



# How to write and lead a participatory bible study



## Why use this activity?

The purpose of participatory Bible study is to encourage a group to discuss a passage of scripture together, to reveal what it says to us, to hear from God and to take action. This tool can be used to help prepare a study from any Bible passage for a small discussion group.



## You will need

- One or several Bibles, perhaps referring to more than one version (translation) so that you can compare between them.
- You may need a concordance, Bible dictionary or Bible study guide



## Timeline

Typically one to two hours. Participatory Bible studies can be prepared relatively quickly, in perhaps just 30 minutes - when you are experienced in doing so. Or it can take many days, depending on how much research, prayer and other preparation you choose to put in to it.



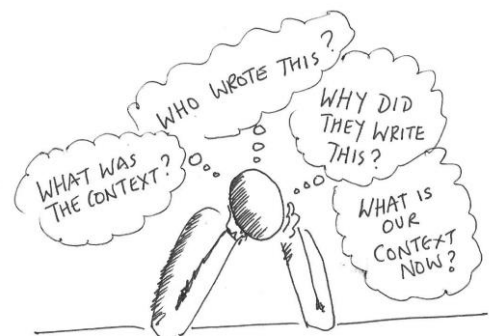
## Keys to success

Before leading a group in discussing the passage together, it is important to spend some time in preparation. The main purpose of the preparation time is to familiarise yourself with the passage and to think of some study questions for the group to use together. There are three key issues to consider while doing this preparation:

- **Observation** - looking closely at what you see in the passage
- **Interpretation** - interpreting what the passage means
- **Application** - applying the passage to your life or context so that you can respond

The following keys to success, are particularly useful if you are new to preparing and leading participatory Bible studies. The more you do it, the more you will develop your own ways of preparing and leading.

- **Preparation:** It is important to set aside sufficient time to prepare so that you feel confident in leading the Bible study. However,



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some people find that if they spend too much time preparing, this can make it harder to hear other people's insights during the group study time.

- **Trusting God:** Don't think that you have to know everything or be able to provide all the answers. The Bible teaches us that we are a body, and each of us has different functions and gifts. Whilst some people find that they learn most from personal study, other people find they learn more from hearing other views, experiences and insights.
- **Relationships:** We serve a God of love, and he loves each of us. The most important part of a Bible study is for people to feel welcome, accepted and trusted. As we build relationships together then we open ourselves up to hear from God and His word and we can grow together.



## What to do - preparation

### Read and observe the passage

- Either consult the group in advance or choose your own passage that you would like the group to discuss. If there is a specific topic that you need the Bible study to cover, then think carefully about which passages would be suitable. If you need help finding a suitable passage you may like to use a concordance or internet Bible search tool.
- Be open to being challenged about any preconceived ideas you have about what the passage says. Spend some time carefully reading and reflecting on it. Try to examine the main focus of the passage before looking at the detail.
- The first stage is to try to see what is there. Re-read the passage several times.
  - *What questions can you think of when reading the passage?*
  - *Is there anything you do not understand?*
  - *What stands out for you?*



Make a note of what you see and any questions you have.

- Try not to look at any secondary material before you have spent time carefully examining the passage itself. If there are any words that you do not understand you could use a Bible dictionary.
- Think of some questions that could help the group to observe what the passage is saying.

### Interpret the passage

- After observing and understanding the obvious facts in the passage, we need to interpret them so that we know the original meaning the author was seeking to convey.
- To interpret a passage it is helpful to understand some background about what is written.
  - Who wrote it?

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- When was it written?
  - Who was it written to?
  - What is it saying?
  - Why do you think the writer said this?
  - What did it mean to the people then? etc.
- Try to understand the context of the passage within the book itself and in relation to the rest of the Bible. Interpret scripture with scripture. Look for other similar passages to help you to understand what this passage is saying. To do this, you could use an internet Bible search web-page, a cross-reference Bible or a concordance.
  - If you need help in interpreting the passage, look at some Bible commentaries to see what other commentators have said.
  - Note some questions that will help people to understand and interpret the passage.

**Apply what you've read**

- After coming to an understanding of what the passage means we need to know what it is saying to us personally.
  - It is important to look at our own lives and see if we are doing what the Bible teaches. The following questions may be asked: How does what this text says apply to me?
  - How can respond to it now?
  - In what ways do I need to change?
- Think of some specific questions that will invite others to discuss how the passage applies to their own lives.

**In summary, before leading the Bible study, try to do the following:**

- Spend time carefully reflecting on the passage and look to interpret it in the context in which it was written.
- Try to have some understanding of what the passage says and what it is saying to us now.
- Think about how the passage applies to your life and allow it to challenge you.
- Prepare a series of questions for the group that will invite them to observe, interpret and apply the passage for themselves.
- Make a note of observations and questions to remind you as you lead the study.

**Helpful tools for preparing to lead a Bible study**

- There are many short Bible studies in Section C of *Reveal*. You are welcome to use them or adapt them.
- [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) is an excellent website that allows you to look up Bible passages in a variety of different translations. The site also allows you to search the Bible by 'keyword' and by topic.
- There are also a number of very helpful Concordances and Bible dictionaries that have been written.
- Tearfund has published many Bible studies on many different subject areas. To view these, please go to: [tilz.tearfund.org](http://tilz.tearfund.org)

Awareness-raising

Children &amp; youth

Climate &amp; environment

Conflict &amp; peace-building

Corruption &amp; governance

Disaster risk management

Discrimination &amp; inclusion

Food &amp; livelihoods

Gender &amp; sexual violence

Health &amp; HIV

Influencing decision-makers

Migration &amp; trafficking

Water, sanitation &amp; hygiene

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## What to do – during the group discussion

### Start with an introduction

- Welcome people and make sure they feel comfortable. If this is a new group, make sure everyone is introduced to each other and has time to talk before the study begins.
- Introduce the main topic in the passage. Be clear about the main aim of the study.
- You may want to share some background about the passage that you will be looking at.

### Read the passage

- Read through the passage slowly so that people have time to understand it and think about what it is saying.
- You may like to ask someone else to read the passage.
- You may want to read it several times.



### Encourage the group to discuss and share openly

- Invite others in the group to respond to the passage.
- Ask specific questions about the passage that will encourage others to discuss how to *understand*, *interpret* and *apply* it themselves.
- Share some of the things that you have learned from the time you have spent looking at the passage.

### Conclusion

- Summarise some of the main points of discussion.
- Encourage participants to reflect more on the meaning of the text and to put what they have learnt into action.

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**Helpful tips for facilitating Bible study groups**

- Try to keep the group size between 4 and 12. If groups are bigger, then there is less opportunity for everyone to join in the discussion.
- It is important that the facilitator spends time examining the passage beforehand so that they are able to help the group to understand it better. This does not mean they should use the group as an opportunity to share everything they have learnt. If they do, people may feel that what they have to say is not as valuable because they do not know as much as the facilitator.
- Encourage people to pray and ask for God's help before they begin the study. Finish by thanking God for what has been learnt and ask for help in applying the learning in everyday life.
- Try to ask open questions about the passage of scripture that will encourage people to engage together with what it is saying. Always try to keep the conversation going.
- The purpose of the Bible study is to engage with the passage in order to seek what God is saying in it, and to let those truths affect our lives as a result. Try to make sure there is a good balance in the discussion between understanding what the passage is saying and applying the passage.
- The facilitator should make sure that no-one dominates the discussion. Encourage those who are quiet to share their views, but recognise that some people may prefer to listen and think about what is being said rather than speak.
- Be encouraging and create a safe place for discussion. It is important that everyone feels comfortable to be able to share their thoughts on the passage. People need to know that they are valued and that what they say will be heard. This does not mean that each person's comments will be equally true and helpful. If the discussion moves too far away from engaging with the biblical passage then the facilitator needs to steer it back.

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