

Every group meeting is an improvisation. No matter how much you prepare, there's always a chance that someone will ask a question you can't answer, or that the discussion will go in an unforeseen direction. Maybe someone in the group has a crucial need you have to address. Maybe the Spirit gives you a new understanding of how a biblical teaching applies to the lives in your group.

This Leader's Guide is a tool that helps you unpack a text. But it can be more than that. We're giving you a document full of possibility.

If you're new to group leading, you can simply follow along step by step. Remember that your job is to ask questions, not necessarily to give all the answers. It's okay to let silence stretch its arms as your group thinks through the discussion. As you honor participant's answers—even the half-baked ones—they'll be encouraged to participate even more. Some of those answers may get fully baked in the group oven.

If you're accustomed to doing your own thing, go for it! This guide provides ideas to help you do your job even better. Whether you're a novice or a veteran, read through each lesson in advance. Know your options. Plan out those parts you're likely to use. Develop a game plan.

We've provided handouts to use with each lesson. You'll need to make enough copies for your entire group beforehand so participants can make notes along the way and remember the Scripture used in the Bible study. The handouts also include activities for further study during the week.

With that in mind, let's preview the guide. The main body of the Leader's Guide is written as a conversation you would have with your group. **When there's a specific question to ask**, it appears in bold type. When we want to whisper directions in your ear, we'll get your attention with **Leader:** *then use italic type*. (If you're looking for a quick answer, the suggested answer sometimes appears in parentheses after the question or *in an italicized list*.) But many of the questions are open for discussion, so they have no suggested answers in parentheses. Instead, the paragraphs that follow after might include thoughts you could add to the discussion.

EACH LESSON HAS PARTICULAR SECTIONS:

Session Goals

This is the point of each session—the big idea and what we hope participants walk away knowing, feeling, and doing differently as a result of studying the material. All of the teaching, questions, and reflections ultimately point back to these goals.

Open

This is an icebreaker. Adjust it to the character of your group, but don't skip it, for several reasons. (1) Every group needs some transition time. (2) The people get to know each other. (3) The introductory questions draw out practical connections between the subject matter and their lives.

Read & Watch

We often rush into the interpretation of a Bible passage without really hearing what it says. For this study, we urge you to read the text slowly before you begin the analysis. Let people drink in the words and images for themselves. Then the video teaching from Louie Giglio will make more sense. People will be able to compare it with their own impressions of the text.

Before watching the video, take a moment or two to walk through the "things to look for" questions. They'll help concentrate attention on the most important parts of the video teaching. Then, when you watch the video, make sure to set the audio at a comfortable level and everyone can see the screen. You don't want your group to miss anything.

Discuss, Go Deeper & Peek at the Greek

Here's the meat of the Bible study: questions about the meaning of the text. The section usually starts with some "easy-answer" questions that review what the Scripture actually says. But then there are tougher questions about the *whys* and *hows*.

Every so often you'll see a *Go Deeper* or a *Peek at the Greek* section. These are optional features, connecting you to other Scriptures on certain themes found in Colossians or presenting a look at the original language of the text. You don't need to use all of these. Go through in advance to see which ones seem most promising to you. Here are some factors to consider:

- Some people *love* exploring through the Bible and comparing references. Others, especially those who are rather new to Bible study, get confused by it. They might not know where to find those other books of the Bible, and they might not be sure what 1 Corinthians or the Gospel of John has to do with Colossians anyway. In some cases, you could explain what the other passages say, or get individual group members to read the other passages, so the "exploration" is kept to a minimum.
- Any one of these *Go Deeper* explorations could become a rabbit trail, leading you away from what you intended to cover. Some groups like it that way, finding new adventures in the comparison of different parts of Scripture, but if you have a clear agenda for this study, keep a leash on the discussion.
- These cross-references serve as a sort of "elastic" for your meeting. If you're running out of time, you can drop the *Go Deeper* content and the lesson will still make sense. But if you have plenty of time, these explorations can fill it productively.
- *Peek at the Greek* sections provide insight into the careful wording used in the book of Colossians. A discussion of the original language may help to clarify a sticky issue in the text, so feel free to reference them as you see fit. However, some groups may find the technical analysis overwhelming. As with everything, it's your call.

We recommend that you go through the *Go Deeper* and *Peek at the Greek* portions in your personal preparation and choose how you will handle them: yes, no, or maybe. Even the "no" sections will give you helpful background as you lead the group.

Last Word & Live It Out

This is an opportunity for your group to be challenged to do something with what they've learned. This study guide offers a menu of responses. Any one of them would be a valuable response to the lesson, but consider urging the group to respond both inwardly and outwardly. Many of us are very good at internal responses in which we treasure the lessons from Colossians we just learned. But actually talking with a neighbor? Actually helping someone in need? Keep nudging your group to the more challenging responses.