

TheWordWorks

Small Group Bible Study Module 1: Why study the bible in small groups?

Introduction

Why study the bible in small groups? It's a fair question to ask isn't it? On any given week, many of us are already receiving 'bible-input' from a whole bunch of different sources – sermons on Sunday, our own personal bible reading and devotions, podcasts we listen to on the way to work, mid-week prayer meetings, etc.

With so many ways for us to hear God speak through his word, why introduce another format for studying the bible?

There are plenty of reasons out there but let me give you 3 quick reasons why I think small group bible studies are so beneficial for the local church.

1. An invaluable way for Christians to teach one another

In Colossians 3:16, Paul addresses Christians in general and calls for them to teach and admonish one another with the word of Christ.

In some ways, we already do this in our churches through preaching, attending conferences and other 'big group meetings'. However, at many of these big group meetings, typically it's only a small handful of Christians who do the teaching and admonishing from up the front. And understandably so! It'd be unrealistic and even unhelpful for all Christians present at larger gatherings to be involved in the teaching and admonishing.

However, if Paul's call is for Christians in general to be teaching and admonishing one another, then it's worth considering if our churches are providing members with adequate avenues to do so.

This is where small group bible studies can be of great benefit. Because small group bible studies are interactive and involve discussion between members, they naturally enable the work of mutual-teaching and admonition. As group leaders and members study the bible together, and as they contribute to discussions by asking questions, making observations and seeking clarification, each of them help others in the group to wrestle with God's word and its implications.

2. A conducive space for training Christians to read the bible

When my wife was at university training to be a doctor, on top of having to go for lectures, I remember that a large part of her course involved spending time at hospitals and learning how to do things on the job. I think the same thing applies to training Christians to be better bible readers. While there's some benefit to sitting in a pew and listening to a Sunday sermon, there's nothing quite like 'getting your hands dirty' and studying the bible for yourself.

Small groups provide members with a space where they can discover the bible for themselves, rather than simply being told what the bible says. And because of the interactive environment of small groups, members not only get to practice reading the bible, they also get immediate feedback from people they're interacting with. This cycle of practice followed by feedback is what makes small groups such a valuable environment for training Christians to be better bible readers.

3. A place where Christians can grow in depth of relationship with one another

Imagine this scene with me. Sunday service has just ended. You got to hear a great sermon which preached God's word clearly and faithfully. You turn to the person next to you hoping to encourage them and hopefully get to know them better. You get chatting, and things are going well - you're both encouraging one another with the Scriptures, you're even getting to know a bit more about each other's lives! But 10 minutes into your conversation... your 3-year-old starts crying and needs your attention... your friend realises they need to send their kids to Grandma's for lunch... and before you know it the conversation's over. Sound familiar?

I'm not sure about you but based on my experience and from speaking to others, this is how Sundays are like for lots of Christians. Where often there's only a golden 10-15 minute window for people to have meaningful conversations or to build relationships with one another.

Again, this is where small group bible studies can be of great help. Small groups serve as dedicated time in the week where Christians can get together for a more extended period of time to study the bible together, to apply the bible to our lives, to encourage one another, to pray for each other another in light of what we've learnt, and in the process get to know one another better.

Hopefully this short module has convinced you a little more about the value of small group bible studies. With that, over the next few weeks, we'll now think about the 'how' of small group bible studies - starting with How to prepare for a bible study.