

# BIBLE STUDY METHODS FOR GROWING DISCIPLES

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this workshop is to introduce a variety of Bible study methods. This workshop is for adults who wish to enrich their personal devotions and individual Bible study as well as for study group leaders who are looking for ideas to make the study of Scripture exciting, meaningful, and transformative.

## DESCRIPTION

In this interactive workshop, participants will practice three methods of study designed to deepen individuals' understanding of Scripture as well as enhance their ability to apply biblical principles to everyday life.

Through an ongoing process of discernment and the observation of healthy, growing churches, National Ministries has identified nine qualities that, when present, contribute to effective disciple-making in the local church. These qualities are: spiritual and relational vitality; vital, transforming worship; gifts and call as the basis for ministry; a commitment to equipping; shared ministry and mission; holistic small groups; Spirit-led structures; a focus on mission; and a commitment to evangelism and numerical growth. Through quality study of Scripture, we can help develop spiritual and relational vitality, nurture small groups, and equip persons for shared ministry and mission. While we cannot manufacture spiritual vitality, we can seek to open ourselves up to God through spiritual disciplines, which include Bible study.

**TIME FRAME:** 2.5 hours with a 15-minute break

## BASIC WORKSHOP OUTLINE

I. Gathering and Welcome (*15 minutes*)

II. The Goal of Bible Study (*15 minutes*)

III. Bible Study Method: Asking Key Questions (*30 minutes*)

Break (*15 minutes*)

IV. Bible Study Method: Verse-by-Verse Study (*30 minutes*)

V. Bible Study Method: "You Are There" (*35 minutes*)

VI. Closing (*10 minutes*)



## PREPARATION AND MATERIALS

- Prayerfully review the workshop in its entirety.
- Prepare or secure volunteers to prepare and oversee the drinks and snacks for the break.
- Identify the material you want to display on newsprint, overhead, or in Power Point.
- Review and photocopy the handouts, noting areas of emphasis during the workshop.
- Post several sheets of newsprint together and title the top: The goal of Bible study is . . . .
- Draw the following chart on newsprint (or create Power Point slides that fill in the chart as you go):

<b>Bible Study Method</b>	<b>How It Meets Bible Study Goals</b>	<b>Limitations of the Method</b>	<b>Benefits of the Method</b>
Asking Key Questions			
Verse-by-Verse Study			
“You Are There”			

Gather the following materials:

- newsprint, chalkboard, overhead, or Power Point with key information
- masking tape, markers, chalk, or computer/projector (if board or Power Point is used)
- paper and pencils
- colored pencils, fine point markers, and crayons
- Bibles, Bible Atlas, Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias

## CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOP

### I. Gathering and Welcome (*15 minutes*)

Welcome the participants and allow for introductions as suits your setting.

Review the purpose and give a brief overview of the workshop.

Invite the participants to spend a few minutes considering what they believe is the goal of Bible study.

### II. The Goal of Bible Study (*15 minutes*)

Point out the newsprint titled “The goal of Bible study is . . .” Ask the participants to finish the sentence by adding words, phrases, or even drawings on the newsprint. After a few minutes, review their responses and ask for clarification as necessary.

Take a second look at the responses and note how each reflects Christian discipleship. Explain that this workshop is built on the understanding that the goal of Bible study is to nurture mature disciples of Christ.

Review the following information (You may want to display this information on a Power-Point slide, white board, or newsprint):

- Discipleship is the *ongoing, lifelong process* of *growing* to live more fully as a *follower* of Jesus Christ.
- The disciple-nurturing teacher helps persons have an *encounter* with the living Christ such that they are transformed from being conformed to the world into being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 12:2).

Note: You will refer back to the newsprint at the end of each practice study.

### **III. Bible Study Method: Asking Key Questions** (30 minutes)

Explain that you will be practicing three Bible study methods, beginning with asking questions that are based on four purposes of Scripture outlined in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (NRSV). (You may choose to ask individuals to read the passage from different translations if they are available.) Note for participants that 2 Timothy was written *before* the New Testament was compiled, so this reference is to what we call the “Old Testament,” which was the Bible of the early church. It is important, therefore, that we not neglect Old Testament texts in our Bible studies.

Distribute Bibles and Handout A, “Asking Key Questions Based on 2 Timothy 3:16,” and review the instructions. Allow 10 minutes, then ask for volunteers to respond to the following questions: (Participants may not finish in the time allotted and that’s okay. This is just practice.)

1. Did you learn anything new from this passage: About God? About people? About your relationship with God and others?
2. Did you identify any areas for personal growth?
3. Did you develop a plan for personal growth?

Refer to the newsprint you developed in Part II (“The goal of Bible Study is . . . .”) and have a discussion using the following questions:

1. In what ways does this method serve our identified goals of Bible study?
2. What are some of the limitations of this method?
3. What are some of the benefits?

As responses are given, fill in the Bible Study Method chart you created on newsprint or Power Point prior to the session (see PREPARATIONS AND MATERIALS).

### **Break** (15 minutes)

Direct the participants to the facilities and to the snacks. Give the time for return to the session.

#### **IV. Bible Study Method: Verse-by-Verse Study** (30 minutes)

Distribute Handout B, “Verse-by-Verse Analysis Chart,” and explain that this method of study involves examining a passage of Scripture in detail by asking questions, finding cross-references, and paraphrasing each verse.

Divide the participants into groups of three and invite them to study 2 Corinthians 5:13-15, working together to fill out the chart. Review the following instructions:

- Each group should appoint someone to report to the rest of the group.
- Write the verse’s text in column one.
- In column two, paraphrase the verse.
- List any questions and/or observations you have about the verse. Try to find the answers to your questions in other Bible passages if possible and list the answer as well.
- If you are using a study Bible with cross-references in the margin, look up the cross-references and note them in column four.
- In column five, list any insights that come to you from your study.
- Select which verse you would like to report on.
- Each individual then records in column six a personal application for each verse—these will *not* be shared.

Allow 10 minutes for the study, then reconvene and allow 10 minutes for each group to report out their results for one of the verses.

Fill in the Bible Study Method chart with the participants’ responses to this method.

#### **V. Bible Study Method: “You Are There”** (35 minutes)

Explain that the “You are There” study method involves putting yourself into the biblical story as one of the major characters and retelling the story from his or her perspective.

Distribute paper and pencils and make available art supplies, such as markers and colored pencils and basic Bible research materials (atlas, dictionaries, encyclopedias). Invite the participants to select one of the following stories:

- The story of the Flood (Genesis 6–8)
- The crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14)
- The destruction of Jericho (Joshua 6)
- The story of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah (2 Samuel 11–12)
- The resurrection of Lazarus (John 11)
- The story of the Last Supper (Luke 22)
- The story of Paul’s conversion on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-22)

Review the process as follows (you may want to post this on newsprint):

- Review the story and choose the character in the story from whose perspective you will tell the story.
- Read through the story several times and select a piece of the story to retell.
- Consider what your character saw, heard, and felt.
- Write or draw the story through the eyes of your chosen character. Keep in mind that the point of this method is to understand a familiar Bible story in a more intimate way. Take care not to rearrange the facts to say something other than what the story says.

After 15 minutes, ask the participants to join with 3 other people and take about 3 minutes each to retell their stories.

Fill in the Bible Study Method chart with the participants' responses to this method.

#### **VI. Closing** (*10 minutes*)

Explain that the methods you have practiced are only a few of the creative ways that individuals and groups can enrich their study of the Scriptures. Distribute Handout C, "Innovative Group Bible Study Methods."

Thank the group for their participation and answer any final questions or respond to comments.

Close the session with prayer for God to open the hearts of learners so that Scripture might transform lives, churches, communities, and our world.

NM 502 original by Ronald E. Schlosser, revised 2007 by Rev. Yvonne Carter, National Christian Education Coordinator, National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA

**Asking Key Questions Based on 2 Timothy 3:16**

*All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16, NRSV)*

*Instructions:*

- Read John 15:1-17 two or three times.
- Meditate silently on each question below, and then write your responses in the spaces provided.

1. What does the passage teach?

What does the passage say about God?

---

What does it say about people?

---

What does it say about my relationship with God and others?

---

2. In what way is this passage offering rebuke: Am I falling short in any of what it is teaching?

---

3. In what way is this passage offering correction?

What is the opposite of my sin?

---

What action do I need to take to get back on track?

---

4. What do I need to do to stay on track? Use this final question to lead you to other passages that will help you answer this question and develop a plan of action.

### Verse-by-Verse Analysis Chart

Verse Text	Paraphrase	Questions & Observations	Cross-References	Insights	Personal Applications

## **Innovative Group Bible Study Methods**

### **1. Depth Encounter**

With this Bible Study method, participants follow along in their Bibles as one person reads aloud a portion of Scripture. Each participant writes out his/her own paraphrase of the passage. The group members then read their paraphrases aloud and respond to one another's paraphrases, identifying which phrase or verse particularly speaks to them. The person who has done the paraphrase shares his or her thoughts about this phrase or verse.

This is followed by discussion of questions, such as:

- What does this passage say about my relationship with Christ?
- What does this passage say about my relationships with others (friends, family, enemies, animals, creation, institutions, etc.)?
- If I really believe this passage, how would I see persons and situations differently?

Participants ask one another discernment questions to help each other clarify thinking and feelings, such as:

- How would you apply that thinking to (name a situation)?
- If you had to explain that to a child, how would you say it?

Do not pass judgment on another's perspectives—do not offer responses such as “that's great” or “I disagree.” The purpose is to help each other work through the implications of the passage for his or her own life.

### **2. Key Words and Ideas**

This Bible Study method works well if texts are printed on paper, so that participants don't have to write in their Bibles. Participants read through the selected text silently. During a second reading, participants highlight key words in each verse. The key words help show the development of the writer's thought and/or the central idea. For instance, in John 8:13-20 (RSV), the key words witness, true, judge, true, law, Father, know, and hour reveal the point of Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees.

Participants share identified key words in small groups, then they work together to write a summary sentence that lifts up the key teaching of the passage. In the John 8:13-20 for example, such a sentence might read, “When attempting to determine who Jesus is, we will misunderstand him at every point if we think only in earthly frames of reference.”

This method can be adapted for use with narrative passages. Each section or paragraph might be summarized in a phrase or short sentence. For example, the story of the raising of Lazarus in John 11:1-44 might be summarized as follows:

Verses 1-4:	The Friendship of Jesus
Verses 5-16:	The Courage of Jesus
Verses 17-27:	The Promise of Jesus
Verses 28-37:	The Humanity of Jesus
Verses 38-44:	The Power of Jesus

### 3. Parallel Versions

With this Bible Study method, a portion of Scripture is read by one of the members of the group. The other participants read along silently from different versions and note differences in words and expressions of thought.

Following the reading, the group discusses the differences among the various versions, verse by verse. The group then works on its own paraphrase of the passage, selecting the best rendering from existing versions or rephrasing in their own words. As each verse is composed (on chalkboard or newsprint), there should be group consensus as to the way it is stated.

### 4. “You Are There” Interviews

This Bible Study method uses the approach of interviewing eyewitness to an event and is best used with narratives. Participants select which character from whose perspective they wish to view the story. For instance, in the story of the man born blind in John 9:1-38, participants might put themselves in the place of the disciples, the Pharisees, the neighbors of the blind man, his parents, or the man himself. To get into the story, one member of the group reads it aloud from the Bible while the other members close their eyes and imagine themselves as the various persons on the scene, experiencing what is happening. The reader then acts as interviewer and asks each participant to describe his or her feelings about the incident. The participants respond in the first person.

To elicit responses, the interviewer asks probing questions. For example, those who take the role of disciples might be asked: “You wanted to engage Jesus in a theological discussion about illness, but instead he heals a man on the Sabbath and causes quite a commotion. How did you feel in the midst of the commotion? Why do you think Jesus does these things? Are you willing to continue to follow him, even if it means death?” The parents might be asked: “Why are you afraid to talk about this miracle? What do you think of Jesus, the one who restored your son’s sight?”

After the feelings of the biblical characters are explored, the members discuss what insights they have gained in relation to their lives today.

### 5. Raising Questions

With this Bible Study method, as a Scripture passage is read aloud, participants jot down questions that the passage raises for them. The questions can be about:

- something they don't understand
- something about the background or context of the passage
- gaps in the story that make them wonder
- something that is related to a contemporary situation

Each participant formulates three questions, which are listed on chalkboard or newsprint. Group members then select questions to research and discuss using Bible commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and concordances. Participants might pair up on questions. Findings are reported to the group, which may then continue the discussion and consider implications for modern life.

## **6. Theological Themes and Life Issues**

With this Bible Study method, themes such as grace, forgiveness, justice, stewardship, discipleship, sin, salvation, peace, and parables are studied. Essential tools are a concordance, Bible dictionary, Bible encyclopedia, and Bible commentaries. Teams of persons can work together on the research, recording what they find out so that they can report to the whole group. The entire group works together to consider the implications for today.

## RESOURCES

*The Bible Comes Alive: New Approaches for Bible Study Groups* by Hans-Ruedi Weber (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1996).

*The Bible Speaks to You* by Robert McAfee Brown (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985).

*Discipleship Journal's Best Bible Study Methods*, Compiled by Melissa Munro and Judith Couchman (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002).

*Encounters with the Living Christ: Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John* by Robert B. Setzer Jr., (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999).

*How to Study Your Bible: The Lasting Rewards of the Inductive Method* by Kay Arthur (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2001).

### *The Kerygma Program*

This is an intensive, long-term, in-depth study of the Bible. For more information or to order, call The Kerygma Program at 1-800-KERYGMA, or visit the web site: [www.kerygma.com](http://www.kerygma.com).

*Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods: Twelve Ways You Can Unlock God's Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

*Transforming Bible Study* by Walter Wink (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990).

*Using the Bible in Groups* by Roberta Hestenes (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985).

Women of the Bible Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999). (Available from Judson, 1-800-4 JUDSON or [www.judsonpress.com](http://www.judsonpress.com).) Available titles are:

*Deborah: Daring to Be Different for God*

*Esther: Becoming a Woman God Can Use*

*Hannah: Entrusting Your Dreams to God*

*Mary: Choosing the Joy of Obedience*

*Ruth: Trusting that God Will Provide for You*

*Sarah: Facing Life's Uncertainties with a Faithful God*