

GOALS FOR THE GROUP LEADER

Help the group members:

1. to learn a few important rules for explaining the Bible
2. to consistently apply these rules

I. WORSHIP (14 min.)

1. Prayer

Pray that God will guide us through his Spirit; that we will be aware of his presence and that we will listen to what he says.

2. Meditation

Worship is to admire and praise God that he has explained himself in Jesus Christ.

Theme: Jesus Christ is the greatest expounder (exegete)

Read the Bible verses mentioned below and the explanation. Or explain the verses in your own words.

➤ *Jesus Christ explains God.*

Only Jesus Christ explained the living God! Moses brought the Law which explained God's righteous demand against the sin of mankind. But Jesus Christ brought grace and truth which revealed and explained God's personality and character as well as his plan of salvation. Jesus Christ is the greatest Expounder (Exegete) of God himself! He causes people to know God!

John 1:16-18.

¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

➤ *Study Jesus Christ.*

To merely study the Bible is not enough. People must also come to Jesus Christ (the Truth), because he himself is the heart of the Bible message. And people must study Jesus Christ.

John 5:39-40.

³⁹ You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

➤ *Jesus Christ's teachings come from God.*

Jesus Christ is the Greatest Bible Scholar. Everything he (the God revealed in time) teaches and commands comes directly from God the Father (the eternal God). Whoever has the right attitude, namely, willingness to do the will of God, will certainly know that what Jesus Christ teaches comes from God.

John 7:15-19.

¹⁵ The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?"

¹⁶ Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. ¹⁷ Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. ¹⁸ Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. ¹⁹ Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?"

John 17:17.

¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

➤ *Study the Bible.*

The Bible is God's truth. By means of this truth God sets people apart from sin and dedicates them to his plan.

3. Worship

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to worship (in one or two sentences) God as the One who reveals (expounds) himself sufficiently in Jesus Christ.

II. INTRODUCTION THEME (1 min.)

The theme for this meeting is: Bible interpretation

Read or explain in your own words.

Jesus warns against false teachers (Mark 7:7-8,13). Paul commands Christians to correctly handle the word of truth, that is, to proclaim the Word straight or without twisting it (2 Timothy 2:15).

Therefore interpreting the Bible is NOT giving *your* personal opinion about the contents of the Bible, but explaining what *God* intended the contents of the Bible to mean. Just as we do not drive our car according to our own rules, so we may not interpret the Bible according to our own rules! Interpretation of the Bible means explaining the Bible as God intends it to be understood! It means explaining the Bible according to the rules of biblical interpretation (hermeneutics).

III. SHARING OF QUIET TIMES (30 min.)

Let everyone in the small group take a turn to share (or read) what he has learned from one of the assigned quiet times.

Theme: Correctly interpreting God's Word

- Day 1 Matthew 22:23-33
Whoever does not know the Bible errs
- Day 2 Luke 11:37-52
Whoever changes the Bible into human laws will be judged
- Day 3 Mark 7:1-9.
Whoever nullifies the Bible by human traditions, worships God in vain
- Day 4 1 Corinthians 4:6-7
Do not go beyond anything written in the Bible
- Day 5 2 Corinthians 4:1-6
Do not distort the Bible
- Day 5^{BS} 2 Timothy 2:9-19
Correctly handle (interpret) the Bible¹
- Day 7 Titus 1:9-16
Hold firmly to the message of the Bible in accordance with sound doctrine
- Day 8 Revelation 22:10-19
Do not add or take away anything from the Bible
- Day 9 Galatians 1:6-9
Whoever preaches another 'gospel' will be cursed
- Day 10 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16
Whoever proclaims God's Word should expect opposition

IV. ADDITIONAL SHARING (15 min.)

Part IV is optional.
If after sharing quiet times there is still time left over, the following may serve as subjects for conversation.

1. Discussing the study

Discuss the study with reference to the questions mentioned below:

Theme: How must you explain the Bible

Why must we determine the addressee in each Bible passage?

- What is the main emphasis in the following Bible passages: Hebrews 1:1; Hebrews 3:12; Hebrews 8:12; Hebrews 10:24-25; Hebrews 10:32-34; Hebrews 11:8-10; Hebrews 12:22-24; Hebrews 13:5.

What are good examples in Bible history that Christians

¹ 2 Timothy 2:15 in Greek. "To guide the Word of truth along a straight path" like a road that goes straight towards its goal without being turned aside by wordy debates or impious talk.

may follow?

What are issues (teachings) that should be determined by the culture of the kingdom of God?

2. Commitment

Let the group members consider the following question and record their answer:

- "Which rules for Bible interpretation do you actually use?"

3. Personal sharing

Discuss personal growth and commitment. Who would like to share a difficulty or blessing in his/her personal life? What are your thoughts or feelings?

V. MEMORISATION (5 min.)

1. Review of previous Bible verses

Let pairs of group members review each other's previously memorised Bible verses (the last memorised Bible verse or the last 5 memorised Bible verses).

2. Memorisation of the new Bible verse

Explain the meaning of the new Bible verse.

BIBLE INTERPRETATION

2 Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God
as one approved,
a workman who does not need to be ashamed
and who correctly handles the word of truth

2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV)

VI. BIBLE STUDY (45 min.)

Theme: A workman who correctly handles the Word of truth

1. Bible Study

Make use of the 5 step method and study:

2 Timothy 2:1-26

¹ You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. ² And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. ³ Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer. ⁵ Similarly, anyone who competes as an athlete does not receive the victor's crown except by competing according to the rules. ⁶ The hardworking farmer should be the first to

receive a share of the crops.⁷ Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.⁸ Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel,⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained.¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

¹¹ Here is a trustworthy saying:
If we died with him,
we will also live with him;
¹² if we endure,
we will also reign with him.
If we disown him,
he will also disown us;
¹³ if we are faithless,
he remains faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.

¹⁴ Keep reminding God's people of these things. Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. ¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

¹⁶ Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. ¹⁷ Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus,¹⁸ who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. ¹⁹ Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."

²⁰ In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. ²¹ Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

²² Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

²³ Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. ²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵ Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

2. Emphasis

God's Word may NOT be interpreted in arbitrarily. Christians MUST understand what God originally intended to say.

3. Explanation for the group leader

2:1. A worker must receive before he can give

Timothy is a worker, a person who proclaims the gospel to people and then builds up the believers. A worker must be strong, but not in his own strength and abilities. He must be strong through the grace which God can give.

Grace is an undeserved gift from God (Christ) and became visible in Timothy's life as follows: Timothy was chosen by God before the beginning of time (2 Timothy 1:9). He had a godly grandmother and mother who taught him God's Word (2 Timothy 1:5). He received the Spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). He received a spiritual gift in order to carry out his ministry (2 Timothy 1:6). He had one of the greatest apostles as his personal mentor, who taught him the sound teachings of the Christian Faith (2 Timothy 1:13-14). Even the best people cannot supply all this to a worker!

2:2. A worker must pass on what he received

During a period of about 14 years (50-64 A.D.) Timothy learned much from his mentor Paul. He had travelled with Paul (cf. Jesus' 'with him' principle in Mark 3:14), he had observed his example every day, had spoken much together, had heard how he proclaimed the gospel and had seen his persecutions and sufferings, (2 Timothy 3:10-11).

Timothy was not the only 'witness' of all these things. There were many such witnesses. A 'witness' is here not a passive spectator, but an active co-worker, someone who like Paul and Timothy proclaimed the gospel to others.

Paul exhorted Timothy not only to be a teacher and trainer, but a multiplier of teachers and trainers! He encouraged Timothy to be a disciple (mature believer) himself and to train other people to become multipliers of disciples. The people he selected to entrust his teaching and training should have two characteristics: they must be faithful (a Christian character) and they must be able to teach others (a Christian ministry ability).

2:3-7. Being a worker is a heavy task

To pass on what you have learned yourself is not that easy.

➤ *Soldier.*

A worker is a soldier of Christ. Soldiers must be willing to fight and suffer for the gospel (2 Timothy 1:8; 2:9; 3:12). During a fight, a soldier has but one thing in mind: the goal, which is to gain the victory in battle. A soldier does not allow lesser interests to distract him. He only wants to please his commanding officer (Jesus Christ), who gained the kingdom of God for him.

➤ *Athlete.*

A worker is an athlete for Christ. He participates in the competition in the arena and runs in order to win the prize (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27). But athletes must compete according to the rules.

The rules include the rules for explaining the Bible correctly (i.e. hermeneutics). These rules help the worker to proclaim the gospel and teach the truth in the Bible as God intended the truth to be understood. Besides the rule concerning 'what' (the truth) there is also the rule concerning 'how' (in love for God and the neighbour) (cf. Ephesians 4:15,29).

➤ *Farmer.*

A worker is a farmer in Christ's service. Farmers rise early and work hard throughout the whole day. Note the contrast between a hard-working farmer and a sluggard (Proverbs 20:4; 24:30-34). A farmer may be the first to enjoy the fruit of the land: i.e. his own faith, hope and love will grow. The same will happen to others!

2:8-10. His mentor gave him an example of faithfulness and perseverance

Timothy's spiritual father, teacher and mentor, Paul, proclaimed the truth (Galatians 1:6-9). But his mentor paid the price for it: as Paul was writing these words in 2 Timothy, he sat imprisoned (in chains) in Rome. Paul was willing to bear all the difficulties and opposition in the world in order to save and train some people. His desire was that they might obtain salvation together with eternal glory.

2:11-13. The importance of being faithful

God (Christ) makes promises as well as threats! A Christian who dies with Christ because he is faithful to Christ unto death, will certainly reign with Christ (cf. Revelation 3:21-22).

But someone who calls himself a Christian, but then disowns (denies) Christ because of oppression and persecution, will certainly be disowned by Christ (cf. Matthew 10:32-33).

Christ will reward the faithfulness of his workers, but also punish their unfaithfulness! He remains faithful, not only to his promises, but also to his threats (cf. Jeremiah 18:6-10)!

2 Timothy 2:13 may not be interpreted out of its context to mean that Christ would remain faithful even to Christians who are unfaithful. Christ cannot disown himself. He will carry out his threat and disown those who disown him.

2:14. A worker must not have useless quarrels about words

A worker must not get side-tracked by useless debates about the Christian Faith or about anything else.

During the first century A.D. there were Jews who did everything to try and bring Christians back under the Jewish Law (Matthew 23:15; Acts 15:1; the Letter to the Galatians). These Jews had added 613 human laws (Matthew 15:6-9) to the law in the Bible and they occupied themselves with useless arguments and quarrels about these laws. They also occupied themselves with endless debates about Jewish genealogies, trying to determine whether a person was a real Jew (descendant from Jacob) or not (Titus 3:9). They also tried to convince Christians to keep all these laws (Acts 15:1)! Paul warned that people, who occupy themselves with useless debates (dialogues, arguments) instead of proclaiming and teaching the truth, are sinful and condemned.

2:15. A worker must handle the truth correctly

Literally: "To guide the Word of truth along a straight path" like a road that goes straight towards its goal without being turned aside by wordy debates or impious talk.

➤ *Test and approve.*

Timothy must do his best to present himself to God as a worker who is approved by God after a period of testing. The test consists of not being ashamed of Christ, his Word or of ploughing straight furrows with the Word of God.

The theologians of the Jews and the other religions do not determine what the truth is! They also do not determine how a person will be judged! The One who determines the truth and determines how you will be judged is no one less than Jesus Christ. God the Father has entrusted all judgement unto Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the One who tests you in all kinds of situations to determine whether you know him (Matthew 7:21-23), whether you are genuine, upright, honest as a person, whether you have not distorted the truth in the Bible (2 Corinthians 4:1-2) and whether you have acted upon the truth in the Bible (John 5:39-40). Jesus Christ will be

the Only and Final Judge (Matthew 25:31-33; John 5:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15). If you pass the test he will approve you! Note his words of approval in Matthew 24:45-47, Matthew 25:21 and Matthew 25:34-39. However, if you fail the test he will disapprove you. Note his words of disapproval in Matthew 25:40-46.

‘The word of truth’ is above all the gospel as Jesus and Paul brought it (John 17:17; Galatians 1:6-9) and the whole revelation of the Bible (Acts 20:27).

➤ *Plough straight furrows with the word of truth.*

These words have been wrongly interpreted. A great advocate of the dispensational theory, C. I. Scofield, followed the dispensational theology of John Darby and built up his dispensational theology on these words as translated in the King James translation: “Rightly dividing the Word”. Scofield thought that *the whole Bible had to be divided* into two parts: the first part deals with God’s plan with the Jews (and thus not with the Christians) and the second part deals with God’s plan with the Church (and thus not with Israel). Scofield taught that God had two different plans, that there were two different holy books (the Old Testament and mainly the New Testament), two different ways to be saved (through keeping the law and through grace by faith), two different peoples of God (Israel and the Church), and two different destinations (the blessings of the new earth for Jews and the blessings of the new heaven for the Christians). Scofield (and Darby) definitely did NOT plough straight furrows with the Bible!

The Greek word: ‘orthotomeo’ means something completely different than ‘dividing’! The word is also used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Proverbs 3:6² and 11:5³ where it means: ‘to make a way straight’. It means to construct a road straight through the jungles and mountains, so that the traveller is able to walk straight to his goal!

In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul commands Timothy to go straight towards the goal and proclaim God’s Word of truth, without allowing himself to get distracted by debates, dialogues and quarrels. It is NOT the clever words of the Christian debater, but the inspired Word of Jesus Christ which he personally speaks to the listener that creates faith in his heart (Romans 10:17). It is not winning the argument with words, but repentance in the heart that will lead a person to a knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 2:25-26)!

² Proverbs 3:6 *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.*

³ Proverbs 11:5 *The righteousness of the blameless makes a straight way for them, but the wicked are brought down by their own wickedness.*

Paul is not speaking about a specific interpretation of the Bible, but about the handling of the Bible. Timothy must NOT occupy himself with useless debates (dialogues, arguments) with adherents of another faith. The Christian must NOT allow himself to be forced into a position of defending the Bible, but must continue to attack by proclaiming and teaching the truth of the Bible. He must NOT get caught in the trap of arguing about words, laws, genealogies, theological issues, history, etc. but go straight to the goal of proclaiming Jesus Christ and him crucified. He must proclaim and teach the truth in the Bible as clearly as possible and insist on responding to it, whether it is convenient or inconvenient, that is, whether people welcome it or do not want to hear it (1 Timothy 4:2)! He must teach people “the whole will of God” (Acts 20:27) and not merely a part of it (e.g. a Bible text taken out of its context)! He must NOT go beyond what is written (in the Bible) (1 Corinthians 4:6)!

2:16-18. A worker must avoid godless chatter

Those who indulge in godless chatter only become more ungodly. The teachings of those who indulge in useless debates (dialogues) spread like gangrene. It infects and pollutes other people and only leads further and further away from God. Two such false teachers were Hymenaeus and Philetus, who wandered away from the Christian Faith, because they maintained that the resurrection has already taken place (2 Timothy 2:17; cf. 1 Timothy 1:19b-20).

False teachers destroy the faith of people and that is why they are mentioned by name, in order to warn Christians against them.

2:19. The truth is unshakeable

➤ *The solid foundation.*

God’s solid foundation stands firm. Here it probably does not refer to Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:10-11) and also not to the apostles (Ephesians 2:20), but to the Christian Church (Matthew 16:18)! The Church is “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

The words ‘stand firm’ are written in the present perfect tense, which indicates that this foundation had been laid in the past (at Christ’s first coming) and since then continues to stand unshakeably. The Church stands unshakeable in spite of the false teachers, the false prophets and even the gates of hell that oppose it (Matthew 16:18)!

➤ *The seal.*

God’s foundation does not have an inscription written on it, but a seal or stamp, which denotes: “The Lord knows who are his” and “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.”

A 'seal' denotes protection guaranteed by a higher authority and it is thus a warning to people who tamper with this seal (cf. Matthew 27:66)!

A 'seal' denotes the hall-mark of the owner (Song of Songs 8:6a) and the genuineness of the product. It refers to the people who have received the truth in the Bible and have been sealed or stamped with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). They are the born-again Christians and are God's property (people).

A 'seal' guarantees the assurance that the Lord knows his people from all eternity as his chosen people (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9).

But a seal has two sides: On the one hand the Lord assures Christians that they are his chosen people. On the other hand Christians can only be sure of this truth when they turn away from wickedness (e.g. the lies of other religions, cults and sects). The first truth cannot stand without the second truth! Assurance of justification can only stand when there is also sanctification (Romans 6:6,11; James 1:22-25; 2:17,22-24)! Someone who calls himself 'a Christian', but does not turn away from wickedness, can never be sure that he is saved!

2:20-23. People do not all stand on the same line with regard to the truth

➤ *Articles with different destinations.*

The Christian Church in its present form is incomplete and imperfect! Some people are sincere and devoted believers in Jesus Christ and are compared to articles of gold. Other people are believers who are less sincere and less devoted to the truth and are compared to articles of silver. Not all Christians are instruments for noble purposes.

Then there are people who seem to belong to the Church, but are not born-again. They are compared to articles of wood and earthenware that will not be able to stand the test of fire at the judgement (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; cf. Matthew 13:24-30,36-43,47-50; Romans 9:20-23).

➤ *Becoming an instrument for noble purpose.*

The only way to be sure that you are an instrument for noble purpose is to turn away from wickedness (Proverbs 28:13) and to be cleansed by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7,9).

Assurance of salvation (justification by faith in Jesus Christ) is indissolubly bound to holiness of life (sanctification by obedience to Christ) (James 2:8-13).

God wants to use cleansed Christians in his service. That is why Christians must flee from the evil desires they acquired during their youth. They must pursue everything that is right in God's eyes and everything that is faithful, loving and peaceful. They must deliberately choose to have nothing to do with stupid arguments, because these only produce quarrels. Paul is especially thinking of quarrels with people who reject or criticise the Bible, because he himself set an example of having healthy discussions (dialogues) about the message of the Bible (Acts 17:2-4,11)!

2:24-26. A worker must not quarrel, but teach

A worker must remain friendly to people who are pig-headed and opponents. He must gently instruct them in the hope that God will grant them repentance that leads to a knowledge of the truth.

Not all opponents are deliberately rebellious or deliberately hold on to wrong teachings. Many are caught in the trap of the devil and his lies. Only the truth (Jesus Christ himself and his Word) will enable them to escape from the trap of the devil who has taken them captive to do his will (John 8:31-44).

VII. PRAYER (8 min.)

Pray with one another in response to what God said to you during this gathering. Let every group member take a turn to pray one or two sentences about what God taught him during this meeting.

Pray with one another for one another (Romans 15:30) and for other people (Colossians 4:12).

VIII. THE NEXT MEETING (2 min.)

Hand out the preparation for the next gathering.