

My Six Questions for Group or Personal Bible Study

One person has said that the best strategy for Bible study is to bombard the text with questions. Here are six general questions for personal or group study that can be applied to any passage of Scripture. These are not the only questions to ask but they do lead you through the steps of inductive Bible study – observation, interpretation, application. I've used 2 Timothy 3:16-17 as an example.

What is the main idea of this passage?

At first glance you can see these verses are about Scripture, the Word of God. But looking more closely the main idea is even a little narrower. Paul is talking about the benefit or profit of the Scripture. Sometimes it is more difficult to narrow down the main idea but it helps in understanding the unique contribution of a passage by refining a general idea as much as possible.

What does the writer tell you about this main idea?

Paul said several things here about the Scriptures. He tells us he is writing about all Scripture. He tells us that all Scripture is profitable for four things: teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. And Paul tells us the ultimate purpose of these four things: that we would be adequate and equipped for every good work.

What is unclear or puzzling to you in this passage?

Initially, this passage seems pretty straightforward. But someone might wonder, "What does 'inspired' mean?" or, "What proof is there that the Bible is 'inspired by God'?" Another question might be, "What is the relationship between teaching, reproof, correction, and training?" One of my favorite questions to ask is, "Why did the writer include these verses here?" Answering this question will often lead you into the larger context.

What other passages or verses in the Bible shed additional light on these verses?

The cross references in your Bible can help here. Or a passage may remind you of another passage. 2 Peter 1:20-21 connects with this passage and tells us about the Holy Spirit's role in revealing Scripture. Earlier in this letter to Timothy, Paul tells him to be diligent in handling the Scriptures well so that when we stand before God we won't be ashamed.

What implications or general principles can you draw from this passage?

Implications can be stated through "If/then" statements:

- If it is true that all Scripture is inspired by God, then I should not limit myself to my favorite passages of the Bible but read all of Scripture.

- If all Scripture is profitable, then it is important to understand and apply it accurately.
- If all Scripture is intended to equip me for every good work, then it is authoritative over my behavior.
- If all Scripture is to train me in righteousness, then my life should be changing as a result of reading the Bible.

What specifically do you sense the Spirit leading you to do in obedience to this passage?

In the article, “Hand-Crafted Application Questions” (see Life Group Leader resource page) Rich Lowry uses the acronym F.O.R.M. – Family, Occupation, Religion, Motivation. This is a helpful tool to begin to think about the relationships and spheres of our lives and how the Scripture speaks to each.

2 Tim.3:16-17 clearly speaks to “religion” or our faith. But it speaks to my motivations and tells me that when I read the Bible I must come reverently because it is God’s word to me for the purpose of changing me. That reverence for God’s word must include seeking to obey and not just understand the Bible. So I will take 30 minutes once per week to identify one specific application from my Bible reading to focus on for the coming week.

Why not give these questions a try in your personal reading and in your Life Group? Feel free to massage or adapt these questions to suit your personal style. The key point is ask questions as you engage in your personal Bible reading or when you study with your group.