Leading an Establish Group

A guide to the heart, rhythms, and practical work of leading together

Before We Begin

I'm so glad you're considering leading an Establish group!

I've been teaching the Bible for more than twenty years, and one of my greatest joys is watching someone discover something in God's Word that they had never seen before. Maybe it's a passage they've read dozens of times but suddenly understand. Maybe it's a connection between the Old and New Testaments that makes the whole story come alive. Or maybe it's simply seeing something about God that leaves them standing in awe of Him.

I never get tired of those moments!

That's part of why Eric and I started Establish. We want people to become familiar with the whole Bible, begin to see how it fits together, and, most importantly, come to know the God who gave it to us. And we'd love for you to invite others into that journey.

You don't have to be a Bible scholar or have all the answers. You don't even have to be comfortable teaching. As the teaching videos become available, you can prepare to teach a lesson yourself or watch the video with your group and lead the discussion. But you do need to be willing to spend time in God's Word yourself, prepare thoughtfully, and encourage the people God has placed in your group.

You'll notice that our preparation assignments are called *Just Enough*. There's a reason for that! I want people to open God's Word before hearing someone explain it. But I also know that life is busy, and I don't want Bible study to become an overwhelming list of assignments. *Just Enough* gives people a little time in Scripture to become familiar with the passage, begin noticing what God has said, and arrive with questions and discoveries of their own. Then, when we gather, we can build on those discoveries and begin connecting the dots together. The goal isn't to arrive knowing all the answers. It's to arrive having spent some time listening to what God has said.

This is a long-term commitment. There will be weeks when everyone is excited about what they're learning. There will also be weeks when life gets busy, people fall behind, and you wonder if anyone has opened their Bible! Don't be discouraged. You're helping people develop something that can shape the rest of their lives. That takes time, patience, prayer, and plenty of encouragement.

This guide is more than a list of setup instructions. It describes the heart of an Establish group and the approach we hope you'll carry into your own gatherings. Use it to prepare, and keep it nearby as you lead.

My prayer is that you'll find as much joy in this journey as I have. There is nothing quite like sitting around a table with open Bibles, watching people discover who God is and what He has revealed.

Let's get started!

Part One — Getting Your Group Started

1. Understand the Establish Approach

Before inviting people, it helps to understand what you're inviting them into. Establish brings together three rhythms that work alongside one another.

Reading the Bible. We want people to become familiar with the whole Bible, not just a collection of favorite passages. Over time, they'll begin recognizing the people, places, promises, and events that make up the biblical story—and the passages that once seemed unrelated will begin to connect.

Studying Scripture together. The focused Establish lessons help us slow down and look more closely at particular passages and truths. Participants spend time in Scripture before the meeting, then build on those observations through teaching, discussion, and prayer.

Hiding God's Word in our hearts. Scripture memory will be introduced gently as the lessons progress. The lessons will provide the passages and instructions; leaders don't need to organize a separate program at the beginning. We want people to discover the value of carrying Scripture with them and letting it take root in their hearts.

These three rhythms work together, even though they move at different speeds. Our goal isn't simply to help people know more about the Bible. We want them to know the God who gave us the Bible—to trust Him more deeply, love Him more fully, and walk with Him more faithfully.

2. Pray About Whom to Invite

Before you begin making a list of people to invite, spend some time praying.

Ask the Lord to bring people to mind and to begin preparing their hearts for what He wants to teach them through His Word. Don't limit your invitations to people who already attend church!

Think about friends, neighbors, coworkers, or family members who may know very little about the Bible. Perhaps someone has expressed curiosity about God but wouldn't know where to begin. Or perhaps someone has sat in church for years but still feels lost when opening Scripture. Maybe there's someone you wouldn't ordinarily think to invite.

Pray about each person. Ask God to give you wisdom about whom to approach, opportunities for conversation, and the right words to extend a warm invitation.

You never know what God might do with a simple invitation!

Sometimes we underestimate what God may already be doing in someone's heart. We may have no idea what questions they've been asking or how ready they might be to hear what He has revealed. Wouldn't it be wonderful to discover that God had been preparing someone's heart long before you invited them?

Establish isn't just for people who already know Jesus. It's also an opportunity for people who are curious to open the Bible, ask questions, and discover who He is. You don't need a large group. Even a handful of people who are eager to learn can make a wonderful beginning.

When you invite people, explain the long-term commitment kindly and clearly. They'll be reading Scripture during the week, preparing for focused lessons, and meeting regularly. Scripture memory will come later. They don't need to understand the Bible already—that's why you're gathering to study it together!

3. Make Your Initial Plans

Choose a regular meeting day, time, and location. We recommend allowing approximately two hours for gatherings. Choose a Bible reading plan and a pace the group can sustain, then set a start date to share at the kickoff.

Reading the same passages gives everyone a common starting point for questions and discoveries, even when someone misses a few readings. You might choose a shorter plan or one that takes several years to work through the whole Bible. You can even make your own, as long as everyone can access and follow it.

The goal isn't to finish on schedule, but to help people develop a habit of spending time in God's Word. And the broader reading plan doesn't have to match the focused lesson each week. One helps them see the big picture; the other allows them to slow down.

Reading plan choices:

- **NavPress / Navigators:** A plan drawing from different parts of Scripture with five catch-up days in each month.
- **Five Day Bible Reading:** Five reading days per week and two flexible days. This is an optional *Bible reading plan*, not a schedule for how many Establish lessons to complete.
- **The One Year Bible:** Standard and chronological editions with daily readings.
- **The Bible Recap:** Chronological reading with accompanying explanations.
- **YouVersion: A Chapter a Day:** A guided Bible App option, arranged in shorter sections, with one or occasionally two chapters on a day.
- **Establish's One Chapter a Day:** Our undated, printable plan covering every Bible chapter once in approximate chronological order. Old and New Testament readings are interwoven and Gospel chapters are arranged in an approximate harmony. About three years and three months at one chapter a day.

You can also explore the reading choices on the Getting Started page.

Each Establish lesson is designed to be completed over one week. Share the *Just Enough* preparation ahead of your gathering, then work through the teaching and discussion together when you meet. The lessons are intentionally designed to be manageable alongside your group's broader Bible reading.

4. Set Up Your Private GroupMe

Create a private GroupMe and decide how you'll use it to keep your group connected. Begin inviting members to join, remembering that some may be unfamiliar with GroupMe or need to download the app. Provide simple instructions for getting started so everyone feels comfortable participating from the beginning.

You'll use GroupMe to share reading assignments, links to *Just Enough* preparation and teaching resources, meeting details, questions, discoveries, prayers, and words of encouragement. Eventually you'll also share Scripture memory as the lessons introduce it.

But I hope it becomes much more than a place to distribute information. Our conversations don't have to end when we leave Bible study. Someone may ask a question about what they're reading. Another person may share something that encouraged them. We can pray for each other throughout the week.

As the leader, you'll help establish that atmosphere. Encourage participation, but don't expect everyone to respond to every message. Keep personal prayer requests within the group, and ask before sharing someone else's story.

5. Host a Kickoff Gathering

Before you begin the actual study, bring everyone together for a relaxed kickoff gathering.

And have some food! A meal, appetizers, or dessert and coffee will do. It doesn't need to be elaborate. The important thing is that people feel welcome.

There is no homework for this first gathering. No reading assignment to finish. No passage to memorize. No lesson preparation. Just come!

Welcome everyone. Let people enjoy food and conversation as they arrive. Then gather together and take the time to introduce the program. Don't rush through this part!

Introduce Establish. Tell everyone why you're excited about studying Scripture together. Explain the purpose and the three rhythms: reading through the Bible, focused lessons and teaching, and Scripture memory introduced gradually as the lessons progress. Show the website, where the materials live, and how a normal week will work. Explain that the leader may teach from the provided videos and notes or play the video for the group and guide a discussion afterward.

Remember that someone at your table may be opening the Bible for the very first time. Don't assume everyone understands a reading plan, how to find a Bible passage, or how to prepare for a lesson. Explain things simply. Invite questions. The point isn't to make people feel they have to arrive knowing everything; it's to help them become eager to learn.

Explain your shared reading plan. Show where to access it, explain its pace, and give the start date. Let everyone know that missing a day isn't failure. They can begin again.

Confirm GroupMe is working. Everyone should already have been invited. Now take a few minutes to be sure they've joined and are comfortable using it. Send a welcome message while you're together and ask everyone to reply, so any difficulties can be resolved before the study begins.

Get acquainted. Give everyone time to share a little about themselves and, if they'd like, what they're hoping to learn or what has been difficult about reading the Bible. Don't pressure anyone to share more than they're comfortable with.

Finish with questions and prayer. Make sure everyone knows the next meeting time and what—if anything—they'll need to do before it. Ask the Lord to give your group a growing love for His Word, understanding as they read, and joy in getting to know Him. Pray for the relationships beginning to form and for His work in each person's heart.

What a wonderful way to begin!

6. Follow Up After the Kickoff

Send a warm message through GroupMe. Thank everyone for coming, share the reading plan and start date, remind them of the next meeting time, and provide the first *Just Enough* link if the lesson is ready. No one needed to prepare for the kickoff; the first preparation begins afterward.

Part Two — Leading Your Weekly Meetings

7. Prepare Without Overwhelming People

Before each lesson, share the *Just Enough* preparation link through GroupMe. These assignments are generally expected to take about 30–60 minutes per lesson and are **in addition to** the broader Bible reading plan. Scripture memory instructions will come later as part of the lessons.

The name matters. We're asking people to read and begin noticing Scripture before hearing the teaching—not to become experts before they come. Encourage preparation, but don't let unfinished homework keep someone from gathering with you.

As the leader, work through the passages and preparation yourself. Read the surrounding context. Think about what stands out, what questions might arise, and where your group may need encouragement. Review the teaching materials as they're available.

You won't anticipate every question. Sometimes the best answer is, "That's a great question. Let's look into it." Whenever possible, return to Scripture and help people discover what God has said for themselves.

8. Choose How You'll Share the Teaching

When the teaching videos are available, leaders will have two good options.

Teach the lesson yourself. Watch the video in advance, work through the Scripture and notes, and guide the lesson in your own words.

Watch the teaching together. Play the video at your meeting, then lead your group through the questions, discussion, and discoveries that follow.

You may even use both approaches at different times. Either way, watch and prepare in advance so you're ready to help your group engage with the Scripture—not simply press play and leave.

You do not have to be an experienced teacher to lead. The teaching resources are meant to make the content accessible so that you can attend to the people God has brought together.

9. Gathering Together

We recommend allowing about two hours. Here's one possible meeting rhythm; adapt it as needed.

Activity	Suggested time
Welcome, fellowship, and opening prayer	15 minutes
Bible reading discoveries; memory practice when introduced	20 minutes
Teaching (live or video), Scripture, and discussion	70 minutes
Prayer and encouragement	15 minutes

You don't have to discuss every question. Each lesson is designed for one week, so give attention to the passages and questions that will best help your group understand what God has revealed. It's better to have a meaningful conversation about the most important truths than to rush through every question.

Ask what people noticed. What surprised them? What connections did they begin to see? Share the things that stirred your own wonder as you prepared. Your enthusiasm can help your group look more carefully too.

10. Welcome Questions and Discoveries

Some participants will speak easily; others will need more time. Make room for both. When a question comes up, resist answering too quickly. Help the group look at the passage: Who is speaking? To whom? What is happening? What do the surrounding verses say?

Sometimes the most exciting discovery is the answer someone sees for themselves. You may need to redirect a discussion gently when it wanders, but let people know their questions are welcome.

And keep asking the most important question: **What are we seeing about God that we don't want to forget?**

Part Three — Encouraging Your Group Along the Way

11. Make GroupMe a Place of Encouragement

I want to spend extra time here, because this has been one of the most meaningful parts of leading my own groups.

Don't let your messages become nothing more than assignments and reminders.

This is a long-term commitment. Some weeks people will be full of excitement. Other weeks they will be busy, tired, confused by a passage, or discouraged that they've fallen behind. They'll need encouragement—especially after the newness wears off.

Share something that encouraged you in Scripture. Write a prayer for your group. Remind them why we're doing this. And consider sharing a worship song that connects with what you're learning. In one of my shorter studies, I sent a note of encouragement, a prayer, and a song each day. For an ongoing Establish group, find a sustainable rhythm of your own.

It doesn't have to be elaborate or become another burden. Be yourself. Let your group hear your heart. Let them know you're thinking of them and praying for them—not just checking whether they completed a task.

12. Help People Keep Going

Sooner or later, someone will fall behind. Maybe several people will! Life happens. People get sick, travel, care for families, or struggle to establish new habits. Encourage them to come back. They don't have to make up everything before they're welcome at the table.

The same is true of *Just Enough*. We want people to prepare when possible because it enriches discussion, but someone who hasn't finished should still come. Encourage faithfulness without creating guilt. A difficult week doesn't undo everything they've learned.

13. Welcome New People Along the Way

Someone may want to join after your group is underway. Welcome them! Explain the three rhythms, help them join GroupMe, and share the current reading plan and lesson links. They don't have to go all the way back to the beginning before they can participate.

Take time to know the people in your group. Listen when they're struggling, pray for their needs, and celebrate their discoveries. You're not simply gathering people to finish a curriculum. You're walking alongside one another as you learn to follow Jesus.

Part Four — Resources and Staying Connected

14. Share the Teaching Freely

Establish's own materials may be used, printed, shared, and adapted, but not sold. Third-party resources retain their own permissions. When possible, share links from the Establish website so people can find the most current versions.

Lessons, teaching notes, videos, and discussion resources will be added as they're ready. We hope these materials make it easier for people in many different places to open their Bibles and grow together.

15. We'd Love to Hear About Your Group!

Eric and I would love to know about the group you're starting. Where are you gathering? Who has God brought together? We would be encouraged to hear what you're discovering.

Please share your name, email, and group location using our group registration form. And if you have questions about the resources, please reach out.

We're grateful you're willing to invest your time in helping people know the Lord.

Appendix A — A Simple Invitation

I've been wanting to get a group together to read and study the Bible, and I'd love for you to be part of it!

We're going to use a free discipleship study called Establish. We'll be reading through the Bible together, learning to study Scripture more deeply, and eventually introducing Scripture memory.

You don't need to know much about the Bible—or even have attended church before. If you're curious about God and what the Bible says, you're welcome!

It will take some commitment, but I think it could be a wonderful opportunity to learn together. We'll start with a relaxed kickoff, some food, and time to get acquainted. There won't be any homework for that first gathering.

Would you be interested?

Appendix B — Your First GroupMe Welcome

Welcome, everyone!

I'm so glad you're here. This GroupMe will be our place to share reading assignments, lesson links, reminders, questions, discoveries, and prayers between meetings.

I hope you'll feel free to ask questions or share something that caught your attention in Scripture. Nobody has to know all the answers. We're here to learn together!

Our first gathering will be a relaxed kickoff with food and a chance to get acquainted. No homework! We'll introduce Establish, explain how everything works, make sure everyone is connected here, and answer questions.

My prayer is that, as we open God's Word together, we'll come to know Him more deeply and discover things about Him we've never seen before.

I can't wait to get started!

Appendix C — A Weekly GroupMe Message

Good morning, everyone!

I'm looking forward to seeing you this week. I've been thinking about what we're studying, and I can't wait to hear what you've been discovering.

Our Bible reading: [Reading assignment or plan link]

Just Enough: [Preparation link]

Our next gathering: [Day, time, and location]

Scripture memory: [Only when introduced by the lessons]

I know some of you have full weeks ahead, and I want to encourage you not to lose heart if you can't get to everything. We're not just trying to finish assignments. We're learning to know the Lord through His Word, and that is worth the time we give it.

I've been praying for you. My prayer is that God will give each of us a growing hunger for His Word, open our understanding as we read, and help us see more clearly who He is. And for those of you feeling tired or overwhelmed, I'm asking Him to give you perseverance and encouragement.

I found a song that reminded me of what we're learning, and I hope it encourages you too: [Worship song link]

I'm grateful we're studying together. See you soon!

Appendix D — Launch and Kickoff Checklists

Before You Invite

- [ ] Pray for the people God may want you to invite, including friends or neighbors who don't attend church.
- [ ] Ask the Lord to begin preparing their hearts and to open doors for conversation.
- [ ] Explain the invitation and the long-term commitment.

Before the Kickoff

- [ ] Choose a regular day, time, and location for meetings.
- [ ] Choose the reading plan, pace, and start date.
- [ ] Set up GroupMe and send invitations and simple instructions.
- [ ] Invite everyone to a kickoff with food and **no homework**.
- [ ] Have the website, reading plan, and teaching options ready to demonstrate.

During the Kickoff

- [ ] Welcome everyone and enjoy food together.
- [ ] Introduce the purpose of Establish and the three rhythms.
- [ ] Explain the reading plan, lesson rhythm, and video/teaching choices.
- [ ] Confirm that everyone can use GroupMe.
- [ ] Give people time to get acquainted and ask questions.
- [ ] Share the next meeting date and first assignments (for after the kickoff).
- [ ] Pray together.

A Final Encouragement

I hope you'll remember something as you lead.

You won't always know what God is doing in the hearts of the people sitting around your table. Sometimes you'll see it in their questions, their excitement over a passage they've finally understood, or a change in the way they pray and respond to life. And sometimes you won't see it at all.

But every time you gather around God's Word, you have the privilege of helping people hear what He has revealed about Himself.

What a wonderful privilege that is!

So keep opening your Bible. Keep praying. Keep encouraging. Keep pointing people to Jesus. And don't lose your own sense of wonder along the way.

There is so much more of God to know, and He has graciously given us His Word.

I can't wait to hear what your group discovers!

With love and prayers,

Shelley

Establish · www.wisemenbuild.com