

Bible Study Curriculum

The Bible Study Curriculum described below was developed specifically for an in-prison format. It combines interactive lecture and small-group discussion formats. It assumes that the participants represent a wide range of backgrounds, from those who have no knowledge of the Bible to those with considerable knowledge. It is designed for a total of about 45 minutes of lecture and discussion time, with the rest of the time devoted to singing and prayer.

Meeting Format

Your meeting format will depend on your situation -- are you meeting in the prison chapel, the visiting room, or a classroom? Are there tables available? Can you easily move chairs into small group circles? What restrictions are imposed by prison regulations or by the corrections officers supervising your group? Here's our typical weekly meeting looks like:

Check-in: A Corrections Officer collects passes and two of the Chaplain's inmate assistants take attendance as the men enter the visiting room. Men who are working on *individual Bible studies* turn in their completed books and pick up new ones as soon as they arrive.

Singing (10 minutes): We start off with a session of spirited singing, using a *song list* we've compiled. Sometimes we have inmates who perform solos or as small choral groups.

Prayer (10 minutes): We then engage in a time of corporate prayer, in English and Spanish (and occasionally other languages as well). Those who choose to pray are encouraged to speak out clearly and to keep their prayers brief.

Awards (5 minutes): Inmates are encouraged to pursue independent Bible study each week. We are currently using two six-book *Navigators Bible Studies*, Studies in Christian Living (in English) and Design for Discipleship (in Spanish). For each book completed, we award a small diploma. This award ceremony has turned out to be a significant motivation for inmates to complete the studies. Over one-third of the inmates take part in these studies.

Introduction (10 - 15 minutes): The volunteer leader introduces the lesson and we read the relevant scripture passages together.

Small Group Discussion (20 minutes): We break into small groups of 8 to 10 people to discuss the questions associated with the lesson. Generally, a volunteer leader leads each discussion, although some groups are led by experienced inmates.

Summary and conclusion (10 - 15 minutes): We reassemble as a large group to discuss answers to the questions. The volunteer leader then summarizes and concludes the lesson.

Closing song and prayer (5 minutes): We close with a song and a prayer, often led by inmate.

Background Information

No single approach can possibly fit every prison ministry situation. To understand our curriculum, you need to understand the context in which it was developed. You'll need to adapt your approach to the situation you face.

MCI-Concord is the primary intake and classification center for the Massachusetts correctional system. It has a fairly high turnover rate as inmates are evaluated, classified, and moved on to other institutions. The average stay is about six months, and most inmates who attend our Bible Studies do so for only a few weeks before being moved out. We have therefore focused our lesson plans on important topics in Christian doctrine and Christian living, organized in relatively short sequences, which we cycle through approximately every six months.

Our group meets weekly for an hour and a half each Monday evening. We currently have 12 active lay ministry volunteers, with an average weekly attendance of about 9. We meet in the main visiting room, which is free on Monday evenings because that's the one night when no family visits are allowed.

The prison population is about 2000. The prison administration has limited total inmate attendance to 100. The Protestant Chaplain maintains a list of inmates who have signed up to participate. Only these men are allowed to move from their living units to the visiting room. The Chaplain also maintains a waiting list. Men are dropped from the active list if they miss two consecutive meetings, and a name from the waiting list is added.

Special Meetings

Your program may also include special events, such as

- an outside guest speaker
- a videotape presentation, followed by a discussion session
- a special music program, such as a guest singing group or choir
- a talk by an ex-inmate who has succeeded in the "straight life"

Special events involving additional outside visitors will require permission from the prison administration. Be sure to submit any such plans well in advance of your planned meeting. This is especially true of bringing in anyone with a prior criminal conviction -- this will probably require special permission from the superintendent of the institution, and possibly from higher authorities as well.

Of course, you will also want to hold special programs for holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

Lesson Materials

We offer three series of Bible study lessons, all designed for large-group presentations and small-group discussions. All may be download (free of charge) from the following links:

[Living in the Kingdom](#)
[Growing in Christ](#)
[Being Part of the Church](#)