

How to do a self sustaining objective in-depth group Bible study Without the need of a great teacher (D. Mar)

All Bible study groups encounter the same problems. In the absence of any knowledgeable teacher, most feel inadequate to lead a good Bible study. And in the effort of eliciting participation for group discussion of a passage, a common mistake is often innocently committed with the question, "what does it mean to you?" When discussions go down this path, biblical hermeneutics loses its objective mooring and its function of discerning truth is lost, because, all subjective interpretations become acceptable.

While using study booklets or topical videos are useful aids in study, there is another method of group study that will provide greater objectivity and independence from the interpretations of commentators.

What are the essentials?

This Bible study approach has at least 5 key individuals leading the study.

1. The "Seeker"

This individual picks the passage for study and becomes the "leader" of the session. The Seeker's responsibility to the group is to make careful observations such as:

Who, What, When, Where, Why?

What is repeated / emphasized?

Is there a contrast? Etc.

2. The "Writer"

This individual uses reference works to learn about the author of the book and his background. What is the date of authorship and what is happening at this point in his life? What is the literary style of the passage and are there any literary devices within it (i.e. chiasm, etc).

3. The "Geek"

This individual uses reference works to learn about the meaning of key Hebrew or Greek words used in the passage. How is the word used in the Old Testament? How is it used in the New Testament? Does the grammatical structure of the passage affect its meaning?

4. The "Cultured Historian"

This individual uses reference works to learn about the socio-cultural context of the passage. What is happening to the Jews / God's people at this time in ancient history? Are there any interesting archaeological evidence? Does geography play a role in understanding this point in history?

5. The "Pagan"

This individual uses reference works to learn about the theological context of the passage. What are the prevailing religions? What was their impact upon God's people at that time?

How does it work?

Here is a process for this type of Bible study that will help you succeed.

1. Form a group with others who want to study the Bible as seriously as you do for an agreed period of time.

A define period of the group's existence is important for participants to determine if they could commit to this group, and it allows the freedom to join other groups when the period expires.

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2. At the first meeting, anyone can suggest a passage for future study. The person, whose passage was chosen, becomes the Seeker.

During this meeting, people can volunteer to be the Writer, Geek, Cultured Historian and Pagan. They may have a particular interest in the subject or desire to learn how to use a certain resource. Some passages may have a lot of details to explore, so there might be more than one Geek, Cultured Historian or Pagan. The remaining members of the group are encouraged to study the passage without any outside references and list any questions they may have for discussion.

3. At the second meeting, the Seeker leads the study which can be for any duration; thus, the end of the meeting may not end the study. In such instances, the study resumes in subsequent meetings until completion.

a. The Seeker begins the meeting by posting on the wall, with painter's tape, a large piece of paper with the passage rewritten so that its phrases can be easily observed and understood. If the Writer found a literary device, such as a chiasm, the passage is written so that the Hebrew device can be easily seen. It might matter in some instances which Bible translation being used, so it should be noted. (Tip: I use white butcher paper for my paper source. Other sources can be a large artist sketch pad or a piece cut from a banner paper roll.)

The Seeker presents what he / she has learned of observations he / she made of the passage. All questions are reserved until after all key players present their findings. Because the Seeker is the leader of the session, he / she calls up the next person.

b. The Writer presents his / her findings about the biblical author. This may include any notes they might want to write on the Seeker's posted paper and / or handouts to the group.

c. When called upon by the Seeker, just like the Writer, the Geek, Cultured Historian and Pagan present their findings about their respective subjects. This may include any notes they might want to write on the Seeker's posted paper and / or handouts to the group.

It is important that each presenter cites their reference source. This helps others become acquainted with the references' strengths and limitations. As the group tackles different passages, people should be encouraged to use different sources and broaden their exposure to the diverse scholarship available for deep study.

Online resources are convenient and useful; however, many copyright free resources are dated (over 100 years old) and do not take into account the latest scholarship from archaeological, epigraphic and textual findings.

d. After the presentations, the Seeker entertains questions from the group. Here the presenters do their best to answer the questions, but some questions may not have a conclusive answer. Compelling questions can be reserved for further study by everyone and discussed at the next meeting.

It is true that the more one observes of the biblical text, the more accurate the interpretation will be. With the Seeker moderating, the group should be able to conclude the passage's study with an accurate interpretation and inspire the appropriate behavioral response in the pursuit of holiness.

e. Upon completion of the study, the process repeats at #2: the meeting that determines the next passage for study and who will be the Writer, Geek, Historian and Pagan.

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The benefits of this group study approach should be apparent.

You will learn a good Bible study method for personal use and how to use reference works as a tool.

With a focused study of God's word, everyone will gain a better understanding of how to live right before God and a better grasp of theology.

The real work of a deep study is shared with your friends, and the success of their study depends on your personal efforts and contribution. You will see how God uses you to be a blessing to others.

Your conviction of the historical reality of Jesus Christ and the invisible God in heaven will grow, and you will be more effective in teaching others about Jesus' Good News.