



Bible Engagement in Small Groups

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Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Acts 5:42 (NIV).

Bible Engagement in Small Groups



Introduction

Why should Christians connect with the Bible in small group settings?

We're better together! Spiritual health and growth is accelerated when we talk to each other about the Bible.

Bible Engagement in Small Groups



Introduction

What should be the primary focus of a small group Bible study?

To meet with Jesus!



Strengthening Bible engagement in small groups

- Bathe everything in prayer
- Value relationship glue
- Read the Bible in multi-sensory ways
- Teach public reading of Scripture
- Don't reduce the Bible to a sourcebook for finding the right answers



Strengthening Bible engagement in small groups

- Use open-ended questions
- Keep the Bible as the main focus
- Discuss uncomfortable or difficult passages
- Aim to read and hear the Scripture through the voices and ears of the whole group



Strengthening Bible engagement in small groups

- Listen beyond your traditional theological grid
- Try different methodologies
- Major on Jesus
- Pray the Scriptures
- Do it!



Q & A

Bible Engagement in Small Groups



Interpreting the Old Testament

Bible Engagement in Small Groups

Interpretation



To engage in interpretation assumes there is, in fact, a proper and improper meaning of the text and that care must be taken not to misrepresent the meaning.

When dealing with the Scriptures, to properly interpret a text is to faithfully convey the inspired human author's meaning of the text, while not neglecting divine intent.

Robert L. Plummer



Interpreting Different Genres

- The Bible contains many genres (literary types characterized by particular style, form or content) that must be recognized to interpret the text properly.
- Misunderstanding the genre of a book (or passage) can lead to a skewed interpretation.



Genres

There are seven genres of Old Testament literature:

- **Narrative**
- **History**
- **Poetry**
- **Prophecy**
- **Apocalyptic**
- **Law**
- **Wisdom Literature**

Interpreting Narrative



About seventy percent of the Old Testament is narrative (story).

Narrative has four main elements:

- **action**
- **plot**
- **setting**
- **characters**



Interpreting Narrative

The key to interpreting narrative is to analyse the actions of the characters and the consequences.

We should actively enter into the story through identification with the character(s) by relating their lives to our lives (i.e. recognizing and engaging with the joys, trials, pathos, ambiguities and complexities of their lives).

Interpreting Narrative



Interpretive principles:

- View the story first and foremost through an ancient Hebrew and not a 21st Century cultural lens
- Look for the main theme/idea and don't get sidetracked by the details
- Recognize that stories simply record what happened (good, bad and ugly) rather than what ought to happen
- Stories are incomplete and selective



Interpreting Narrative

Interpretive principles:

- Actions of characters are imperfect and most of the time they don't set a good moral or practical example for us
- Stories illustrate rather than teach doctrine or theological truth
- God is the ultimate hero of all stories



Interpreting History

There are twelve historical books that make up about half of the content of the Old Testament.

Taken together, these books tell the story of ancient Israel's formation, rise to prominence, collapse into moral and physical defeat, and restoration.

The historical books are **Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.**



Interpreting History

Interpretive principles:

- The actions of God are more important than the actions of humanity
- Biblical history is more descriptive than prescriptive
- Passages are best interpreted in the context of the overarching event



Interpreting History

Five interpretive principles:

- An understanding of OT geography, law, and customs is essential
- Investigate the circumstances behind/beyond the text

Interpreting Poetry



About thirty-three percent of the Old Testament is poetry.

- Hebrew poetry is unique
- Poems of the mind rather than poems of sound
- Intended to express or evoke strong emotions
- Structured on images and ideas
- Uses figurative and exaggerated language that should not be taken literally
- Uses parallelism, acrostics, chiasm, stress patterns, subordination, contrast and repetition

Interpreting Poetry



Psalms are the largest body of poetry and longest book in the Old Testament.

There are seven major sub-genres of psalms:

- Psalms of lament
- Psalms of praise
- Psalms of celebration
- Psalms of thanksgiving
- Psalms of penitence
- Psalms of wisdom
- Psalms of imprecation



Interpreting Poetry

The psalms are divided into five sections:

- Psalm 1-41
- Psalm 42-72
- Psalm 73-89
- Psalm 90-106
- Psalm 107-150



Interpreting Poetry

Five key principles for interpreting the psalms:

- Recognize the sub-genre (i.e. identify the authors intent)
- Pay attention to structure and segmentation
- Identify the use of symbolic language
- Explore any significant messianic references
- Experience them through singing, praying and memorizing



Interpreting Prophecy

Prophecy is the delivery of a Spirit inspired message from God through an appointed prophet.

About thirty percent of the Old Testament is prophecy.

The prophetic books are divided into Major (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel) and Minor prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi).



Interpreting Prophecy

There are two categories of prophecy:

- Forth-telling (divine messages that are non-predictive)
- Fore-telling (divine predictions)



Interpreting Prophecy

There are three major categories of predictive prophecy:

- Messianic prophecies
- Oracles against foreign nations
- Covenant-centered kingdom promises given to Israel as a geo-political entity, including end-time prophecies involving the final world-wide showdown between Israel and her enemies



Interpreting Prophecy

Some key principles for interpreting prophecy:

- Prophets saw themselves and their task occurring in the context of community, so prophecy should be interpreted with this in mind
- Earlier events should be seen as foreshadowing later events
- Ask if the predictions are fulfilled or unfulfilled



Interpreting Prophecy

Some key principles for interpreting prophecy:

- Distinguish the unalterable purposes of God from conditional consequences or warnings
- Identify if it's a divine message or divine prediction
- Identify a divine prediction as a messianic prophecy, oracle against a foreign nation, or a covenant centred promise
- Analyse the apologetic nature of the prophecy



Interpreting Apocalyptic

Apocalyptic literature unveils or reveals God's plans, mainly through the use of symbolic and/or mysterious imagery. The book of Daniel is the only Old Testament apocalyptic literature.

Interpreting Apocalyptic



Apocalyptic literature is characterized by:

- a special journey by a human into heaven
- visions and/or dreams
- angelic visitations and mediators
- descriptions of immediate and future realities
- warnings of future distresses and trials
- divine interventions
- encouragement to the faithful to persevere
- God initiating a new and better existence
- final divine judgment



Interpreting Apocalyptic

There are five interpretive methods:

1. Preterist –

presupposes all of the recorded events took place within the period of time that is contemporary to the writer.

It assumes that any eschatology it contains has already been realized.



Interpreting Apocalyptic

There are five interpretive methods:

2. Futurist –

presupposes that all of the recorded events have yet to take place. The symbolism and imagery that is used may be interpreted as literal or symbolic, or a combination of both.



Interpreting Apocalyptic

There are five interpretive methods:

3. Historicist –

presupposes the events described in the text are directly related to world events that can range from the time of the writer to the end of the age. Equates the apocalyptic images and symbols to specific world events.



Interpreting Apocalyptic

There are five interpretive methods:

4. Idealist – presupposes the apocalyptic literature does not tie into either historical or future events, but rather to spiritual truths. Searches for the spiritual meaning that is conveyed in the symbolism.



Interpreting Apocalyptic

There are five interpretive methods:

5. **Genre apocalypse** –

presupposes that the literal meaning of the images in the apocalyptic literature can be determined through comparison with all other texts of the Genre.



Interpreting Law

The Law is God's instructions and commands concerning the moral, social, and spiritual behaviour of His people, found in the first five books of the Bible (i.e. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy).

There are 613 *mizvot*/commands in the Old Testament.

Interpreting Law



To determine which of the laws still apply to us today, one of three approaches are used:

- Traditional approach differentiates between OT moral, civil and ceremonial law, with only the moral law still binding
- Narrative approach interprets the commandments according to the context
- Covenant approach reads the mosaic law through the grid of the New Testament



Interpreting Wisdom Literature

Wisdom literature can be defined as concise memorable proverbs, axioms, or rule of conduct expressing general observations about life through a biblical worldview.



Interpreting Wisdom Literature

There are five sapiential books:

- Job
- Psalms (some of them)
- Proverbs
- Ecclesiastes
- Song of Songs



Interpreting Wisdom Literature

There are two main forms of wisdom literature:

- Instruction
- Saying

Interpreting Wisdom Literature



There are six secondary forms of wisdom literature:

- Admonition (instruction command or prohibition with a motive clause)
- Wisdom or folly speech (instruction in message form)
- Numerical saying (numbered lists)
- Comparative saying (uses a simile or metaphor)
- Better than saying (proposes priorities or values)
- Example story (saying from personal experience that illustrates a truth)



Interpreting Wisdom Literature

Five key principles for interpreting wisdom literature:

- Recognize the circumstantial and contextual nature of the instruction or sayings
- Read it as helpful guidance but not as absolute promises
- Unpack it as part of a collection of collections
- Identify hyperbole (deliberate exaggeration)
- Don't take individual statements as the whole truth on any subject



Interpreting the Old Testament

Ten questions to ask when you read the Old Testament:

1. What is the context (first life setting) of the passage?
2. Why did the human author write the passage?
3. How did the human author want the original audience to respond to his words?
4. How does the passage fit into the Story as a whole?
5. What does the passage teach about God the Father, Son or Holy Spirit?

Interpreting the Old Testament



Ten questions to ask when you read the Old Testament:

6. What is literal and what is figurative in the passage?
7. How does the passage challenge, correct or encourage me/us?
8. Does the passage point to or foreshadow the future?
9. How does the passage explicitly or implicitly tie into the main theme of the Bible? (cf. Luke 24:27)
10. What should my/our response be?



Thank you for our time together.

Every blessing on your ministry!

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