

Help in Preparing and Leading Group Bible Studies



It is all too easy to get lost in Bible study, lost somewhere between stories about men long since dust and dusty tomes claiming to “help” us. So let us note the key point first of all: the events recorded in the Bible happened to real people in real life.

Our aim, therefore, is to discover how God helped them in their situations, and how this speaks to us in our own situations. (N.B. “tome” is an old, dusty word for old, dusty books).

How the Bible Works

The Bible:

- teaches - tells and explains the truth
- rebukes - points out wrong
- corrects - helps us change from wrong to right
- trains - helps us develop the skills, attitudes and habits of righteousness

(All of this helps us grow in God. See 2 Timothy 3:16-17.)

Truth demands action - we must “hear and do” (James 1:22-26). We need to hear the truth from God because we are not living it and it is truth that sets us free (John 8:31-36). When God through his Word points out our wrong and works to correct us, it hurts. If we don't listen and obey, it will hurt even more.

Why Group Bible Studies?

If you really believe something, you will live it. In order to believe it, we have to first see it for ourselves. Group Bible studies help us discover the truths of God's Word for ourselves; they bring together different people with different ways of seeing things, thus enriching individual insights.

How?

Our approach is **INDUCTIVE**, using questions to probe the Bible and relate it to our own lives. (Induction is the approach to issues which examines facts by asking who, what, where, when, and why and how questions.) From this, we draw out conclusions and can use them to solve problems. Our questions should be @, dear and specific. They should relate to the passage, forcing us to think and take a closer look at the passage than usual. They should progress from looking at facts, to working out what they mean, to how they should affect how we live:

▪ **Observe Facts**

- what does the text say?
- who are involved?
- what happens: events, issues, conflicts, and their resolution.
- where and when (backdrop) - culture, geography, history, specific setting?
- what points are stressed, conclusions are drawn, examples are set before us (to emulate or to avoid)?
- how is language used - poetry, prose, figures of speech, illustrations, etc.?

▪ **Interpret Meanings**

- what does the text intend to communicate?
- how do events unfold, people interact, issues come out, conclusions arise?
- what is significant or stressed in what happens or is said - major events, key words or ideas, important experiences? Why?
- what is implied by what happens or is said?
- how does context, both immediate and that of the whole Bible, affect the text?
- what did the writer intend his original readers to understand? (Did he have us in mind? Did God?)

▪ **Apply Results**

- what points, events, or experiences speak from the biblical setting into our own?
- how should we respond? [Truths to learn and live; mistakes or sins to avoid or turn from; corrections, restitutions, confessions, reconciliations to make; instructions to be put into practice; promises to claim and conditions to meet (cf. 2 Peter 1:2 - 4).]
- where, when, with whom?

Specific Types of Group Bible Studies

Bible studies focus on a specific theme or on a specific text. Since a theme can only be studied by examining texts which relate to it, we will stress techniques for the study of texts in this primer.

- **OIA**
 - uses questions to bring out observations (O), interpretations (I) and applications (A).
 - when presenting the study, mix O and I at first, then move on to A questions.

- **Swedish Technique**
 - useful for both group and individual study
 - first read the passage, marking new insights with a candle; challenges or what pricks our consciences with an arrow; and what we do not understand or do not agree with, with a question mark. (Use a pencil, or if you don't want to mark up your Bible, use a sheet of paper with three columns.)
 - Share with one another about what you have marked.

- **Panel of "Experts"**
 - think of some questions relating to an important issue - music, sex, Apartheid, why Christians are afraid to witness; whatever.
 - Empanel some "experts" and choose a moderator, using members of the group.
 - Discuss questions and typical answers in the light of what the Bible has to say on the subject. (Some preliminary research is, of course, necessary.)

- You think of some more ideas.

Protective Fences

“You can make the Bible say anything!”

Have you ever been hit with that one and stopped cold? Can you pick up when an alleged interpretation of the Bible is “off”, and tell why?

Hundreds of years ago, the Protestant Reformers worked out some principles which serve to guide us in interpretation, and as fences to keep us on safe ground:

- **The Scriptures Alone:** Nothing else is to be held on par with the Bible, whether in principle or in practice. The Bible is God's written word, and is the basis for what we believe and how we should live. (2 Timothy 3:14-17, Deuteronomy 17:18-20, and Joshua 1:1-9.)
- **Scripture Clarifies Scripture:** Let the Bible interpret itself – scriptures throw light upon one another, and God does not contradict himself.
- **Take the Natural Sense Seriously:** Read the words in their context. If the natural meaning makes sense do not look for “hidden” meanings. Read poetry as poetry, and prose as prose. Figures of speech are figures of speech. Respect words, language, and logic.
- **Be Open to Further Light from Scripture:** We all make mistakes, so we must be open to correction.
- **Weigh Facts of Grammar, Language, Culture and History Carefully:** These facts can really help us clarify meanings, but sometimes, claimed “facts” are not true. Check such claims with reputable sources and authorities. (Also, authenticate authorities, and remember that they too can make mistakes.)

Bible Helps

Over the years, scholars have developed tools which can really help us:

- **Concordances** - list where the Bible uses particular words. Strong's and Young's are the best.
- **Bible Dictionaries** - discuss themes, names, words, concepts and much more. "The New Bible Dictionary,' IVP, is quite good.
- **Study Guides** - give outlines for studies on particular books of the Bible, or themes in the Bible. Scripture Union puts out some good ones.
- **Commentaries** - comment on the Bible, or its books, section by section. Devotional ones are more personal, and Interpreter's commentaries are more technical.
- **Bible Atlases** - give the geography of the lands in which the events in the Bible happened.

Presenting The Study

- Start with prayer. (1 Corinthians 2:9-12.)
- Read the passage.
- Use an introduction to set the tone - why this study, how we'll approach it, what we hope to gain by doing it.
- Probe the passage, using a well chosen method such as those outlined above.
- Guide the discussion - but don't do all the talking.
- Let the group answer the questions asked -- if you answer, it stops others from sharing and actively interacting with the text.
- Learn to ask questions such as, "could there be anything else?" and "Could there be another way of seeing it?"
- Let the group correct itself by probing the text more closely and examining alternatives.
- Be prepared to learn from the group.
- If there is something that stumps everyone, note it down and promise to research it for "next time". Move on. (Keep your promise.)
- Control time. Make brief summaries and move on, especially if the study is going off on a tangent or bogging down. (What is a reasonable time for the study? For its major sections?)
- Make sure the group members have come to clear conclusions and have specific action steps to take. (Sometimes, you can use a personal visit to pick up on this point.)
- The main issue is what we grasp and live, not that "we finished the study." If necessary, finish the study another time.
- Evaluate. What happened? How, why? What went well? Poorly? What follow-up actions (for yourself and with the members) should be taken?
- Take time.

Some Practical Work

"I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand."

- Prepare a Bible study on 2 Timothy 3:14-17. This will rivet the power of the Bible in your mind.
- Learn to use a concordance, a Bible Dictionary, and a topical list.
- Begin your own programme of Bible readings, if you have not yet done so. This is the best way to learn the Bible, and knowing is the best basis for preparing effective Bible studies - and for successful discipleship. Daily Bread, published by Scripture Union, is helpful.
- Read good books on Bible study. R.C. Sproul's "Knowing Scripture", IVP, is excellent.
- Develop a term plan for Bible studies in your group. Put it into effect.

Appendix 1: A Sample Study

How To Grow Spiritually

- Read 2 Peter 1:1-15.
- To whom did Peter write? Does this include us? How could we know?
- This letter is Peter's "Last Will and Testament". He was very concerned that Christians should focus attention on the most important issues, and so remain firmly anchored in Christ.
- "Knowing God" was important to Peter. What are the benefits of knowing God, according to the passage?
- How is knowing God different from knowing about Him? (Hint: what is the difference between knowing your mother and knowing about her?)
- In this light, how does Jesus make "His divine power" available to us and how can we best use this power?
- Peter stresses God's promises. Where do we find God's promises? How, then, should we seek to find them and put them to work in our lives?
- List three major promises of God. How can we reap their benefits?
- What are the things Peter wants us to "add to our faith"? Why?
- Compare this list with Galatians 5:22-23, and read Romans 5:1-5. How can these qualities be built up in our lives?
- What happens if we fail to build up these qualities? How can we avoid this?
- If we have put our faith in Jesus, can we afford to rest on our laurels? Why or why not?
- What action steps should we take? How, and how soon?

Appendix 2: Useful Topics And Texts

The following are some suggested topics and texts for Bible studies, under four headings: Discipleship - Related Themes; Some Great Passages in the Bible; Books to Study, and; Fundamental Doctrines.

We urge that you prepare studies before hand, using the inductive approach, and that cell members be given preparatory work: passages to read and questions to ponder and jot down responses to.

Please note the following:

- All cells should do studies on "Personal Evangelism", "Prayer", and "Body Ministry".
- All cell members should be introduced to the rudiments of inductive Bible study, and be encouraged to use this approach in both personal and group Bible study.
- "Handling a Cell Group" outlines the basis for the cell strategy. Please consult it before selecting topics for study in your cell.
- The topics and texts are suggestions. Make your own choices. (No more than three or four main texts per study, please!)

- R. A. Torrey's "What the Bible Teaches" or a study Bible such as the "Thompson Chain Reference Bible" are useful further resources.
- We urge that the New International Version (NIV) be used as a "standard" version, as it is an excellent, widely available and non-controversial translation in modern English. (All too few can decipher the KJV nowadays.) The New Revised Standard Version is also a widely accepted and accurate modern translation.

Basic Discipleship-Related Themes:

- **The Gospel:** Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12; John 3:14-21; Acts 10:38-48, 11:11-18, 15:5-11; and Ephesians 1:11-14. (These texts clarify how and when we are forgiven.)
- **Foundations:** Hebrews 5:12 - 6:2. Also, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:1-11.
 - a) Repentance; Isaiah 55:1-13; John 4:1-42; Acts 9:1-22, 22:1-21, 26:12-23; Acts 17:16-34; 2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:13. Check Revelation 2:1 - 3:22.
 - b) Faith: Romans 4:1-8, 4:18 - 5:2; Romans 9:30 - 10:17; Hebrews 11:1-6. Examine Romans 1:16-17 and Hebrews 10:26-39, with James 1:16-25.
 - c) Baptisms: (John's) Matthew 3:7-17; Luke 3:7-14; John 1:19-34; Acts 18:24 - 19:7. (Water) Matthew 28:28-20; Romans 6:1-7, note 4:18 - 5:2 for "we"; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Colossians 2:11-12. (Spirit) John 1:29-34, 7:37-39; Acts 1:4-8, 2:1-4, 16-21, 31-39, 8:14-20, 9:17, 10:43-48, 11:15-18, 19:1-6; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11, 12:13.
 - d) Laying on of Hands: Genesis 48:13-22 and Hebrews 11:21; Leviticus 1:2-4 and Hebrews 10:1-18. Numbers 8:10-11, 27:18-21, and Deuteronomy 34:9. See Acts 6:1-6, 13:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:14, 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6. Mark 10:16, 16:18; Luke 4:40; Acts 28:18. Acts 8:14-20, 9:17, 19:4-6, but also 10:43-48.
 - e) Resurrection and Eternal Judgement : Ecclesiastes 12:6-7; Hebrews 9:27. 1 Corinthians 15:21-25; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11; Revelation 20:1-15; John 3:16-21, 35,36, 5:22-30; Acts 17:30-31; 1 Corinthians 3:10 - 4:5. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-58.
- **The Bible / The Word Of God:** 2 Timothy 3:14-17; James 1:16-25; 2 Peter 1:2-4. See Deuteronomy 8:1-5, 17:18-20; Joshua 1:1-9; Psalm 1:1-6, Matthew 7:24-27; Mark 4:1-20. Read Psalm 19,119.
- **The Mandate Of The Church:** Matthew 28:18-20 and Titus 2:11-14. See Acts 1:4-8, 2:16-21, 31-39; Romans 1:1-5, 14-20; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21; Ephesians 1:17 - 2:10; 2 Timothy 2:2 and Ephesians 4:11-16. Note Micah 6:8; James 1:26, 27.

- **Body Life / Church Life:** Acts 2:32-47, 4:32-35; Romans 12:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:12 - 14:1; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Ephesians 4:1-16; Philippians 2:1-11; Hebrews 10:19-25. Read 1 Corinthians 12-14.
- **Commitment:** Matthew 6:19-34, 10:32-39, 16:13-28; Luke 14:25-35, 17:7-10; John 6:60-71, Romans 6:1-23; 1 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Colossians 3:1-4:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12; Hebrews 12:1-17; 1 Peter 1:13 - 2:3; Revelation 12:10-11.
- **Handling Differences:** 1 Corinthians 13:1-7; Matthew 5:21-26, 7:1-5, 18:15-17; Romans 14:1 - 15:7; 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; Galatians 6:1-5; Ephesians 4:20-32; Philippians 2:1-11; James 3:1 - 4:12 and Acts 15:1-22.
- **Prunings, Trials, Hardships:** John 15:1-7; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Hebrews 12:1-13; James 1:2-12; 1 Peter 2:18-25, 4:12-19.
- **Struggles With Sin:** Romans 6:1 - 8:17 (an overview); Romans 12:1-21; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20, 10:1-13, 13:1-7; 2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1; Galatians 5:13 - 6:10; Ephesians 4:17 - 5:21; Philippians 2:1-18, 3:12 - 4:1; Colossians 3:1 - 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12; Titus 2:1 - 3:11; James 1:16 - 2:26 and 2 Timothy 3:14-17 and Psalm 119:1-16, 33-40, 105-120, 129-136; 2 Peter 1:13 - 2:12; Hebrews 4:12-16 and Luke 4:1-13; 1 John 1:1-2:6.
- **Praise And Worship:** Psalms 47, 63, 86, 91, 95, 100, 108, 130, 143, 148, 149, 150; Revelation 1:4-7, 4:1-11, 5:8-14, 19:4-10.
- **Family And Sex:** Genesis 2:18-25, 18:18-20 and Proverbs 1:1-19, 5:1-23, 6:20-35, 7:1-27, 31:10-31; Song of Solomon 1:1 - 8:14; Matthew 5:27-32 and 1 Timothy 5:1-2; Ephesians 5:22 - 6:4.
- **Civic Duties:** Romans 13:1-7 and Acts 5:27-42 and Matthew 22:15-22; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Philemon 1-25 (Onesimus was an escaped slave belonging to Philemon); Proverbs 14:34; Micah 6:8 - 7:7; James 1:26 - 2:13 and 5:1-6. Note Leviticus 19:15.

Some Great Passages In The Bible

- Matthew 5-7. The Sermon on the Mount.
- Romans 1:16 - 5:2. The Gospel.
- 1 Corinthians 12 - 14. The Body of Christ.
- Ephesians 4:1-16. The Body of Christ.
- Ephesians 1:15-23. The Destiny of the Church.
- 1 Corinthians 13. The Love Chapter.
- Hebrews 11-12. The Life of Faith and its Culmination.
- Romans 8. Life in the Spirit.
- Matthew 24. Signs of the End.
- Matthew 25. Three Vital Parables.
- Psalm 119. The Law of God.
- Ezekiel 33:1-20. Is There Blood on Our Hands? (See also Paul's farewell, Acts 20:17 -37.)

- Daniel 1. Hope for Freshmen.
- Isaiah 40. The Glory of God.
- Isaiah 53. The Lamb of God.
- Isaiah 55. “Ho, everyone that thirsteth...”
- Ecclesiastes 12. The Conclusion of the Matter. (Verses 9-14 are hand-picked for students.)
- Exodus 20:1-17. The Ten Commandments.

Some Good Books To Study

- James. Practical Christianity.
- Ephesians. The Revelation of the Church.
- Mark. Meet Jesus, in Person.
- Acts 1-15. The Beginnings of the Church.
- 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. Advice to Young Leaders.
- 1 John. How to Make Sure that You are Saved.
- Nehemiah. God’s (Re-)builder.
- Jonah. God's Reluctant Messenger.
- Malachi. The Lord’s Complaint.
- Haggai. Getting Oty Priorities Right.
- Ecclesiastes. Life, From the Underside
- Ruth. A Beautiful Love Story.

Fundamental Doctrines

The following points are taken from the U.C.C.F. statement of faith, and lie at the heart of any sound (Biblical) Christian faith:

- a. The unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the God Head: Gen. 1:26 (a); Deuteronomy 6:4; Mark 2:1-12, 12:29; John 1:1-18, 3:12-18 and 5:16-30, 10:22-39, 14:1-34; Acts 5:14; Romans 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 12:6; Ephesians 4:6; Hebrews 1:1-14.
- b. The Sovereignty of God in creation, revelation, redemption, and final judgement: Psalm 139, Isaiah 40:27-31, 44:21-24, 45:18-24; Romans 8:28-39, 9:14-21, 11:33-36; 1 Timothy 6:1-2; Hebrews 1:1-2.
- c. The Divine Inspiration and entire trustworthiness of The Holy Scriptures as originally given and their supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct: Joshua 1:1-9; Psalm 19:7-8, 119:11, 16, 105, 160; John 10:35(b); Acts 17:10-11, 18:24-28, 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 1 Timothy 4:13; Hebrews 1:1-3, 4:12; 2 Peter 1:2-4, 16-21, 3:15-18.
- d. The universal sinfulness and guilt of all men since the fall, rendering them subject to God’s wrath and condemnation: Psalm 51:3-6, 82:6-7; Romans 1:18-35, 3:9-23, 5:12-19, 6:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:10; Hebrews 9:27.

- e. Redemption from the guilt, penalty and power of sin through the sacrificial death (as our Representative and Substitute) of Jesus Christ only, the incarnate Son of God: Isaiah 52:13-53:12; John 1:29,36, 3:14-18; Romans 3:21-26, 5:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 2:10-17, 7:18-28, 9:11-14, 23-28, 10:1-25, 12:22-24; 1 Peter 1:18-20, 2:24-25, 3:18; Revelations 1:5-6.
- f. The bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead and his ascension to the right hand of God the Father: John 20:24-29; Acts 1:1-11, 2:22-36, 3:13-15, 9:1-19 and 22:6-15 and 26:12-26, 10:38-43, 17:24-31; Romans 1:1-4, 6:1-9, 8:11; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8, 12-44; 2 Corinthians 5:6; Ephesians 1:19-21; Philippians 3:21; Colossians 3.1; Acts 7:55.
- g. The presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the work of regeneration: John 3:3, 5, 8:6, 16:63; Romans 8:9, 13-16; Galatians 3:3, 4:6; Titus 3:4-7; 1 John 4:13.
- h. The justification of the sinner by the grace of God through faith alone: Romans 1:1 6,17, 3:20-28, 4:4-8, 4:18 - 5:2. 5:6-11; Galatians 2:16, 20, 3:2, 5, 8, 11-14, 22-24; Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 10:43.
- i. The indwelling work of the Holy Spirit in the believer: John 14:17-26; 1 John 3:24, 4:13, 5:6; John 16:13-15; Romans 8:1-5, 9, 11, 14-16, 10:15-17; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, 3:3; Galatians 4:6, 5:15-25; Ephesians 2:18, 5:18-21.
- j. The one Holy Universal Church which is the body of Christ and to which all true believers belong: Matthew 16:18; John 17:20-23; Acts 2:37-47, 11:25-26; 1 Corinthians 12:12,13; Ephesians 1:15-23, 4:1-16, 5:25-27; Hebrews 12:18-24.
- k. The expectation of the personal return of the Lord Jesus: Acts 1:11; Romans 8:19-24; 1 Corinthians 11:26; Titus 2:13-14; 2 Peter 3:8-14; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:10, 2:1-12.