

Neighborhood Bible Study Group Thoughts

This is not like the typical “article” I send out each week. Instead, it is an explanation of the motivation for and a few ideas regarding starting a neighborhood bible study group. I’m certainly no expert at such, and welcome any suggestions or insights that might be helpful moving forward, but my purpose in sharing these things is to inspire you to consider doing such yourself.

Backstory: We have a retention pond literally in our backyard. I love to fish and do so often- it’s pretty much my only hobby. I bought a kayak even though the pond isn’t all that big (about 2.5 to 3 acres) to avoid the issue of tramping through my neighbor’s backyards as I fished (even though such is allowed in HOA rules). As a result, several of my neighbors began to open up and visit with “the guy who fishes” as I did so. Inevitably, these kayak/backyard conversations would lead to what I did for a living. Of course, along with the explanations invitations were issued to visit the church where I preach. No takers.

But over the last few years that we’ve lived here, we’ve had opportunities to be “good neighbors.” You know, unloading and installing a washing machine for an elderly couple who were no longer able to do so themselves, fixing a backyard fountain/water-feature for another elderly couple, pulling/spraying weeds down on the rocks (surrounding the pond) for others as well as our own waterfront, picking up trash in and around the pond after storms blow and wash it in, assisting a neighbor to the car for a trip to the doctor, and of course, as we live in Indiana, clearing a few extra driveways and sidewalks a few times each winter. You know, just trying to be “good neighbors.”

Light-Bulb Moment: After a few such assistances for one particular couple, this dear lady took to calling me their “angel” for helping them. “How sweet!” I thought. Then it hit me... *angels* are often “**messengers**” of God... I could be doing so much more than helping with yard work, fixing things, and clearing driveways... I could... and should be **delivering God’s message of salvation!** (Duh!) Such was the impetus for the “Badger Lake / Pebble Run Bible Study Group.”

After much thought (and prayer!), I formulated a plan, picked a starting date, made up invitations, and began hand-delivering them to the neighbors we had met (along with a few extras they could share with others they knew but we didn’t in some cases). Then, as our first meeting is later this week, yesterday I took to social media to ask our friends and brethren to pray for this effort- both that our neighbors would be willing to come into our home and study the Bible with us each week, and that their hearts/minds would be open and receptive to God’s Word. I was humbly overwhelmed by the response from brethren and friends. They were so encouraging and willing to pray as I asked!

Second Light-Bulb Moment: Friends on social media were so responsive, prayerful, and encouraging that I got to thinking further: Perhaps I should share a few thoughts that went into our plans for this study so that it might give others the confidence to start their own Bible Study Group of neighbors, non-church member friends, co-workers, etc. So, although we haven’t had our first session yet, and I’m sure adjustments will have to be made, here are some initial thoughts that went into and prompted what we’re trying to do, and might be helpful to you in starting your own Bible Study Group:

1. It's **not hard** to make a simple invitation and pass it out to neighbors... especially if you've tried to be "good neighbors" to them (think "tilling the soil" prior to "planting the seed"). Just make the invitation and walk around the neighborhood and explain what you're trying to do and why. (Obviously, if you live in a rural area, driving would be easier, lol!)
2. Though I'm sure some will not come, as evidenced by their "polite but non-committing" acceptance of the invitation, that's OK- **it's about providing opportunities**; the rest is up to them. But I'm also sure that some will come. If for no other reason than that we've helped them unload appliances or assisted them with taking care of their property... and been "good neighbors" to them.
3. Though I'm certainly no "expert" at this kind of thing, I do have a few pieces of advice that may help:
 - a. **Don't make it a "church" bible study group by inviting brethren from your own congregation.** If your neighbors do come, they might feel "targeted" when they realize there's a lot of people who all go to church together that are not from "the neighborhood." Make and keep the study for and with your "neighbors" (or whatever the association is that ties them together).
 - b. Tell them the study is **non-denominational**, not only because it is, but because those that do come will likely be already members of a particular denomination, or a "non-denominational" or "bible" church. Regardless of the fact that the "church of Christ" is 'non-denominational,' if you make "the church" your central focus, they WILL think you did a "bait-and-switch" on them. You want them to come! Besides, evangelism is supposed to be about sharing the "good news" of the gospel of Jesus Christ. So keep that in mind and resist the urge to make the study about increasing attendance/membership of your local congregation. If people are willing to respond to Christ and the gospel, that other stuff will come in due time. Your objective is to help people understand the Bible, and thereby come to know, believe, and obey Jesus, PERIOD.
 - c. Start with something basic and with a wide appeal. We're doing "**Keys to Understanding the Bible**," because anyone who is at all interested in studying the Bible wants to do it better. But, and I think this is important...
 - d. **Be flexible and make it comfortable for them to ask their bible/spiritual questions in the study.** Make it clear that the Bible has answers for them, and that you and the group will do its best to find those answers with/for them. However, care must be taken that such opportunities for questions are not allowed to "derail" the overall direction and purpose of the study- however you get there, you must "*preach/teach Jesus*" ([Acts 8:35](#)) to them.
 - e. **Pick an evening and time on which you can be consistent, and that is convenient for most of the group**, but also make it clear that missing a class or two is understandable and will be "worked around." Having *linked* but *stand-alone* lessons will help facilitate this. People have busy schedules. Try to be as accommodating as possible, but be dedicated and consistent. In the initial meeting (or even conversations leading up to it), determine what day and time is

best for everyone, then stick to it... every week on the same day and at the same time as much as possible. Attendee's will soon associate that day and time with the Bible Study Group and be more likely to remember and attend. You have to commit to this. "On" this week but "Off" next week and the one after, or Thursday this week but Tuesday next and Monday the one following won't be conducive.

- f. As much as possible, **ask questions and carefully lead the group to the Bible for the answer** (rather than what "I" or "you" think or believe or "my church" teaches or practices). Those that attend came to a "**Bible Study Group**" not to hear a one-way treatise or "sermon."

Wow! This is already much longer than I intended, but if you're still reading, I hope these things are both inspiring and helpful. And as I said at the beginning, I'm no "expert," but I am open to suggestions! May God bless all our efforts to serve and glorify Him, and let's get busy- *"the fields are white for harvest!"* (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)