

DISCOVERY

How to Lead Your Group or Class Using This Process

Beginning in April 2020, we have modified the Study Questions page that is part of The Lookout study material now contained in every issue of *Christian Standard*. These Bible Discovery questions are developed to be used in groups and classes to do several things well:

- **engage people directly in God’s living and active Word**, allowing Scripture to speak for itself,
- **provide space for God’s Word to saturate the minds of group members** so it may teach, rebuke, correct, and train,
- **connect people in biblical community**, where the New Testament “one another” passages can be lived out,
- **discuss God’s Word alone** (without an overdependence on outside sources), which helps people grow in obedience and maturity in Christ, and
- **apply God’s Word** so it may thoroughly equip and empower people for every good work, enabling groups to grow, bear much fruit, and reproduce.

Start Here—The Lookout: Study, Apply, Discover

The Lookout section of *Christian Standard* comprises four pages each week: an Introduction page followed by Study, Application, and Discovery. Leaders should read the Study and Application pages beforehand to prepare for their group or class; in fact, all group members will benefit by reading these materials, including the supplemental texts, before meeting together.

However, and this is important, leaders will find it most beneficial to *not* read the Study and Application material aloud in the group/class session. The point of the Bible Discovery process is for group members to read and listen to God’s Word and then *discover* (rather than being told) what God is teaching them through his Word. God has promised that his Word will not return to him empty but will accomplish what he desires and achieve the purpose for which he has sent it (Isaiah 55:11). God will reveal truth through his Word; we want to get out of the way and allow God’s Word to speak for itself.

Bible Discovery Overview

Bible Discovery takes your group through a God-honoring and God-exalting process in which people will directly engage with God’s Word; it is a discipleship tool that consistently works with seekers, young Christians, and more mature believers alike.

As you will see, the Bible Discovery process is very simple to use but profound in its impact. You will notice in these studies that certain words and phrases are repeated from week to week. This is intentional; we want to keep these studies simple to lead, allowing leaders and groups to easily learn and be able to reproduce the process.

How to Lead Each Part of the Bible Discovery Process

As you begin to use the Bible Discovery process, you will notice a flow that repeats itself from week to week, regardless of the Scriptures being considered. Each lesson includes seven components, and each one plays a vital part in the overall process:

1. Opening Discussion Questions

These questions follow up on decisions made the previous week, help group members begin their time together with grateful hearts, and lead naturally into group prayer. Encourage group members to respond to each question in 60 seconds or less and to make their answers concrete and specific. If someone says something like, “I had a good day” or “It was a bad week,” ask them to be more precise: “What specifically about the day was good?” “What happened, specifically, that made your week bad?”

2. Bible Reading and Observation

This section gets the group into God’s Word, but more importantly, it gets God’s Word into group members! The pattern for this part can be summarized as RRROD: Read-Read-Retell (or Summarize)-Observe-Detail. Some folks may not immediately see the value of reading, rereading (preferably from a different Bible version), and then retelling the Bible narrative, but we strongly urge you to try it. Remember that the Bible was originally written to be read aloud in gatherings, and it is still a very effective part of studying Scripture. This process helps God’s Word saturate people’s minds and hearts so it may teach, equip, and transform us.

The RETELLING (or summarization) of the Bible passage begins to engage the group in observation. The person chosen should simply retell (not interpret) the passage(s) in his or her own words, without looking at the text, while others listen. This should take no longer than 60 seconds. Remind the reteller to keep it simple, as if they were telling the story to a 10-year-old. Other participants can then jump in and mention things they noticed that were left out or something else they observed.

The leader can follow up by using the next question or two that ask group members for general OBSERVATIONS about the text (questions such as, “What in general did you observe?” or “What jumped out to you?”). The purpose is for group members to see and then discuss the major themes and their thoughts about the passage.

This is followed by a series of open-ended questions that help the group dig deeper into some of the DETAILS/specifics of the passage. Note that the group study always moves from general to more specific.

3. Discoveries About God and People

Every lesson will include questions about what group members learn from the passage about God and what they learn about people, humanity, and/or themselves. These questions get to

the point of the passage being studied. The Bible consistently teaches us about God and about us; it shows us God's nature and the fallen yet redeemed nature of humankind.

OPTION: Some groups choose to write down what is being shared by participants in this part of the study. One person other than the facilitator takes personal notes and reads it back later or jots down what's shared on a whiteboard or flipchart.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE: It's important throughout the Discovery process to keep discussion focused on the passage being considered in this lesson. The process can easily break down when people begin mentioning outside sources such as other Bible passages, a sermon they once heard, or a book they've read. (These are examples of what may be called "hyperlinking.")

Why is it important to stay within the passage being studied?

First, it puts the non-Christian, new Christian, and longtime Christian—the pedestrians and seminarians alike—on the same footing. People who are not as "churched up" as others can feel disenfranchised and alienated when they sense they don't have the same knowledge as others in a group. This is why countless people in our churches stay away from groups and classes. One of the reasons the Discovery method is so effective is that it includes mixed age groups, life stages, and spiritual stages.

Second, staying within the passage being studied helps keep the wolves away from the sheep! If someone quotes one good theologian, author, or teacher, that opens the door to someone else to quote anyone.

There are a couple possible exceptions to this rule. It is generally acceptable for someone in the group to refer casually to something they read in The Lookout's supplemental text, the Study page, or Application page for that week's lesson. They may even refer to a previous lesson in the same unit. But don't allow those comments to take the group down a rabbit trail. Move the discussion back to the passage currently being considered.

What do you do as a leader if someone hyperlinks or says something inaccurate or even wrong? The leader should simply ask, "Where is that found in the passage?" Simply remind people to keep the discussion focused on the passage being studied.

4. Obedience

Every lesson includes at least one question regarding how group members will *obey* what they are learning. Along with the psalmist we proclaim that God's "statutes are wonderful; therefore I obey them" (119:129). The Bible warns, "Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them" (1 John 2:4, 5). And James puts it bluntly: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22). Studying God's Word must always result in obeying—doing what it says.

5. Mission

Each lesson also includes at least one question about how participants will therefore (based on their study of this passage) serve others or share God's message with someone. This, of course, is part of doing what God's Word says. We study Scripture not merely for more head knowledge (which tends to puff us up), but to tangibly love others (which builds them up; see 1 Corinthians 8:1). Bible Discovery groups and classes meet in biblical community (inward) to grow in our faith (forward) and carry out God's mission (outward), which gives glory to God (upward) . . . and God wants this to be reproduced (onward) over and over.

6. Decision: 'I Will . . .'

Through his Word, God transforms our minds, our hearts, and finally, our wills. So every lesson includes a time in which each person can consider and then proclaim an "I will" statement based on the passage studied and the group discussion. This statement will usually flow naturally from your discussions about obedience and mission. Encourage participants to make their statement simple, measurable, actionable, realistic, and timely. Challenge them to make statements to which they can respond definitively to the questions, "Did you do it? How?" (Note that the following week's opening questions will ask how everyone did over the past week in living out the decisions they've made. This natural accountability rhythm is vital in helping one another grow spiritually.)

Remind participants to avoid responding with superlatives or comparatives such as, "I will trust God more" and "I will do better this week." Instead, encourage quantifiable responses such as, "I will trust God more by having a conversation with my co-worker about God" or "I will ask my spouse for forgiveness for the way I spoke to him/her last week."

Also, be aware of "Christianized" "I will" statements such as "I will read my Bible more" or "I will pray more." Those are good starts, but encourage more measurable and specific statements. How many minutes will they spend in the Word or prayer? What will they read? Who/what will they pray for? When will they set aside time for Bible reading or prayer?

This part of the Bible Discovery process is vital in that it links God's Word and group discussion to what group members will actually do in response. Therefore, *do not rush this part*. Give time for people to prayerfully reflect on what they've observed, learned, and discovered and how they will then respond to God. This is the transformational part, where group members' lives actually begin to look different. It's a very intentional part; as participants discover or rediscover truth about God and themselves, how will they actually behave differently this week? What will they commit to and be accountable for?

7. Challenges for the Week

The official meeting time ends with a simple question: "What challenge will you be facing this week?" This ending accomplishes several objectives:

1. It builds a sense of community as the group hears about one another's needs.

2. It integrates the New Testament one-another passages into group life: “Build each other up,” “Serve one another in love,” “Carry each other’s burdens,” “Be kind and compassionate to one another,” “Encourage one another daily,” “Pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

3. It provides occasion for group prayer. Note that we don’t do the typical (and often awkward for less-churched people) “prayer requests.” We end as we began, but this time we look to the challenges we’ll face in the upcoming week. Typically, groups do pray at this point, but it comes more naturally. Be sensitive to people who may not yet be Christ followers.

4. This ending time should also give group members opportunities to connect and intersect between group meetings. Relationships should be 24-7, not just one day a week. It’s about doing life together as friends, not just having a weekly meeting.

And One More Thing: Reproduction

This Discovery process is intentionally simple in order to make it reproducible. Encourage group and class members to invite others. Keep the same process going each week. People will enjoy it. As the group grows, break into subgroups of about three to eight people each, facilitated by other group members. Share leadership! Because of the simplicity of the Discovery process and the natural rhythms, group members will say, “I can do that!” So let them!

Stick with the Process: A Few Suggestions

For many groups and classes, the Bible Discovery process will feel different than the typical Bible studies they’ve experienced in the past . . . particularly if those groups have used many of the books, study guides, and videos that have been widely available over the last several decades.

Two facts are important to remember.

First, when your group or class uses The Lookout section long-term, you are effectively studying through the entire Bible, hitting the most significant themes and passages, every six years. Studying God’s Word, not someone’s thoughts or ideas *about* God’s Word, is what brings spiritual transformation and helps produce spiritual fruit.

Second, the Bible Discovery process is developed to get everything else out of the way so a group can engage directly with God’s Word. But it does more than that. It brings about God’s purposes for his Word as participants learn to obey it and live out his mission for his world.

There is a tendency for groups to tinker with or try to “tweak” the Discovery process, especially by those who have not used it for very long. We encourage you to stay with it and trust the process. Together as a group, become accustomed to the flow of it. The words, the order, and the methodology in each step are intentional, have worked well over time, and can have immense value for you and your community.

Bible Discovery Background

The Discovery process we are using is adapted from the Discovery Bible Study (DBS) method used effectively around the world in making disciples and multiplying churches exponentially. This “DBS hybrid,” as one church leader called it, works together with our Study material by Mark Scott and Application material by David Faust.

We believe God’s people need to get into God’s Word both individually and in groups. But the process for how one studies God’s Word alone and how groups study it in community are very different. ***Bible Discovery, therefore, is best used in groups and classes whereas the Study and Application pages work best for individual study.***

We appreciate the assistance of several leaders who helped us “discover,” develop, and deploy this process in The Lookout section of *Christian Standard*. Thanks especially to Wes Sebree, Russ Howard, and Doug Lucas.

Imagine . . .

Imagine what God will do when individuals take time during the week to read the Bible, including the supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections. Imagine those same individuals coming together as a group to engage together in God’s Word, discovering and obeying God’s truth, living it out in mission in their communities. Imagine those groups inviting and including people who were once far from God as they discover him among his people. Imagine God’s Word going out to our communities and not returning to him empty but accomplishing what he desires and achieving the purpose for which he has sent it! This is our prayer for this Bible Discovery process!