

HOW TO LEAD A STUDY GROUP ON THE URANTIA BOOK

Think of the best study group experiences you have ever had. Balanced participation, shared openness, intellectual discovery, heightened sense of values, warm fellowship, good cookies. What could be such a superb focus for study as The URANTIA Book? And yet many study groups languish and die. Why? How can we stimulate healthy study groups? This booklet is designed to assist you in becoming a better participant and leader in study groups. The need is great. And so are the rewards for the group, the individual, and the planet.

There are many ways to lead a study group well. The ideas here derive from personal experience and from material gathered by David Kantor in the mid 1970's for the San Francisco Bay Area URANTIA Society. David shared with me some of the fine literature available in Christian publications about Bible study.

Do not try to read and absorb all this material in a single sitting. In some parts there may be more information than you want or need right now. Adapt the ideas here in your way. Bring forth the method of teaching and leading that expresses your unique indwelt personality--and ministers to the rest of the group, too.

1. LEADERSHIP

A study group leader is responsible for organizing the outline of the study group and for helping the discussion to be productive. This task requires some degree of mastery of the material to be covered in The URANTIA Book and some degree of social control.

What degree of mastery of the book do I need in order to lead a study group? No one's mastery is complete. A good study group leader should feel comfortable acknowledging that he or she does not know the answer to a given question. A study group leader is not an expert so much as a facilitator of group process. The point is for people to experience **discovery**. And expertise is not often the most helpful quality in aiding others to achieve that goal. Sometimes discovery flourishes most when the leader asks a question about a passage to which he or she truly does not know the answer. People jump in to answer others' genuine questions.

Some study groups, however, expect the leader to have looked up the facts that are presupposed by the passages to be covered. If one of the passages for the evening refers to the Father Melchizedek, then be sure you know who this being is. Give some thought to the problems of interpretation that arise in your texts. Refresh your experience of the values that are indicated in the texts.

Social control, ideally, is invisible and unconscious. Nobody dominates the conversation, no fruitless tangents are pursued, and no troublesome people ever show up. Individuals and groups differ in the degree to which they enjoy a more free-wheeling discussion. Many a study group limps or dies, however, because of inadequate social control. A healthy study group is one that maintains self-mastery over these typical problems--and shares the responsibility of doing so. The lesson on forgiveness and its associated grievance procedure (p. 1762ff) are helpful to bear in mind. Find the unique solution for your unique situations. The most important point is to realize that there is a need, at times, to exercise social control. Determine to do what is necessary. You will get better at it over time. But do not shirk this essential task.

A third quality of leadership is perseverance--the tenacity to pursue a worthy goal no matter who else cares to join. One study group began with a husband and wife, who studied alone every week for about two years; then they were joined by another couple. After a few more years, more people joined, and after a decade

there were sixty people coming to the group.

2. GROUPS

I would trace the study group back to the time of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews in the sixth century B.C. In the absence of their temple, these Jews gathered to read the scriptures (including singing psalms) and hear a rabbi comment on the portion of the Torah for the week. This innovative meeting enabled the Jews to preserve and deepen their religion in captivity, and the institution enabled dispersed Jews all over the world to maintain religious continuity. It is a survival institution of the first order.

Let us remember that groups **MULTIPLY** the power of individuals to do good. If people join together for study, to discover together new truths, remarkable things can happen. People who meet together for many years experience an unconscious growth, a socialization, and deepened friendships that are all too rare in our society.

Lastly, let us recall the importance of **TEAMWORK**. We often think of groups in terms of leaders and followers. But in The URANTIA BOOK, leaders are generally associated not with followers but with a team. The ideal preparation for a meeting is for everyone to come prepared to lead the meeting--and then to support the leader in doing so.

The master, supreme, ultimate, and absolute leader, of course, is God, whose spirit equally dwells within each of us. Ask, "What is God doing here? How can I help those values to be actualized?" This question is an antidote for more or less concealed egotism in study group participation.

We should not neglect the social sciences in trying to understand more about groups. The social sciences are, at bottom, in search of laws . . . and we know that there are laws of creation. There are laws of material striving and laws of spiritual striving. Social science does not utilize this perspective and tends to focus on material issues such as how power is acquired and maintained in groups. Such observations, however, are not irrelevant to religious study groups. By being lucid about these factors, we can do a better job, hopefully, in reaching for the higher goals of group study.

A lot has been written about groups--the different types of participation/non-participation, the ways of gaining and maintaining power, and the ways of managing groups to achieve different goals. I went through Eric Berne's The Structure and Dynamics of Organizations and Groups (New York: Grove Press, 1963). This text is utterly humanistic in its perspective, but includes the following items of interest.

--Each group has an external boundary which determines membership and an internal boundary which determines leadership. Threats to group survival may come from within or from without.

--Each person has a private, partly unconscious image of the group--who's prominent, who is allied with whom, etc. These images greatly affect participation and affect how the structures of groups change. The leader individual who functions as the leader in most of these images is the psychological leader. The person with the official responsibility may be somebody else; and the one who is the effective leader may be still a third person.

--Groups have a rational, technical culture to get their job done, a traditional etiquette to enforce respect for each person, and an archaic emotional character as well.

--If a group has only two roles, leader and follower, and two are leaders and ninety-eight followers, then the group is called 2% organized. A fully organized group has specific roles for each member. Increasing role differentiation promotes efficiency--the capacity to do work. If an efficient organization is neither

undermanned nor overmanned, it operates more effectively--it actually gets the work done.

--Many types of service groups average 89% attendance.

--Groups oppose irregularity.

A crisis may be precipitated internally in a group by an individual who suddenly expresses concern for the group and brings the condition to the attention of all, calling for change. An external crisis may be precipitated by competition or challenge from other groups. A crisis may or may not lead to renewal. The ultimate effect of any crisis will depend on the ability of the group leaders to utilize the lever of crisis for positive change.

3. THE PARTICIPATION OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN THE GROUP

Enjoyment of study is through satisfaction which can be derived through
Being silent * Being accepted * Expressing yourself * Being appreciated *
Being prepared * Setting goals * Expressing enthusiasm *
Attaining goals * Thinking * Giving * Taking * Helping achieve oneness *
Experiencing variety * Practicing adaptability * Ministering *
Studying * Making progress *

Prepare for participation and contribution by praying for enlightenment as you study on your own.

Practical participation:

DESIRABLE ACTIVITY

Pray for the meeting

Listen to others

Build morale

Contribute your own ideas

Share your own experience

Reinforce others

Think

Inquire

Help maintain the quality and orientation of the group by the quality and orientation of your contributions.

Analyze

CARRIED TO AN EXTREME

Become pious and ostentatious

Become non-responsive

Become "goody-goody"

Dominate discussion

Start an encounter group

Become a "Sir Galahad"

Become an intellectual snob

Ask too many shallow questions

Become "holier than thou"

Substitute dry intellectualization for motivating truth

The activities which occur in your study group should form an organic part of the efforts of our unseen benefactors to spiritualize humanity.

Remember that intellectual uniformity cannot be a goal. We can hope to clarify the range of alternatives on questions where opinion is divided. We can seek the benefits of critical thinking in an atmosphere where love prevails. The pursuit of knowledge about science, philosophy, and religion is not an end in itself, but serves us in our relationships with all personalities in the Father's family.

4. HOW TO DEVELOP A TOPICAL STUDY

The short way is to go to the Concordex. The long way is to read through The URANTIA Book from cover to cover, taking notes on the subject(s) of your interest as you go.

One goal for a meeting was given by the preacher Henry Emerson Fosdick: each one should solve some important problem that the group is experiencing.

Some topics are worth several meetings. There is a wonderful experience of

feeling the satisfaction of getting to the bottom of what The URANTIA Book has to teach on a certain topic. That maximum understanding this year may well fall short of what you can achieve next year, but that is no reason not to try for the fullest possible comprehension now. Some of the best seminars are in no hurry to complete a given amount of material. This can be overdone, but that happens very rarely.

Sometimes it is helpful to consider the topic from the perspective of each Part of the book in succession. Is there a Paradise pattern of the phenomenon you are exploring, an ideal, or a purpose of Deity? Is there a local universe development of this phenomenon? What is the history of this phenomenon on our planet? How do the life and teachings of Jesus illuminate the question?

If you use the Concordex, look up references not only for the term for your main interest, but look up related terms, synonyms and antonyms as well.

If you find yourself with too much material for a meeting, PAUSE AND REFLECT. Many students at this point are so wrapped up in the topic that they lose sight of the needs of the individuals in the group. I have seen a person have a group go through thirty-three quotes in a single meeting. I have seen people become very fatigued from the intellectual pressure required to go through too much material too fast.

One way to get through a larger amount of material, though, is to group similar passages and ask members of the group to read them in sequence without commenting until after the series has been finished. It's a good idea to point out what it is that you want the group to look for in the series of passages. Often one passage may spark comments on diverse topics that may have little relevance to your purpose for the evening.

How many passages are about right for an evening's study? Of course that depends on many factors. I guess that a good average is around eight. It's nice to have extra relevant passages at hand to use in case the need arises. It's also very nice to think a bit about how much time you want to allocate for different parts of the discussion. You can still be flexible, but often—for me—the best study groups, and the ones that felt the most spontaneous, were the ones in which I made out a classic teacher's lesson plan, with the different activities and the time each was supposed to take.

I have seen one sentence used as the springboard for an evening's reflection. Each passage that was read that evening was used to bring light to this one passage. It was a wonderful study group. It shows how the whole of the book may be used to illuminate the part. And it is a reminder that a great gem of a sentence is well worth being the focus of an entire evening of study.

5. COMPARATIVE STUDY: ONE FINE WAY TO EXPLORE A TOPIC

If you do no more than share a list of passages that you really like, individuals in the group may benefit from simply bringing old favorites to mind on a new occasion. It is possible, however, to do much more. The highest level of study, according to Mortimer J. Adler in his How to Read a Book, is to compare the great thoughts of authors of different books. If you are interested in topical study, you might consider this path. Bring literature outside The URANTIA Book to extend and to clarify what the book contains. The URANTIA Book draws on many human sources, and it is designed to function in a cultural civilization—interacting with the ideas and ideals of current and future generations. Correlating passages from the book with evolutionary products may be confusing for a beginners' group. Those who know the book well will find it very stimulating. One benefit is that it helps us see the book through the others' eyes. What does anthropology say about primitive religion? What does biology say about evolution? What does the Bible say about Jesus' Ordination Sermon? (See Duane Faw's

Paramony.) What does current theology say about evolving Deity? It doesn't take much hunting in the library to come up with some material that will prove interesting to your fellows.

Such study groups need to be carefully guided so that they remain sessions which are primarily devoted to the study of The URANTIA Book. If a leader uses one of these sessions simply to expound some enthusiasm about a book which is alleged to be parallel to The URANTIA Book, then the study group purpose has been lost. A separate kind of study group should be formed if a different purpose is to be pursued.

6. THE PERSONAL TOUCH IN TEACHING

A person fresh from a Harvard Master of Arts in Teaching program was asked, "What's the most important thing in teaching?" Without a moment's hesitation she replied, "Teach the students, not the subject." So often we get carried away with what we have to add to the topic; we do not pay attention to whether we are saying anything that anybody needs to hear. We assume that they need to hear whatever we have to add, without considering what needs are really present. Ideally, again, there is no conflict between these concerns: everything that can be contributed on a topic is meeting the genuine questions of those present. It can take a great effort of prayer, though, to order one's impulses to the needs of the whole.

Of course, the leader of a study group need not function in the role of a teacher, and particularly need not establish a pattern of asking questions to which others respond.

Ada Lum's How to Begin an Evangelistic Bible Study (Madison: Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, 1971) offers the following points:

"Our self-image may be a barrier to a clear witness. I once asked a group of students to write briefly what they thought their peers' concepts of Jesus Christ and Christians were. Frankly, I was primarily interested to know what the Christian self-image was. About three-fourths of the peers indicated a very negative concept of themselves."

Here are some questions for study:

In what specific ways does Jesus show his interest in people as individuals? His understanding of their basic needs? What does he see in people and their human dilemmas that others apparently do not see? In what ways do his attitudes to people and their predicaments contrast with those of his contemporaries?

What do you learn about human nature from Jesus' viewpoint? What does he command? What does he condemn?

What happens when Jesus takes on the problems of his society—corruption, pride, ignorance, evil, cruelty, sickness, materialism? What traditions and prejudices does he come up against in doing so?

How does Jesus affect people? Why? How do they affect him? Why? how does he bring out the best in people? How does he affirm their personal worth?

What human interest details do you observe? What unique aspects of Jesus' personality and character does this event reveal? What fresh insights into his life mission do you now have?

Relax and deep your sense of humor.

Allow people time to think about that has just been read or asked.

Ask several people to contribute views, especially on strategic interpretation or application questions.

FOR A BEGINNERS' GROUP, Ada Lum suggests:

The newcomer to the group is an individual who wants to be completely accepted in whatever condition he arrived, with whatever needs; he does not want to be dominated by established readers.

Do not sing devotional songs or worship at a beginners' group.

Avoid impressive cross references to all parts of the book; the newcomer may get the wrong idea of the intellectual qualifications for belonging to the study group.

7. MATERIAL DETAILS

1. It is good to have a Concordex and a dictionary on hand if needed.
2. Promptness is a courtesy. Most groups are facilitated by a commitment to start and end on time.
3. Provide adequate lighting and ventilation. Decide on a policy about smoking.
4. Establish a policy about the presence of children; they can be extremely distracting to some groups and a valuable addition to others.
5. A light snack or beverage is nice to have during the meeting. Some groups munch before the group, some after, to provide opportunity for socializing.

8. STUDY

The URANTIA Book says and implies a great deal about reading. Here are some collected [^]which are designed to provide material for more than one topical study group.

1. The place of study in our morontia career (525.5).
2. The benefits of studying even cosmological information (1162.1)
3. The power of group effort in study: (494.last on **teamwork**).
4. Be lucid about our resistance to study; study becomes voluntary only later in our universe career (537c).
5. Ganid, the apt pupil, USED Jesus' teachings (1481.1).
6. Jesus' **earnest and joyous** study group (1533.4-1534.4). He engaged in **intense study** (1420d). (Note also that Jesus learned by **memorization** (1362); he selected readings well (1399); was tolerant (1467.5), a patient listener (1476.6).)

READING

1. **The Thought Adjuster and the Spirit of Truth assist us in reading (17.2). We can let the mind which was in Jesus be in us. How can we facilitate their ministry as we read?**
2. We live in an age of speed reading. And while there is value in perusing material quickly at times, the authors at times slow us down. "Stop and ponder the solemn fact that God lives within you As you ponder the loving nature of God" (39-40)
3. We are encouraged to "Meditate on the revelation of these divine attributes which was made in loving service by your own Creator Son" (89). "**Let the sublime knowledge of the mortal life of Jesus of Nazareth sink into your souls . . .**" (228, italics added). "Of all human knowledge, that which is of greatest value is to know the religious life of Jesus and how he lived it" (2090).
4. Note a contrasting claim that the ascension career should be "the supreme study of mortal man" (449). How can this be harmonized with the 2090 passage?
5. How to read the Bible (1767-69); ". . . **look for those eternally true and divinely beautiful teachings.**" (1769, italics added).
6. ". . . there is much in the Scriptures that would have instructed you if you had only read with discernment?" (1662b) "And you would have known these truths had you read the scriptures." (1599)
7. "Do you not remember that it is written . . ." (1662) The Spirit of Truth helps us recall and understand Jesus' life and teachings (2060-63).
8. "Do you not remember that I once told you . . ." (1841b)
9. Not to the Alpheus twins but to Nathaniel Jesus says, "But why do you refuse to comprehend the meaning of the record . . . ? . . . And why do you refuse to interpret the meaning of the record . . . ?" (1660)

- 9B. A right study of the scriptures could have prepared students for the coming epochal revelation (1510.1).
- 9C. The tendency to take scriptures one-sidedly as proof texts for conflicting views (1509.3).
- 9D. The difficulty of encompassing many-sided teaching (1542.3).
10. To the Saducees Jesus said, "You all do err in asking such questions, because you know neither the scriptures nor the living power of God" (1900).
11. High teachings need to be lived in order to be comprehended (1950).
12. Reading, like listening, is a **test** of the one who hears: "Think not only of the multitudes and how they hear the truth; take heed also to yourselves how you hear. Remember that I have many times told you: to him who has shall be given more, while from him who has not shall be taken away even that which he things he has" (1692d).
13. Do not read only line by line, but note the artistry of the composition of sections, Papers, and the book as a whole. "The wise philosopher will always look for the creative design which is behind, and preexistent to, all universe phenomena" (42).

CAUTIONS

14. It is not good for intellectual development to outpace spiritual growth (1121.4).
15. Truth should not be overanalyzed, but embraced in wholeness (2075.5)
16. It is an error to overteach. We should not try to overlearn.
17. Avoid misplaced literalism (1605).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

Good posture and environment help. (We are more alert standing, less alert sitting; least alert lying down.)

Note the questions, imperatives, promises in what you read.

Think of your purpose in reading. Bring to mind what you already know about the material you are about to read. Think of what questions you would like to answer. Preview the material to get an overview. Read carefully: note the facts, examine the logic, explore the values. Next, review. Then do something with your knowledge—write an outline, share an insight with a friend, put a truth into practice. Realize that the place to stop reading may be at that point where an insight comes that you need to interiorize or decide on. How to Read a Book by Mortimer Adler and Charles van Doren notes many levels of reading (and different types for different types of material). Their highest type is comparative study—reading on the same themes in several great books. Recall the broadmindedness of Jesus (1467.5).

After you have done your best intellectually, give time for the Spirit to teach the deeper lesson.

9. HOLISTIC STUDY OF A PAPER

Because I feel so strongly about the benefits of this method, I am including the full text of an article titled "Another URANTIA Book" that I wrote for the Plantary Prints.

The URANTIA Book is so great—wouldn't you like ANOTHER ONE, two thousand pages of additional revelation from the same authors? That's what it felt like when I started studying the same URANTIA Book all over again this year—with new methods! I had read the book through a dozen times since finding it fifteen years ago. I had lead countless topical study groups. With a Ph.D. in philosophy and loads of teaching experience in some fine university departments and some struggling colleges, I thought I was sort of getting on top of things, not necessarily spiritually, but at least in my study. Then I received my assignment as Director of the Boulder School and began to practice a method of study whose potentials I had suspected for years but had never taken the time to do.

How to read The URANTIA Book? Most of us, most of the time, just go at it, reading page by page without considering our method of study. We thrill to the revelations of God, the enlightening cosmology, the engaging narratives. We find our favorite quotes and focus less on the other material. Such, surely is the appropriate way to read when we come to the book as new readers. And we should never outgrow the pleasure of reading straight through a paper. But what if we yearn for more advanced study?

Here is the technique that has reopened The URANTIA Book for me: making outlines of each paper. Few people care for this work. Few books are worth it. This is the method I use and teach:

1. Take a sheet of paper and write down the title of the section. Then beginning on the next line, write down a one-line summary of each paragraph in the text. Use a new line on the sheet for each paragraph in the text.
2. After summarizing each paragraph in a section, come back and write down, next to the section title, your own subtitle for the section. This may be a sentence or phrase.
3. After going through the paper in this way, write down in an orderly way your section subtitles (as well as your one-sentence or -phrase summaries of the introductory paragraphs).
4. Then come up with your own subtitle for the paper as a whole. Now you have completed your outline--consisting of sentences or phrases that serve as subtitles for the paper as a whole, the introduction, and each of the sections. ⁹On that foundation, explore further. What is really going on in this paper? How are the sections grouped? Why is the material arranged this way? Sometimes a section has a very interesting internal structure. I dig around. Often I find a lot.

In order to work to the limits of one's ability, technical questions must be looked at such as the following:

- Why does the narrative begin and end where it does? (The break between the end of Paper 122 and the beginning of paper 123 may imply a lesson about epochal revelation.)
- What is the relationship between sections? (Look at sections 8 and 9 of Paper 150 to discover the author's artistic use of irony.)
- How completely does the title of the section cover the material therein? (Look at section 3, Paper 120. This section is really doing more than one job.)
- What are the different emphases in similar passages, e.g., at the opening paragraphs of Paper 3, Section 2?

Sometimes these detailed investigations will yield little, if any additional insight. Sometimes you will come up with no subtitle for a section different from the title in the text. Sometimes you will find no special comment to make in reflection upon your carefully written overview summary.

It is not necessary to work on the hardest questions in order to profit immensely from this effort. One student has been consistently asking the simple question of why this paper was written; he has found a flood of new insight. Another great question to ask is about what problems we face today that are similar to the ones addressed in this paper?

Naturally there is more than one good way to do an outline and more than one method to gain an overview. But "the wise philosopher will always look for the creative design which is behind, and pre-existent to, all universe phenomena." (p. 42) It is a great delight to see what different people find. God has something special to reveal to each person. And when this labor has been completed, a holistic view of the paper has been achieved.

Later a quieter, more spiritual phase begins. It is very interesting to see

what different types of minds will come up with as they compare notes. It is more than interesting to see what the Spirit can impart to the student who has exhausted his or her evolutionary mental capacity in the effort to comprehend. In this phase, the student prays for added wisdom and insight, and for the experience of the values referred to in the study. At school we have a time to reflect on papers and listen for the teaching of the Spirit. Then, if new ideas come, we share them without speculating on the source of the ideas.

A dry presentation of method can hardly suggest the richness of its results. But can you begin to see why I feel as though I have just been given another URANTIA Book? Whatever methods you use, we at the Boulder School wish you a superb experience as you share in studying this majestic and many-sided treasure!

THE PURPOSE OF THE URANTIA BOOK

In attempting to interpret The Urantia Papers, we should not neglect the many statements in the book which communicate the revelators' purposes. If we're trying to figure out a machine, it helps to know what the machine was made to do. Statements of revelatory purpose may be found more or less explicitly in many places. Examples of explicit statements are made on 1.2, 17.2, 1109.6-1110.4, 1122, and 2086.2. Examples of implicit statements may be found in many places, e.g., 364.5; 1162.1; 1930.7. It seems clear, for example, that one of the purposes of Part IV is to impart new life and direction to the ongoing mission of the Fourth Epochal Revelation.

CONCLUSION

A few closing remarks. Perhaps the main point, easier said than done, is that without living the teachings, we will not comprehend them. So we want to read this book, not just with our minds, but with our lives.

In attempting to discern structure in the papers, it is very helpful to notice passages which tell something about how larger pieces of the text fit together. For example, after Peter's confession of Jesus' divine Sonship, the author of Part IV presents a scheme of the four major parts of Jesus' life. That scheme is a springboard for reflection. How does this scheme illuminate Jesus' public career strategy? Can we go back to earlier papers and understand them better now? How does this four-part scheme fit with other structural comments about Jesus' ministry made elsewhere?

Another structural feature of major importance comes to light when we notice that the book itself is Fifth Epochal Revelation, and it contains within itself an account of the previous epochal revelations. Ask what are the similarities and differences between these revelations? Are there types of epochal revelation? What are the implications for us today of recognizing types of epochal revelation?

Those who want to go beyond the ideas presented here may recall that there is a huge literature on education and teaching methods, as well as a field on the sociology and psychology of group process. Finally, for those with an appetite for intellectual mountainpeaks, reading has become a hot topic among the academics. Countless sophisticated articles and books may be found in philosophy, literature, and religious studies on hermeneutics--the way of interpreting a text. Richard Palmer is an author who can introduce you to this field.

Finally, you are not alone as you labor to prepare a study group. Centuries from now, stories will be told of the otherwise unsung men and women who took The URANTIA Book into new areas, introduced the book wisely to others, and planeted an enduring study group. Such labor work does not gratify our desire for

dramatic action, but it is a powerful technique of evolution. The study group is the stable and flexible cell of a living revelation whose destiny is just beginning to unfold.

Jeffrey Wattles 1/87

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