

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Reading with the mind: How do we study the Bible?



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

“Having faith is not about turning off the mind or stopping asking questions.” Do you agree with this? Why? Why not?



Understanding the information (20 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Having faith is not about turning off the mind or stopping asking questions. Teaching was at the heart of the life of Israel - God told them to “Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.” (Deuteronomy 11: 18-20). Jesus’ ministry was marked by teaching crowds and individuals, Paul taught and persuaded people wherever he went, writing in Philippians to guard what they focus their minds on. (Philippians 4:8).



To begin growing in the practice of studying the Bible it is good to start by doing it with other people – supporting each other and learning from the way in which others do it. While there are different techniques that can be used, effective study will always involve repeating the experience over time, putting aside time and making effort, always looking for the personal significance of what you are studying.

Bible study is not a test of how clever you are - there were those who had a lot of knowledge, but missed the point of coming to Jesus. And not every part of the Bible is equally relevant for every stage of life or situation. You don’t need to start with the more difficult parts. In 1 Corinthians 3:2 Paul wrote, “I fed you with milk, not solid food.”

There are many resources and methods: Discovery Bible Study questions, using two or three different translations of the Bible, bibegateway.com places different translations side by side, reading large chunks or diving into individual verses, reading the verses before or after them help make the meaning clearer. Commentaries explain books of the Bible in more depth.

How do we know we are reading it right? To a certain extent it is impossible to read anything without interpreting it, and this is equally true of the Bible. We have to interpret Scripture, and we look through two lenses to do so:

1. How do we understand what the Bible meant in the time and place it was written, to the audience who received it (this is known as exegesis)?
2. What is God saying to us here and now, with the particular experience and background we have (we call this hermeneutics)?

These two lenses help us to see the way in which the Bible may have had a particular meaning for those who originally read it, but also help us to understand how its story and message is relevant for now, and indeed, for eternity.

We may apply the Bible to situations that the original authors could not have imagined (cars! Robots! The internet!). But it is always true that a biblical text can never mean what it never could have meant to the author or her readers.

And the fact that the Bible was written into a very different world from ours doesn't make it irrelevant. In fact, it can be a help in that it helps us to listen to what God is saying beyond our own 21st century experience, and to think about God's bigger picture through all time.

Here are five ideas which will help us interpret the Bible as well as possible:

We come with humility. Isaiah talks about people "trembling at God's word". (Isaiah 66:2) We are not the ones who create the message of Scripture – God is.

It's always good to read each part of the Bible through the lens of the whole story. It is a unified story, and the more we can interpret parts by looking at how they relate to others the more balanced our interpretation will be.

It's good to be aware that the Bible is made up of different kinds of writing – story, poetry, fact, image, letters. When we interpret it's always good to think about what this particular piece of writing was doing.

The Bible is also an evolving story (called a progressive revelation). The complete picture, which is fulfilled by Jesus, is not given all at once, but was the result of people listening to God over centuries.

Anything we read in the Bible, particularly within the Old Testament, can only be fully understood in the way that they point to Jesus. Difficult passages earlier in this evolving story will be consistent with the direction of the whole story, but may not be the complete picture of God's character. Whenever we read something which doesn't resonate with God's love, the best way to interpret it will always be to find, in whatever way possible, how it points to Christ.

Discuss: How does studying the Bible "renew our minds" (Romans 12)?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Deuteronomy 11: 18-21 in which God commands His people to study His words.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://youtu.be/yA3jkQ03tXc>

What struck you as important in the video?



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your word.
We are so privileged to be able to open Your book
and learn about the mystery and wonder of Your love.
We thank You for all the lessons and knowledge
You have graciously given us.
Help us to remember what we learned today,
and to apply it to our lives.
Help us remember to stay humble and have faith,
even in the darkest times.
And give us the courage to share Your truth
with those around us.
In Jesus' name, we pray.
Amen.

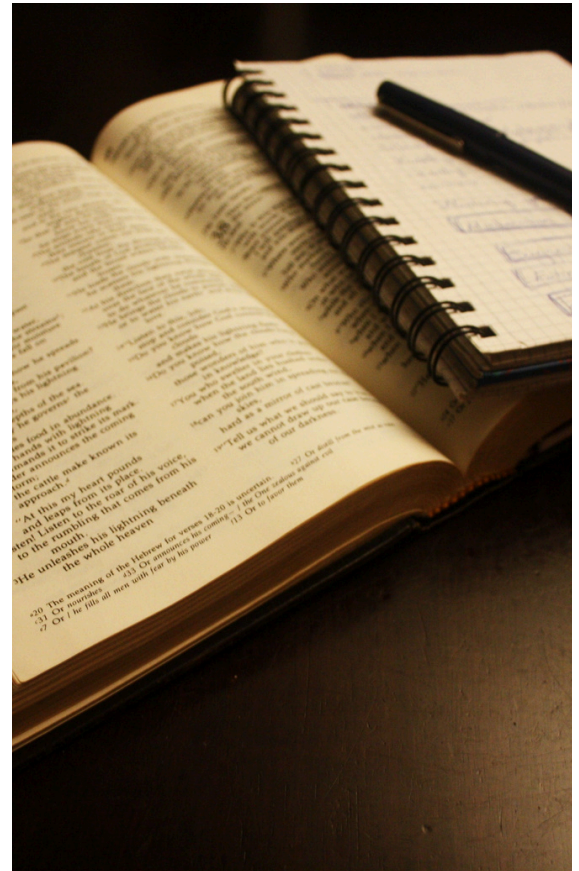




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