

Study Overview

The Importance of Scripture

Our hope for understanding God, ourselves, the world and all of life hinges upon God's revealing himself to us. His desire to do this is seen by his self-witness in nature, but primarily through the Word which he inspired, the Bible. Jesus Christ and his good news of grace are the focal point of the entire Bible.

Furthermore, the Word of God creates and builds up true Christian communities (Acts 2:14-42; 1 Pet. 1:22-25). True community life cannot be sustained apart from it. Why? Because the Gospel alone calls us out of our self-indulgence and into relationships with others: "Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love." Therefore, the study and application of Scripture must be at the center of our communities, and our central aim in this endeavor must be to encounter *Jesus* in the pages of the Bible.

However, our goal is not simply to produce "smarter sinners." Rather it is see whole lives changed by the grace of Christ — and whole neighborhoods changed *through* us! This will only happen through devotion to prayer, gospel-induced relationships, gospel-motivated deeds and more. True Christian communities do more than study the Bible (Acts 2:42-47)! They grow holistically, increasing in their love for God and for 'neighbor' as the word of Christ dwells in them richly (Col. 3:16; 2 Thess. 1:3).

Key Features

1. Centrality of God's Word
2. Digestion
3. Process-oriented (not answer-oriented)
4. Discussion (not teaching)

Preparing the Study

Bible Translations. It is recommended that your Community Groups use either the English Standard Version (ESV), which we use in Grace DC's Sunday services, or the New International Version (NIV). Each has its various strengths and weaknesses. You may choose to print out a copy of the Bible passage each week (which may be particularly helpful for new members and non-Christians). But it would also be good to encourage your committed members to bring their own Bibles, as this is useful for cross-referencing other parts of scripture, or seeing the larger context of the passage being studied, etc.

Study Guides. Sermon Discussion Study Guides are available each week on our website. These prepared questions should be seen as the starting point for the leader and the group. It's important for you to consider the needs and personalities of your group members. You may choose to customize and adapt the questions or come up with your own. But you should also feel free to use the Discussion Questions *as is* — even read the questions directly off the sheet. You can print out a copy of the Discussion Questions each week (or email them to the group ahead of time); or you may simply lead the group orally.

Preparation. You may want to prepare for the study as follows:

- (1) Pray and ask for God's help during your time of preparation ("Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law!" —Psalm 119:18)
- (2) Soak in the text. Read through the passage, taking notes on key insights and applications you remember from the sermon, and new ones that stand out to you as you read the passage again. Also take note of unresolved questions that come to mind.
- (3) Jot down some answers to the Discussion Questions. Begin to evaluate the quality of the pre-written questions; eliminate leading or loaded questions, clarify confusing words or phrases, etc.).

- (4) Supplement your answers with insights you receive from other resources if you choose to use them (Bible commentary, etc). *This step is optional.*
- (5) Tailor the study to the needs and personality of your group. Adapt the Discussion Questions or add your own questions. Be sure to include a balance of personal application questions, “kingdom application” questions, and questions that help us to consider how the gospel begins to change us.
 - (6) Pray and thank God for the things you learned and prepared. This would be a good time to pray for your group members — pondering them in light of the things you studied in God’s Word.

STARTING the Study

Starting. Making the transition from a social time (ice-breaker, meal, etc.) to the Bible Study can sometimes be a challenge. Consider the following tips on kicking off a weekly study:

- (1) Pray for God’s help during your study of his Word. You may ask for a volunteer, or you yourself may pray.
- (2) Introduce the passage to be studied: “We’re going to look at Acts 1:1-11 this week. Grab your Bibles!” At this time, you may pass out the discussion questions or print-outs of the Bible passage, and read through the brief introduction at the top of your study sheet (optional). In particular, be sensitive to visitors and people who were not present at the prior week’s study.
- (3) Read the passage together. You may have each person read a short selection (e.g., 1-2 verses), or you may simply ask for a volunteer to read the whole passage him/herself. Note: Be sensitive to new Christians and non-Christians in the group. Don’t assume they know where “Acts” (or whatever passage you’re studying) is located in the Bible.
- (4) Warm-up Question. Before your group digs into the meat of the study, it is often helpful to ask one or two brief “launching questions” to initiate discussion. Use a question that touches on some theme to be covered in the study, but one that could be answered by anyone in the room, regardless of religious background or familiarity with the Bible passage. For example: “In your own words, how would you define FREEDOM? What are some images, historical events, or personal experiences that come to mind when you think of ‘freedom?’” NOTE: At this time, it’s best not to ask a question that is overly personal or probing: e.g., “Tell us of a time when somebody violated your trust.” The key is simply to get their minds and mouths *moving!*