

Bible Reading Groups

Bible Reading Groups are gatherings of 2-4 people who meet to read and discuss the Bible together. Generally, one of the members is a committed Christian with some familiarity with the Bible, though by no means do they need to be an expert. The other member(s) are typically non-Christians who are investigating Christianity (perhaps a work colleague), family members, new believers, or maturing Christians desiring to grow to lead or serve. Regardless of who you read the Bible with, this guide is designed to give you a simple method to make this time (a) accessible for everyone, regardless of your experience reading the Bible, and (b) profitable, so that you get as much out of it as possible.

A Typical Framework

Different groups will take on the personality of their members, but most groups will follow a broad pattern, as follows.

1. **Pray**, ask God to help you understand the text you will be looking at together.
2. **Read** the selected Bible passage out loud together. Consider alternating who reads every few verses or so.
3. **Discuss** the passage in a *conversational dialogue*.
 - Focus on the text, not some other topic or “hobby horse.”
 - Be as good a listener as you are a speaker.
 - It’s normal to have some doubts, so acknowledge them honestly, but don’t feel the need to “fix” them for the other person; trust the Holy Spirit to work through his Word over time.
 - Don’t think you have to have all the answers. If a question is truly important to your mutual understanding of the passage, set it aside and discuss it at a future meeting; in the meantime, do some study or ask a pastor or elder for perspective.
4. **Apply** the passage to everyday life.
5. **Pray** to conclude, based on the passage you read. Allow your thanksgivings and prayer requests to spring from what you’ve read and how it applies to your lives.

How these various elements work out will depend on a variety of factors, including how much time you have to meet and how familiar each of you already is with the Bible. Also, if you’re reading with a non-Christian, you may decide to skip praying out loud together during your meeting.

Some Tips

- If you don’t know each other well, consider spending some time just getting to know each other better.
- You may invite someone to read a specific book of the Bible with you, or you may want to decide together which book to read.
- Set expectations for whether you will prepare ahead of time (this maximizes the effectiveness of your discussion) or if you will simply meet together to read the Bible and encourage each other from it (more like a joint devotional time). Either approach is fine, just be clear so that you are both starting from the same place (otherwise, it will not be a conversation around the passage; one person will tend to dominate the conversation).
- Consider a system for discussing the passage. Two common approaches:
 1. **“Mark” your Bible and discuss your marks.** After reading the passage together out loud, each person reads back over the passage on their own and looks for three things:
 - ★ Star: anything that stands out in the passage—something important or that particularly strikes you.
 - ❓ Question mark: anything that is hard to understand; something you would like to ask the author about.
 - ➔ Arrow: anything that applies personally to your life.Share your star(s) and discuss. Share your question mark(s) and discuss. Share your arrow(s) and discuss.
 2. **Discussion questions.** Intentionally discuss the content, meaning, and application of the passage by working through a standard set of questions. The following pages in this guide are designed to give you good questions to ask of each type of Bible literature. Print off the appropriate sheet and keep it in your Bible while working through the book it applies to. Switch out for other question sets as necessary as you move to other books.
- Schedule a recurring time to meet if you can, perhaps weekly or every other week (or daily or several times a week with your family).
- Consider starting with an initial commitment, not an open-ended commitment—it could be six weeks, three months, or for however long it takes to read one book of the Bible together. You can always choose to continue if you want to.

Questions for the Gospels and Acts

Context

- What has happened so far in the narrative?
Have there been any major events, characters or themes?
- What has happened just prior to the section you are reading?

Observation

- What do you learn about the main characters in this section?
How does the author describe them? How do they describe themselves?
- Is time or place significant in the events that happen in the passage?
- Is there a conflict or a high point in the passage?
- Do you think there is a main point or theme in this section of the story?
- What surprises are there?

Meaning

- Are there any "editorial" comments from the author about the events in the narrative? How do these comments illuminate what is happening?
- Does someone in the narrative learn something or grow in some way?
How? What does this person learn?
- What does the passage reveal about who Jesus is, and what he came into the world to do?
- How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

Application

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding about God, Jesus, life, or some biblical truth?
- What does this passage teach you about being a disciple of Jesus?
- Is there any sin (attitude, behavior) you need to repent of?
- How might that sin reveal a deeper heart idol that you need to repent of?
- How does this passage point you to the gospel? (believe)
- What choice do you want to make in response to this passage? (obey)

Questions for Old Testament Narrative

Context

- What has happened so far in the narrative?
Have there been any major events, characters or themes?
- What has happened just prior to the section you are reading?

Observation

- What do you learn about the main characters in this section?
How does the author describe them? How do they describe themselves?
- Is time or place significant in the events that happen in the passage?
- Is there a conflict or a high point in the passage?
- Do you think there is a main point or theme in this section of the story?
- What surprises are there?

Meaning

- Are there any "editorial" comments from the author about the events in the narrative? How do these comments illuminate what is happening?
- Does someone in the narrative learn something or grow in some way?
How? What does this person learn?
- How does the passage point forward to what God is going to do in the future through Jesus? How does it anticipate/foreshadow Christ to come?
- How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

Application

- How does this passage challenge your understanding about who God is and what he is like?
- Is there any sin (attitude, behavior) you need to repent of?
- How might that sin reveal a deeper heart idol that you need to repent of?
- How does this passage point you to the gospel? (believe)
- What choice do you want to make in response to this passage? (obey)

Questions for New Testament Letters

Context

- What can you learn about the person or situation to which the letter is written?
- What clues are there about the author and his circumstances?
- What was the main point of the passage immediately before this one? Are there logical or thematic connections to the passage you are reading?

Observation

- Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the text? Are there key connecting words (for, therefore, but, because) that indicate the logical flow of the passage?
- What is the main point or points? What supporting points does the author make? (Note: Identify the subjects, verbs, and prepositional phrases to understand the point.)
- What surprises are there in the flow of the argument?

Meaning

- How does this text relate to other parts of the book?
- How does the passage relate to Jesus?
- What does this teach you about God?
- How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

Application

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
- Is there any sin (attitude, behavior) you need to repent of?
- How might that sin reveal a deeper heart idol that you need to repent of?
- How does this passage point you to the gospel? (believe)
- How does this passage call on you to change the way you live? (obey)

Questions for OT Wisdom Lit & Poetry

Context

- Are there any clues about the circumstances in which the passage was written?
- What has happened so far?

Observation

- Are there repetitions or multiple instances of similar ideas? Do these repetitions make a particular point, or point to the structure of the passage?
- What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they indicate about God or the other people in the text? What might they indicate about modern readers?
- How do the indented lines of poetry relate to the ideas introduced in the left-aligned line that it falls under? (amplification, comparison, contrast)
- What is the tone of the passage? What emotions is the author arousing?
- What is the main point or points?
- What surprises are there?

Meaning

- Are there specific instructions/commands given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God's commands?
- What does the passage teach us about God, and his people, and life in his world?
- Does the passage point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed in some way?

Application

- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
- Is there any sin (attitude, behavior) you need to repent of?
- How might that sin reveal a deeper heart idol that you need to repent of?
- How does this passage point you to the gospel? (believe)
- How does this passage call on you to change the way you live? (obey)

Questions for OT Prophets

Context

- Are there any clues about the circumstances in which the prophecy was given or written? In what period of Israel's history does it occur (pre-exile, exile, post-exile)?
- Are any people or places mentioned that you aren't familiar with? (Refer to a Bible dictionary or commentary.)
- Are other parts of the Old Testament mentioned or alluded to in the passage? What part do these "memories" play in the text?

Observation

- Are there repetitions or multiple instances of similar ideas? If so, how do they relate to the structure of the passage or make a particular point?
- Paying attention to when the prophet is speaking and when God is speaking, what does the passage tell us about God's plans? What does it tell us about God's character?
- What kind of human behavior, if any, is condemned or rewarded? What response is called for (if any)?
- What is the main point or points?

Meaning

- Are there specific instructions/commands given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God's commands?
- Does the text have a sense of expectation about something happening in the future? What is to be expected and when? How should this motivate action in the present?
- Does the passage point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed in some way?

Application

- How is your situation similar to or different from those being addressed?
- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
- How does this passage lead you to trust God and his promises in Jesus?
- How does this passage call you to repent-believe-obey?

Questions for Apocalyptic Literature

Context

- Are there any clues about the historical circumstances the literature is addressing?
- Are other parts of the Bible mentioned or hinted at in the passage? What part do these "memories" play in the text?

Observation

- What images are used in the passage? What effect do they have?
- What emotions does the passage arouse (e.g. fear, expectation, awe)?
- How does the passage seek to reveal what God is like? Where in this passage might we find hope for men and women?
- Is there a crisis in the passage? What is the tension/conflict about, and how does it relate to readers?

Meaning

- Are there specific instructions/commands given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God's commands?
- Does the text have a sense of expectation about something happening in the future? What is to be expected and when? How should this motivate action in the present?
- Does the passage point to Jesus? Is the gospel foreshadowed or looked back upon in some way?

Application

- How is your situation similar to or different from those being addressed?
- How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
- Is there any sin (attitude, behavior) you need to repent of?
- How might that sin reveal a deeper heart idol that you need to repent of?
- How does this passage lead you to trust God and his promises in Jesus? (believe)
- How does this passage call on you to change the way you live? (obey)