with others around that issue. That's why the Every Bible Study Series is built around twelve felt-need issues men face. If you don't address the points of pain or need first, it will be hard to engage in deeper studies of God's Word later.



Mark Batterson: What are you struggling with? Relationships? Depression? Faith? I'd do an honest self-assessment and find a study that deals with that issue. It's a fool-proof way to make sure the study is relevant to your life situation.



Liz Curtis Higgs: Consider the spiritual maturity of those who'll be participating in the study. Are they thirsty for milk? "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation" (1 Peter 2:22). Or are they ready for meat? "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:14). And where do *you* fit on that continuum?

As to the materials themselves, there are books, workbooks, and videos designed for all spiritual levels. Choose something that challenges you but doesn't overwhelm you, offered in a time frame that's realistic. Commit to doing your part and trust the process.

3. What are some tips for Bible study leaders?



Kay Arthur: Of course I would say teach them to study inductively—to discover truth for themselves. Don't keep them dependent upon you for truth. You are not God—don't get in the way. Jesus always and only spoke the words of God—the more you give them of the Word the stronger they will be, especially if they are reading Him in you, His living epistle.

People's opinions of the text are not what is important; rather have your group see what the Scripture says—and have them see it in context. It breaks my heart when I hear people in a class going around the room telling people what this verse means to them, or what their opinion of it is when they haven't studied the text themselves, or considered the context.

Don't teach or determine you are going to teach to the lowest level of commitment. Study the gospels and find out what Jesus said about true disciples—and go for it. It's not numbers that are important; it's faithful followers. Be willing to let people walk away.

Challenge them to make knowing God's Word for themselves and living accordingly at all times the primary goal and passion of their lives. We are sanctified by truth—set apart, made holy as He is holy—by truth (John 17:17). Study Jesus' prayer in John 17. Every aspect of our lives is to be lived in uncompromising devotion to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Keep this before your students, and have them hold you accountable.



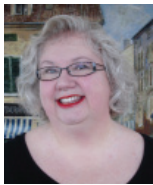
Lisa Harper: The best teachers are even better students, so study and then study some more (2 Timothy 2:15)! Relax, be real, and leave the results to God (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). God doesn't call the equipped as much as He equips those He calls (1 Timothy 1:7). Seek your Heavenly Father's approval—not your audience's (1 Thessalonians 2:4b-6).



Kenny Luck: The biggest tip I have for Bible study leaders is this: measure your success not by how you talk but by how much others talk. The most successful Bible study leaders are those that get others engaged. Second, a Bible study leader who really "leads" must lead in the area of transparency and authenticity. That means "letting in" the other members of study to your life as God's Word shines its light in to the corners of your life and exposes issues or calls out your fears.



Mark Batterson: The biggest tip is this one: the group will only be as vulnerable as you are. You need to set the standard. If you open up, the group will open up.



Liz Curtis Higgs: Pray for your participants on a daily basis. Work hard to make everyone feel comfortable, whether they are new to the Bible or have studied God's Word for years. Think of ways to deepen the content for mature believers, perhaps by adding more weighty questions, and consider how to lighten the approach for others using visual aids or simple object lessons to bring the point home.

During group discussion, move your participants smoothly from question to question. Keep things on track, biblically and practically. Help them discern between eternal truths and personal opinion. Trust the Holy Spirit to teach you as you teach others, guiding and empowering you. And don't be afraid to have fun!

4. Is a group study better than individual study?



Kay Arthur: I believe both are necessary. First, see what you discover for yourself, and then go deeper with others. We are members of a body—no one person has a corner on the truth. At Precept Ministries International, we have 3 D's: **Discover** truth for yourself (personal Bible study), go **Deeper** with others and **Disciple**.



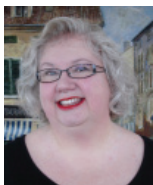
Lisa Harper: Not necessarily, but the relational element of a group study is important for those who feel isolated or who don't have a lot of other support in their walk of faith.



Kenny Luck: Both group and individual study are critical. In group study you get the added benefit of hearing and learning from other people as well as their support and counsel as issues surface. You learn that you are not weird or alone in your issues in a group study, which provides a lot of comfort. Individual study allows for intimacy and learning with God that provides personal dialogue from His Word to your Spirit and then back to Him in prayer. I love that aspect of personal study. I value both and advocate both.



Mark Batterson: The value of a group study is synergy and accountability.



Liz Curtis Higgs: Time alone in God's Word is vital. We hear His voice most clearly when no one else is speaking. The best group studies include a time of personal study and preparation at home, such that participants meet not only to be fed spiritually, but also to share what God has taught them individually. Think of group Bible study as a spiritual potluck dinner. Each guest brings their best effort from home—vegetables, salad, bread, or dessert—while the leader prepares the main course. Everyone is fed, various flavors are enjoyed, yet it's the hearty meat dish that sticks to the bones.

5. How important of an element is group discussion in a Bible study?



Kay Arthur: This is where iron sharpens iron and we learn from one another which is very valuable if the students are studying the Word in their personal Bible study.



Lisa Harper: I think it's emotionally beneficial because God has wired us as relational beings, who function best in the context of community (see the book of Acts). I also think it's Biblical since Revelation 12 tells us that Satan is defeated when we talk to each other about what God's been doing in our lives!



Kenny Luck: Group discussion has the potential to be very enlightening and comforting. It is best in groups of two to three max. I have been leading small groups for over 20 years and learned pretty quick that large groups don't allow for good discussion time. Discussion is huge but should be done in smaller numbers or subgroups for there to be participation and intimacy.



Mark Batterson: Group discussion is critical. No discussion = no revelation. It takes a while to get to a place where people feel a conversational ease, but once you get there then the group will take off. Again, the leader needs to set the example. And don't be afraid of silence. Tell the group it's OK to wait a few moments and allow people to gather thoughts. If the group is afraid of silence, you'll never cultivate good discussion.



Liz Curtis Higgs: There are times when information and inspiration flow in one direction—from the pulpit on the Sabbath or from the platform at a conference. But for a group Bible study to be effective, each person should be given a chance to share what they’ve learned. Bible study materials that include prepared questions are the best resource for group discussion, especially when those questions point to Scripture for answers.

Since one of the goals of Bible study is personal application, allowing participants to share the truths they’ve seen at work in their lives can benefit the whole camp. A gifted leader will recognize when it’s time to direct the discussion back to God’s Word.

6. What can I do to make reading the Bible more exciting?



Kay Arthur: Learn to study inductively—you won’t believe the excitement, the transformation. We hear it over and over again from people who knew there had to be more to Bible study; a way to remember, to go deeper—they cried out to God and God brought us together and now they are beside themselves with what they’re learning on their own.



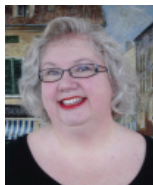
Lisa Harper: The Bible is mostly narrative—it’s a STORY, so pay attention to the characters, how they interact, etc. the same way you would a great book or movie!



Kenny Luck: One of the things that makes reading the Bible exciting is simply knowing a little bit about how it came together, over how long, how many authors, and how consistently it speaks of ONE story over 1200 years. When you get it—that the Bible is a supernatural book which represents the mind of God himself, it becomes a natural draw.



Mark Batterson: One way is to “mix it up” by reading different translations. I also think we should approach the Bible as a prayer book. There are promises to claim. There are principles to obey. If the Bible is approached statically, it won’t be exciting. But if you approach it proactively—looking for something to put into practice—it changes the entire dynamic.



Liz Curtis Higgs: God’s Word *is* exciting! It’s “living and active” (Hebrews 4:12), a “lamp” and a “light” (Psalm 119:105), “living water” (John 4:10), and something to be spoken “with great boldness” (Acts 4:29). The disciples themselves said, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32). And Paul assures us God’s Word has the power to change lives, since “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). I get excited about God’s Word when I simply *slow down* and read the text word by word and phrase by phrase, rather than trying to digest whole passages at a time. When I begin any Bible study, I consult twelve translations, from the King James Version (1611) to the New Living Translation (2004), letting the truth of each verse wash over me before I move to the next one. The wisdom of man, found in commentaries and books, certainly enhances our understanding of the Bible, but it’s vital to allow God’s Word and His Holy Spirit to teach us first.

7. Should I pick a study that's topical or one that focuses on one particular book of the Bible?



Kay Arthur: Start with a book of the Bible—the more you know the Bible book by book, the better you are able to evaluate topical studies. When studying topically, you must remember that “context is king” when it comes to interpretation.



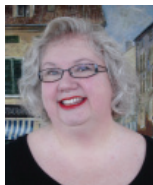
Lisa Harper: It depends on your personality and learning style, but I think it's a good idea to vary the teacher and format of the Bible studies we're involved in so we don't become jaded, and curriculums don't become just another item on our to-do list.



Kenny Luck: Topical studies are awesome when you have an issue you're facing that needs addressing, resolving, and help. That might be for a season of your walk with the Lord. The Bible speaks to everyone so I love that I can dive deep into the Bible and find out how God feels about something. Book studies are like opening a treasure chest and really getting to know someone (an author), some episode among God's people, or some time period of history in order to see a larger message, lesson, or theme developed through those books. I go back and forth between topical and book studies. In the end, topical or book study does not matter. An open heart, an eagerness to see God at work, and willingness to make application is key. Just dive in!



Mark Batterson: I'm a thinker so I like the idea of both kinds of study. There is time to do the hard work of studying an entire book of the Bible word by word, and there is a time to focus on topical studies. It depends on the personality and the season.



Liz Curtis Higgs: Some groups prefer a thematic study on a timely subject that catches their interest or meets their needs. Others are drawn to an expository approach, working through a particular book of the Bible (my personal preference for study).

Take into account the number of weeks for which the study is designed—six? eight? ten?—and the amount of preparation required. Some groups enjoy videos, others prefer workbooks, and many love books by trusted authors. As long as the Bible itself is at the heart of the study, you can be sure spiritual growth will happen.

8. Can you share an example of how you or someone you know has been transformed because of a Bible study?



Kay Arthur: Which of the hundreds of thousands? My friend who is 60 and dying of liver cancer that caught her and her husband by surprise, and who in weakened voice is thanking us at Precept Ministries International for what she, has learned over all these years through inductive study. Our Precept course on marriage (which they've taught 7 times) saved their marriage—and has allowed them to celebrate 34 years of marriage. What she learned in Precept made her an effective, successful counselor for 14 years, ministering to 9,000 students and parents who are covering her in prayer and pouring in their thank yous while there is still time. Her husband takes Precept to a country I am not free to

mention (and will continue to do so). Seeing the lives of these oppressed people transformed is one of the greatest joys of his life. My friends are not bitter, angry, or disappointed with God in the midst of this sudden trial—rather it is what they know about their God that enables them rest in faith.

Or should I tell you about the couple in Uzbekistan (parents of two) who refused to stop teaching people how to study God’s Word for themselves even though it meant persecution, facing imprisonment and eventually deportation, leaving everything they owned behind. And they haven’t stopped—they can’t because it transforms people’s lives so they live as more than conquerors, no matter the cost!



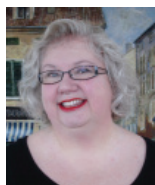
Lisa Harper: I met a woman several years ago whose story includes the sad chapter of walking away from her husband and children into the arms of another man. When the affair ended, she was so ashamed of the way she’d abandoned the people she loved most that she contemplated suicide. But then someone read her the story of Gomer and Hosea—essentially her story—which prompted her to ask her husband and children for forgiveness. Ultimately, her family was restored because of God’s mercy and the hope she found in that Old Testament book!



Kenny Luck: Me! When I first became a believer I was so grateful for the clear instructions of the Bible on how to live, what to do and not to do, what things to embrace or avoid, and the incredible wisdom it provided on EVERYTHING. I have told non-believers who question the Bible to read the book of Proverbs and do what it says whenever it gives advice in order to show them the power of the Word of God. I don’t have to prove anything. The Bible proves itself by the power of the truth to transform those who trust it.



Mark Batterson: The great irony is that transformation is often the result of just talking about the Bible. It forms you into a community. And before you know it, you start praying for each other and serving each other. I remember a few years ago a Bible study group that all fasted for one person who was applying for a job on Capitol Hill. It meant so much to this person that his entire group would do that. I think Bible study has a unique way of cultivating relationships that can’t be cultivated in any other way!



Liz Curtis Higgs: I brought home my first Bible in February 1982, the month I awakened to the reality of Christ as the Living Word of God. Within weeks I was involved in a home Bible study with a dozen women from my church, who took me under their wings. I’d always seen the Bible as a dry, boring collection of archaic rules. Imagine my surprise when I discovered it was a life-altering book filled with wisdom, grace, and incredible truths, not to mention some pretty amazing stories.

Before the year was out, I began leading a Bible study at work with two women who soon gave their hearts to Christ. Did I know the Bible thoroughly then, from Genesis to Revelation? I did not. But I knew the “author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2) and trusted Him to “guide me ... and teach me” (Psalm 25:5), which He graciously did, and continues to do not to my credit, but to His glory.

9. What is the best size for a group Bible study?



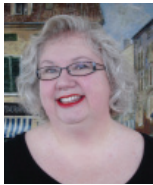
Lisa Harper: I think the size of the study is irrelevant—it could be two people meeting in Starbucks or two thousand people meeting in an auditorium—but the size of the discussion groups need to be small enough for everyone to have a chance to connect and be heard.



Kenny Luck: Size can adjust just as long as discussion groups are small.



Mark Batterson: In my experience less than five is awkward and more than twelve makes some people feel nervous. There are certainly scenarios where a larger group makes sense. And there is a place for one-on-one discipleship. But I think the best size for a Bible study is six to eight because it forces everyone to be engaged in the study and participate. You can't hide in a group that size.



Liz Curtis Higgs: For a home or small group study, eight to ten is ideal. Though I've taught Bible studies with hundreds of participants, those teaching sessions still ended with small groups of twelve to sixteen gathering for a time of discussion. There is also much to be said for doing a Bible study with one close friend. The prayer time is rich, and the accountability factor is significant.

10. Would you recommend couples to do a Bible study together?



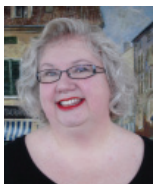
Lisa Harper: Well, since I'm 46 and single and think my husband might be lost and not asking for directions, I don't have any personal experience in this area. But according to my married friends, couples studies are a great way to grow more intimate with God and each other!



Kenny Luck: I highly recommend gender AND relational studies. Couples should do a Bible study with other couples but the men of those groups should meet separately and do men's study because men, in particular, will not be totally forthcoming in a mixed group. That's what we do at Saddleback Church, and it works very well with our couple's small groups



Mark Batterson: I think it's a wonderful way for couples to cultivate a habit of working on their spiritual lives together. Lots of couples struggle with doing devotions together. A Bible study can be a great way to help them cultivate that habit.



Liz Curtis Higgs: Nothing strengthens the marriage bond like opening God's Word together, whether it's just the two of you at home or a classroom filled with couples. Some Bible studies are written especially for women, and others just for men, so you'll want to choose a study meant for both of you. Bible studies are not the place to air marriage difficulties in public. Rather, it's a time to build each partner's relationship with God, such that challenges can be faced in private with God's Word as your source of strength, wisdom, and comfort. We're told, "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken" (Ecc 4:12). When each partner binds his or her heart to Christ and His Word, their relationship will be deeper and their marriage far more secure.