

# A Loving Life Interactive Bible Study Quick Start Guide

## Summary

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The Quick Start Guide will:

- Show you how the manual works.
- Help you solve problems in interactive study.
- Give tips for discipling with the book of Ruth.
- Speak to men, calling men to look seriously at the book of Ruth.

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**Ask seeJesus for help.** No question is unimportant.

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## 1. Reflections on Discipling with the Book of Ruth

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This study approaches discipleship in the same way you would approach the Grand Canyon or Chartres Cathedral in Paris. What is the application of the Grand Canyon or Chartres? The question is odd. You don't *apply* the Grand Canyon, you worship there. You don't *apply* Chartres, you are stunned by the beauty. You let it fill your soul. You stop talking. You are silent as your soul expands. The only reason for talking is to share the experience of entering and beholding beauty. Likewise, my hope is that the book of Ruth first fills your soul, then overflows into your life.

The book of Ruth also disciplines by drawing you into a story. The immersion into the story changes you. It offers the opportunity of remapping the story of your life, of drawing you into a life of love, of *hesed*. We are shaped by the stories we enter. I can't think of a better story to enter than the story of Ruth. Let it capture and re-map your heart with God's normal!

I hope that because of your study of Ruth you will see the world with new eyes. In particular, I hope you see...

1. **Love.** What is love? What is the cost of love? Why do we shy away from love? What does it mean to love without an exit strategy? I hope that your heart is captured in a new way by love.
2. **Gospel.** How does understanding the love that we see in the book enrich and anticipate our understanding of the gospel, of God's love for us? How is the gospel a journey that we go on? I hope that your appreciation of the gospel deepens.
3. **Community.** How do we create community? What is the glue that keeps us together? I hope that participants will stop searching for community and, like Ruth and Boaz, learn to create community through love. The great modern idolatry is inclusive community. But community remains elusive because the only true community is based on love, and love that lasts is always rooted in Christ.
4. **Feminine.** What does it mean to be feminine? How do we survive and even thrive in a world (as this one was) dominated by men? I hope that both men and women doing this study have a new, enriched view of the feminine.
5. **Masculine.** What does a godly man look like? What characterizes him? How do you combine gentleness and power?
6. **Lament.** How do you relate to God when he seems to have deserted you? How does faith encourage us to lament? Why do we dislike the idea of a lament?
7. **Prayer.** What does a praying life look like? Do we wait for God to act or do we act? What does it mean to live in a story?

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quoted and referenced comes from the English Standard Version.

## 2. A Special Word to Men

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Finally, I hope this is not seen as just a woman's study. It is for men too, especially. It is a study in what it is to be human, to be a follower of God in a chaotic world filled with suffering. It is in the chaos and suffering, when we are loving and getting no love in return, that we learn true manhood. No longer can we count on our culture to support Christian values. The front lines are no longer clear. That is the world of Ruth, and it is what our world is increasingly becoming. The old ways of loving don't work anymore. We need to dig deeper into God in order to not just survive but to be an overcomer—in the words of the apostle Paul—to become a “super-overcomer” (hypernikon). My vision is that we may become 360-degree warriors learning to love on all sides.

### 3. Frequently Asked Questions

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**Q. Can I shorten a lesson or divide a lesson into briefer segments?**

Yes. (See Point #4, “How this Interactive Bible Study Works.”)

**Q. I’d like to use this study with seekers, but how do I begin?**

See also Point #7 in the *Quick Start Guide*, “Should I Use the Study for Discipleship or Evangelism?”

**Q. Do I have to include seekers?**

No. Many groups use the study simply for discipling. (See the discussion in Point #7, “Should I Use the Study for Discipling or Evangelism?”)

### 4. What Is Unique About the Ruth Study?

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- **Questions Instead of Lecture.** People enjoy discovering Scriptural insights on their own. Especially in matters of faith and religion, people prefer to draw their own conclusions than to be told what to believe. People also feel more involved and respected when they are asked for their opinions.
- **Insightful Questions.** The questions in the study have been taught and revised by the author for the best phrasing to elicit the best possible response. The questions are carefully sequenced so that each question logically follows the preceding one.
- **Balanced Between Inductive and Deductive Teaching.** Though the heart of the study is inductive teaching—comprised of insightful, interactive questions—a lesson that is all inductive would run the risk of participants only sharing their feelings, thus missing good content. So every lesson also contains a good deal of direct, deductive teaching.
- **Biblical Insight.** The study digs into the biblical text to find out what is really going on. It teaches participants to study the Bible, which results in their deepening love and respect for God’s Word.
- **Historical Insight.** By drawing on the latest discoveries in biblical archaeology and our growing understanding of the Ancient Near Eastern world, the study brings Scripture to life. Participants learn facts from the ancient world that open up their understanding of the Bible, and therefore enlighten their own lives.
- **Heart Insight.** The goal of each lesson is not just behavioral change in the participants, but also insight into their hearts and how they drive their behavior.
- **Jesus Insight.** Participants will discover things about Jesus in the study of the book of Ruth that they have never seen before.
- **Simple but Deep.** The study is all laid out for you in this Leader’s Manual; you just need to follow along. And though the manual is simple to use, it contains depth of insight. It is “connect-the-dot Socratic teaching.”
- **Gospel-focused.** Almost every lesson is tied to Jesus’ death on the cross. This keeps the focus of the study on the fact that the central power for change in people’s lives comes not from human effort but God’s grace.
- **Worshipful.** At times the participants (and you) will be led to worship because of the loveliness of Jesus.
- **Geared for Unbelievers.** Instead of preaching at unbelievers, the content of the study slowly draws them into seeing Jesus. The material begins with their “felt needs” in relationships and gradually shows them that they cannot change themselves for the better. The study does not assume that unbelieving participants are “seeking.”
- **Critique of Modern Culture.** The study incorporates some critiquing of modern culture, and it invites participants to turn from the inward-seeking bent of modern American culture.










- **Geared for Both Unbelievers and Mature Believers in One Group.** Both mature believers and seekers can learn from the study because love is difficult for all of us, and everyone can benefit from an in-depth, insightful study of Ruth. The study puts everyone on a level playing field. The questions do not assume any prior knowledge of biblical material, nor do they expect participants to have a biblical worldview.

## 5. How to Teach the A Loving Life Study

**See it taught if you can:** By attending a seminar or class. Some aspects of the inductive method used in this study should be seen to be understood.

### Learn the layout of a typical lesson

In each lesson, you will find the icons below that will help guide you to teach. Within each lesson, all italicized text is instruction to the teacher.

- **10 min.** The approximate duration of each point in a lesson is written next to the title of that point. They are estimates to help you plan. Each lesson is about 60 minutes long.
- **“Q.”** Questions in bold type are the heart of the material. Sub-questions meant to fill out a particular question are double-indented.
-  **Teach:** A short section of instruction. Do not linger on them—they may be read briskly and without additional comment or feedback.
-  **Draw:** A map, chart, or simple sketch that illustrates a principle. **Please note:** the Participant's Guide has similar charts that are either complete or need to be completed by participants.
-  **Historical Background:** Teaching that introduces information about the cultural/historical setting of a biblical passage to illuminate the group's understanding of the text.
-  **Literary Insight:** Similar to the Historical Background; provides literary knowledge, helping people understand nuances in the text.
-  **Modern Culture:** Teaching point that demonstrates how our modern culture is in tension with a biblical worldview.
-  **Gospel Connection:** Brief instruction that explains how principles of the lesson relate to the essential gospel message.
-  **Personal Connection:** Teaching and questions to help people apply truths learned to their lives. Invite people to choose one to focus on.
-  **Teaching Tip:** Advice to the teacher about how to handle teaching or group interaction. Many tips to the teacher do not appear as a “Teaching Tip,” but as italicized text. For example:
  1.  *Write their answers.* (Always seen with the “flip chart” icon, as it is here.) This indicates that you should write the group's answers on the flip chart.
  2. *Teach what they do not say.* An indication that there are nuances in the answer to a certain question that you will probably have to teach after participants have had time to share their thoughts.
- **The Gray Bar:** The gray bar indicates items in the Participants Manual.

### Apply the lesson to your life

The church will be transformed and the world captured by Jesus' beauty not because we are good teachers, but because people see Jesus in our lives. If we are just communicating abstract principles and not struggling to obey, then we risk creating Pharisees. But if we are repentant and obedient before God, then others will see that our faith is authentic, and they will be drawn to repentance as well.

### Get to know the lesson

- Read each lesson three times before teaching it, underlining or highlighting parts that you think are especially helpful, or crossing out sections you want to skip.

- Make sure the length of each lesson fits the time restraints of your group meetings. If it does not, then either divide the lesson into two sessions or skip parts of a lesson. Most lessons contain recommendations for dividing them into shorter sessions.

## 6. How This Interactive Bible Study Works


### Questions

- The heart of this interactive Bible study is questions that help the participant understand the text and their hearts. When people discover truths on their own, those truths are more interesting and memorable than if they had been “spoon fed.” Also, because participants are discussing and listening, they get to know the people in their group at a deeper level.
- Many questions have multiple answers, simply because there is seldom just one answer to life’s questions. When participants realize that, they tend to relax because the study feels less like school, where many may have memories of the fear of giving a wrong answer. The multiplicity of answers also facilitates the development of conversation and community.
- Move through questions rapidly. If you answer every question exhaustively, then the lesson will tend to drag. Most questions can be asked and answered in a minute. Think of the pace of TV commercials.

### Encouraging participants to respond

- As much as possible, the leader should dignify an answer by commenting on it and showing how it fits into the lesson.
- Answer every question the participants have. You want to create an atmosphere in which they feel safe to bring up an issue even if it has nothing to do with the study. Their concerns are as important as what you want to communicate to them.

### Writing participants’ answers on a flip chart

- Why is it good to write down their answers?
  1. It helps them remember.
  2. You can refer back to what someone has said.
  3. It stimulates discussion; others can ponder and compare answers.
  4. It honors what they say.
- Write answers on the flip chart word-for-word instead of rephrasing of them. Why? What the participants say is important, and doing this encourages them that you take their input seriously.
- If you are a poor speller or have bad penmanship, you can turn it into a joke or have someone else write for you. (It is best if you do the writing yourself, however.)
- Do not write down answers to every question; do so only when the question is a brainstorming one with multiple answers, or when the answer is important to remember. It takes too long to write everything. Answers that are most suitable for writing are marked in the manual:  [Write their answers.] You need not be limited to only these instances, however.
- Use the flip chart to draw other visuals such as charts and maps. Many people are visual learners, and visuals bring stories to life.
- You might feel odd the first time you use a flip chart, but it will quickly become normal to you. The benefits are worth some initial awkwardness.

### Selecting a flip chart

- **Large flip chart with stand**
  1. A large flip chart (34" by 27") is ideal because it allows you to go back and review sheets from earlier in the lesson and from previous lessons.
  2. Make sure the stand has a bar across the top to hold the flip chart.

3. Make sure the stand has telescoping legs so you can adjust the height. In a living room setting, where it would be more comfortable to sit down, you will want the chart to be level with your chair, so you do not have to reach up.
  4. Office Max, Staples, and Quill all have flip charts and stands.
- **Alternatives to a flip chart**
    1. **White Board.** Requires special markers and a dry eraser. The drawback of using a white board is that it does not allow you to refer back to previous pages.
    2. **Small White Board.** You can get smaller white boards (that are not as large as a flip chart) that you can prop up on a chair for groups with few people.
    3. **Smaller Flip Chart.** Office supply stores have several small table-top flip charts that you can use for smaller groups or around a table.
    4. **8½ x 11 Writing Pad.** Works well with small groups of 2 to 4 around a kitchen table or at a restaurant. So you do not have to support it with your hand, you can clip it to a stand-alone computer document holder.

## Shortening a lesson

The average length of a lesson in this manual is 60 minutes. If you are meeting for a shorter length of time, you have a few options for shortening a lesson:

- You can split the lesson in two.
- You can eliminate or condense some points. We have listed the approximate teaching time for each lesson point on the title page of each lesson, so you will be able to shape your lesson to your time limit.
- Inductive teaching (asking questions) is slower than deductive teaching (lecturing), so you can save time by teaching deductively some of the inductive material.

## A word for experienced teachers

An experienced teacher will make a lesson plan his or her own by adapting it to (1) the time constraints of the teaching time, (2) the group and its needs, and (3) his or her own particular preferences. So feel free to make each lesson plan your own by adding, moving, or skipping sections. However, we encourage you in the beginning to follow the lesson plan carefully so you understand how the study works. Each lesson has been carefully crafted through thousands of hours of development, so it is good to learn first how they are taught before attempting any major alterations of your own.

## Application

Each lesson is geared toward applying an aspect of biblical truth to the participants' lives. These applications are seldom explicitly stated in "go thou and do likewise" fashion, because we want to avoid encouraging participants to view this study as simply a "How-to" or "Self-help" course, through which positive change can come from following a ten-step plan. The *A Loving Life* study is not just a behavioral workout, but a heart workout as well. Sometimes, the greatest achievement of a lesson could simply be leading participants to enjoy the beauty of God and his love. If, however, you want to spend more time on specific application to their lives, then add a question to the end of each lesson like these:

- "Can you think of a relationship in your life that this lesson applies to? How? What change might it mean in that relationship?"
- "How does what we've talked about apply to you personally? How does it change the way you think about yourself?"
- "How does this lesson affect how you think about Jesus? How might that change you?"
- "Can you think of one specific thing that you'd like to change in your life this coming week because of what you've learned?"

## Open-ended discussion

The *A Loving Life* study is student-centered but teacher-directed. That is, the teacher is moving the lesson along a set course. The reason for this approach is that if a lesson becomes student-directed, it can easily degenerate into everyone sharing opinions that lead to minor quarreling over words and no ultimate application. You end



up knowing what is on people's minds but they do not learn to see Jesus or study the Bible. Nevertheless, if you or the participants enjoy more open-ended discussion, then you can do that by:

- Lingering longer on discussion questions.
- Lingering longer on digressions or questions the group may bring up.

It is especially important in a study with just one participant to be sensitive to the need for more open-ended discussion.

## **7. Solving Problems in Inductive Teaching**

### **One or two people answer all the questions**

- Be up front: "Okay, let's hear from some others now. We haven't heard from some of you."
- Be direct but light: "Okay, Jen, you can't answer this one. You've had your maximum of four questions for the evening. I'd like to hear from some of the others." Or, "Tom, your answers are right-on, but let's hear from some other people in the group."
- Ask only part of the group to answer your question:
  1. "I haven't heard much from the right side of the room. What do you folks think about this question?"
  2. "We've heard from the women, but let's hear from some men now."
  3. "Let's hear from some people who we've not heard from for this next question." (Be prepared to wait.)
- Handle it privately: "Sue, you really do a nice job answering questions, but I'm concerned that Doug and Laurie haven't gotten much of a chance to say things. Do you mind waiting on some of your answers to give them a chance?"

### **The whole group is silent**

- Silence is not bad. The group may simply be thinking, so be silent and wait after you ask a question. If you answer your own question, participants will stop answering them. It is hard to be silent while you are waiting for an answer. Many people find that awkward. Try counting silently to twenty, and then if there is still no answer, try re-wording the question.
- Handle chronic silence by dividing the group into sub-groups of three. Give each group the same question to work on and let them discuss it for a few minutes. Then reconvene the entire group and have one person from each sub-group report their conclusions. This works like a charm. It always injects energy into the group and gets people interacting. Everyone in a group of three is compelled to talk.

### **Some people in the group are always quiet**

- Just let them be quiet. Some people are just naturally quiet. (The Bible calls that wisdom!) It is important that they feel safe in the group and not be pressured to talk.
- Some are quiet because they do not want to be embarrassed by giving a wrong answer. They may be used to school experiences when questions were often deliberately difficult. Since the questions in our manuals are written in a way that does not require Bible knowledge, you can encourage your group by saying things like, "I'm not hunting for a deep answer here. Just tell me what comes to your mind."
- Encourage them to open up with subtle invitations: "Okay, let's hear from some others now."
- Occasionally ask them questions directly: "Matt, I've not heard from you tonight. What are some of your thoughts on this question?" Be careful about putting people on the spot, however. Do this only if you know the person and sense that he or she would not mind.

### **The question goes flat; no one answers it**

- Give a hint. (Hints are often listed in the lesson.)
- Make the question easier by narrowing down where to look for an answer. For example, if it's a Bible question, give the verse that has the answer.
- Rephrase the question.



### **Someone gives a wrong answer**

- Most of the questions are geared for either multiple answers or relatively obvious answers, so this should not happen often. But there are questions that have only one answer.
- Point the person back to the text: “Where do you see that in the text?”
- Point the whole group back to the text without putting the particular person who gave the wrong answer on the spot: “Let’s stick to the text with our answers.”
- Disagree directly: “I don’t think so because....”
- Disagree more gently: “It’s possible, but I’ve not heard that before.”

### **Answers are vague and “floaty”—not grounded in the details of the passage**

This is more common in the beginning of the study. People are not used to paying close attention to the text. Until they become accustomed to interpretation, a little guidance can encourage them:

- “That’s possible, but what does the text say?”
- “Where do you see that in the text?”
- “That’s an interesting observation. What you say is quite true.” Then restate your initial question and get the group to focus on the passage. “Look at the story we’ve just read; how do you see Jesus....”

### **Someone leads the group off the subject**

- Let him or her go on the tangent, and then go back to your question. If the person persists, then suggest that you talk about it after the study.
- Be sensitive to the subject and the person raising the issue. If it appears to be just a trivial or purely intellectual subject, then go back to your lesson plan. But if it appears to be connected with a heart issue or something the person is really struggling with, then take the time to answer it or ask others in the group what they think.

### **Poor readers or non-readers**

- This is more common in a prison setting or with people for whom English is a second language.
- The simplest aid is to write the text out on the flip chart ahead of time and tape it to the wall. Read it slowly several times, pointing to the words as you read, so they can hear it and pick up most of the words.

## **8. Should I Use the Study for Discipleship or Evangelism?**

Do both at the same time!

“Evangelize the Christians and disciple the lost.” —Pastor, leader of a *seeJesus* study

Advantages of combining evangelism with discipleship

- **Advantages for Non-Christians**
  1. Non-Christians see that Christians struggle with the same issues they do. Stereotypes are broken down.
  2. As the study is a “learning” event (instead of an “evangelistic” event), non-Christians are relieved of the pressure to convert. More than one non-Christian participating in a study has said, “I’m so relieved that no one tried to convert me.”
  3. Non-Christians learn to study the Bible from their first exposure to it.
  4. Non-Christians learn a mindset of being a disciple of Jesus from the very beginning. This holds out the prospect of a more sincere convert instead of someone who has made a quick, emotional decision.
- **Advantages for Christians**
  1. Discipling is so much richer when combined with evangelism. It is such a delight to see non-Christians discovering eternal life in Jesus.

2. Evangelism frequently gets “put off” until we are ready, and then it gets forgotten. By bringing unbelievers into our Bible study, it is not forgotten.
3. The pressure comes off Christians, because they are not trying to convert someone quickly, but instead are developing relationships while learning more about Jesus themselves.

**Reasons for using the *A Loving Life* study only for the purpose of discipling Christians:**

- Learning to love is a wonderful goal in and of itself.
- It gives the leader time to become familiar with material before teaching it to a “tougher” audience.
  1. Gives you time to pray for non-Christians who you might invite to a study.
  2. Gives the Holy Spirit time to fill you with Christlike love.

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