

Get Ready: Preparation Guide

Getting ready to lead an International Essentials session is simple. Each one-page outline can be used as both the leader's guide and as the students' worksheet. It includes directions and guided discussion questions. The discussion is designed to flow through four phases, as explained below.

Before you begin: *Pray*

Only God can empower you to have a successful session. Pray that God will help each person in your group to:

1. Attend the session.
2. Understand what is discussed.
3. Apply the main lesson in a specific way.
4. Share what they learn with someone else.

Four Phases of the Group Discussion Flow

CONNECT with Each Other

Connection: Begin by finding out how everyone is doing, checking on how their application went from last week, and praying together. International students value connection time, so take time to build cross-cultural friendships through love and trust (both for you with them, and for them with each other).

Discussion:

Our Lives – Use these questions to draw out personal experiences, to create an authentic atmosphere, and to help group members see the relevance of this lesson to their lives. Encourage them to share experiences from their time in America and from their home cultures.

Deeper Perspectives – Use these questions to move them from their personal feelings and experiences into foundational values and beliefs. As internationals, many of their views may not be based on biblical principles.

Transition: This statement or question eases the discussion into the Bible section, creating curiosity about what God's Word says about the issues they've begun to talk about.

Notes:

Use Examples - Be ready to use examples from your life as the group discussion proceeds.

Use Discernment – Use the connection time to assess everyone's spiritual condition. If there are a number of non-Christians present, your session may contain more basic explanations and you may need to be sensitive about prayer times, etc.

HEAR God's Word

Background: There will usually be a paragraph which you can read aloud that will give some good context to the Bible passage.

Passage: Have one or more of the group members read the Bible passage(s) aloud.

Discussion: The Bible discussion questions are designed to be open-ended and thought-provoking. They are also usually ordered to guide the group through the passage and from the theoretical to the practical. However, feel free to come up with your own questions, based on the spiritual interest and maturity of your group. Since your group consists of internationals, you may need to ask questions which clarify or ensure proper understanding.

Each Unit (group of five lessons) includes a Teacher's Guide, and that guide may include some alternative Bible discussion questions that you can use if you feel the need.

UNDERSTAND it

This "understand it" section has two parts: Summary and Clarification.

Summary: This part helps the group members to summarize the most important truths and principles in the lesson. Encourage the group to write down summary statements in the space provided. Give examples if they need help to think of good summary statements.

Clarification: This part offers a chance to ask questions if anything remains confusing and to vocalize what has made the deepest impression. Be patient. Encourage them to share, giving examples if they have a hard time getting started talking about these issues.

APPLY it to Life

This section also has two parts: Act and Tell. Both give them the chance to think and plan about how to apply what they've learned in the lesson

Act: Give everyone time to think and write then discuss and pray about what God may be telling them to do in the following week. We want to encourage the group to act upon what they have discussed and learned. Space is given to write these applications down. Occasionally, homework may be included to help them process the lesson's content or to prepare for the following week's lesson.

Tell: One great way to imprint the lesson in their hearts and minds in the following week is to challenge them to share what they have learned with someone who is not in the group (believer or preferably, a non-believer). Lead them and give them time to consider who that person might be and to pray together for him/her. Space is given for them to write that person's name down so that they will remember him/her later in the week.

After several weeks, see if some members of your group might like to lead their own groups. Look for people who are particularly faithful to attend and are excited about the discussion, application and sharing. (People they have been telling week-to-week may be willing to join their new groups.) Talk to them about how important it is for group leaders to be growing in their walk with the Lord. Inconsistency in their walk can undermine a person's credibility with group members. It is a privilege to teach people about God, but it is also an important responsibility.

If they are willing to accept that responsibility, give them copies of the Session Preparation Overview and the Sample Group Discussion Flow. Walk through these with them and answer questions. You might want to help them prepare a lesson. If possible, have them teach a part (or all) of one of your group sessions. Give suggestions afterwards to help them be ready to start a new group. Now you are getting seriously involved in spiritual multiplication. Before long, there may be several groups meeting because of how God used you in starting your original group. You will begin to identify with the Apostle John when he said in 1 John 1:4, "We want you to enjoy this, too. Your joy will double our joy!"

International Essentials Leader's Guide

Lesson A: Apply

Bible Passages: Matt 13:3-8; 18-23; Joshua 1:8

Session Objective: Create a thirst for God's Word in our hearts and a commitment to live it out. You want to help the students have a deeper desire to know God through His love letter to us, the Bible. But they also need to be clear that they're not just gaining head knowledge but seeing their lives change as they DO what it says.

- In the "Hear" section emphasize the need to apply the Bible to our lives and not just know it.
- Since the main thrust of this lesson is about applying God's truth, the last section (Apply) is crucial. Under "Act" make sure that they share specific ways that they will apply this lesson.

Lesson B: Pray

Bible Passages: Acts 4: 14-31

Session Objective: Build the heart attitude and lifestyle of dependent, hopeful prayer to God.

- In the Discussion section make sure to find out their current attitude and practice toward prayer. International students from different cultures will have varying thoughts about prayer.
- Look for the group to at least come away with the following principles:
 - Pray together in times of stress and difficulty,
 - Acknowledge God's sovereignty, His control, over all things.
 - Expect God to answer prayer in unexpected ways.
- In the "Hear" section emphasize this question-- "From this passage, what are some good principles for us about how to interact with God when we are threatened? What changes might we expect?" Make sure to give it adequate time:

Note: There is a suggested 'homework' that the group members should be encouraged to do later in the week (2 Sam 11:1-12:13).

Lesson C: Witness

Bible Passages: John 1:35-46

Session Objective: Be gripped by the need and command to tell others about Jesus.

- Look for the students to come away with a couple of the following principles:

We should tell others the good news about Jesus because . . .
- Through Jesus, all people can personally 'come and see' God (get to know Him like a friend).

- Jesus demonstrates through His supernatural power that He is the Son of God (the Messiah, the King of Israel).

• In the "Hear" section this is a key question: "What are some barriers to talking about Christ with non-Christians?" Make sure to discuss it well. Help the students identify and step out to overcome barriers that might block us from telling others about Jesus. Share from your own personal experience too.

• The "Act" section has a very relevant practical step to take, so make sure that a specific plan is made

Lesson D: Fellowship

Bible Passages: Hebrews 10: 24-25; John 15:12-13

Session Objective: Build a of lifestyle of love toward other believers.

- Look for the group to at least come away with the following principles:
 - The benefits of meeting with other believers include mutual encouragement and motivation to love and good deeds.

- Jesus set the best example for how we are to treat other believers-- laying down our lives for each other.

• In the "Connect" section you should be able to uncover some felt needs for fellowship.

• In the "Hear" section the Bible passages are rather general. Help the students to think of practical and specific ways that they could live these out. Brainstorm with them about possibilities of what these verses might look like in their every day lives.

Lesson E: Think

Bible Passage: Acts 17:16-31

Session Objective: Begin grasping the biblical view of God Himself, in order to better love the Lord with all our mind.

- Look for the students to come away with the following principles:
 - God has unique characteristics and is very different from 'gods' of other religious traditions.

- How we think about God greatly affects what we believe about the world and ourselves, and what we value in life. Thus, what we think about God radically and unavoidably shapes how we behave.

• In the "Connect" section help students to articulate what they really believe about God's character. As new believers it's not crucial that they have every point theologically correct. Help create an atmosphere where they can safely share what they really believe.

• In the "Hear" section, the last 2 discussion questions are the most important, so let them fully discuss them.

Note: The Bible passage shows Paul presenting the biblical God to two different worldviews. Help your group members wrestle with how to contrast the Biblical view of God with alternative worldviews today.

Also, note that Epicureanism is actually very similar to today's secular materialism, and Stoicism has similarities to Eastern pantheism with which Asian students may be quite familiar.

Apply

Because we love God we will learn His Word and apply it to our lives

CONNECT with each other

HEAR God's Word

UNDERSTAND it

APPLY it to life

Begin with Prayer

How are you doing?
How did Application go from last week's lesson?
Let's pray together for wisdom from God for today's session.

Discussion Questions Our Lives:

- What are the most honored sacred writings in your home culture?
- How much have you read and learned of those writings? Have they made a difference in how you live your life?
- What are some things you've learned about the Bible? Do you know who wrote it?

Deeper Perspectives:

- What is something you've already learned from the Bible that's impacted your life?

Lesson Theme

The Bible is the primary resource God uses to help us grow in our relationship with Him. Because we love God we will learn His Word and apply it to our lives.

Bible Passage: Matthew 13:3-8 and 13:18-23

Background: Jesus often taught spiritual truth in the form of stories such as this one.

Bible Discussion Questions:

- What key truths do you think that Jesus is trying to tell us about how to find an abundant life – a life that produces a 'fruitful harvest'?
- What are the conditions that keep the seed from being fruitful?
- Which of the 4 soils best represents your life right now? Please explain why.
- Have you had any persecution or difficulties as a result of believing in Jesus?

- Are you starting to "produce fruit" in your life? If so, please share some examples.

Bible Passage: Joshua 1:8

Background: Joshua prepares to lead Israel into the land God promised them. God gives Joshua some important instructions before beginning this difficult task.

Bible Discussion Questions:

- What do you think "success" means in this verse?
- What are we supposed to do with the Bible in order to have this success?
- If you have begun a regular habit of reading and studying the Bible, what time of day works best for you to do this?
- What benefits have you had from this time spent in God's Word?

Assignment

Previously, you had an assignment to read the article "Why Trust the Bible?"

- What was most helpful to you from the article? Was there anything that was hard to understand or that you would like to discuss further?

The Bible is unique because it is inspired by God, and it is completely true, in every part. This is called "inerrancy" which means "without error".

Summary

- How would you summarize what we learned today about knowing and applying God's Word? Write down the important points:

Clarification

- Was there anything confusing that you still have questions about?

- What made the deepest impression on you?

Act

- In the coming week, what is one thing that you will do to learn the Bible and apply it to your life?

- Write down your specific actions to take below. Then share what action you plan to take. After that, let's pray for one another.

Tell

Who might be interested in hearing what we are learning? Write down the name of that person to tell.

Let's pray for each other that we would apply God's Word to our life and tell our friends. Who will pray for us?

Pray Talking to God

CONNECT with each other

HEAR God's Word

UNDERSTAND it

APPLY it to life

Begin with Prayer

How are you doing?

How did Application go from last week's lesson about Knowing and Applying God's Word?

Let's pray together for wisdom from God for today's session.

Discussion Questions

Our Lives:

- When things are either very bad or very good in your life, is it your habit to talk through those things with a good friend? How does that help you?

- What can you do if you can't find a friend (or the right kind of friend) to talk things over with?

Deeper Perspectives:

- What characteristics would you need to see in a person in order to trust him or her enough to talk through your personal struggles or joys?

- From your background, what have you learned about talking with God? Do you believe that you can share your struggles and joys with God, and will He listen and care?

Transition

- As Christians we always have a trustworthy Friend with whom we can pour out our hearts, anytime and anywhere. Acts chapter 4 shows us an example of this.

Bible Passage: Acts 4: 7-31

Background: Acts introduces us to the early church shortly after Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. The Jewish Council held a lot of authority over the people of Israel at that time. They were worried about being blamed for Jesus' death. When the Christian believers shared Christ with the people, they included the fact that the Jews and Romans had killed Him. This made the Jewish leaders very nervous and angry, and they had the authority to demand that the Christians stop spreading this message, and to punish them if they did. The young Christians had little or no political power to resist the Jewish leaders' authority. Yet they still longed to communicate the good news of Christ to the people.

Bible Discussion Questions:

- What strikes you from this passage about how the disciples responded after being threatened?

- What did they know and express in prayer about God in the midst of this threatening environment?

- Did the disciples' prayers result in any changes?

- From this passage, what are some good principles for us about how to interact with God when we are threatened? What changes might we expect?

Summary

- How would you summarize what we learned today about talking with God about the joys and difficulties we go through in life? Write important points down:

Clarification

- Was there anything confusing that you still have questions about?

- What made the deepest impression on you?

Act

- In the coming week, what practical steps can you take to begin talking things over with God more?

- Write down your specific actions to take below. Share what action you plan to take. After that, let's pray for one another.

Assignment:

Please read about a great sin that David committed (2 Sam 11:1-12:13). Read also David's prayer of repentance from that sin (Psalm 51). Answer the following questions, recording your answers in a notebook:

- What are some characteristics of David's interaction with God in this prayer?
- From this passage, what are some good principles for us about how we should interact with God if we sin?
- What clues are in this passage about how God responds when we admit our guilt of shame?

Tell

Who might be interested in hearing what we are learning? Write down the name of that person to tell.

Let's pray for each other that we would apply God's Word to our life and tell our friends. Who will pray for us?

Witness

Witnessing to Non-Christians

CONNECT with each other

HEAR God's Word

UNDERSTAND it

APPLY it to life

Begin with Prayer

How are you doing?

How did Application go from last week's lesson about talking with God in Prayer?

Let's pray together for wisdom from God for today's session.

Discussion Questions

Our Lives:

• These days people love to use Facebook (and other websites) to tell others exciting news. But people have been spreading good and interesting news in simpler ways throughout human history.

Phidippides was a Greek "herald" or messenger. After the Greeks won the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C., he reportedly ran 40 km - today's Olympic Marathon distance - from the battlefield to Athens to deliver the news of victory. Upon arriving, he uttered, "We have won!", and then died from exhaustion. Phidippides was obviously a man who was very motivated to tell others good news.

- When was the last time you were motivated to tell others some good news? After telling them, how did you feel?

Deeper Perspectives:

• Why would the news about Jesus be welcomed as good news to people here in America? In your home culture?

• In what ways might news about Jesus NOT be welcomed by people here in America? In your home culture?

• Would there be any cases when we should go ahead and tell others important news, even if we don't know whether they will receive it favorably?

Transition

• *The Bible also contains incredibly good news that ought to be told to everyone who will listen.*

Bible Passage: John 1:35-46

Background: The first character in this story, John, is also called "John the Baptist". God gave John the responsibility of introducing Jesus to the nation of Israel. John the Baptist is not the same person as the author of this gospel (the apostle John).

Bible Discussion Questions:

• Why do you think the people in this passage were so motivated to tell others about Jesus?

• Describe or summarize from this passage how the news about Jesus spread quickly.

• From this passage, what were people saying about Jesus that caused others to be attracted to Him?

• What terms were they using to address Jesus?

• Explain what you think those various descriptions of Him mean.

Note: This passage tells how John told others about Jesus and how these people then told family members about Christ and even brought them to personally meet Him. It illustrates how quickly the good news about Jesus can spread through personal networks

• Are you like John and the disciples in the Bible passage? Are you motivated to tell others about Jesus?

• What are some barriers to talking about Christ with non-Christians?

Summary

• How would you summarize what we learned today about telling others about Jesus? Write important points down:

Clarification

• Was there anything confusing that you still have questions about?

• What made the deepest impression on you?

Act

• In the coming week, what practical steps can you take to have a spiritual conversation with someone who doesn't know Christ? What is one piece of good news about Jesus that you can share?

• Write down your specific actions to take below. In groups of two or three, share what action you plan to take. After that, let's pray for one another.

Tell

Who might be interested in hearing what we are learning? Write down the name of that person to tell.

Let's pray for each other that we would apply God's Word to our life and tell our friends. Who will pray for us?

Fellowship

Form close relationships with true followers of Jesus for support and encouragement



CONNECT with each other

HEAR God's Word

UNDERSTAND it

APPLY it to life

Begin with Prayer

*How are you doing?
How did Application go from last week?
Let's pray together for wisdom from God for today's session.*

Discussion Questions:

Our Lives:
• When you were in your home country with whom were your strongest relationships?

• Some cultures strongly value individuality while others more strongly value community. You have probably noticed that American society highly values "individuality". Describe your home culture. How do the American approaches to family and friendships differ with your home culture's approach?

Deeper Perspectives:

• Most international students experience loneliness because they are away from their family and close friends. Have you been able to establish relational networks since you have arrived? Have you experienced loneliness? Would you like to share about it?

Lesson Theme

• *Close relationships are really important to us all. In fact, belonging to a supportive, interconnected community helps us thrive as human beings.*

We all need to form close relationships with true followers of Jesus for support and encouragement.

Bible Passage: Hebrews 10: 24-25

"Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."

Bible Discussion Questions:

• What are some benefits of meeting with other believers?"

• Have you met any other Christians with whom you can fellowship? If not, let's brainstorm about where you can meet some more followers of Jesus.

Bible Passage: John 15:12-13

"This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends."

Bible Discussion Questions:

• What do these verses teach us about relationships with other Christians?

• How do you think this passage relates to the statement we discussed earlier: "We need to form close relationships with true followers of Jesus for support and encouragement."?

Summary

• How would you summarize what we learned today about fellowship with other followers of Jesus? Write down the important points:

Clarification

• Was there anything confusing that you still have questions about?

• What made the deepest impression on you?

Act

• In the coming week, how will you develop meaningful fellowship with other Christians?

• Write down at least one specific action to take. Then share what action you plan to take. After that, let's pray for one another.

Tell

Who might be interested in hearing what we are learning? Write down the name of that person to tell.

Let's pray for each other that we would apply God's Word to our life and tell our friends. Who will pray for us?

Think Loving God with all Our Mind

CONNECT with each other

HEAR God's Word

UNDERSTAND it

APPLY it to life

Begin with Prayer

*How are you doing?
How did Application go from last week's lesson about Fellowship with other believers?
Let's pray together for wisdom from God for today's session.*

Discussion Questions: Our Lives:

- Are you confident that you are on the way toward the life you were meant to have or to achieve? Or do you sometimes feel doubtful, confused, anxious or disappointed?
- Explain further why you answered the way you did.

Deeper Perspectives:

Sometimes, in order to find out if you are really on track with your life, you have to get back to the very foundation of what reality is all about. Buddhism says that ultimate reality is a universal 'oneness'. Atheism says that unconscious matter is what is ultimate.

- In your (or your home culture's) view of the world, what is most ultimately real?
- Do you think that Americans or those from your country think enough about ultimate questions?

Transition

- The Bible gives us a clear picture of what is ultimately real, and it expects us to think deeply at times about that ultimate reality.

Bible Passage: Acts 17:16-31

Paul was on his second missionary journey and had gone to Athens alone ahead of his co-workers Silas and Timothy, when they had temporarily parted ways after Thessalonica. Previously in Acts, the author Luke had focused attention on Paul's messages to Jews. Not this time.

Epicureans

Epicureans were basically atheists, who saw the universe and its effects as merely the interaction of particles of matter ("atoms"). One of their philosophy's aims was to rid people of the fear of "the gods" and of punishment after death. They taught that we can know the world truly through observation by our senses. They also taught that our purpose is to achieve pleasure (at least up to the point where discomfort results), while living honorably, wisely and justly.
(Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Epicurus)

Stoics

Stoics believed that Nature is God ("pantheism"). They believed that our circumstances are guided by Nature's will, or "Fate". They taught that we humans have a choice in how we respond to Fate and should strive to keep our passions in check, guide our actions by reason, and live a tranquil ('stoic') and virtuous life.
(Wikipedia, Stoicism.)

Bible Discussion Questions:

- What characteristics of "the Christian God" did Paul describe to the Athenian philosophers?
- Why do you suppose Paul thought it was important to bring out those characteristics to them (keeping in mind that they believed in Epicurean or Stoic philosophies)?
- How do these characteristics of God compare with prevailing views of 'The Ultimate' in your home culture? How about in American culture?
- How might knowing these characteristics of God influence our values, our direction and purposes in life and, ultimately, our behavior? Why might this be one way to "love the Lord with all your mind"?

Summary

- How would you summarize what we learned today about loving God with all our minds as our ultimate reality? Write important points down:

Clarification

- Was there anything confusing that you still have questions about?
- What made the deepest impression on you?

Assignment

For homework this week, please read (and discuss if possible), "Habits- Think Homework"

Act

- In the coming week, what practical steps can you take to think more clearly and deeply about God's character as our ultimate reality? For example, one key to transforming our minds to the Biblical world view is spending lots of time reading, meditating and discussing God's word. In what ways can you continue to learn more about passages which reveal God's character?
- Write down your specific actions to take below. In groups of two or three, share what action you plan to take. After that, let's pray for one another.

Tell

Who might be interested in hearing what we are learning? Write down the name of that person to tell.

Let's pray for each other that we would apply God's Word to our life and tell our friends. Who will pray for us?