

Lesson 5: Hearing and Obeying God's Word, Part 2

In our last lesson, we considered the importance of both hearing and obeying the Bible, God's Word. The lesson focused primarily on what this looks like on an individual basis. Today we build on our understanding of individual Bible study and consider what it would look like to hear and obey God's Word in a group setting.

The Power of Group Study

Before we consider the mechanics of group Bible study, we need to ask the question "Why bother?" After all, it's easier to study the Bible as an individual than to gather a group of people for a similar purpose. Group dynamics can be messy and complicated. Nonetheless, there are a number of compelling reasons to hear and obey God's Word in a group setting as we seek to accomplish the mission that Jesus gave us (remember Matthew 28:16–20?). Let's consider a few.

THE MODEL OF JESUS

- Read Mark 3:7–19. What does this passage tell us about Jesus' disciples (verse 7) and the group He specifically designated as "apostles" (verses 13–15)?
- For Jesus, what were the advantages of influencing a group rather than doing all His work in people's lives on a one-to-one basis?

A simple reason that we study the Bible in groups is that Jesus set a precedent of teaching to groups, particularly His group of apostles. In our study of the Bible, we are learning to hear and obey what He is teaching us, and just as His apostles *together* processed and lived out what He said, together we study the truths of what God said about Him in the Bible, and together we live out these truths. This is how spiritual growth takes place, and by including others in our groups, we can lead others to true happiness and grow in happiness ourselves!

THE VALUE OF MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

Another reason we study the Bible in groups is that the multiple perspectives in any group play both a constructive and a protective role. Constructively, one person's perspective on the text can enrich and sharpen another's perspective. Protectively, having multiple perspectives increases the chance that the group will be able to avoid errors in interpreting the passage under study. In both cases, the whole (the group) is more than the sum of the parts (the individuals).

EVANGELISM

- Read John 16:7–15. What does this passage tell us about the role of the Holy Spirit, who would come after Jesus left the earth?

- Based on our prior studies, what do you think is the primary way the Holy Spirit accomplishes these purposes today?

A sometimes under-appreciated advantage of studying the Bible in groups is that it allows a logical setting in which to expose those who don't yet believe in Jesus to the work of the Holy Spirit through the "living and active Word of God" (Hebrews 4:12). Those who are interested in Christianity will often agree to read the Bible with someone who can guide them in such a study of it. When God brings about this readiness in an unbeliever's life, He may choose to work in the heart of the unbeliever through a study of the biblical text.

The Mechanics of Group Study

Given these reasons for group study, we logically ask, "How would we go about doing something like this?" Below you'll find some guidance in implementing a group study.

INVITING PEOPLE TO JOIN

Rarely do we present an invitation to someone to study the Bible with us when we first meet them. However, once we've built up a certain level of rapport with someone (which may take place very quickly), we can ask them if they might want to study the Bible with us. We shouldn't underestimate certain people's interest in digging into the Bible. Even if they don't see themselves as very spiritual, they might want to know more about the Bible for intellectual reasons or because they recognize that the Bible is the most influential piece of literature ever written.

Once a person indicates willingness, it's a good idea to try and establish a regular schedule of study. Meeting once every week or once every other week seems to work well. Give the person an idea of how long the study will take (about an hour to an hour and a half each time), and suggest that they invite a family member or friend.

This last point is significant. Some people who have been very successful in sharing Jesus with others actually try to avoid one-on-one studies for a number of reasons. If you suggest to the person that he should include a family member or friend, you will be teaching that person the importance of reaching out to others—even before the study begins! Furthermore, you'll be laying the ground work for creating future groups out of the new group.

DECIDING WHAT TO STUDY

Since "all Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Timothy 3:16), at some level you can't go wrong in a Bible study as long as you stick to the Bible. On the other hand, certain passages and studies may work better depending on where the group members are spiritually. For groups primarily composed of unbelievers, or groups that have a mix of both believers and unbelievers, studies dealing with the overarching storyline of the Bible can be excellent. Our friends at Contagious Disciple Making have a well-structured 26-week study of the Bible that you can find at bit.ly/1NMas3U. Another option is an eight-week study of selected passages from the Gospel of Mark, drawn from *One-to-One Bible Reading* by David Helm:

- Mark 1:1–15
- Mark 2:1–12
- Mark 3:7–35
- Mark 8:22–38
- Mark 10:17–45
- Mark 14:53–15:15
- Mark 15:16–39
- Mark 15:42–16:8

CONDUCTING THE STUDY—LOOKING BACK

When you begin the study, take some time to get settled, then go around the group and ask people to share both a highlight from the week and something that is stressing them out. Do the same yourself. This is a quick way to hear about what is important to people and it will give you items to pray about later.

After you have done this, ask people how they did on last week's "I Will" question. If it is your first meeting, you'll skip this step. In each of the following meetings, though, you will have "I Will" items from the prior week to follow up on. This is a time of accountability, so it might make people a bit uncomfortable. You can eliminate most of this discomfort if it is clear that you care for the people of the group, and you're not trying to "get them." Model what you expect from others by reporting how you did on the last lesson's "I Will" item as well.

This time of catching up and accountability is the "Looking Back" portion of the study. Don't skip this portion to jump right into the biblical text, though that may be tempting. Looking back to the prior lesson ensures that when you set goals for next time, people will expect to be asked about these goals. Furthermore, the Looking Back section shows care for those in the group and makes it easier to build relationships with one another.

CONDUCTING THE STUDY—LOOKING UP

After you have looked back, it's time to look up, which is another way of saying that you're trying to hear God say something new to you. In the "Looking Up" section of the study, we do an inductive Bible study on a passage of Scripture.

To study a passage of Scripture in a group, you'll start in much the same way you did in individual study. At that time, you took a piece of paper and divided it into three columns called "Scripture," "My Words," and "I Will." For a group study, you'll proceed through these same three segments, but tweak them for group participation.

Scripture

Instead of writing the Scripture passage word-for-word as you did in the individual study, have one person in the group read the passage aloud. After he is done, have another person read the passage aloud, preferably in a different version.

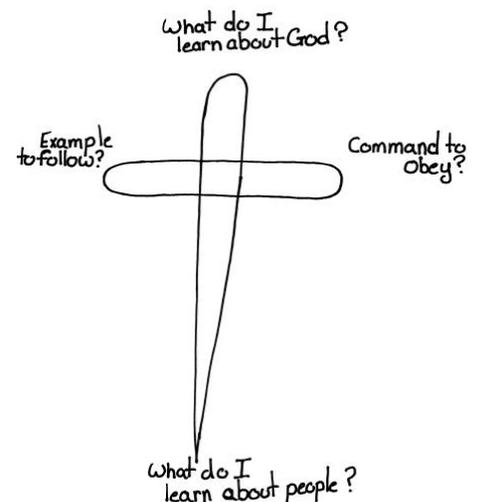
My Words

Next, invite someone in the group to rephrase the passage in his own words. Again, the idea is for the person to do this as if he were explaining the passage to someone else who wasn't familiar with it.

Now invite the group to expand the summary, suggest things that were left out or overemphasized, and so on. We're not trying to get to a "perfect" summary, but by taking a few minutes here, you'll enable the group to get a much better sense of how everyone else understood the main points of the passage.

The Sword

Remember how you worked through the Sword Method in individual study (see the Rembrandt to the right)? In group study, instead of having each individual write down answers to each of these four questions, dig into them one-by-one as a group. It's a good idea to record what people say by writing their comments on a piece of paper that everyone can see or a white board if one is available. Consider adding statements about God above the sword, commands from the passage to the right of the sword, and so on.



Again, it's common that in studying a passage you'll not be able to write something for all four of the focus areas. If the group gets stalled on one question, no problem—just move on. If as you are leading the group, God brings to mind a question to ask to dig further into one of these topics, go ahead and ask it. Just make sure that as you do this, you don't get too off-topic, too technical, or dominate the conversation. We want the group to do 70% of the talking and the facilitator of the group 30%.

CONDUCTING THE STUDY—LOOKING FORWARD

I Will

Just as with individual study, it's now time to consider how we can obey the passage we just looked at. Here are the three questions from individual study that helped us move toward "I Will" items, which are just as applicable for group study:

- "What point in the passage struck me the most?"
- "How would my life look different if I lived more in line with this passage?"
- "Why might God be showing me this point right now given what's going on in my life?"

Take a moment to pray and ask God how He might want you to put the passage into practice. After you have done this, have everyone try to come up with one actionable item to obey and write it down.

The last lesson's pointers about "I Will" statements are worth repeating:

- "I Will" statements must be specific in order to be effective. It is good to recognize, for example, that God's Word is powerful, but what will you do about that? Commit to reading the Scripture regularly? Write someone a note of encouragement based on a particular Bible verse? Something else?
- "I Will" statements are ideally actionable within a short time frame—something like 24 to 48 hours. If you wait too long to obey something, it becomes more difficult to obey (and to remember).
- It's OK for an "I Will" item to address your emotions, attitudes, and thought life. Just recognize that your assessment of how you did in following through on such "I Will" items will be more subjective and possibly require particular attentiveness.
- In addition to your "I Will" takeaway from the Scripture passage, consider a second action item: telling someone what you learned. This is where your paraphrase in the "My Words" section comes in handy. Look back at it and make sure you're ready to share God's Word with someone else.

Have the members of the group share their "I Will" items with one another, and pray for one another to succeed in accomplishing these things. Make sure you write down your "I Will" item, also, because in next week's Looking Back portion, each group member will report on how they did in carrying it out.

Looking Forward

TIME TO PRACTICE

Let's put the lesson into practice right now. As a group, do a Bible study on Mark 1:1–15. For our purposes today, don't worry about the Looking Back section where you check in with one another and report on last week's "I Will" items (you may have already done this!). Instead work through the study of the passage, and then practice setting some "I Will" items for next week.

Well done! You're now able to lead a group study of the Bible using a simple and transferable method. This method is designed to help you not only hear what God is saying to you in the Scripture, but also to obey what He's told you.

SET GOALS AND PRAY

Your study of Mark 1:1–15 has produced an "I Will" item for you, as well as providing you with a summary of the passage to share with other people. Share your "I Will" item with the others in the group so that you can check in with one another at your next meeting about how it went. Then close the meeting by asking that God would strengthen you to obey what you heard Him saying in the Scripture, and share that truth with others.