

Conducting Progressive Bible Studies

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Part 1 What Is a Bible Study?

¹ Worldwide, about six million Bible studies are being conducted by God’s people each month. By using good teaching methods, we can help these Bible students progress to the point of dedication and baptism and become “adequately qualified to teach others.” (2 Tim. 2:2) Would you like to help your student to make such progress? Starting with this issue, *Our Kingdom Ministry* will feature a series of articles that will explain basic aspects of conducting progressive Bible studies.

² **When to Report a Bible Study:** If you regularly and systematically have Bible discussions, though brief, using the Bible along with one of the recommended publications, you are conducting a Bible study. This is true even if the study takes place on the doorstep or over the telephone. The study may be reported when it has been conducted two times after the study arrangement is demonstrated and if there is reason to believe that the study will continue.

³ The *Require* brochure and the *Knowledge* book are publications used for conducting many Bible studies. After they have been completed, if it is evident that a person is making progress, even slowly, and that he is developing appreciation for what he is learning, then the study may be continued in the *Worship God* book. The brochure *You Can Be God’s Friend!* may be used to study with people who have limited education or reading ability.

⁴ The Bible study work has been effective in assisting millions to become true disciples of Jesus Christ. (Matt. 28:19, 20) By applying the suggestions offered in upcoming articles of this series, you can conduct a progressive Bible study.

Part 2 Preparing to Conduct the Study

¹ Teaching effectively on a Bible study involves more than just discussing the material and looking up the cited scriptures. We need to present the information in a way that touches the student’s heart. This requires thorough preparation with the student in mind. — Prov. 15:28.

² **How to Prepare:** Begin by praying to Jehovah about the person and his needs. Ask Jehovah to help you reach the student’s heart. (Col. 1:9, 10) To get the theme clearly in mind, take a moment to consider the title of the chapter or lesson, the subheadings, and any visual aids. Ask yourself, ‘What is the thrust of the material?’ This will help you to focus on the main points as you conduct the study.

³ Carefully review the material paragraph by paragraph. Identify the answers to the printed questions, marking only the key words and phrases. Analyze how the cited scriptures relate to the main point of the paragraph, and decide which ones to read during the study. You may find it helpful to make brief notes in the margin of the publication. The student should clearly see that what he is learning is from God’s Word. — 1 Thess. 2:13.

⁴ **Personalize the Lesson:** Next, consider the lesson with the particular student in mind. Try to anticipate his questions and the points that he may have difficulty understanding or accepting. Ask yourself: ‘What does he need to understand or work on in order to make spiritual progress? How can I reach his heart?’ Then adapt your teaching accordingly. At times, you may see a need to prepare an illustration, an explanation, or a series of questions to help the student grasp the meaning of a certain point or scripture. (Neh. 8:8) But avoid inserting additional information that contributes little to the theme. A brief review at the end of the study will help him to retain the main points.

⁵ What joy we have when new ones bear righteous fruit to Jehovah’s praise! (Phil. 1:11) To help them reach that goal, prepare well each time you conduct a Bible study.

Part 3 Effective Use of the Scriptures

¹ Our purpose in conducting Bible studies is to “make disciples” by helping people to understand and accept the teachings of God’s Word and apply them in their lives. (Matt. 28:19, 20; 1 Thess. 2:13) Therefore, the study should center on the Scriptures. At first, it may be helpful to show students how to find specific texts in their own copy of the Bible. How, though, can we use the Scriptures to help such ones to progress spiritually?

² **Select Texts to Read:** In your preparation, determine how each cited scripture in the lesson applies to the point under consideration, and decide which ones you will look up and discuss during the study. Generally, it is good to read those that show the Scriptural basis for our beliefs. Texts that provide background information may not need to be read. Take into consideration the needs and circumstances of each student.

³ **Use Questions:** Instead of explaining Bible texts to the student, have him explain them to you. You can prompt him to do this by the skillful use of questions. If the application of a scripture is obvious, you might simply ask how the text supports what is stated in the paragraph. In other cases, a more specific question or series of questions may be needed to direct the student to the proper conclusion. If further explanations are needed, these can be made after the student has responded.

⁴ **Keep It Simple:** A skilled archer often needs just one arrow to hit a target. Similarly, a skilled teacher does not require many words to make a point. He can convey information simply, clearly, and accurately. At times, you may need to do research in Christian publications to understand a scripture and explain it correctly. (2 Tim. 2:15) But avoid trying to explain every aspect of each scripture in the study. Include only what is needed to make the point under consideration.

⁵ **Make Practical Application:** When appropriate, help the student to see how Bible texts apply to him personally. For example, when considering Hebrews 10:24, 25 with a student who is not yet attending Christian meetings, you might discuss one of the meetings and invite him to attend it. But avoid pressuring him. Allow God’s Word to motivate him to take the action needed to please Jehovah.—Heb. 4:12.

⁶ As we carry out the commission to make disciples, may we “promote obedience by faith” through our effective use of the Scriptures.—Rom. 16:26.

Part 4 Training Students to Prepare

¹ A student who reads the lesson beforehand, marks the answers, and thinks of how to express them in his own words should make rapid spiritual progress. Therefore, once a regular study has been established, prepare a lesson together to show the student how. With most students, it will be helpful to prepare an entire chapter or lesson together.

² **Markings and Notations:** Explain how to find direct answers to the printed questions. Show the student your copy of the study publication in which you have marked only the key words or phrases. As you consider the material, he may want to follow your example, marking in his copy only what is needed to help him recall the answer. (Luke 6:40) Then ask him to give the answer in his own words. This will allow you to see how well he understands the material.

³ A careful examination of unquoted scriptures is an important part of the student’s preparation for the study. (Acts 17:11) Help him to see that each cited text supports a point in the paragraph. Show him how to make brief notations in the margin of his study publication. Keep before him the fact that the Bible is the basis for what he is learning. Encourage him to make generous use of the cited scriptures in his comments during the study.

⁴ **Survey and Review:** Before the student begins his detailed preparation of the study material, it will be helpful for him to get an overview of the subject. Point out that he can survey the material by briefly examining the chapter title, subheadings, and illustrations. Explain that before concluding his session of preparation, he would be wise to take a moment to review the main points presented in the lesson, perhaps using the review box if one is provided. Such repetition will help him retain the information.

⁵ Training the student to prepare well for his study will help him to make meaningful comments at congregation meetings. It will also help him to develop study habits that will benefit him long after his personal Bible study is completed.

Part 5 Determining How Much Material to Cover

¹ When teaching, Jesus took into consideration his disciples' limitations, speaking to them "as far as they were able to listen." (Mark 4:33; John 16:12) In a similar way, teachers of God's Word today need to gauge the pace at which they cover material on a Bible study. The amount of material that can be considered will depend on the ability and the circumstances of both the teacher and the student.

² **Build Solid Faith:** Some students may require two or three sessions to grasp what other students can easily take in during one session. We do not want to sacrifice the student's having a clear understanding for the sake of speed. Every student needs a solid basis for his newfound faith in God's Word.—Prov. 4:7; Rom. 12:2.

³ As you conduct the study week by week, spend whatever time is necessary to help the student understand and accept what he is learning from God's Word. Avoid a hurried pace that detracts from the richness of the truths being taught. Allow sufficient time to focus on the main points and to consider key scriptures that provide the basis for the teachings.—2 Tim. 3:16, 17.

⁴ **Keep the Study Moving:** While we want to avoid rushing through the study, we also want to avoid becoming sidetracked. If a student is inclined to speak at length about personal matters, we may need to arrange to discuss these after the study.—Eccl. 3:1.

⁵ On the other hand, our own enthusiasm for the truth can make it a challenge not to talk excessively during the study. (Ps. 145:6, 7) An occasional side point or experience can enrich a study, but we would not want these to become so numerous or lengthy that they hinder the student from acquiring an accurate knowledge of basic Bible teachings.

⁶ By covering a reasonable amount of material at each study session, we help Bible students to "walk in the light of Jehovah."—Isa. 2:5.

Part 6 When a Student Raises a Question

¹ Once a Bible study is well established, it is usually best to consider Bible teachings in an orderly manner rather than jump from subject to subject. This helps the student to build a foundation of accurate knowledge and to progress spiritually. (Col. 1:9, 10) Often, though, students raise questions on various subjects during the study. How should these be handled?

² **Be Discerning:** Questions related to the study material being considered can usually be answered on the spot. If a question will be addressed later in the study publication, it may be sufficient simply to point that out. However, if a question is unrelated to the study material or will require research to answer properly, it may be better to consider the matter after the study or at another time. Some find that writing the question down assures the student that his question is being taken seriously and helps prevent the study from becoming sidetracked.

³ Many Bible teachings are considered only briefly in our basic study publications. What if a student has difficulty accepting a certain teaching or holds strongly to a false belief? It may be beneficial to consider additional material that thoroughly discusses what the Bible says on that subject. If the student is still not convinced, leave the subject for another time and continue on with his regular study. (John 16:12) As he gains a broader knowledge of the Bible and progresses spiritually, he may come to understand that Bible teaching.

⁴ **Be Modest:** If you are not sure of the answer to a question, resist the temptation to venture an opinion. (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 4:11) Explain that you will research the matter and return with an answer. You might even use the opportunity to teach the student how to do research. Progressively show him how to use the various research tools provided by Jehovah's organization. In this way he will eventually be able to answer his own questions.—Acts 17:11.

Part 7 Offering Prayer at the Study

¹ In order for Bible students to make spiritual progress, Jehovah's blessing is essential. (1 Cor. 3:6) Therefore, it is proper to open and close an established study with prayer. We can often do this from the very first study with people who are religiously inclined. With others, we may need to discern the appropriate time to introduce prayer. You might use Psalm 25:4, 5 and 1 John 5:14 to help the student see why prayer should be offered and also use John 15:16 to explain the importance of praying to Jehovah through Jesus Christ.

² Who should offer prayer at a Bible study? If a baptized brother accompanies a sister on a study, he would offer prayer, although the sister might conduct the study while wearing a head covering. (1 Cor. 11:5, 10) On the other hand, if an unbaptized male Kingdom publisher accompanies a sister on a study, she would offer prayer. In such a situation, she should wear a head covering when praying as well as when conducting.

³ **What the Prayer May Include:** Prayers at a Bible study need not be lengthy, but they should be specific. Besides seeking God's blessing on the study and giving thanks for the truths learned, it is fitting to give praise to Jehovah as the Source of instruction. (Isa. 54:13) We can also include expressions that reflect our sincere interest in the student and our appreciation for the organization that Jehovah is using. (1 Thess. 1:2, 3; 2:7, 8) Our asking for Jehovah's blessing on the student's efforts to apply what he is learning can help him to see the importance of being a 'doer of the word.'—Jas. 1:22.

⁴ Many are the benefits of prayer. It brings God's blessing. (Luke 11:13) It emphasizes the seriousness of studying God's Word. As the student listens to our prayers, he is learning how to pray. (Luke 6:40) Moreover, prayers that spring from a heart filled with love for God and gratitude for his matchless qualities can help the student to develop a personal relationship with Jehovah.

Part 8 Directing Students to the Organization

¹ Our goal in conducting Bible studies is not only to teach doctrinal information but also to help students become part of the Christian congregation. (Zech. 8:23) The brochure *Jehovah's Witnesses—Who Are They? What Do They Believe?* can help us to do this. Place a copy with new Bible students, and encourage them to read it. In addition, take a few minutes each week on the study to share a point about Jehovah's organization.

² **Congregation Meetings:** The principal way in which Bible students come to appreciate God's organization is by associating with us at congregation meetings. (1 Cor. 14:24, 25) Therefore, you might begin getting them acquainted by describing the five weekly meetings, one meeting at a time. Mention the title of the next public talk. Show them the material that will be considered at the *Watchtower* Study and at the Congregation Book Study. Describe the Theocratic Ministry School and the Service Meeting. When you have an assignment in the school, perhaps you could rehearse it with them. Share outstanding points that were presented at the meetings. Use photographs in our publications to help them visualize what takes place. From the very first study, invite them to attend.

³ When the Memorial, assemblies, and the visit of the circuit overseer approach, take a few minutes to explain and build enthusiasm for these arrangements. Progressively answer questions such as: Why are we called Jehovah's Witnesses? Why do we refer to our meeting places as Kingdom Halls? What are the duties of the elders and ministerial servants? How are the preaching work and the territory organized? How is our literature produced? How is the organization financed? What are the roles of the branch office and the Governing Body in overseeing the work?

⁴ **Instructive Videos:** Another way Bible students can see Jehovah's marvelous organization is by means of our videos. These can take them *To the Ends of the Earth*, acquaint them with *Our Whole Association of Brothers*, and show them how we are *United by Divine Teaching*. A woman who had received our magazines and other literature for five years was moved to tears by the video *Jehovah's Witnesses—The Organization Behind the Name*. She had come to trust the Witnesses that visited her, but after watching the video, she felt that she could trust the organization too. A formal study was started with her, and the following week, she attended meetings at the Kingdom Hall.

⁵ By spending a few minutes each week with our students and using the tools that have been provided, we can progressively direct Bible students to the one organization that Jehovah is using today.

Part 9 Preparing Students to Witness Informally

¹ When Andrew and Philip realized that Jesus was the promised Messiah, they could not hold back from telling others the thrilling news. (John 1:40-45) Likewise today, as Bible students begin to exercise faith in what they are learning, they are impelled to speak about it. (2 Cor. 4:13) How can we encourage them to witness informally and prepare them to do so effectively?

² You might simply ask the student whether he has spoken to others about what he has learned from the Bible. Perhaps there are friends and family members whom he could invite to sit in on the study. Ask him if any of his workmates, schoolmates, or other acquaintances have expressed interest. In this way he can begin to give a witness. Help him appreciate the need to exercise discernment and to be respectful and kind when speaking with others about Jehovah God and his purposes.—Col. 4:6; 2 Tim. 2:24, 25.

³ **Sharing Their Beliefs:** It is very important to train Bible students to use God’s Word when sharing their beliefs. At selected points during the study, ask the student: “How would you use the Bible to explain this truth to your family?” or “What Bible text would you use to prove this to a friend?” Note how he responds, and show him how to base his teaching on the Scriptures. (2 Tim. 2:15) By so doing, you will be preparing the student to witness both informally and, when he qualifies, in the organized preaching work with the congregation.

⁴ It is wise to prepare Bible students to face opposition. (Matt. 10:36; Luke 8:13; 2 Tim. 3:12) When others raise questions or make comments about Jehovah’s Witnesses, this may open the way for students to give a witness. The brochure *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Who Are They? What Do They Believe?* can equip them to be “ready to make a defense.” (1 Pet. 3:15) It provides accurate information that new ones can use to help well-meaning friends and family members understand our Bible-based beliefs and activities.

Part 10 Training Students in the House-to-House Ministry

¹ When the elders determine that a Bible student qualifies as an unbaptized publisher, he may begin to share with the congregation in the public preaching work. (See *Organized to Do Jehovah’s Will*, pp. 79-81.) How can we help the student to meet the challenge of preaching from house to house?

² **Preparing Together:** There is no substitute for good preparation. Show the student where he can find suggested presentations in *Our Kingdom Ministry* and the *Reasoning* book, and help him select a simple approach that is practical for the local territory. From the start, encourage him to feature the Bible in his ministry.—2 Tim. 4:2.

³ Practice sessions are very beneficial for a new publisher. As the student rehearses the presentation, show him how to handle tactfully the responses that are common in the territory. (Col. 4:6) Assure him that Christian ministers do not need to know the answer to every question that a householder might raise. Often it is best to handle such questions by offering to do research and to return to discuss the matter further.—Prov. 15:28.

⁴ **Preaching Together:** The first time the student shares in the house-to-house ministry, let him observe as you give the presentation that the two of you prepared together. Then get him involved. In some cases, it may be best to have the new publisher give only part of the presentation, such as reading and commenting on a scripture. Take into consideration the personality and abilities of the student. (Phil. 4:5) Be generous in giving commendation as you progressively train him in the various aspects of the preaching work.

⁵ It is important to help a new publisher establish a regular schedule for participating in the ministry, doing so weekly if possible. (Phil. 3:16) Make definite arrangements to work together in service, and encourage him to work with other zealous ones also. Their example and association will help him to develop skill and find joy in preaching from house to house.

Part 11 Helping Students to Make Return Visits

¹ When a Bible student begins to share in the preaching work, he will meet people who show interest in the good news. How can we help the new publisher to make effective return visits and to cultivate the interest he finds?

² Preparation for a return visit begins with the initial call. Encourage the student to take a sincere interest in those with whom he speaks. (Phil. 2:4) Progressively train him to draw them out, to listen to their comments, and to note the things that concern them. When someone shows interest, have the new publisher write down the pertinent information about the call. Use that information to help him plan further discussions.

³ **Preparing to Return:** Review the initial call, and show the student how to select an aspect of the Kingdom message that will appeal to the householder. (1 Cor. 9:19-23) Prepare together a brief presentation that features one Bible text along with a paragraph in a study publication. In addition, prepare a question that can be raised at the conclusion of the discussion to lay the groundwork for the next visit. Show the new publisher how to add to the person's knowledge of God's Word with each successive visit.

⁴ It is also helpful to provide the student with a simple introduction. After greeting the householder, he might say: "I enjoyed our previous conversation, and I have returned to share further Bible information on [mention the topic]." You may also need to show the new publisher how to respond if a different person answers the door.

⁵ **Follow Up Diligently:** Encourage the student to set a good example in returning promptly on all who show interest. Finding people at home may require persistence in calling back. Teach the student how to make appointments to visit again, and help him appreciate the need to return as promised. (Matt. 5:37) Train the new publisher to be kind, considerate, and respectful as he searches for sheeplike ones and cultivates their interest.—Titus 3:2.

Part 12 Helping Students Start and Conduct Bible Studies

¹ When our Bible students begin sharing in the field ministry, they may be intimidated by the thought of starting and conducting their own Bible studies. How can we help them develop a positive attitude toward this essential part of our ministry?—Matt. 24:14; 28:19, 20.

² Once a Bible student qualifies to be an unbaptized publisher, he is likely already taking full advantage of the Theocratic Ministry School. The training he receives in preparing and presenting student assignments will help him to develop the teaching skills that are needed by "a workman with nothing to be ashamed of, handling the word of the truth aright."—2 Tim. 2:15.

³ **Teach by Your Example:** Jesus trained his disciples by giving clear instruction and setting a fine example. He said: "Everyone that is perfectly instructed will be like his teacher." (Luke 6:40) Your imitating Jesus by setting a proper example in your own ministry is vital. As your student observes your lead in the ministry, he will appreciate that the objective in making return visits is to start Bible studies.

⁴ Explain that when we offer a study, it is not generally necessary to describe the study arrangement in detail. Often it is best simply to demonstrate the study by using one or perhaps two paragraphs from a study publication. Helpful suggestions for doing this can be found on page 8 of this issue and on page 6 of the January 2002 *Our Kingdom Ministry*.

⁵ When appropriate, invite the student to accompany you or another experienced publisher on other Bible studies. He might share in commenting on a paragraph or a key scripture. Thus, by observation, the student will learn much about conducting progressive Bible studies. (Prov. 27:17; 2 Tim. 2:2) Give him commendation, and discuss how he can improve.

⁶ Training new publishers to be teachers of God's Word will equip them for the "good work" of starting and conducting studies of their own. (2 Tim. 3:17) How satisfying it is to work side by side with them in extending the loving invitation: "Let anyone that wishes take life's water free"!—Rev. 22:17.