

Towards Better Bible Studies Training

What makes a good group Bible Study?

Everyone in the group enjoying seeing for ourselves truths from the Bible and applying them to our lives through guided-discussion

Aim of a group Bible Study:

To help people to see for themselves what the Bible is saying, what it means for them and to encourage right responses

Leading a Bible study is somewhere between authoritative public Bible teaching (preaching) and aimless “facilitating” / neutral chairmanship

Not the blind leading the blind

Something should be “taught” / discovered from the Bible. The study has an agenda! The leader should prepare and aim for the group to see certain things

Not a monologue sermon nor a free for all – group interaction – sharing insights

Mainly draw out the meaning by asking questions – pass the ball across the goal and allow other people to score – aim for “aha! I see!” moments as people discover things for themselves

We hope to model right understanding of the Bible so that people will be more equipped to read it for themselves

What is taught should be from the Bible, clear, true and useful (applied)

At the end we should know what the point of it all was!

These 2 sessions: (1) How to prepare a Bible Study
 (2) How to lead a Bible Study

Session 1: getting in right - understanding the Bible

Session 2: getting it across - “teaching the Bible” through a group discussion

Lots we could say (finish by 9:30pm)! We might have time to revisit some of these things next week

Progress not perfection! Practice makes better!

I’ll give you a copy of my notes at the end

Some Tips on *How To Prepare a Bible Study*

Pray

Read the text lots, slowly

Read different **translations** – more literal translations such as NASB and ESV useful e.g. for spotting repeated words – paraphrases e.g. Living Bible, Message give readable interpretation
(What version will group members use? KJV? NIV? – make sure you check your final questions against that version)

Write lots

Photocopy / print out the text with wide margins and make notes – mark text: circle, underline, highlight, coloured pens, link things up, use symbols (?, !) etc. – interact lots with the text
The Bible text can be found online at www.biblegateway.com – you can move bits of text around etc.

Don't depend too much on the **chapter, paragraph & verse divisions or headings** as these are not part of the original inspired text

Don't depend too much or too quickly on **pre-prepared resources or commentaries**

What are your **first impressions** of the passage?

What initially strikes you about it?

Expect the unexpected – look out for surprises

Work hard at things that are puzzling

(We want to change in the light of the passage and not just confirm our prejudices, so it's worth thinking about things that we wouldn't naturally have said like this)

What is distinctive about this text? What would we miss out on if this text weren't in the Bible? (May be something to focus on)

Ask lots of questions of the passage:

3 Types of questions (for preparation & in the study group itself):

Q1) Observation questions – What? – what does it say?

Don't assume you know what it says!

E.g. Why does verse 29 say that the expert in the law asked the question he puts to Jesus in that verse?
(Luke 10)

Q2) Interpretation questions – So what? – what does it mean?

E.g. Why do you think Jesus might have chosen a priest and a Levite as the characters in this story?

Q3) Application questions – Now what? – what does it mean for us today?

How should we respond? How should our study affect what we think, believe, feel, say, do, or don't think, believe, feel, say, do?

E.g. What might it mean in practice to “go and do likewise” (Luke 10:27)?

On the whole, keep **the main thing** the main thing
(Make sure you can see the wood the trees make)

What is the **overall thrust** of the passage?

What is the big thing that God is saying to us here?

Your study must at least be congruent with the main thrust of the passage, even if you sometimes concentrate on some of the details

Work on writing sound-bites: a **Summary Sentence / Theme Sentence** and an **Aim Sentence**.

The Summary Sentence should give the main point of the passage: e.g. "God is the loving ruler of the world who perfectly provides for his people"

The Aim Sentence should describe our response to the passage: e.g. "At the end of this study I want people to trust in God for their needs rather than be fearful about the future"

What are the boundaries of this **section**?

Is there a **structure / pattern** to the passage?

How does the material divide up?

Is there an **inclusion** – a repetition of something at the beginning and the end of a section, like bookends?

E.g. "the obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5; 16:27); "the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3, 10)

Are there **structural markers** in the passage? E.g. mentions of time or places – John 1:29, 35, 43, "the next day"

Are there **parallels**? "Parallelism" (cf. rhymes in English poetry) in Old Testament poetry esp. in the Psalms – e.g. Ps 24:1-2 – saying the same thing twice – or something different / extra – a contrast (Prov 29:1)

Chiasms – E.g. ABA or ABCDCBA etc. – stresses what's in the middle (D) – e.g. Genesis 11; Daniel 2-7; John 1:1-2; Jonah 1:4-15

Is something inserted in a kind of **sandwich**? E.g. Jesus' cursing of the fig tree with the visit to the Temple (Mark 11:12-21)

For a narrative type text: Who are the **characters** here?

What are the **scenes**?

Can you give the **sections headings**? (Good headings will have content. Maybe imperatives. Avoid attachment to the allure of alliteration's aidful art)

What **genre** / type of writing is this?

(We would read a phone book, a travel guide, a novel & a love letter in different ways)

Some Biblical genres: Law, Prophets, Writings; Gospel, parables, letter, history, poetry / song, wisdom, proverbs, apocalyptic

Are there any metaphors / imagery here?

What is the **mood / tone** of the passage?

How can I reflect this as I teach it?

How will this shape our response? E.g. rejoice that God is always with us; mourn over our sin

Who do you identify with in the story? Why? Who are we meant to identify with?

E.g. David in Goliath story a better picture of Jesus than of us

Are some characters examples / models (Hebrews 11) or warnings?

Does the **narrator comment** in any way? E.g. Matthew 2:15; Genesis 25:34; Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25

By whom was this written?

To whom was this written?

When was this written?

Where was this written?

Why was this written?

Does the author explicitly state his purpose at all? E.g. John 20:31; 1 John 5:13; Luke 1:1-4

What situations / problems are / seem to be being addressed? E.g. 1 Corinthians 1:10-12; 3:1-4; 4:6-10; 6:1, 6-8; 11:17-18

Is there a **key / summary verse** in the text?

Are there **repeated words or ideas**?

What are the **“link” words / phrases**? How do they show the logic of the passage? (so, for this reason, consequently, then, but, in order that, because, therefore, since, when, nevertheless, just as, if etc.) What is the “therefore” therefore?

Are there any **words** that you don’t understand (or that people in the group might not understand)? E.g. “propitiation” (1 John 4:10)

Look up any key words in a concordance or search on-line. How does this author seem to use this word? How do other Bible writers use it?

Are any of the words used in a special sense by this author / in the Bible? Cf. “hope” in English might imply quite a bit of uncertainty; “hope” in the Bible has much more confidence

Does the author use the same word in different ways? E.g. ? Paul’s use of “law” (*nomos*) in Romans – law, Law of Moses (Torah), principle

Do different places use words in different ways? Cf. “called” in Jude 1, 1 Cor 1:23-24; Matthew 22:14

Are the **places** mentioned significant? Look up any place names in a Bible atlas & dictionary

What are the associations of these places elsewhere in the Bible? E.g. Egypt, Sinai / Horeb, Jerusalem

Do the **names** (1 Sam 4:21; Isaiah 8:1; Hosea 2:23; Matthew 1:21) have significant meanings?

Context – a text without a context is a con!

“Its amazing what he got out of that text” – did he put it in?!

“Proof-texting” - Danger of using the text as a pretext

What comes before **and after**?

Consider **“the bible onion”** – word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, section, book, genre / time, testament, Bible

Place in time – e.g. before or after the call of Abraham, monarchy, exile, AD70 – Fall of Jerusalem etc.

Place in salvation-history – before or after Christ?

Get to know a Bible overview – see Vaughan Roberts, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the story-line of the Bible* (Leicester, IVP, 2003), pp149, 157-8

E.g. what might the significance of the promised land be for a Christian (Hebrews 11:16)?

Is this a prophecy about something already fulfilled or yet to be fulfilled?

How does this text relate to Jesus? (Luke 24)

E.g. Old Testament passages about the temple might tell us something about Jesus since he is the New Temple (John 2:21); Exodus as picture of redemption from slavery to sin, Jesus as Passover Lamb

Does this text **allude to or quote** other Biblical texts? (E.g. Ps 95 referring to Ex 17; Luke 4 quoting Isaiah 61; Mk 12 alluding to Isaiah 5)

Look up any of these texts in context. How did the original author use these words? Does the author mean to recall more than the actual words he is quoting?

Is this text **alluded to or quoted** by other Biblical texts? (E.g. Heb 3 quoting Ps 95)

How does **the rest of the Bible** inform my understanding of this text?

Since the whole Bible is God's word, no contradictions because God doesn't contradict himself – different passages complimentary

Article 7 of the Church of England: "The Old Testament is not contrary to the New"

Article 20 of the Church of England: "... neither may it [the church] so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another"

Understand what is more difficult in the light of what is clearer

What are the applications of this text? (James 1:22-25)

Don't be in too much of a rush to apply the text – remember we are not the ancient Israelites, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, the Rich Young Man, the Apostle Paul or the Corinthians

Is what goes on in this passage normative for us? Description or prescription?

Is the application made explicit by the author? "I am writing this so that..."

Are there any imperatives in the text?

Are there commands to obey, warnings to heed, promises to trust etc?

What are the applications:

to individuals

to different types of people

to non-Christians

to Christian

to humble / fearful – how does it comfort / encourage?

to proud / complacent – how does it challenge etc.

to families

to our group

to our church

to others / to everyone / to the world

Applications: to the mind – think differently

to the heart / emotions / feelings

to the will

How will it change what we think, say, do?

What should we **not** think, feel, say, do / repent of in the light of this text?

What can we turn into prayer (ask God's help with)/ praise (thanks)?

How does the passage address our motives?

How does it motivate us to the right response?

Some Tips on *How To Lead A Group Bible Study*

(Over by 9:30pm)

Any questions from session 1?

(I'll give you my notes at the end)

This session: assuming you have studied the text and prepared theme / summary and aim sentences.

You should lead the study in such a way that your aim is achieved and group members grasp the main point of the passage.

You may have to “**kill your babies**” / leave things on the study desk – don't bother them with extraneous details, e.g. do you *need* to mention the Greek and Hebrew you looked into? (de-skilling for them)

Try to model how we can study the Bible for ourselves in your group study.

Main technique: **asking questions** of the group (just as you asked questions of the text in your own study)

Remember the aims of a group Bible study / what makes a good group Bible study.

Think through how you'll do every different aspect of the session to best achieve your aims.

More than one way to skin a cat or lead a Bible study!

Share wisdom / experience / mistakes!

Be prepared but be flexible.

You may have got the passage wrong – be open to learn from others in the group.

Know your group! What will work well with them?

Use material others have produced selectively. (Don't read out the homegroup notes questions with gaps!)

Remember the aim is to understand and apply the Bible not complete the study guide or answer its questions!

Do **group members prepare in advance**? Tell them what the passages are.

Set exercises or questions. Email me for an electronic version of the homegroup notes – QQ only.

Begin and end on time – but aim for a relaxed atmosphere – don't be too rigid.

Can be helpful for group to know end time.

Plan how long to spend on each part – e.g. jot down in your notes where you hope to be 15 mins in, half way through the study, ten mins before the end etc. What to miss out if short of time.

Some possible timings:

7:45pm – arrivals, coffee, chat

8pm – share prayer points for one another and time of open group prayer

- 8:15pm – pray for study, read passage and discuss
- 9pm – open time of group prayer and praise in the light of the passage
- 9:15pm – formal end – people know they can get away or stay and chat

People might not want to come if it drags on too late on a school night!

Hosting / hospitality – a good welcome

Is the venue helpful?

Seating arrangements – can everyone make eye contact with everyone else?

Does everyone have a Bible? (Have a couple of spares available)

What **Bible versions** are people using?

Same translation – (homegroup notes prepared with NIV in mind) – check your questions don't depend on a wording they haven't got in their translation

Other translations helpful – no infallible translation – different perspectives

Do people know how to find the Bible passage? Give page no. if necessary, if people have the same version. Encourage people to use the contents page / a bookmark with the books of the Bible on it.

Memory aids: God's Electric Power Company; Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians; All the Ts, 1 & 2 Thess., 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus etc.

Begin and end with **prayer** – we depend on God's help to understand his Word.

Review the previous session – especially if this study depends on the last one.

How did people do on the applications since then?

How will you **read the passage**?

All in one go, or in sections, or all first then repeat sections?

(Silently? – probably not a good idea, but maybe if it were extremely long, to save time / to reflect on it)

One person or a number? (In parts for a narrative – Dramatised Bible)

(Is everyone happy to read? Eyesight / dyslexia / shyness? – “I've asked Daisy to read”, so people know they won't be picked on in front of everyone)

A verse or paragraph or logical section each? (write down on a bit of paper for people what verses you want them to read)

Introduce the study

Maybe ask a question before looking at the Bible

Something that will bring out what people think before the study – at the end talk about how this is challenged / qualified by the study – e.g. “how do Christians tend to use the word “fellowship”?” / “How can you know if someone is a real Christian?” / “where do you or other people look for confidence?”

Launch into the topic – get people talking.

Bring out the importance / relevance of what we are going to be thinking about – get people to talk about a need that the text then addresses.

Is any background information necessary? Be succinct.

Does anything in the passage require special explanation? E.g., “propitiation”. Will someone else be able to explain it?

You could ask them what questions strike them about the passage and work on those!

Will you refer to or ask people (one person or everyone?) to **look up other passages**?
Avoid parallelomania. Make sure you study this passage.

Different types of questions:

Ask some of the questions that you asked of the text which seemed revealing. E.g. what are the repeated words in this passage? What idea comes in vv1 and 10?
Could give people a photocopy and highlighter pens.

Some easy questions; some stretching questions – not all too patronising and basic nor too hard.
If it's an easy, straightforward question, people might need reassurance it's not a trick question! (Flag up straightforward questions)

Try to have **logic and sequence** to questions – build on previous questions.
Signal to people new topics / a change of approach / tack.

A mixture of **open and closed questions**.

Closed questions: one right answer – yes / no / Jesus!

Open questions: more than one right answer

Signal whether you are looking for an answer from the text or not. Cf. “What does John say...” / “Can you think of any ways...”?

Avoid “guess-what’s-in-my-mind” questions.

Use observation, interpretation and application questions.

Get people to summarize or paraphrase. If people simply read out the text, ask them to put it in their own words.

Ask people to spot similarities and differences, list positives and negatives etc. Give them a table to fill in (e.g. Mt 13, soil type, response, meaning).

Point people to particular verses if necessary.

Don't be scared of silence. **Give people time to think.**

Avoid answering your own questions.

Be ready to **re-word questions**.

Listen very carefully to what people say – genuinely interact with what people say.

Don't pretend / assume someone gave the answer you wanted – don't put words into their mouth.

Ask people to clarify / expand. Why do you say that?

Try to summarize what they said and ask them if that's what they meant.

Let people ask their (relevant-ish!) questions.

Allow differences of opinion.

“In essential unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity”.

Allow mistakes. Don't be too crushing of wrong answers!

Be willing to challenge / correct wrong ideas: don't just blandly endorse everything that's said.

“Perhaps” / “maybe”! If someone says something that's not definitely wrong!

Be **honest and open** yourself and others might be more likely to be so. Admit weakness.

Admit it if you don't know something.

Offer to do some research and report back next time if something is important.

Make them look at the text! Its meant to be a BIBLE study!

“If you say it, prove it” - Where did you get that from in the passage? - Can you point us to a verse for that?

The Bible is the Court of Appeal!

Group dynamics – how would you map it out? Aim for guided interaction of group with the text.

Not monologue / sermon.

Are some people left out?

Do some people dominate?

Sit next to the dominating person and avoid eye-contact!

Icebreaker games / activities – do something social / fun / practical together.

Use non-verbal communication - eye contact and body language.

Address questions to individuals? “Anyone on the sofa?”

Dealing with “awkward” customers

Talkative Tanya

“What do others think?”

Side-track Sid

“That's a great question / big issue. Shall we discuss that over coffee?”

Silent Simon

Some people are quieter by nature and are happy not saying much.

It doesn't say in the Bible that people HAVE TO take part in group Bible study discussions.

Look in his direction and ask an easy or open question.

Ask him in advance to read something simple so he gets used to speaking.

Confused Colin

Hobby-horse Horace

Any other characters?

Entice the mice and bully the bulls.

Encourage and thank people.

Ask people to stop and think on their own - ? jot down an answer.

Discuss in pairs / in small groups and report back.

Use imagination: how might Mary have felt?

Role-play? Mock interview of author or character (e.g. Philemon, Paul or Onesimus) – Should be controlled by the text – distinguish what the text says or implies from speculation.

Use marker pens and big sheets of paper.

Use maps, diagrams and lists etc.

Summarise / conclude

Crystalize specific applications.

What can we ask God's help with / give thanks for from this passage?

How would you explain this to a 10 year old / an American?

How would you put this in your own words / sum it up in a sentence?

What's the main thing that's struck you in tonight's study?

Refer back to your summary / theme sentence and aim sentence.

Did anything emerge in the study you should follow-up with an individual / get help with?

Are there any **group applications / responses** to make to the text?

Is there something we need to do as a **church**? – who is going to speak to John about it?

Pray and praise in the light of what you've learnt – don't let Aunt Mable's bunions dominate the prayers every week – separate prayer time for specific needs.

Have some prayers written out people can use.

Encourage short prayers. No need for impressive theological jargon.

Pass around a pen so people know it's their turn to pray if they want to.

Tell them not worry if 2 people speak at once.

Get feedback on how you lead.

Encourage others to lead and offer training and feedback.

Any ideas on **resources**?

Resources / Further Reading (some of which I haven't used!)

Searchable Bible translations on-line: www.biblegateway.com

More literal Bible translations: The English Standard Version; The New American Standard Bible

Interlinear Bibles with a literal translation under each word

Beynon, Nigel and Sach, Andrew, *Digging Deeper: Tools to Unearth The Bible's Treasure* (Leicester, IVP, 2005)

Duvall, J. Scott and Hays, J. Daniel, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2001)

Fee, Gordon and Stuart, Douglas, *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003)

Marshall, Colin, *Growth Groups* (Matthias Media)

Morris, Karen and Rod, *Leading Better Bible Studies: Essential Skills For Effective Small Groups* (Aquila Press, 1997)

Reid, Andrew, *Postcard From Palestine* (Sydney, Matthias Media, 1997)

Wolvaardt, Bennie, *How To Interpret The Bible: A Do-It-Yourself Manual* (Veritas College / The Good Book Company, 1999)

Bible Overview:

Campbell, Phil and Smith, Byron, *Full of Promise* (St Matthias Press / The Good Book Company, 1997 / 2000) – interactive Bible Studies on the Old Testament

Goldsworthy, Graham, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Exeter, Paternoster, 1981)

Roberts, Vaughan, *God's Big Picture: Tracing the story-line of the Bible* (Leicester, IVP, 2003)

Reference Books:

Carson, France, Motyer and Wenham (ed.s), *The New Bible Commentary* (Leicester, IVP, 1994) – recommends further reading

Marshall, Millard, Packer and Wiseman (ed.s) *The New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, IVP, 1996)

Bimson, Kane, Patterson and Wiseman (ed.s) *New Bible Atlas* (Leicester, IVP, 1985)

Commentaries:

Commentary series tend to be a bit of a mixed bag. Those produced by IVP (e.g. The Tyndale Commentaries and The Bible Speaks Today Series are evangelical). You can find some commentary recommendations at:

http://www.oakhill.ac.uk/resources/old_testament.html

http://www.oakhill.ac.uk/resources/new_testament.html

Other notes:

Carson, Don A., *Exegetical Fallacies* (Baker)