

A Strategy and Practice for In-depth Study Groups of The Urantia Book¹

Georges Michelson-Dupont, trustee, Urantia Foundation

Recloses, France



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Table of Contents

A Strategy and Practice for In-depth Study Groups of The Urantia Book	1
Why should we study <i>The Urantia Book</i> ?	3
What is a study group?	3
Why are study groups important?	3
Study Group Leaders and Teachers.....	4
Study groups are for whom?	4
The study group strategy	5
Questioning.....	5
Questioning about what?	5
Sharing.....	6
From Concepts to Experience.....	6
Cross-referencing.....	6
Preparing for a Study Group.....	7
Functioning of the Study Group	7
The Agenda of the Study Group.....	8
Conclusion	8

Why should we study *The Urantia Book*?

When you open *The Urantia Book* to study, you have a “rendezvous” with God and the spiritual forces that conspire to help you “grasp the reality of spiritual values and to comprehend the philosophy of universe meanings.” This is not flowery rhetoric, this is an experiential reality: Do you realize its importance?

A Melchizedek of Nebadon exhorts us to engage in the study of *The Urantia Book*:

“It is not enough that the ascending mortal should know something of the relations of Deity to the genesis and manifestations of cosmic reality; he should also comprehend something of the relationships existing between himself and the numerous levels of existential and experiential realities, of potential and actual realities. Man's terrestrial orientation, his cosmic insight, and his spiritual directionization are all enhanced by a better comprehension of universe realities and their techniques of interassociation, integration, and unification.” (1162.1) 106:0.1

The Urantia Papers. The papers, of which this is one, constitute the most recent presentation of truth to the mortals of Urantia. (1008.2) 92:4.9

What is a study group?

A Urantia Book study group consists of individuals willing to study and share in a fraternal and truth-seeking atmosphere the teachings in order to practice them in their daily lives.

The study group location should be conducive to study and sharing. The time and frequency of the study group should be fixed.

How long should a study group last? Many of them meet for about two hours once a week. The experience of our study group in France bears out that a full day of study can be very productive.

A study group should have a moderator and a “teacher,” preferably a long-time reader with good understanding of the book and with the skill to stimulate discussion.

The moderator or the teacher would do well to interview prospective attendees in order to determine their motivation for wanting to attend the study group.

Finally, rules approved by the members of the study group can be helpful. These rules might pertain to such matters as self-restraint with regard to dominating discussions.

Why are study groups important?

Although religion is a personal experience, the natural outcomes are social.

The reading of *The Urantia Papers* by oneself is certainly important as an introduction to the teachings of the book but usually thereafter comes the desire to meet with other readers to share “the pearl of great price.” Most readers feel the need to expand their understanding and to share their intellectual perspectives and spiritual lives in a friendly and private venue.

Urantia Book study groups are essential for at least the following reasons:

- Study groups are the place where religionists can share their faith with others and can build the social brotherhood of believers by intimate association. The progress of one study group attendee can benefit the other attendees, and the progress of the group can benefit each member of the group. One for all and all for one.
- Study groups offer a friendly and secure environment to welcome new readers and to study the book with other readers.
- Study groups are a place where team spirit is fostered and where creative teamwork is exercised.
- Study groups develop a dynamic for growth, a cross-fertilizing of ideas and ideals conducive for training teachers and leaders.
- Study groups are needed, if not essential, for a secure dissemination of the Urantia Revelation worldwide.
- Study groups represent the next progressive stage in the evolution of religion. This next progressive stage, which moves beyond sectarian institutionalization led by trained clergy who administer religious doctrines, is revealed in *The Urantia Book*: each personality is a child of God with the gifted and indwelt ability to directly experience and perceive religious truth and spiritual values.

Study Group Leaders and Teachers

Teachers and leaders are long-time experienced individuals with the teachings and doctrines of *The Urantia Book*, wise individuals who desire to serve the readership without imposing their point of view. In no way are these individuals “gurus” or “masters” with self-appointed authority seeking for personal aggrandizement or a paid position. Their motivation is a natural result of having found God and having acquired the desire to be of service.

“Religious desire is the hunger quest for divine reality. Religious experience is the realization of the consciousness of having found God. And when a human being does find God, there is experienced within the soul of that being such an indescribable restlessness of triumph in discovery that he is impelled to seek loving service-contact with his less illuminated fellows, not to disclose that he has found God, but rather to allow the overflow of the welling-up of eternal goodness within his own soul to refresh and ennoble his fellows. Real religion leads to increased social service.” (1121.6) 102:3.4

Study groups are for whom?

It is an error to believe that *Urantia Book* study groups are only for highly educated people. The only requirement is that the study group attendee must believe in God. Also, it helps to have courage, patience, and open-mindedness. We should accept that not everyone is ready for it.

Remember that God only reveals himself to his children at the times they *wholeheartedly* desire to know him regardless of their education. It is a relationship of love between two personalities and not an intellectual accomplishment.

The study group strategy

There is a difference between a reader group and a study group.

A successful study group is based on the following principles:

1. Questioning,
2. Sharing,
3. From concepts to experience.
4. Cross-referencing.

Questioning

After the reading of paragraphs, the leader-facilitator might ask questions to stimulate discussion.

- *Questioning* transforms a passive reader into an active seeker and makes it easier for the Thought Adjuster and the Spirit of Truth to participate.
- *Questioning* is non-invasive, non-coercive, non-destructive, non-interpretive, and quite Jesusonian. It is respectful of participant's free will and does not force nor control the mind.
- *Questioning* has the potential to open the mind to a new perspective.
- *Questioning* encourages sharing and brotherhood.
- *Questioning* enhances the possibility that the study group members will discover answers for and by themselves.

Questioning about what?

A Melchizedek of Nebadon stated the following:

“Because your world is generally ignorant of origins, even of physical origins, it has appeared to be wise from time to time to provide instruction in cosmology.”

“While statements with reference to cosmology are never inspired, such revelations are of immense value in that they at least transiently clarify knowledge by:

1. The reduction of confusion by the authoritative elimination of error.
2. The co-ordination of known or about-to-be-known facts and observations.
3. The restoration of important bits of lost knowledge concerning epochal transactions in the distant past.
4. The supplying of information which will fill in vital missing gaps in otherwise earned knowledge.
5. Presenting cosmic data in such a manner as to illuminate the spiritual teachings contained in the accompanying revelation” (1110:3) 101:4.10

Sharing

“Spiritual growth is mutually stimulated by intimate association with other religionists. Love supplies the soil for religious growth.” (1094:2) 100:0.2

1. The *sharing* of answers and the exchanging of ideas 1) provides for opportunities to hear other points of view, and 2) promotes good will.
2. The *sharing* of spiritual matters and experiences with others, combined with the support of the Thought Adjuster and the Spirit of Truth, fosters soul growth.
3. The *sharing* of personal interpretations enhances comprehension of the material.
4. *Sharing* enhances the interest and holds the attention of study group attendees. In addition, the spiritual presence of our unseen friends, our Thought Adjusters, and the Spirit of Truth contributes to effecting a spiritual transformation, and participants are not tired at the end of the day.

From Concepts to Experience

Recall that in the second paragraph on page 1 of the Foreword, a Divine Counselor states that the purpose of *The Urantia Book* is “to expand cosmic consciousness and enhance spiritual perception.” The expansion of cosmic consciousness is more intellectual in nature. And often we lose the significance of intellectual concepts because we do not connect them with our day-to-day life. During study group discussions, the study group leader-facilitator should do his or her best to associate the intellectual concepts with the real life of the study group attendees by bringing the teachings to the experiential level.

To illustrate this approach, let us take the following example: The concept of “mind spiritualization” is somewhat vague.

First, using thought-provoking questions, the leader-facilitator brings the study group attendees to the realization that mind spiritualization involves a day-to-day exercise of choice between the egoism of the animal nature and the altruism of spiritual nature, between the impulses of the animal nature and the meanings and values of the spiritual nature.

Second, once the concept is linked with the daily life of the study group attendees, the concept becomes an experiential reality. The leader-facilitator will expand the concept and experience from the individual level to the universe level by discussing the consequences and cosmic responsibilities of our choices—relative to the Universal Father, the Thought Adjuster, the Spirit of Truth, and the Supreme Being,

Cross-referencing

To make clear the meaning of a paragraph, it might be helpful to refer to other paragraphs dealing with same topic.

For instance, the following paragraph explains the survival technique, but the complexity of the terminology makes the paragraph somewhat difficult to understand.

In the inner experience of man, mind is joined to matter. Such material-linked minds cannot survive mortal death. The technique of survival is embraced in those adjustments of the human will and those transformations in the mortal mind whereby such a God-conscious intellect gradually becomes spirit taught and eventually spirit led. This evolution of the human mind from matter association to spirit union results in the transmutation of the potentially spirit phases of the mortal mind into the morontia realities of the immortal soul. Mortal mind subservient to matter is destined to become increasingly material and consequently to suffer eventual personality extinction; mind yielded to spirit is destined to become increasingly spiritual and ultimately to achieve oneness with the surviving and guiding divine spirit and in this way to attain survival and eternity of personality existence. (26.1) 1:3.7

After the above paragraph has been read, the leader-facilitator might facilitate understanding of the paragraph by cross-referencing as follows:

“Those adjustments of the human will” refers to the innate capacity of choice of the personality’s free-will between the relative right and wrong. By reading (191.7) 16:6.4, one finds additional explanation of the mechanism of the Cosmic Mind in personality.

Also, by reading (194.7) 16:8.7, one finds the different situations in which the free will of the personality is involved:

“Those transformations in the mortal mind” refers to the acceptance of the mortal mind to cooperate with the Thought Adjuster through repetitive choice of right versus wrong, the altruistic urge versus the egoistic inclination. In Paper 110, section 3, a Solitary Messenger explains how to improve cooperation with the Thought Adjuster.

“The transmutation of the potentially spirit phases of the mortal mind into the morontia realities of the immortal soul” refers to the mechanism used by the Thought Adjuster to transfer the spiritual content of human thoughts to the morontia soul. (1193.4) 108:6.5

Preparing for a Study Group

The in-depth study of the Urantia Revelation, like the study of anything, requires self-discipline on the part of the study group attendees and especially the leader-facilitator.

Well before the meeting of the study group, the leader-facilitator has some homework to do:

1. The preparation of several thought-provoking and stimulating questions.
2. The preparation of a list of words to be explained during the meeting of the study group.
3. The selection of cross-referenced paragraphs related to the material to be studied.
4. The preparation of a list of intellectual concepts to be discussed.
5. The recommendation that attendees read the text in advance and write down questions and comments.

Functioning of the Study Group

A well-organized and administered study group has written rules of conduct accepted by all of the members.

The reading of a paragraph or paragraphs is followed by questions, comments, and discussion.

The leader-facilitator leads the discussion, asking questions that he or she has prepared in advance and making sure that the discussion stays on topic.

With the help of the leader-facilitator:

- Terminology is clarified.
- Ideas are discussed.
- Concepts are analyzed and expanded with the aid of cross-references when appropriate.
- Study group attendees share their personal experiences in such a way as “to expand cosmic consciousness and enhance spiritual perception.”

The Agenda of the Study Group

The study group starts with two or three minutes of meditative silence at the end of which one of the attendees might say or pray something to end the meditation.

Then, a moderator is designated. The moderator’s role is to designate who will speak and to ensure that each attendee has the opportunity to speak.

The leader-facilitator invites someone to read the first paragraph and to continue reading until someone has a question or comment or the leader-facilitator has a question. All the attendees are encouraged to participate in the discussion or with their questions or comments.

Have a 15 minutes recess in the morning and afternoon sessions.

Conclusion

My purpose in writing this article was to offer you some ideas and techniques based on my years of experience leading study groups and seminars.

I wanted to give you some ideas as to how to make a study group successful and inviting—an place where study group attendees enjoy sharing, discussing, finding mutual inspiration, and building human brotherhood.

On page 17, a Divine Counselor states the following: “In making these presentations about God and his universe associates, we have selected as the basis of these papers more than one thousand human concepts representing the highest and most advanced planetary knowledge of spiritual values and universe meanings.”

The revelatory commission delivered the best possible revelation, long before the day of its world-wide mission, with the hope that individuals would be attracted and transformed and would become the living disseminators of the teachings worldwide. Are we apostles, disciples, actors, or just spectators of the fifth epochal revelation? It belongs to each of us to find an answer to this question in conformity with our personal motivation and desire to participate in this extraordinary adventure.

We who are exposed to the teachings of *The Urantia Book* must be actively involved in our communities of readers. It becomes our responsibility to foster and promote a worldwide proliferation of efficient and attractive study groups wherever and whenever we can, but the question is: How do we do it?

When looking at living human cells, we observe that they multiply by division. A study group is like a cell; when the study group attendees number more than, say, 12 or 13, it is the time for a division. By the time a study group reaches its “critical mass,” teachers, leaders, and facilitators need to start a new study group. Indeed, study groups are like sacks of grain; until the grain seed is disseminated, no harvest is possible.

Finally, study groups are the crucibles for the establishment of communities of believers from which the gospel of Jesus—the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man—will spread out into the world.