

Bridge Course Training

December 2023

This is information needed to set up and run the Bridge Course. It will cover what the Bridge Course is, how it is meant to be used, how to run the course, and will include instruction for small or growing courses.

INTRODUCTION:

In an increasingly divided world, it has become difficult to reach people with the gospel. Negative stereotypes and hostility towards Christians has made outreach and our mission to reach men and women with the gospel challenging. Because of this, many churches are adding members almost exclusively through transfer growth (Christians leaving one church and joining another) as opposed to conversion growth (non-Christians coming to Christ).

At the same time, we are in a moment in time where people are lonely, unfulfilled and often without hope. Many long to experience genuine community, meaning, and satisfaction in life. This is something that the world can never provide. Here is where Bridge comes in. In contrast to the constant lies and deceptions promoted in our culture, the Bridge Course provides weekly messages centered on the truth of the gospel and an opportunity for nonchristians to build genuine friendships and to experience the love of Christ in the lives of believers. Through prayer, teaching, friendship and discussion, we have seen God use the Bridge to not only answer questions but to open hearts to the message of the gospel.

Bridge also has very real benefits for your church. It helps to bring a sense of unity and purpose in the area of evangelism. There is a specific joy that comes from seeing lost men and women come to know the forgiveness of Christ. The Bridge also gives great opportunities to serve, even for those who have just come to Christ through Bridge. It is exciting to see new believers using their gifts to reach out to their friends, neighbors, co-workers, classmates, and family. And the Bridge is a great way to introduce your church to people who may not have otherwise walked through your doors.

WHAT IS THE BRIDGE COURSE?

Bridge is a way for non-Christians to explore the Christian faith in a relaxed, non-threatening environment over ten weeks. Each week begins with an informal meal or dessert, followed by a talk that is designed to raise important questions and inspire conversation. Those conversations take place during the discussion time and are characterized by open questions and an environment where guests can explore what they believe without pressure. Everything we do is with our guests in mind. We try to create the most warm and welcoming environment as possible.

The gospel is shared in each of the messages, which answer different critical questions. The messages are meant to provide biblical answers, and the discussions are intended to provide time to interact over them.

The evening is meant to also provide a time to have guests encounter friendship and to see the community of the body of Christ and our love for each other. It's also an opportunity to joyfully serve our guests and genuinely love them with the love of Christ. Romans 1:16 tells us that the gospel is the power of God for salvation. That's why the message of the gospel is central to the bridge course. But we also want guests to see the power of the gospel that has transformed our lives. Through the proclamation of the gospel and growing relationships, we want to see people come to repent and believe in Christ and be added to the community of faith in the local church.

Like Alpha, The Bridge Course is a 10 week introduction to Christianity. Each session starts with dessert or a meal, followed by a talk on different topics. The talks are:

1. How Good Are You?
2. Why Doesn't God Just Forgive Everyone?
3. How Can God Allow Suffering?
4. How Could God Send People to Hell?
5. Can We Really Trust the Bible?
6. Is Jesus Really the Only Way?
7. Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

Retreat Sessions:

- What Will Really Satisfy?
 - Why Do We Need the Holy Spirit?
 - What Does the Holy Spirit Do?
 - Will I Make it to Heaven?
8. Why Do We Matter?
 9. Is Christianity Really Worth It?
 10. Where Do We Go From Here?

Celebration Dinner:

- Who Really Needs God?

Each of the talks are found at bridgecourse.org/talks.

After the talk there are open discussions, which are a time to explore Christianity and interact over the talks in a very relaxed, non-pressured environment. If you have more than 12 guests, you can break into separate groups that are roughly divided by age. Each group has a leader and co-leader, and two assistant leaders. All the leaders sit with their group through the meal or dessert, talk and discussion time. It's helpful to have both men and women as leaders and assistant leaders.

After Week 7 or 8, there's an overnight retreat. We've found it works best to do a Friday night into Saturday. We start with dinner on Friday and end on Saturday afternoon. There are 4 talks on the retreat. When starting out you can just do the retreat in whatever location you are meeting in (a

home, a school, a rented facility or a church). As the course grows, it's very helpful to do the retreat at an off-site location like at a retreat center (if possible).

After week 10 of the course, we have the Bridge Celebration Dinner, which serves as the completion of one course (like a graduation) but also an introduction to the next course. It's a very effective way for all of the guests who completed the course to bring family, friends, co-workers, classmates, and neighbors to an introduction for the next course.

If you'd like to register your course so that you can be an official Bridge course and take advantage of our website search feature, there are a few requirements.

1. You must follow the recipe. You must use the videos in their entirety without changing or abbreviating the content. You may not skip a session or add your own session. This includes being sure to end the course with the Celebration Dinner and having a retreat even if you don't go away for an overnight.
2. You must use the discussion questions that we have provided to guide the discussion time. You most likely won't have time to get to all the questions during the discussion time but we are asking you to use the questions provided.
3. If you provide child care you must abide by all applicable child protection laws and guidelines for your location with no exceptions.

WHAT MAKES FOR A SUCCESSFUL COURSE

The first component is prayer. One of the reasons for any success the Bridge has experienced is due to the priority of prayer. Prayer properly declares our dependence on God. A. C. Dixon wrote "When we depend upon organizations, we get what organizations can do; when we depend upon education, we get what education can do; when we depend upon man, we get what man can do; but when we depend upon prayer, we get what God can do." Because we need God to draw non-Christians, open their hearts, convict them of sin, show them the beauty of Christ and the Gospel, regenerate them and give them the gift of faith and repentance, we must pray. We can't do any of these things, but God can. That's why we ask all of our leaders and assistant leaders to commit to praying each and every day for the guests in their group. We also ask them to participate in an hour long weekly prayer meeting that we hold before Bridge. We pray for all aspects of the course and we pray specifically for each guest by name.

We also ask our church for prayer volunteers and assign them to pray for a specific Bridge group throughout the week. We connect one of the leaders or assistant leaders with the person praying to share details (which must remain confidential) so that they can pray more specifically.

The second component is a commitment to evangelism and outreach. Over the decades, we've had the opportunity to help a lot of churches start Bridge courses. And sometimes people can feel like all they need to do is make a meal, play the video and people will show up. But people won't show up unless we invite them. Unless we reach out. And this is where friendship is so important. Friendships build trust in a society that is pretty untrusting of Christians. Our love and care through genuine friendships can go a long way in attracting people to Christ. Jesus was a friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19) and he calls us to be the same. Look for opportunities to befriend neighbors, co-

workers, classmates and family members who don't know Christ and invite them to join you for Bridge.

The next component for a successful course is following the guidelines set out in this training as fully as possible. We've been doing Bridge for over 25 years. We don't claim to have created a perfect system, but the more churches and other organizations abide by the formula, the greater success we have seen. In fact, most of our structure and methodology comes from The Alpha Course which we did for 10 years. We are indebted to Alpha for their example and inspiration.

Another important component is to befriend the guests during the course. It can be easier to spend time talking to a leader or co-leader, but we want to concentrate on our guests during the course. Show interest in them, ask them questions and take time to get to know them. Building friendships isn't always easy and we sometimes have to force ourselves to relate, but it's one of the most important ingredients of the Bridge Course. Ask God to help you to love the guests with the love of Christ.

Also, the best leaders and co-leaders look for opportunities to connect with guests outside of Bridge in one-on-one settings. This works best after relationships have been built. Maybe around half way through the course. Grabbing coffee or a meal is ideal for going deeper into their lives and gently pointing people to Christ. You can also follow up with those who miss a week with a text or email if they're comfortable giving you, their info. We've found it very helpful to create a group text before the retreat which helps if you are traveling and staying somewhere overnight. It also enables the group to connect on a more personal level.

If you're a leader, be sure to pray for your guests ahead of week 1. And, try to touch base with guests before the 1st meeting (this task can be split with your co-leader and assistant leaders). Let the guests know you are looking forward to meeting them. Make sure they know how to get there, the time to be there, and see if they have any questions.

Each guest should get a Bible (we use the ESV economy version and quote from the ESV Bible in our talks), a How Good Are You booklet, a Bridge manual, and a pen. There are leader manuals for group leaders and assistants. The How Good Are You booklets and manuals can be ordered from our online store at the bridgecourse.org/store. Bibles can be ordered from Crossway where larger orders can be discounted. All leaders and assistant leaders should use the same Bible as the guests. Bringing a big leather Bible which is heavily marked up can be intimidating for the guests.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING AN EVENING OF BRIDGE?

Here's a basic schedule.

5:30 Prayer – we ask all leaders and assistant leaders to be part of this prayer time and to make every attempt to get there on time.

6:30 Dinner or Dessert – You can welcome people and say a simple prayer of blessing for dinner or just serve dessert and coffee.

7:00 Video

7:35 Dessert Break

7:45 Discussion Groups
8:15 End

MEAL TIME

The meal is an important time to build relationships and to help people see that we are kind and considerate. We actually discourage “spiritual” talk during the meal or dessert, so that we don’t overwhelm our guests. They will be listening to a 30 minute talk and will be having a 30 minute “spiritual” discussion later on.

NEXT IS THE TALK

The talks can all be found at bridgecourse.org/talks. They range from 30 to 35 minutes. You should ensure all guests have a manual so they can follow the outline and write down questions they may have.

ANNOUNCEMENTS.

You’ll see the announcements for each week in the leader’s manual in a section called “Leader Notes”. The announcements should be short. You’ll be mentioning things like the ground rules, the dates for the retreat, the Celebration Dinner and the Bridge Study as well as book recommendations. We also tell the Bridge joke, which has nothing to do with Bridge, except to help people relax. You can find these jokes at bridgecourse.org/resources.

DISCUSSIONS GROUPS

Here, we will discuss the details of how to lead an effective discussion as well as the role of leaders, co-leaders, and assistant leaders.

Each group should have a leader and co-leader (preferably a man and a woman), and two assistant leaders. At the start of the first discussion, be sure to introduce yourself and the co-leader and assistants. To start (just the first discussion), we play a name game where folks have to share their first name with an adjective that describes them, that starts with the same letter. I always use Joyful Jim. Go around in a circle and have each person say their adjective and name and then the names of the persons that went before them. Do this until you have gone through your whole group, and be sure to help someone if they’re not able to remember someone’s name. You can also suggest they write down the names if that helps. The name game is a fun way for everyone to remember each other’s name and ease into the course. You should also cover the ground rules the first and the second week if you have new guests.

- Show mutual respect.
- There’s no such thing as a dumb question.
- No one has to talk.
- Only one person will talk at a time.
- Please don’t dominate the discussion.

The most important ground rule is the first one – show mutual respect. Because these discussions are designed to create a safe environment for our guests to share what they believe, we have to

listen well and respect what people are saying. We understand this because of our training, but that's not always true about our guests. Sometimes a guest can be offended or disagree with something another guest shares. They might be tempted to attack or challenge someone's opinion. When this happens you can gently remind everyone to show mutual respect. You can reaffirm that you want to hear everyone's opinion. And if they disagree with someone, that's fine, they can share their opinions or answers with the leader and the leader will look forward to hearing their thoughts.

Let folks know that it won't be a successful group without their thoughts and input. There is no pressure to participate (no one will call on you) and no question is too dumb. We want them to share what's on their minds. We don't want them to give an answer that they think we want to hear. We want to hear what they **actually** think. The goal of this time is for the guests to talk, not the leaders or assistant leaders. Your goal is to facilitate discussion by inviting participation, listening well and drawing out thoughts and opinions. Please don't dominate the group or begin answering all their questions.

Also, stick to the questions found in the manual under "Discussion Starters". You won't be able to get to all of the questions so maybe circle several that you would like to get to. And it's very important to not let the discussions go past 30 minutes.

One of the things we've learned over the years is that you have to work hard to make sure it's a safe environment for doubters. People assume they should try to give a biblical answer, but we want to know what they really think. A good way to get at this is to follow up an answer that is more orthodox with "Does anyone disagree or feel differently about that?". Go the extra mile to bring out the disagreements. Having someone share what they really think, especially if it's really negative or antagonistic, is the best thing that can happen, because it gives everyone else permission to share what they really think – even if it's cynical or negative. If the group has too many "Christian" answers it can prevent the people with doubts from jumping in.

Even though we know there are right and wrong answers we don't want to correct people who are saying things that might be unbiblical. We want to affirm people when they participate by thanking them for sharing or mentioning that what they shared was interesting. It's important that we love people by listening, understanding and respecting what they think. But we also don't want to leave people with the idea that all answers are correct. So what do you do if people are not coming up with a sound answer? First, try to allow everyone to weigh in if possible. Use the question, "What do others think?" a lot. If the group is still producing unbiblical answers, bounce their thoughts off the talk. Say something like, "Jim mentioned that none of us can get to God by our good works. How do you reconcile that with what you are saying?" If that still doesn't work, then draw your assistant leaders into the mix. Don't call on them by name because guests may fear that you will call on them next. So how do you call on them? Just look at them. And if the leader does "call" on you, please answer by using "first person". And answer the leader, not the whole group. In other words don't turn to the group and start proclaiming that it's impossible to get to God by being a good person because the Bible says all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God..." Just look at the leader and use first person – make it more testimonial. Say something like, "I used to think I was good enough to get to God. But when I started reading the Bible, I saw that I was sinful and

that I wasn't as good as I thought." When the assistant leader brings out a true answer, you could "call" on another assistant leader and then just move onto the next question. That way the group is left hearing truth.

Do not answer any questions that the guests ask you until they begin to really press you for the answers. Even when they do ask you what you think, always be sure to draw rest of the group in first. "What do others think?" or "What does this side of the room think?" Resist the temptation to answer everything. The group doesn't need a fully balanced Biblical answer on every question. It's a 10 week course and many people are wrestling with these things for the first time. When you do give an answer, be sure to use "first person" and try to relate to where the guests are coming from. To close the group, you might do a brief summary of the discussion. Don't pray to close the discussion until after the retreat, usually around week 8.

As leaders, you have to be comfortable with silence. Wait for people to work up the courage to answer. Don't jump in and fill the silence too soon. If people aren't answering, you could say something like, "I know it's a difficult question or it can be hard to go first, but take your time..." Then just restate the question and be patient. Don't keep adding layers to the question. If it's not working, move on to the next question. You can also look to your assistant leaders to jumpstart the discussion if no one is answering. They can just give a general answer like, "What I found interesting is..."

As a group leader, you have to let a lot of stuff go. There are many tangents. If you're an assistant leader, please lay back in the discussion. You should only speak when looked to. Your insight too early could squelch the group. Focus on prayer and building relationships.

There will be tangents at times as the group comes up with questions of their own. You have to use discernment to determine whether it is a beneficial tangent, or a "rabbit hole" that can be gently avoided. Don't let the discussion group become a question and answer time for the leader. Stick to the questions in the Leader's Manual. As the weeks go on, people will start asking questions that will be covered in future weeks. Like "How do we know the Bible is true?" It's best to let people know we will be covering that in week 5 and to encourage them to be here that week. You can also let people know you would be happy to talk about their question after the discussion. There's a lot that can be done after the discussion to answer questions in a bit more of a direct manner than in the discussion groups themselves. If a guest asks a hard question that is not in a future week or cannot be answered sufficiently in a short discussion just tell them that you would be happy to talk about it after the discussion. You can also point them to a recommended resource that addresses that issue. Ask them to read it, and let them know you'd be glad to discuss it after that. You don't have to have all the answers to every question. Remember, the guests will hear the Gospel in each of the talks. They don't need a doctrinally accurate answer for every question. Your goal is for the group to engage in thoughtful conversation.

Often, church members or other Christians may bring a guest to Bridge, which is great, and one of the main ways to grow your Bridge course. If they're not aware how Bridge works, they may talk during discussion, give chapter and verse answers, talk too much, and attempt to answer each question. These things can intimidate the guests, make them think the course is not for them, and

tempt them to withdraw. Either before discussion starts or in a separate conversation, a leader should speak to that person, reminding them that Bridge is for the guests, and that it would be best if they just sat back during the discussion so that the guests can do the talking. Let them know they can help best by being faithful in bringing their friend each week, praying and, letting the guests engage in the discussion.

Ending the discussion on time is very important. After 30 minutes, the leader should end the discussion time, no matter how good it may be going. There are several reasons for this. The first is that some of the guests may have children in Bridge Kids (our child care) and they may need to get them home in a timely manner. You don't want to lose a guest because of children (or adults) being kept out late. Another reason is that even if you think the discussion is going well, there could be guests who are ready to go or uncomfortable in this type of setting. They may be overloaded with the talk and all the spiritual conversation. You don't want them to feel trapped. If you have a great discussion going, it's better to end it, rather than letting it lose momentum and ending late. Ending during a good discussion will leave guests with a good feeling and looking forward to future weeks. Make sure everyone knows discussion is over and that they can leave. Beginning a conversation with the person next to you or even standing up can signal to guests that they are free to go. Let people know that you will stay around if they have questions. And then stay as long as the guests do.

Do not pray to end the discussion. You can wait until later in the course to do that, maybe in week 8 which is after the retreat. Also, if someone does ask for prayer, it's best to avoid doing that where other guests can see and hear. Tell them you will pray for them that week. If they want prayer right then, find a discreet place and pray in a way that does not draw attention to it. Depending on where you are in the world and the background of your guests, public prayer, especially early on in the course, can be uncomfortable.

Prepare for discussions by looking at the outline and the questions in the manual. Maybe circle a few questions that you want to make sure get covered. Don't re-write the questions, or turn it into Bible study. Avoid both weak leadership and dominating leadership. Ask questions, affirm those who answer, try to keep the discussion focused on that week's topic, avoid over talking, and treat everyone with respect and interest. And be patient with guests. You may hear the same 'wrong' answer from guests. Understand that most of us could not articulate a full understanding of the gospel in a few weeks either. Keep the focus in discussions on the gospel and not morality. They will hear the gospel week after week.

Assistant leaders may be called on to lead at any time. They can prepare in the same way. If the group gets too big and needs to split, assistant leaders can become leaders for half of the group. This is best done in week 1. You don't want to be dividing a group once the course has gotten underway (unless the group is too small). It could make people feel uncomfortable after they have gotten comfortable. If a leader is sick or can't make it, the co-leader or assistant leaders should lead the discussion. Assistant leaders should provide feedback to the leader regarding the group and the discussions. Leaders may not notice everything, and they can benefit from honest feedback. We have guests fill out an information sheet with their name, address, email and a phone number. The info is good to have, and is necessary to contact them should the need arise.

Sometimes weather or other circumstances can impact the schedule of the course and it's helpful to be able to contact our guests.

RETREAT

The importance of the retreat cannot be overstated. Each week the guests are being asked to wrestle with the truths of the gospel and the big questions of life. They're doing a lot of thinking and trying to comprehend what God's word teaches. The retreat is not just an opportunity to learn something about God, it's an opportunity to encounter God through prayer and ministry. The retreat is best scheduled after week 7 or 8. It's less than 24 hours starting on a Friday night and ending on Saturday afternoon. In some settings where there's not an option to do an overnight (like in recovery houses, prisons, or retirement communities), the retreat messages can be done as additional weeks in the course. Remember this would add 4 weeks to the length of your course. Please do not skip the retreat or the retreat talks for convenience. We provide scholarships for those who can't afford the retreat. You can do this by taking up an offering at your church to provide in this way. And then communicate to guests that there are scholarships available and they can contribute whatever they can afford (even if it's nothing) and we'll take care of the rest.

A typical schedule is as follows:

Friday Night:

6:00 PM - Dinner (if you're going on an overnight, you can eat on the road)

7:30 PM - Announcements and singing. We don't call it worship, we call it singing, but it's very helpful to sing on the retreat if possible. If the group is small it might not be necessary, but as the course grows it can be an important part of the retreat.

7:40 PM - Retreat Talk 1- What Will Really Satisfy?

8:15 PM - Discussion

8:45 PM - Free Time

Saturday:

8:30 AM - Breakfast (this can be a continental breakfast if you are not doing an overnight)

9:00 AM - Retreat Talk 2 (Why Do We Need the Holy Spirit?)

9:45 AM - Discussion

10:15 AM - Coffee break

10:30 AM - Retreat talk 3 (What Does the Holy Spirit Do?)

11:15 AM - Worship and prayer and personal ministry time.

11:45 AM - End ministry time with a song

12:00 PM - Lunch/free time

2:00 PM - Retreat Talk 4 (Will I Make it to Heaven?)

2:30 PM - Discussion

3:00 PM - Singing/testimonies

3:30 PM - Group picture and departure

The first two talks on Saturday morning are about the person and work of the Holy Spirit. After the second talk that morning (What Does the Holy Spirit Do?) we have a time of prayer and ministry. We ask everyone to stand and we sing a song. It's ok if you aren't able to do a song at this point.

We then form circles with our groups and take time to pray together. We let the guests know that they don't have to pray if they're not comfortable but we would encourage them to be part of the group and observe the others being prayed for if they would like. We tell guests, "We're going to ask God to fill us with his Spirit which is reserved for those who are genuine followers of Christ. If that doesn't describe you or you're not sure what you believe, you can just ask God to reveal himself to you."

Then let people know that you're going to pray for the Spirit to come and fill us, and that part of the praying time is just waiting quietly. Then pray for the Spirit to come and instruct people to focus on and think about Jesus and what he has done and to ask him quietly to fill you with his Spirit. We usually take around 3-5 minutes to wait on God to fill us. Then the leaders and assistant leaders can begin praying for individuals or couples. Start with someone that you think would be open to prayer. If there are any people from your church that have a prophetic gifting, you can invite them to come to this ministry time. The leaders should ask the person or couple they feel lead to pray for if they could pray for them. Maybe it's someone that already seems to be affected by the prayer time. Many leaders who may not have a defined gift of prophecy find that the Lord gives them some measure of ability to prophesy or share a relevant scripture in times like these. Invite other guests in the group to pray as well. For each person, ask if you can pray for them, and then gather around them and pray. You should have enough time to pray for everyone in the group if they would like prayer. You can pray for those who are not yet believers as well and ask God to reveal himself to them. We've seen God use prophetic words that have a profound effect on those who don't yet know Christ. Also, if your group is bigger, it might be difficult to pray for each person one at a time. It can help to break into smaller groups after praying all together for one or two people.

After lunch there's free time. It's important to have some free time as having meetings back-to-back can be intense. The free time gives people time to relax, spend time together, and bond over their experiences. Make sure there are some activities available if possible. Some will want to rest, or just sit and talk. It's a good time for relationships to be built.

After the last session and discussion, we like to end the retreat with a time of sharing testimonies. I just ask people if they would like to share how God has met them during this retreat. It's a great opportunity to hear what the Lord is doing in their lives. We then end with taking a picture, and invite everyone to come to church the next day.

WEEK 10 MINISTRY TIME

On week 10 you can end your discussion time 10 minutes early in order to have a time of prayer and ministry. We like to do this so that people who missed the retreat are able to experience the power of prayer. It also gives those who attended the retreat additional time to encounter God and receive prayer. We format this similarly to the retreat. You can take a few minutes to wait on the Lord and ask the Spirit to fill you. And then you can begin to pray for couples or individuals. It might help to start with someone who didn't make it to the retreat. You can ask if the group can pray for them. And if they say yes, you can lay hands on them and pray and the group can share a scripture or a prophetic word if they have them. This ministry time usually takes around 20 or 25 minutes so you might end closer to 8:30.

CELEBRATION DINNER

At the end of the course, we have a Celebration Dinner which is a great opportunity for the guests who've just completed the course to invite friends, family, neighbors, classmates, and co-workers to learn more about Bridge. The Celebration Dinner should be a step up from the regular weekly Bridge meetings. We try to make it a little more fancy, including having our best food. After dinner we ask 1 or 2 guests that have recently taken the course to share their story. I use 6 questions and interview them so that they don't have to prepare in advance.

1. What was your spiritual background 3 months ago?
 - They can share briefly about growing up and a little about their life before coming to the Bridge.
2. Would you have called yourself a Christian at the beginning of the course?
3. How did you decide to do the Bridge?
4. How did you enjoy the course?
 - They can share about the practicalities of the Bridge here. What happens each night and what they thought about it.
5. What happened to you on the course?
 - Here they can talk about what they learned. What was new spiritually? Do they view themselves differently after the course? Do they see Jesus differently? Did they ask him for forgiveness?
6. What difference has it made in your life and work?

These questions can be found at bridgecourse.org/resources.

I ask them if they could share their testimony when they arrive at the Celebration Dinner and give them a copy of the questions so they can look them over. After the testimonies, you can show the video "Who Really Needs God?" and close the time by encouraging the guests to sign up for the next course. There is no discussion at the Celebration Dinner. We are simply trying to inspire the new guests to attend the upcoming course.

YEARLY SCHEDULE

We've found that it works best to do the course 3 times a year. This enables the course to build significant momentum from one session to the next. You may not be able to do the course 3 times at first but it is highly recommended. And don't be discouraged if your first several courses are small or only have a few people. It can still be life changing if you only have one person. And it usually takes two years of running the course to establish momentum. Starting small can also help when there are limited resources.

For us, it works well to run the Bridge in the fall, winter, and spring. If you're in the U.S., you can start the fall course after the Labor Day holiday. Depending on when you start, you should be able to end the week before Thanksgiving or the week after. Because of the busyness of the holidays, we schedule our Celebration Dinner for the first week of Jan. This allows us as a church to use our Christmas Events (like our Christmas Concert, and Christmas Eve Service) to invite visitors to join us

for the Celebration Dinner where they can learn more about the Bridge course. The winter course then starts the 2nd or 3rd week of January and finishes up before Easter. We actually do our Winter course on Saturday mornings (10:30-noon) for a couple of reasons. Some people find it more convenient to come to Bridge on the weekend **and** it requires far less resources because we only do a continental breakfast. We schedule our Celebration Dinner the week immediately after Easter. This allows us as a church to use our Easter Events (like our Easter Egg Hunt, and Easter Service) to invite visitors to join us for the Celebration Dinner where they can learn more about the Bridge course. The spring course starts right after Easter and finishes before the end of June. We schedule the Celebration Dinner right away so that it falls before the July 4th holiday if possible.

The online talks do make it easy to adjust the schedule if you are running the course in a home, at school, in a facility, at work, with a few friends, or even one-on-one. But we've found that it can be a lot of new concepts and information for people to take in all at once which is why we suggest doing it weekly. Conversely, it can be hard to keep momentum going if you spread it out too much. A weekly schedule allows for time to process information and the opportunity to build relationships which is a key to making it successful.

BRIDGE STUDY

When the Bridge Course ends, we encourage each Bridge group to do their own Bridge Study. It's a 4 week Bible study with the option of extending it to 6 weeks. It's designed to help guests grow in understanding the importance of the church, the gospel, the Bible and prayer. These are things that are essential to survive and thrive in the Christian life. But it's important not to assume that everyone in your group is a Christian just because they've been through the Bridge Course. The Bridge Study allows us to come alongside of folks and discern where they are in their journey. We encourage the leaders to be flexible in where and when they do the Bridge Study. It's often best to meet in a home, but you can leave it up to the group. Some groups will meet in the home of a leader or assistant leader but it's great if one of the guests wants to volunteer their home as well. You can also meet at a restaurant or a coffee shop or anywhere the group wants to meet. Be flexible with the time you choose to meet. Some groups like to meet during the week, but others might meet on a Sunday after church. And share lunch together.

Each person will work through the Bridge Study guide. This requires them to do some Bible study work before each meeting. During the Bridge Course we are facilitating a very open discussion, but in the Bridge Study, we are free to be a little more direct and to seek to disciple folks and to model for them what small groups and biblical fellowship looks like. It's important to understand that it can still be a big jump for people to go right from the Bridge Course into the life of the church. Staying close to the guests that have come through Bridge is very important in this stage. There is a real enemy that wants to snatch and scorch and strangle the seed of the gospel. Be sure to follow up with each person in your group and look for opportunities to connect with them. The Bridge Study gives you a great context for this. After the Bridge Study they will hopefully be joining you at church. But look to connect them with your small group or another one that is close to where they live. We've found that taking guests to a small group is a helpful way to get them further connected to the life of the church. You can find the [Bridge Study](#) guides at the Bridge Store for either purchase or download.

Here are some Frequently Asked Questions

1. What materials do I need to run the Bridge Course?
 - All the videos are free and online at bridgecourse.org. Each guest should receive a Bible, Bridge manual and a How Good Are You booklet. You can find these resources at the Bridge Store for either purchase or download. We've found it's best for guests to have a physical manual, Bible and How Good Are You? booklet for easy access and readability.
2. How do I promote the course?
 - Promoting your course is very important. You can promote the course by doing church announcements or emails to the church leading up to the start of the course. We've found that showing the "Welcome to the Bridge Course" video during an announcement slot at church on Sunday morning is very effective. (You can find it on the home page at bridgecourse.org). You can also use one or two of the testimonies at bridgecourse.org/stories. This is also very effective and motivates the church to invite others.
 - We've also found that digital marketing has been exceptionally effective at targeting people in our local area who might have questions about life and are open to attending Bridge. Many of these folks would not be comfortable visiting a church service but are happy to access information about their questions online. We use a ministry called Digital Outreach. You can get more information at digitaloutreach.com.
 - You can also supply your church with invitations to the Bridge Course so they can hand them out to neighbors, co-workers, classmates, family members and friends. You can purchase Bridge invitations and other promotional material at our online store at bridgecourse.org/store.
3. What about child care?
 - We offer child care for most of the Bridge Courses we do. We call it Bridge Kids.
 - It's best to have child care in a separate space, not in the same room as Bridge.
 - It's also important to have quality people serve in this capacity.
 - We've seen God use our Bridge Kids ministry to draw parents back to the course week after week.
 - There does not need to be a fully structured time, but some prepared activities or crafts are helpful.
 - And it is imperative that you abide by all applicable state, province, or federal child protection guidelines and laws.
 - **Child safety is paramount and not optional.**
4. What if I have too many Christians in my group?
 - Because Bridge is designed for non-Christians, we don't want too many Christians in the group. Each group has 2 leaders and 2 assistant leaders already. And our goal in the discussion is to draw out the guests and not the Christians. Christians sharing or

quoting the Bible can effectively shut down non-Christians who can feel intimidated or unfamiliar with the concepts of the Bible. When a church member brings a guest or a Christian shows up, we give them a card that asks them to hold back their participation during the discussion so that the guests can answer the question. You can find that card at bridgecourse.org/resources. We've found that some guests really need their Christian friend to stay with them in the group but others only need that friend to sit with them for a week or two. If that's the case, the Christian friend might be able to come with their guest for a few weeks and then serve in other ways like with hospitality or child care.

5. Where can I run Bridge?

- You can run the Bridge anywhere you can get online. We've had people run the Bridge Course in homes, college dorms, senior care facilities, retirement communities, prisons, recovery houses, high schools, workplaces, coffee houses, border patrol facilities, and church buildings. The course can be used in most any setting. We have a woman in our church who was a caretaker for a 94 year old man. She asked this man if he would like to do Bridge. He said yes, so after her shift was over they would watch the video and discuss the questions. God opened his heart to the gospel and saved him several months before he went home to be with the Lord.

6. What do I do when people are asking about important life decisions?

- Don't be quick to give life advice. The goal of this course is not counseling or even to help them live a moral life. We also can't expect or require our guests to live like Christians when they are not Christians. Our focus is on the gospel and getting them to interact with the truths of the gospel. When God saves them, it will fundamentally change how they orient and live their lives.

7. Do I have to do the meal?

- You don't have to, but we've found that eating together really helps to forge friendships and create bonds. If you can't afford to do a meal you could consider doing dessert and coffee. In the winter we normally run a Saturday morning course where we provide a continental breakfast. We've run courses in Retirement Communities where only a light lunch is provided. In the workplace you could just have people bring their lunch. And if it's during the morning or afternoon you could just do coffee or snacks.
- For larger courses, it's helpful to provide a full dinner. We like to offer our best meals in the first few weeks as a way to encourage guests to stay with the course. You can ask volunteers to help make food or work with local restaurants to obtain free or discounted food. You can also ask guests to contribute some money to help offset the expense. We use low circular tables as coffee tables for each group and provide trays for our guests. This allows for flexibility to expand groups beyond what would fit at a table.

8. How do you do the singing?

- Singing may not work with small courses or in certain locations, but as the course grows and you expand to two groups or more, it's helpful to sing a couple of songs before the talk. We use one acoustic guitarist and simple worship songs. We don't want a full band. We sing two songs each week and use 7 of the same simple songs again and again, rotated throughout the weeks. We do not call it 'worship', but 'singing'. We don't ask people to stand or to sing if they're not comfortable. But we want them to see us singing to Christ and to hear biblically based song lyrics. We encourage our leaders not to be as expressive as they might on a Sunday morning because we don't want to intimidate or confuse our guest. The goal is to introduce the idea of singing to our guests. Only after the retreat do we ask people to stand during the singing.

9. What do I do when the course grows?

- If you're doing Bridge for more than one group, you will want to have a coordinator or administrator who is not leading a group. The coordinator will want to recruit volunteers for a support team that can help with set-up, food, clean up, on site management, child care and tear down.
- It's important that the support team be joyful and kind in their service always keeping the guests in mind. Guests will experience a taste of Christian community through the love and joy of the support team. The best support people are flexible, humble servants who take initiative, love God and one another.
- When doing Bridge for more than one group it's best to divide by age. It's also helpful to have leaders and assistant leaders that fit that age range. So if group 1 is 18-35 and group 2 is 36 and up, use leaders and assistant leaders that fit that age range.
- As the course grows consider using guests that have recently come through the course and surrendered their lives to Christ as assistant leaders. They are great at inviting new folks and connecting with those new to Bridge.
- For the first couple of week we pass around a sheet of paper to collect names and other info. Leaders should put their info on it as well so the guests feel more comfortable sharing their info. The information sheets are used also to create name tags. Starting the second week, we have name tags for everyone. We normally use stickers for them which are inexpensive and easy to use.

10. How do I encourage people to come to the retreat?

- During week three we announce the dates of the retreat to just get the guests familiar with the idea of participating in a retreat.
- During week four we show a promotional video of the retreat along with announcing the dates of the retreat.
- We also have sign up sheets on the table so that guests can sign up. We do this from week 4 through the retreat (usually week 7).
- During week five we have someone who has previously gone on the retreat give a testimony.
- During week six we give another retreat testimony.

- During week seven we inform guests that it's not too late to participate in the retreat even if they can only make some of it.
- If this is your first time doing a retreat you can find these videos and testimonies at bridgecourse.org/resources.
- During week eight after the retreat we do a retreat recap video for those who missed the retreat. We let the guests know that they can watch the retreat videos online to catch up on anything they may have missed.

11. What do I do differently when the retreat is off-site?

- On Friday night, we meet at a central place (usually where you meet for Bridge) and car pool if people are comfortable. Going together helps ensure that people don't get lost or distracted on the way to the retreat. It also helps build friendships in the group. Each group stops for a quick meal on the way to the retreat.
- When there are multiple groups you can do the seating in rows rather than circles if the meeting room is smaller. Welcome everyone, let them know what the schedule will be, when to be back in the meeting room for the morning meeting, and make any housekeeping announcements necessary about your location. If you have more than one group, it's helpful to have name tags with the schedule printed on one side and their name on the other.
- Before each session, tell a Bridge joke. Then have everyone stand and sing a song.
- Make sure there is a large enough screen to project the talks on. As soon as the talk is done, break down into discussion groups for no more than 30 minutes. It might be helpful to put groups in different rooms for the discussion if they are having trouble hearing one another.
- On Friday night we like to have snacks for people to enjoy after the session. If there are activities at your location, make use of them. We sometimes provide a family friendly movie, a bonfire with smores and play basketball or board games.
- During the retreat, you'll want to offer childcare, just as you do for the weekly Bridge meetings. Again, make sure it is a safe environment. Childcare should only be offered for the meeting and discussion times, and not for meal times, or free times.

12. How do I do registration?

- As your course grows, it can be really helpful to have a landing page on your web site with all of the information specific to your course like time and location. These landing pages give guests a place to register.
- Digital Outreach would be happy to help you set up these landing pages.
Digitaloutreach.com

13. How do I become an official Bridge Course and take advantage of our website search feature?

- Under Run Bridge you will see a button to register your course.
- Click that button and follow the directions.

14. What do I do with the books that are recommended with each talk?

- As your course begins to grow you can consider stocking some of the recommended books for people to buy or just to have.
- You can find the books that we recommend in your leaders manuals or under bridgecourse.org/resources.

15. What do I do if I have further questions?

- You can email us at info@bridgecourse.org

And be sure to go to the run bridge tab on our website where you will find most of this information. Thanks for going through the training. I pray that God uses your Bridge course to reach many with the gospel.