

## **Six Questions to Ask When Studying the Bible in a Group**

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The word of God is a small group's primary source of spiritual power, encouragement, and wisdom.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man (or woman) of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. ([2 Timothy 3:16–17](#))

If we are trying to teach, correct, train, or encourage one another toward maturity in Christ, the Bible is our book. To be sure, Bible study is not the only thing (or even the main thing) we do in a small group, but without it, a small group will lack the life it's meant to develop and preserve.

Studying the Bible in a group can be the best and worst way to study the Bible. It can be the best because you get to benefit from the Spirit-filled insight and experience of other believers. It can be the worst for a variety of reasons.

It might be the guy who dominates the conversation, barely allowing anyone else to share something or ask a question. Or the girl whose emotional articulation of what it means to her has little or nothing to do with the actual passage at hand. Or it could be the person who always asks the peripheral and irrelevant question that sidetracks the whole discussion for way too long. Or it might be the three or four quiet ones who never say more than two or three words, even when you call on them.

### **One Way to Read the Bible Together**

"The word of God is a small group's primary source of spiritual power, encouragement, and wisdom."

Reading the Bible in community can be challenging, but it can also be deeply rewarding. The Bible gives us resources for the relationships in our groups that we would never have otherwise. It speaks into Christian community with unparalleled authority and relevance.

If you want to read the Bible with your small group, or have tried in the past and it's fallen flat, you might try the Swedish method. There's nothing especially Swedish about reading the Bible this way. It was named the Swedish Method because Ada Lum first encountered the approach in a Swedish student group. Whether you're reading alone, or with another person one-on-one, or in a small group, this method gives you five things to look for in every passage.

One advantage of this way of reading the Bible is that it requires less preparation of leaders than the alternatives. It's based on mutual discovery and dialogue. It is helpful to have one person facilitate and even lead the conversation, but the model thrives with engagement from the whole group, each person seeing and contributing something from the five categories below.

The five things, each represented by a symbol, are light bulbs, question marks, crosses, arrows, and talking bubbles. I'll explain them each, using 2 Timothy 3:16–17 as an example passage.



A light bulb should be something that “shines” from the passage — something new or fresh. *What stuck out to you this time through?* Every time we read the Bible, God will be reminding us of things we’ve forgotten, and showing us things we haven’t seen before.

And when we read the Bible in a group, he’ll be revealing different things to different people, multiplying the insight and learning. God does not intend for us to see different *meanings*, but to learn the one true multi-dimensional meaning, and then to see some of the limitless implications and applications from that truth.

Light Bulb (Example): *All of Scripture is profitable, not just the verses that seem immediately profitable to me. Part of the challenge of reading the Bible is asking God to show us the spiritual benefit of every word he’s given us.*



Did these verses raise any questions as you read? You might stumble over a word or verse, or a connection to another part of the Bible, or a particular theological point.

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With every question you ask, try and answer your own question before going to others for help. Some of the deepest, most lasting learning we do comes when we press ourselves to search the Bible for an answer to our own question. The answer might be in the verse we’re studying, or in the surrounding chapter or book, or God may bring to mind a verse or verses elsewhere in the Bible. Stop, pray, ask, and do your best. *Then*, turn to others (whether commentaries or other members of your group) for another perspective.

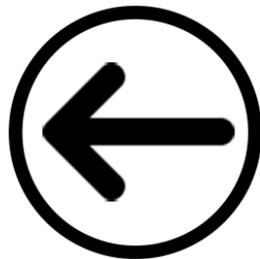
Question Mark (Example): *Why does Paul list the benefits or uses of Scripture like he does? Is there a reason they are ordered the way they are?*



The cross is not original to the Swedish Method, but was added to bring a Christ-centered lens to our Bible reading. Where do we see Jesus Christ in these verses? Jesus did say the whole Bible is about him, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” (Luke 24:44)

What in this passage helped you see more of Jesus and his cross, or what moved you to love him more?

Cross (Example): Jesus died and God wrote a book (the Scriptures) at least in part so that we would not just be saved, but be made increasingly “complete.” Having saved us through the cross, God intends to make us more and more mature; that is, more and more like Jesus.



An arrow indicates a personal application for our lives. Identify and commit to something you sense the Spirit is leading you to do in obedience to this text. Make it specific enough that you can do it this week, and make it personal enough that you yourself can do it (and not someone else).

A lot of Bible study, both privately and in a group, falls short of applying the text to our personal lives. One of the great things about studying the Bible in a group is that there’s built-in accountability. If you talk out loud with others through steps to take toward greater obedience, you have other people around you to follow up and ask you how those particular things are going.

Arrow (Example): When I do my personal Bible reading, I am going to regularly ask if God might be 1) teaching me something, 2) telling me to stop doing something I am doing, 3) correcting some wrong thinking or behavior, or 4) preparing me to live more effectively for him.



The talking bubble is something to share. Write down the name of someone who might benefit from hearing what you’ve seen in the Bible. It could be something that you share with another believer, or it might be a way of sharing the gospel with a not-yet believer in your life. How can you share the joy, peace, and conviction you’ve been given by God with others?

Identify a specific person you might connect with in the next week, and think about a time you could bring this particular truth up with them.

Talking Bubble (Example): The Bible is not just an old book filled with truth and wisdom. It is actually extremely relevant (profitable) for my everyday life (and yours). God wants us to learn how to truly live a full and meaningful life through this book.

### **Why?**

“We multiply the riches when we read and share the Bible together.”

One last question I love to ask when I read the Bible with a group: Why are these verses in the Bible? We’re trying to summarize God’s purpose in putting these particular words in his book. There are a number of ways to ask this question. Why is this passage in this particular book of the Bible? What might the Bible lose if this passage was left out? What’s the author’s main point? Try to sum up your answer in one sentence.

Why? (Example): 2 Timothy 3:16–17, maybe more than any other verses in the Bible, state God’s relationship to his word (God-breathed), and declare its relevance for all of life (profitable). Paul (and God) wants us to see the absolute authority of the Bible, through which God speaks into every aspect of our spiritual growth.

We multiply the riches when we read and share the Bible together.

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