

Preparing a Bible Study

Pray and Read the **passage several times**.

1. **OBSERVATION:** Read it carefully and prayerfully so you know what it really says.

- What is the main idea?
- Build your questions around the big theme or point.
- Write your questions!
- A few simple, clear questions are best. Especially ones that relate back to the main idea.
- Three sorts of questions: max. 3 of each
- Asking them in this order means that people are doing their *own looking*, their *own thinking*, their *own applying*, and that their applications aren't plucked from thin air.
- **Observation:**
- What does it say? Resist the temptation to rush on from feeding back what it says. Try asking people to put part of the passage in their own words.
- Get them rubbing their noses in the Bible, but try not to patronise them with really obvious questions.
- Never answer these questions yourself: embrace the silence.

Examples:

- If there is a word or idea that reoccurs through the passage, ask them to spot all the instances of it. If two people or ideas are contrasted, ask them what the similarities and differences are between them.
- If the story or argument gets really complicated, ask them to explain it, or part of it.
- Good questions get people looking closely at the whole passage, not just stating the obvious about one verse.
- Who is Jesus talking to? And... try retelling us this episode in your own words.
- What are the different types of imagery that Jesus employs?
- What is the context of his teaching – what's just happened?
- How many times does he mention: worrying; treasure; his kingdom?
- What does Jesus say about the world?

2. **INTERPRETATION:** What does it mean?

- Pick the bits that you didn't understand at first, unless they're completely unconnected with the main idea, and ask them what they think they mean.
- Don't be afraid to enter into the debate. What might people have understood in the specific cultural context, and has understanding changed? If so, why?

Examples:

- If there is a jump in the story or the argument, ask them why they think it is there.
- If someone in the story makes an unexplained action, ask them why they did it.
- If there is an obvious link with somewhere else in the Bible, ask them what it is
- What are the dangers Jesus warns us about?
- Why does Jesus choose these images?
- What does he mean by storing treasures in heaven?
- What is Jesus saying about creation?
- What does he mean by the pagan world?
- When he says that you are 'more valuable than the birds', what's he getting at?

- Why is Jesus talking like this?
- How does Jesus use perspective?

3. **APPLICATION:** What are you going to do about it?

- Be direct! Use 'you' not 'we'. Make it positive, steering away from questions that will only make people feel guilty. Often an application might include both an encouragement and a challenge.
- It's important that you contribute what you feel God is calling you to do here: there are no wrong answers.

Examples:

- If there are situations in the passage that are directly comparable to ones that we might face, **ask people how they will put these things into practice.**
- If the cultural situation of the passage is very different, ask them what might be the equivalent in our day.
- If there are Old Testament situations or commands that seem to bear little resemblance to our life, ask them what we learn about Jesus or in light of Jesus
- What does it mean for you to trust in God, this week? What heart attitude do you need to repent of? What can you do now/tomorrow when worry comes into your heart?
- How can you commit to seeking first the Kingdom of God this week?
- To whom will you make yourself accountable as you embrace Jesus' teaching? What are you going to do for the poor in your community/on your way to work?

Application is hard work because it requires serious thinking. Sometimes it takes a long period of meditation (concentrated, prayerful thinking) before we see a way to apply a truth of Scripture we have studied. Sometimes it may mean looking beneath a temporary rule to see a timeless principle in the text. Sometimes it means looking beyond a local custom to see a universal insight. All this takes time and concentration which we may be hesitant and reluctant to give.

Application is hard work because Satan fights it viciously. The devil's strongest attacks often come in your quiet time when you are trying to apply what you have studied. Satan knows that as long as you are content with merely having head knowledge of the Word, you are not much of a threat to his plans. But as soon as you get serious about making some changes in your life, he will fight you tooth and nail. He hates doers of the Word. He will let you study the Bible all you desire as long as you don't ask yourself, "Now what am I going to do with all that I've learned?"

Application is hard work because we naturally resist change.

Often we don't "feel" like changing, which is what true application requires. We live by our emotions rather than by our wills, for we are content to stay the way we are. We hear Christians saying they don't feel like studying the Bible, they don't feel like praying, and they don't feel like witnessing. Feeling has nothing to do with living the Christian life, for feelings come and go. The key to spiritual maturity is to live for Jesus Christ not because we feel good, but because we know it is the right thing to do. I have discovered that if the only time I study the

Bible, pray, or witness is when I feel like it—the devil makes sure I never feel like it! You apply the Word of God to your life not because you may feel like it that day or week, but because you know God expects it of you. Applied Bible study as an act of the will leads to maturity and is a basis for stability in your Christian life.

Rick Warren and others use the S-P-A-C-E P-E-T-S acrostic. This acrostic is a useful aid to meditation and application of scripture. Each letter represents a question that can help you apply the passage to your life. If you memorize the nine questions that this acrostic represents, you will have them available every time you want to meditate on or study a passage. This acrostic asks:

Is there any . . .

- **S**in to confess? Do I need to make any restitution?
- **P**romise to claim? Is it a universal promise? Have I met the condition(s)?
- **A**ttitude to change? Am I willing to work on a negative attitude and begin building toward a positive one?
- **C**ommand to obey? Am I willing to do it no matter how I feel?
- **E**xample to follow? Is it a positive example for me to copy, or a negative one to avoid?
- **P**ray to pray? Is there anything I need to pray back to God?
- **E**rror to avoid? Is there any problem that I should be alert to or beware of?
- **T**ruth to believe? What new things can I learn about God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, or other biblical teachings?
- **S**omething to praise God for? Is there something here I can be thankful for?

Leading a Bible Study – Pray (ask someone else to pray)

Ice-breaker questions

These can be used before the passage is read, to get people opening up and sharing with each other. Take an image or event from the passage and link it with people's own experience, asking them to tell a story of how they have experienced it. A short completely unrelated ice-breaker can help people relax too.

Getting someone else to pray gets them used to the idea that you're not doing all the talking.

Read: Again, this can be an opportunity to get other people opening their mouths. Try and pick readers with a good translation (NIV, ESV). Reading the passage twice is often a good thing!

Deliver questions

Just read them out clearly, and repeat if necessary. Skip out less important questions (which you can put in brackets beforehand) if time is short.

Supplementary questions:

- Which verse did you get that from? What do you mean by that?
- What do you think, Alice? What about you, Tevon?