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## **Basic Assumption of this training:**

The Bible is God's word. Whilst humans wrote it, God uses the Bible to speak directly into our lives today.

## **WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?**

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- Without it we would struggle to understand God's nature and plan for us. In the bible, we see what God has done and what he is like.
- Jesus knew his scripture better than anyone. If we are to live like Jesus, study of scripture is an integral part of that.
- The bible instructs us to study the scriptures.

Some Relevant Passages:

- Acts 8:26-40 (People need an explanation for what they read)
- 1 Timothy 4:11-14 (Devote yourselves to studying the scriptures)
- 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 (All scripture is God breathed and useful)

## **WHAT IS REAL LEARNING?**

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“Teaching is the art or process of facilitating learning.”

To 'Learn' is to not simply understand a concept but for that understanding to elicit a response that demonstrates that understanding.

Simple eg:

A child puts their hand in an open fire, not surprisingly it burns them and causes pain. If the child puts their hand in again it is clear they haven't learnt that fire is painful and should be avoided. If the child stays clear of the fire from then on it indicates they have learnt something new.

Christian Eg:

If an adult has learnt that giving generously is pleasing to God and expected of believers then this will be evident in the way they handle their money and time. Should they continue to be greedy and selfish you can safely argue that they have not learnt from the teaching they've received. *When teaching in a small group context, always have in mind that you are trying to develop understanding that leads to action.*

Catchphrase: Information for transformation.

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Two Types of Bible Study:

## **Topic**

Pick a hot issue such as gay marriage or manifestations of the spirit and then collect a host of verses and arguments in an attempt to summarise the issue in 90 minutes or less. Can be great to give the group a solid overview but it risks taking passages out of context and is nowhere near exhaustive. Generally best suited to someone who has a lot experience in the particular issue being studied.

*Resource: Topical Reference Bible, a Concordance, Dictionary of Theology*

## **Passage**

Pick a chapter or part of a chapter from a book in the bible and study it in detail. Often there will be several issues arise from the one passage although others are clearly focused on one idea. This type of study will help the group to get more out of the bible when they read it by themselves and lets the bible speak for itself. Just because you are studying a single passage doesn't mean you can't cross reference to other parts of the bible – in fact this is to be encouraged.

*Resource: The Small Groups Library (if your church has one)*

Two Styles in Study Leading:

## **Lecture**

One person does the majority of the talking; others chip in with the occasional question. This style might be useful for situations that require a lot of history and definitions. It requires a lot of preparation time by the leader and can get boring for the group very quickly, particularly for those who are not academic learners or have short attention spans.

## **Tutorial**

The leader sees himself or herself as a facilitator of discussion. They ask questions and follow up questions in order that the group may come upon the answers themselves. Excellent for helping the group feel they have been part of the learning because there is more ownership. Can be difficult if the group is unresponsive to questions. Still requires some solid preparation because the leader must guide the group to the heart of the passage.

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*“As we read the bible we must listen to what it has to say **and then obey.**”  
(Fee and Stuart in ‘How to read the bible for all it’s worth’)*

## EXEGESIS

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Observation = what does the passage say?

Interpretation = what does it mean?

Application = what does it mean for me?

In preparing a study you should always go through this process of exegesis (or variation of) yourself. It is then up to you how much of the process you take your group through. Depending on time and the maturity of the people in your group you may like to rush through some sections or flesh others out. This process should give you a good basis for writing a study on any passage with minimal outside reading.

“Exegesis means to draw out the meaning of a text by studying it.”

### 1. Pray

The word of God is going to be easier (or perhaps only possible) to understand with God’s help so pray that the Holy Spirit will open your eyes and heart to what you are reading.

### 2. Initial reactions (OBSERVATION)

Read through your chosen passage and really look at it. Write down everything that you observe from the text, particularly what stood out as:

- a) interesting
- b) strange
- c) offensive
- d) confusing
- e) amazing
- f) any key words or ideas, contrasts,
- g) what do you learn about the writer or recipients
- h) main characters, where and when does it take place

Think through each of these points and see if you can explain them yourself from the passage. If you’re in a group, discuss each point amongst each other. It’s important to remember that no question is too stupid and no point too small. No doubt you will be able to explain some of these points and some you won’t.

You could write a ...

? → For a question

! → For what grabs your attention

Light bulb or candle → For things that might provide illumination

### 3. Context

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The first thing to do is define the genre of writing that your passage is in. The bible is not all written in the same style. There are historical accounts, poetry, prophecy, letters, advice, narratives and laws. Deciding on the correct genre can be fundamental to a clear understanding of the passage. Imagine reading Song of Songs as an historical account or the letters of Paul as poetry – weird.

Further context of a passage can often easily be found:

- Letters (or Epistles) generally refer to the context in the first chapter.
- Much of the Old Testament is narrative (story) and follows in chronological order.
- A lot of books reference other books (particularly the first five books of the Old Testament).

Read the surrounding chapters and look up the references (most bibles will footnote these). Get an idea where the passage fits in the story and where it is headed. Where does it come in the flow of salvation history?

Ask interpretation questions. Ask “Why is this passage in here? What did the writer want the readers to understand? Why did he write this for them?”

*Resource: Study Bibles and Concordances*

#### 4. Other help

If you need to further examine the meaning of the passage try reading some commentaries or the footnotes in your bible. Sometimes other people have insight that you or your group won't have, so speaking to a bible nerd about it can also be very helpful. *It is recommended that you don't read other people's work before going through the first three steps of this study.* The reason for this is to increase the learning experience. The bible can speak directly into your life when you read it so give it a chance before someone else tells you what they think it means. Other people can also be wrong!

#### 5. What is the point?

Summarise the big idea of the passage in one clear sentence. This can be simple eg. “God loves his creation”, or more complicated and historic eg. “Esau was born cursed so as God's promises would be fulfilled”. This sentence helps you remember the passage more easily and guides the formation of good questions for the study. There might be a number of truths in a passage but try to determine the central truth.

#### 6. Pray Again

This time for application of the passage to you and the group members lives.

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## Let's try this out on Luke 7:1-10

Using the principles outlined above, look at:

What is the main theme of this study? What is the key verse?

Write two observation, two interpretation and two application questions for this passage.

## APPLICATION

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“Romans is the most theologically full book in the NT and even then it has 50% application.”

If the aim of bible study is to apply God's word then a large majority of our bible studies should be spent on our personal response to what we have read. This is important to bear in mind because it is easy to slip into too much history or theory, or end with a two minute superficial application. This section provides some helpful ideas on how to do this.

### Practical ideas:

Once you've done the observation and interpretation stages and have worked out the main point, you can start the application process.

Consider:

1. How does the big idea apply to my life? (be specific not just general). What is already part of my thinking/action? What needs to change?
2. What about where my small group member's lives are at? Do you have a good clear understanding of your group? (are they well educated, poorly educated, Christian, non-Christian, teachable, resistant, old, young, workers, unemployed, parents, single, cultural/racial background etc)
3. If the passage is more on what Christ has done for us, don't shift it to what we must do! Celebrate and worship, and thank God.
4. The Bible is also more concerned with motives rather than rules, so remember to bring out not just the “What should we do?” but “Why should we do this?” of the passage .
5. Are there any cultural differences between the world of the Bible and our world which affect the way we read a passage? Eg. Food sacrificed to idols – 1 Cor 8ff.

### When to Apply:

Usually you wait until the end in order to get the big picture, but you can still do 'mini applications' along the way.

Eg. Some people won't like studying well known stories (like Jonah or the feeding of the five thousand) because they think they already know all about them. Often we remember the plot but totally miss the point. An application question can really shake people up a bit and get them to think beyond what they already know.

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You could also stop and pray in the middle of a study (particularly if conversation is getting heated).

## PREPARING THE STUDY

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Once you have done the hard work of exegesis, you can start working out how to present the study.

The standard way is to simply craft a few good observation questions, a few good interpretation questions, and one or two good application questions. That's all you need. Don't ask closed questions (which expect a yes or no answer or a one word answer), or double barreled questions (with two parts to it). Ask open-ended questions.

For example, a good observation question to Luke 7:1-10 might be:

*"Compare the approaches of the centurion to the Jewish elders".*

An interpretation question is:

*"Why did the Centurion's faith surprise Jesus'?"*

An application question is:

*"How does the centurion's faith challenge your faith?"*

*Resources: see Morris and Marshall for more good help on writing studies*

## OTHER WAYS OF PACKAGING A STUDY

### How to tell a story

Creation → Fall → Redemption → Recreation (or Consummation)

This is the overall bible story, which is told, over and over again in smaller versions. Try and take your group on this journey as you look at different passages.

- God Created the world and it was good.
- Humans sinned and evil entered the world.
- Jesus defeats sin on the cross and brings us redemption from the wages of sin.
- Revelation speaks of a time to come where there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Example:

Luke 4:31-37 – Jesus drives out an Evil Spirit

The man (creation) is possessed by a demon (fall) and then Jesus comes along, has an argument (redemption) and then drives the demons out and God is glorified (Recreation).

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## LEARNING STYLES

Remember that people learn in different ways. The bible says this is a good thing (1Corinthians 12:12-31). We need different parts of the body to be fully functional, we can't all be eyes or hands, we need the lot. Try to vary the way you package your bible studies to cater to the many different people in your group. They will not all be like you! Most people fit into one of the following generic categories:

<p><b>Activist</b> Likes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active discussion</li> <li>• Controversies/debates</li> <li>• Role plays/drama</li> <li>• Drawing</li> <li>• Lists</li> <li>• Fast Studies</li> <li>• Diagrams/tables</li> <li>• Being involved in a passage</li> <li>• Pulling it apart</li> </ul> <p>Pointers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask them to do things for the group eg. Leading a study or brainstorming.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Reflector</b> Likes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time to think and make connections</li> <li>• Asking reflective questions - it gives them more time to respond</li> <li>• A sense of how the Bible fits together</li> <li>• Time to think, pray on own.</li> <li>• Homework</li> </ul> <p>Pointers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Won't always talk</li> <li>• Don't put them on the spot</li> <li>• Catch up with this person outside the group</li> <li>• Work in smaller groups sometimes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theorist</b> Likes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Nitty Gritty stuff - why is this word in this verse? (Hebrew/Greek translations etc...)</li> <li>• Take home projects</li> <li>• Meaningful discussion</li> <li>• Cross referencing passages</li> <li>• Drawing the points together, working out how things mesh</li> <li>• In depth knowledge</li> <li>• Historical context etc</li> </ul> <p>Pointers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use commentaries to try and deepen your teaching</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pragmatist</b> Likes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application points</li> <li>• 1-2 specific things to work on and come back and share later - accountability</li> <li>• To state goals/objectives</li> <li>• Follow routine</li> </ul> <p>Pointers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prayer triplets</li> <li>• How can you achieve something? The leader needs to give specific examples in application</li> </ul>

Not everyone will fit these descriptions exactly but they are helpful guide and it's important to always be thinking about how people are responding to your teaching style.

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## WHAT ABOUT MATURITY?

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Many small groups have a variety of different people with a variety of different backgrounds. How do we approach a group that has non-Christians, new Christians, experienced Christians and experienced Christians who still struggle with their faith? It's an interesting mixing pot that can be difficult to juggle.

Awareness and explanation: We suggest you always target the least experienced group member (the non-Christian or new Christian). This does not mean that all the questions are addressed to those people. Rather it is an awareness that a lot of "Christian talk" can go over their heads.

No jargon: If someone starts spouting on about atonement, evangelism or eschatology, stop them and ask for an explanation of the words they've used.

Simple introductions: Use everyday examples to demonstrate theological concepts. When Jesus calls himself the lamb of God – explain why he would use that sort of imagery.

Consistent checking in with the group: As the conversation gets more complex take a quick time-out to ask if people are understanding things so far. Things may need some clarification or further explanation.

Lots of Application: Everyone will be able to relate when it comes to talking about their own lives – it's everyone's favorite topic.

Lots of questions: Talking about people's questions is a key purpose of a study. Two basic questions for you to ask: 1. What do you think? 2. How do you feel?

Avoid being judgmental: Particularly with non-Christians in the group. Do not assume everyone holds the same moral standards as you on drinking or sex or whatever. Don't condone it but avoiding boxing someone as "evil" simply by being ignorant.

## RESOURCES (build up your library with a few key tools)

"New Bible Dictionary" IVP

"Theological Dictionary of the Bible" edited by Walter A. Elwell

"Dictionary of Biblical Imagery"

"Leading better Bible studies" by Karen and Rod Morris

"How to read the Bible for all its worth" by Fee and Stuart

"How to read the Bible book by book" by Fee and Stuart

"The Bible that Jesus read" by Phillip Yancy

Website: [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com)

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## EXTRAS

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Workshop: 3 groups of 5 people. Each group has the same passage (20 minutes to do activity). Butchers paper and textas.

### **Group 1** Experiential knowledge

Group reads the text individually. Each person reflects on their experience - what the passage means to them. Facilitator/leader then tries to draw some conclusions from what was shared.

- What happens when you do this?
- Positives are that you learn from people's experiences.
- Dangers are that experience doesn't always equal truth and can be subjective.

### **Group 2** Academic knowledge

Group reads the commentaries from a range of perspectives and eras and comes to conclusions based on those.

- Problem: The "experts" in commentaries we think will give us all the answers can disagree totally.
- Quote: "The Bible can shed light on the commentaries!" All writers of commentaries come from their own point of view.
- Positives: Different commentaries can shed different light on the Bible passages but don't be a servant of the commentary.

### **Group 3**

#### Kinetic Learning

Group has to build a symbolic structure expressing values, ethos, what passage means. There is no leader or facilitator.

- Materials: need paints, or material, colored, bits of wood, a drill, bolts.
- The group may spend all its time trying to come to a consensus. Some may start building straight away. Others want to understand before they do.
- Raises issues of leaderless group and the role of leader/facilitator.

### **Debrief**

Draw out above observations. Ask what sort of things can you do in your group to incorporate these learning ideas? Chat with other people from your group about how to approach your particular mix of people.