How to be Good
By Nick Hornby (Viking, 2001)

Marriage
Being Good
Being Bad
Guilt
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Using Connect Bible Studies

What Are These Studies?

These innovative home group Bible studies have two aims. Firstly, we design them to enable group members to dig into their Bibles and get to know them better. Secondly, we aim to help members to think through topical issues in a Biblical way. Hence the studies are based on a current popular book or film etc. The issues raised by these are the subjects for the Bible studies.

We do not envisage that all members will always be able to watch the films or read the books, or indeed that they will always want to. A summary is always provided. However, our vision is that knowing about these films and books empowers Christians to engage with friends and colleagues about them. Addressing issues from a Biblical perspective gives Christians confidence that they know what they think, and can bring a distinctive angle to bear in conversations.

The studies are produced in sets of four — i.e. four weeks’ worth of group Bible Study material. These are available in print published by Scripture Union from your local Christian bookshop, or via the Internet at www.connectbiblestudies.com. Anyone can sign up for a free monthly email newsletter that announces the new studies and provides other information (sign up on the Connect Bible Studies website at www.connectbiblestudies.com/uk/register).

How Do I Use Them?

We design the studies to stimulate creative thought and discussion within a Biblical context. Each section therefore has a range of questions or options from which you as leader may choose in order to tailor the study to your group’s needs and desires. Different approaches may appeal at different times, so the studies aim to supply lots of choice. Whilst adhering to the main aim of corporate Bible study, some types of questions may enable this for your group better than others — so take your pick.

Group members should be supplied with the appropriate sheet that they can fill in, each one also showing the relevant summary.
Leader’s notes contain:

1. Opening Questions
These help your group settle in to discussion, whilst introducing the topics. They may be straightforward, personal or creative, but are aiming to provoke a response.

2. Summary
We suggest the summary of the book or film will follow now, read aloud if necessary. There may well be reactions that group members want to express even before getting on to the week’s issue.

3. Key Issue
Again, either read from the leader’s notes, or summarised.

4. Bible Study
Lots of choice here. Choose as appropriate to suit your group — get digging into the Bible. Background reading and texts for further help and study are suggested, but please use the material provided to inspire your group to explore their Bibles as much as possible. A concordance might be a handy standby for looking things up. A commentary could be useful too. The idea is to help people to engage with the truth of God’s word, wrestling with it if necessary but making it their own.

Don’t plan to work through every question here. Within each section the two questions explore roughly the same ground but from different angles or in different ways. Our advice is to take one question from each section. The questions are open-ended so each ought to yield good discussion — though of course any discussion in a Bible study may need prompting to go a little further.

5. Implications
Here the aim is to tie together the perspectives gained through Bible study and the impact of the book or film. The implications may be personal, a change in worldview, or new ideas for relating to non-churchgoers. Choose questions that adapt to the flow of the discussion.

6. Prayer
Leave time for it! We suggest a time of open prayer, or praying in pairs if the group would prefer. Encourage your members to focus on issues from your study that had a particular impact on them. Try different approaches to prayer — light a candle, say a prayer each, write prayers down, play quiet worship music — aim to facilitate everyone to relate to God.

7. Background Reading
You will find links to some background reading on the Connect Bible Studies website: www.connectbiblestudies.com/

8. Online Discussion
You can discuss the studies online with others on the Connect Bible Studies website at www.connectbiblestudies.com/discuss/

Scriptures referred to are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV), Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Other Bible translations can, of course, be used for the studies and having a range of translations in a group can be helpful and useful in discussion.
How to be Good
Nick Hornby (Viking, 2001)

Part One: Marriage

You see, I don’t want a divorce. OK, I know I did, before, when I didn’t know what it meant and I didn’t know what I felt and I didn’t know how awful the prospect would seem — but now I don’t, and I’m (almost) positive I’d do (almost) anything to get my marriage back on track.
(Katie, p. 50)

Please read the Using Connect Bible Studies before leading a Bible study using this material.

Opening Questions

Choose one of these questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How did you react to How To Be Good?</th>
<th>Is marriage still valid in the twenty-first century?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Describe a married couple you admire and say why.</td>
<td>As a group, list ten characteristics of a good marriage.</td>
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Summary

Katie can no longer remember the exact moment when things started to turn sour in her marriage to David, but it is clear that there has been a progressive deterioration in communication. She now tells their story with apathetic bitterness: ‘The row isn’t worth talking about, really: it’s just a row, between two people who actually don’t like each other enough not to row,’ (p. 21).

David’s cynical demeanour has taken its toll on Katie, who resorts to a brief affair in order to feel some human warmth. This leads her to question whether she wants to stay married to David and when the opportunity arises, she asks him for a divorce. David does not want a divorce until he finds out about Katie’s affair. However, following a dramatic change of heart, he realises that he must take his share of the blame: ‘I haven’t loved you enough, and I’m really sorry. I do love you, and I haven’t communicated that properly or positively’ (p. 54). Although he wants to stay married now, David’s conversion brings new problems so Katie moves into a bedsit. Here is the solitude she has been yearning for — she has time to read a book, listen to CDs and simply be Katie, rather than Katie the doctor, wife or mother. What she cannot escape is the need to make a decision about her marriage. In the end, she
decides to go home and carry on, but is uncertain that her future will ever bring the satisfaction she longs for.

**Key Issue: Marriage**

The plot of *How To Be Good* revolves around the relationship struggles between Katie and her husband, making marriage a big issue in this book. With the different crises they face, and the lifestyle changes they make, their marriage is under pressure. Katie and David bicker their way through the opening chapters showing all the telltale signs of a marriage suffering stress. This conflict — and Katie’s affair — seem typical of today’s society. So our studies begin with marriage as a key issue. Is marriage just a semi-useful human convention, or is there a biblical foundation for it? What does it mean to be committed to a long-term relationship? How should marital conflicts be handled? And how do we deal with conflict in other close relationships? At the end of the book, Katie thinks she has found an answer in her need for refreshment and renewal — recharging her batteries seems to help to get life and marriage back on track. Does this really work, and what is a biblical way to maintain a marriage?

**Bible Study**

*Choose one question from each section.*

1. **Ignition — getting married**

   ...getting married — or finding a partner whom we will want to spend our lives with and have children by — is on our agenda. It’s something we know we will do one day, and if you take that away from us then we are left with promotions at work and the possibility of a winning lottery ticket, and it’s not enough …

   (Katie, p. 86)

   **Leaders:** You may like to bear in mind Ephesians 5:31–32 as you discuss these questions — it may add an extra dimension to your thinking.

   ♦ Read Genesis 2:18–25. Why did God make woman? What is marriage for? What is the reason referred to in verse 24?

   ♦ Read Matthew 19:3–12. Why does Jesus take marriage so seriously? Is marriage for everyone?

   **Leaders:** The focus here should be on marriage rather than divorce. Obviously, this is a big issue for many people, however, so we have included some useful links on the background reading page on the Connect Bible Studies website (see below).

2. **Long distance — commitment**

   *This is not the life I chose for myself. Except that is not true, either, because I did choose, I suppose, when I said that I would marry David for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live … What did I think I was choosing, when I married David? What do any of us think we are