

# *Leading participatory Bible studies*

There is great value in learning about what the Bible teaches, in small groups. God does not need experts to help us make sense of the Bible. When people discover truth and new meaning from studying the Bible together, they are far more likely to take action as a result.

Small groups of people who regularly meet together to study and discuss the Bible can be an excellent way of developing disciples. As people build relationships, they can pray together, discuss personal concerns and gain advice, fellowship and friendship. Being part of a small study group can also help each church member feel part of the wider family.

If a church wants to form Bible study groups, the leadership should place people into small groups which should usually mix ages, abilities, men and women. A leader who can facilitate and encourage discussion is important. Once people gain confidence, leading the studies can be shared by different members.

Many people are not used to participatory Bible study. They expect to sit quietly and learn through preaching and teaching by leaders. It is really important to show people how to use these studies, otherwise a leader may simply continue to use them to teach others. Here are some tips to help people start to study the Bible in a participatory way...

- Provide a good example. Use the studies in a participatory way in church meetings or workshops so people understand how to proceed.
- Group size should be between 4 and 12. If groups are bigger, then quiet people are unlikely to join in the discussion.
- The facilitator should be careful not to provide too much background information about the passage to be studied. This can make people feel they lack knowledge themselves.
- Encourage people to pray and ask for God's help before they begin to read. Finish by thanking God for what has been learned and ask for help in applying the learning in everyday life.
- Try to ensure that people keep to the subject. Sometimes the facilitator may need to summarise discussion and ensure people return to the subject.
- The facilitator should be aware of the need to prevent dominant people from talking too much whilst encouraging shy people who lack confidence to share their views.
- In a larger meeting or workshop setting, the larger group could read the passage and introduction together and then break into smaller groups. Write out the discussion questions on small pieces of paper and share these between the different small groups so that each group looks at a different aspect. Then draw them together and invite a representative to share their learning.
- If possible, help people gain skills in leading and facilitating small groups. Encourage each leader to train up another assistant leader within the group.



Photo: Mike Webb, Tearfund