

Training

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.

WHAT ARE THE TALKS?

Week 1: How Good Are You?

Week 2: Why Doesn't God Just Forgive Everyone?

Week 3: How Can God Allow Suffering?

Week 4: How Could God Send People to Hell?

Week 5: Can We Really Trust the Bible?

Week 6: Is Jesus Really the Only Way?

Week 7: Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

Retreat 1: What Will Really Satisfy?

Retreat 2: Why Do We Need the Holy Spirit?

Retreat 3: What Does the Holy Spirit Do?

Retreat 4: Will I Make it to Heaven?

Week 8: Why Do We Matter?

Week 9: Is Christianity Really Worth It?

Week 10: Where Do We Go From Here?

Celebration Dinner: Who Really Needs God?

WHAT MAKES FOR A SUCCESSFUL COURSE?

- Prayer.
- “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.” (A.C Dixon)
- Evangelism and outreach.
- Following the guidelines.

- Befriending the guests during the course.
- Connecting with guests outside of Bridge.

WHAT IS A TYPICAL SCHEDULE?

5:30 – Prayer with leaders and assistant leaders

6:30 – Dinner or dessert

7:00 – Video

7:35 – Break

7:45 – Discussion Groups

8:15 – End

HOW DO THE DISCUSSIONS GROUPS WORK?

- Each group should have a leader, co-leader and two assistant leaders.
- Be sure to introduce yourself and co-leaders.
- Do the ice breaker on week one which is the name game.
- Go over the ground rules for discussion.
 - ✓ 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.
- Let guests know that it won't be a successful group without their thoughts and input.
- There is no pressure to participate and no question is too dumb.
- We want them to share what's on their minds.
- 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.
- Stick to the questions found in the manual under "Discussion Starters".
- 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 them.
- 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.
- When the assistant leader brings out a true answer, you can move onto the next question.
- 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.
- If it’s not working, move on to the next question.
- Assistant leaders to jumpstart the discussion if no one is answering.
- 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.
- Be sure to end the discussion on time.

WHAT HAPPENS ON THE RETREAT?

- The importance of the retreat cannot be overstated.
- The retreat is best scheduled after week 7 or 8.
- It usually takes place on a Friday night and ends on Saturday afternoon.
- The retreat provides a unique opportunity for guests to respond to the gospel and encounter God through prayer and ministry.
- It also provides a wonderful opportunity to connect relationally.

WHAT IS A TYPICAL RETREAT SCHEDULE?

FRIDAY NIGHT:

- 6:30 – Dinner
- 7:30 – Announcements and singing
- 7:40 – **What Will Really Satisfy?**
- 8:15 – Discussion
- 8:45 – Free Time

SATURDAY:

- 8:30 – Breakfast
- 9:00 – **Why Do We Need the Holy Spirit?**
- 9:45 – Discussion
- 10:15 – Coffee break

10:30 – **What Does the Holy Spirit Do?**

11:15 – Worship and prayer time

12:00 – Lunch and free time

2:00 – **Will I Make it to Heaven?**

2:30 – Discussion

3:00 – Singing and testimonies

3:30 – Group picture and end

WHAT IS THE 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 is usually a little nicer than the regular weekly Bridge meetings.
- After dinner we ask 1 or 2 guests that have recently taken the course to share their story.
- 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.

WHAT IS THE BEST 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.
- It works well to run the Bridge in the fall, winter, and spring.
- You can start the fall course in the middle of September.
- And 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 January.
- This allows us as a church to use our Christmas services 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 schedule our Celebration Dinner the week immediately after Easter.
- This allows us as a church to use our Easter events to invite visitors to join us for the Celebration Dinner.
- 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 July 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.

WHAT IS THE BRIDGE STUDY?

- When the Bridge Course ends, we encourage each Bridge group to do their own Bridge Study.
- It's a four 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.
- 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.
- Each person will work through the Bridge study guide.
- 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.

TIPS FOR LEADERS:

- Pray for your guests.
- Spend time looking at the leaders manual and circle 3 or 4 questions you hope to get to.
- Just stick to the discussion starters.
- Don't try to turn it into a Bible study or re-write the questions.
- Ask God to help you to love the guests with the love of Christ.
- Make sure people are comfortable.
- Look for ways to serve them.
- Don't do all the talking.
- Ask simple questions (what do you think? How do you feel?).
- Treat everyone with respect and interest.
- Be sure to give encouragement when someone shares something.
- Keep the focus on the gospel not on morality.
- Consider using the "How Good Are You?" booklet outside of the discussion times to help explain the gospel.

TIPS FOR ASSISTANT LEADERS:

- Pray for your guests.
- Focus on building relationships with the guests during the meeting.
- Look for times to connect with guests outside of Bridge.
- Don't answer any questions unless the leader looks to you.
- And when you do answer a question, don't give your answer to the group, answer the leader relating what you've found in your own life.

- You will probably have to lead at some point if the leader is sick or can't make it, so be prepared for this.
- It's best to have the assistant leaders take over if the leaders can't make it since they are already part of the group and have made connections with the guests.
- Provide feedback to the leaders on how to improve discussion.

Week 1:

Announcements:

- Make sure everyone has a Bridge Manual, "How Good Are You?" booklet, and an ESV Bible.
- Be sure to introduce yourself and co-leaders.
- Review the ground rules for discussion:
 - ✓ Show mutual respect (no put downs).
 - ✓ There is no such thing as a dumb question.
 - ✓ No one has to talk.
 - ✓ Only one person will talk at a time.
 - ✓ Please don't dominate conversation.
- Break the Ice
 - ✓ Start with the name game.
 - ✓ If you were stranded on a desert island what three things would you take with you?

Week 2:

Announcements:

- Review the ground rules again if there are new guests.

Week 3:

Announcements:

- Announce the date of the Bridge Retreat.

Week 4:

Announcements:

- Announce the date of the Bridge Retreat and show a promotional video of the retreat at bridgecourse.org/resources.
- Encourage the guests to come to the retreat.

Week 5:

Announcements:

- Show a testimony to promote the retreat at bridgecourse.org/resources.

- Take time to register guests for the retreat.

Week 6:

Announcements:

- Show a testimony to promote the retreat at bridgecourse.org/resources.
- Take time to register guests for the retreat.

Week 7:

Announcements:

- Coordinate details about the retreat.
- Inform guests it isn't too late to participate in the retreat even if they can only make part of it.

Retreat 1:

Announcements:

- See if there are any questions about the schedule or the retreat.

Week 8:

Announcements:

- Announce the date of the Celebration Dinner.
- Do a brief recap of the retreat for those who have missed it and let them know they can watch the retreat videos online to catch up.

Week 9:

Announcements:

- Announce the date of the Celebration Dinner and encourage guests to think about who they can invite.
- Announce the date for your Bridge study.

Week 10:

Announcements:

- Remind folks about the Celebration Dinner and the Bridge Study.