



**How to prepare
for Small Group
Bible Studies.**



Aims:

- To provide a simple, practical method to help you prepare for small group bible studies that go deeper.
- To think through the heart of a biblical passage, or its “Big Idea”.
- To think more carefully about application questions.

A vital note on prayer:

- It's easy to rush through the process of preparation without prayerful dependence on God and His Spirit – to depend on our strength and not His.
- By prayer, we exercise our faith and dependence on God to supply all we need through His Spirit, to work miracles among us and to strengthen us in His service.
(Galations 3:5, 1 Peter 4:11, Ephesians 6:18)
- Remember therefore, throughout the preparation journey, to pray that the Spirit of God will help us, not only to understand the passage and to teach it to others, but also to apply it to our own lives before we encourage others to do the same.
- Our preparation is not merely an intellectual exercise but an occasion for worship as we see and savour Jesus and learn to walk with Him more closely.
- We've signposted throughout the preparation stages appropriate times to pause, reflect and pray to our Heavenly Father who powerfully works in us as we depend on Him.
(Philippians 2:12-13)



The Model: 3R's - 4C's

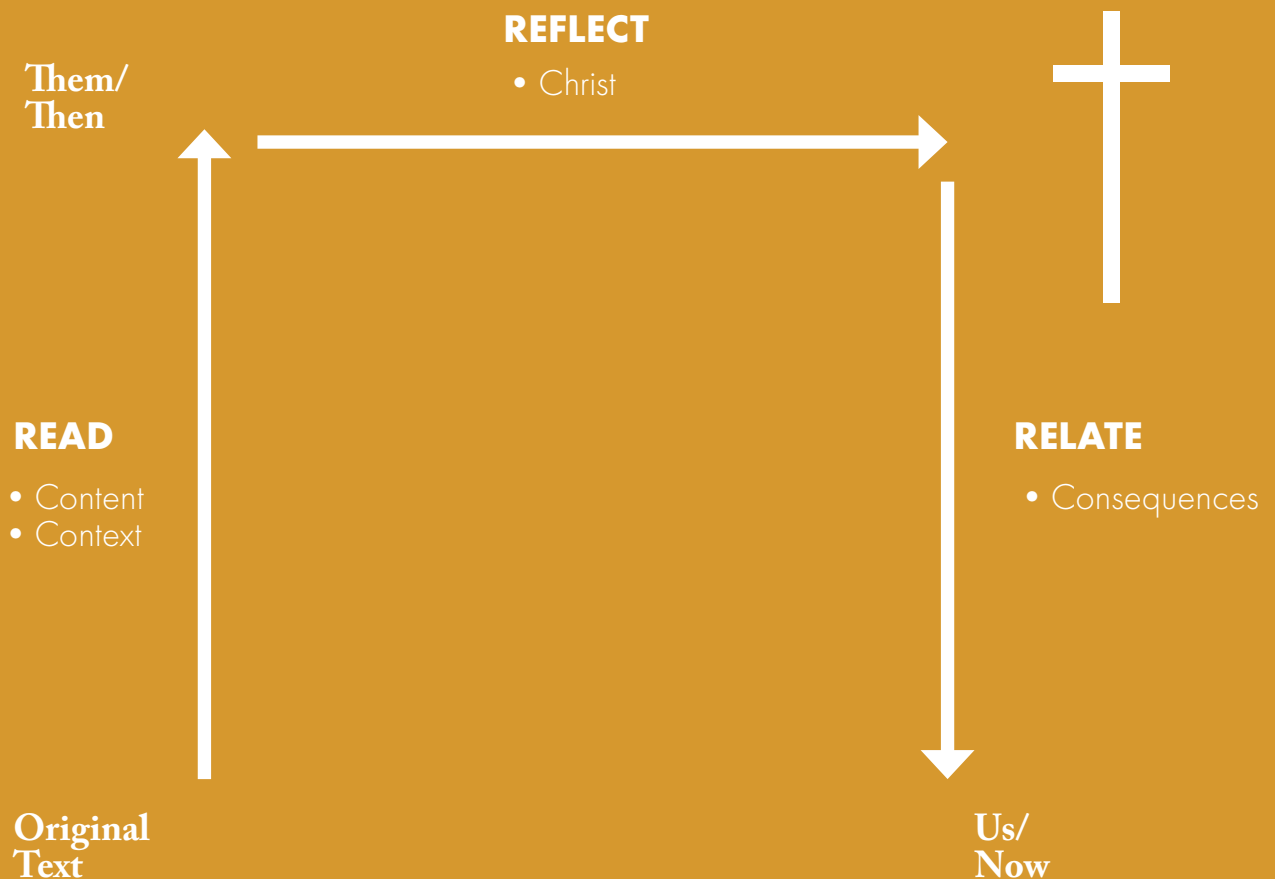


Diagram 1: The preparation journey. (Adapted from Expository preaching, David Helm, see annotated bibliography).

Pause and Pray:

Heavenly Father, I pray that you would give me the Spirit of wisdom and revelation that I may know you better through your word. Please give light to the eyes of my heart, that I may know the hope to which you have called me. In Jesus name, Amen. (Ephesians. 1:17-22)

1. Read

What does the text say?

Content:

- Scribble, underline, highlight the passage
- Look for repeated key words & themes
- Are there any dominant images/pictures?
- How does the author advance the argument in the passage?
- Look for major movements in the text
- How would you break the passage into a structure?
- What's the tone/feel of the passage?
- How does the passage contribute to the overall message or 'melodic line' of the book?
- What surprises you in the text?
- What questions arise from your reading?
- What significance is there that this passage is located here and not elsewhere?

Context:

- **Immediate context?**
 - What's come just before this passage and just after?
- **Context within the Book?**
 - Where else do we see key words/themes in this book?
- **Redemptive Historical context?**
 - Where does the passage lie in the overall story of the bible, from creation, fall, redemption to new creation?
 - Are there themes in this text that are developed throughout the bible's story?
 - Are there prophecies that are fulfilled?
- **Systematic theological context?**
 - Are there theological topics the passage addresses (e.g. Resurrection, creation etc.) with touch points to other parts of scripture?

Content + Context = What the text says

Pause and Pray:

Heavenly Father, as I reflect on your word, please help me to see and delight in your Son, Jesus. May your Spirit reveal His glory to me. Amen. (John 5:39, Luke 24:27)

2. Reflect

What does the text mean?

Take a step back, grab a coffee, go for a walk, do some journaling.
Let it all simmer...

Christ: How does the passage point to Jesus?

- **What about Jesus does the passage show?** (e.g. His character, grace, life, cross, blood, salvation, ascension, resurrection)
- **How does the passage provide a pattern for following Christ?**
- **Theologically reflect on the meaning of the passage, through the lens of Jesus our Saviour and through His grace**
 - By 'theologically reflect', we simply mean, what does the passage say about God, and about Jesus's identity as God, Lord and King?
 - For example, in Mark 4:35-5:20 when Jesus shows his power and compassion (by calming the storm with a word, and when he heals the demon possessed man), Mark reveals Jesus's identity as Lord and God. Only God has this much power. Only God can do this! (e.g. Psa 89:8-10)
 - The passage is revealing something about Jesus' identity as God, before it speaks to our existential and felt needs. It reveals that we must worship, obey and honour Him because he is God
 - Only then, can we begin to draw out the implications of His identity, power and compassion to the personal circumstances of our lives
- **Remember it's about Him and His glory before it's about us**

Big idea: the heart of the passage

- **Try to summarise the heart of the passage in about 10 words**
 - e.g. from Mark 8, "Jesus is the promised Messiah who comes to rescue his people on the Cross"

Pause and Pray:

Heavenly Father, through your Spirit, help me to proclaim Jesus to my own heart that I may see His glory, praise Him, and walk more closely with Him (Psalm 27:4; 103:1)

3. Relate

So what?

What's the "so what" of the biblical passage?

Consequences

- What natural consequences/implications flow out of the text?
- Relate the reality of the text to the reality of the hearts and lives of your members
- This calls for artful wisdom, deep imagination and prayerful dependence on God and His Spirit

Tweaking the St Paul's Study Questions:

- **Make sure your questions relate and point to the text's big idea**
- **From your big idea, be clear in your own mind about:**
 - Necessary consequences (Always true for all believers)
e.g. 'we must put our trust in Jesus to be saved'
 - Possible consequences (Sometimes possible for some people)
e.g. 'As a response to Jesus rescuing me on the cross, I will give to IJM as they rescue people from slavery and then hear of the ultimate rescue in Jesus'
 - Impossible consequences (Impossible application for anyone)
e.g. 'Being a good person is good enough for God'
- **Make sure the applications points flow as natural consequences from the text**

Think of the application questions in 3 broad categories:

- **HEAD**
 - What beliefs, doctrines, truths need to be challenged? How does the mind need to be renewed & transformed?
- **HEART**
 - What is experientially hard to accept? What attitudes need to be challenged? What comfort from God's grace can help your members?
- **HANDS**
 - How does the passage challenge our behaviours and actions? In small group, church, workplaces, schools, retirement homes, families and every aspect of life? How does it impact how we relate to and care for others?
- **With Bible in hand, members in heart and dependent prayer – think of specific questions that will relate the reality of Christ to the reality of your members' worlds**

Pause and Pray:

Father, I pray for every member of my small group. Please use me as a channel of your grace, that we may worship, love, serve and obey your Son by the power of your Spirit. Please help me to love each member of my group, and to discern how best to relate Jesus to their hearts and lives. Amen. (1 Thessalonians 1:2)

POST SCRIPT 1:

What are the dangers of bypassing any of these 3 steps? (Read, Reflect, Relate)

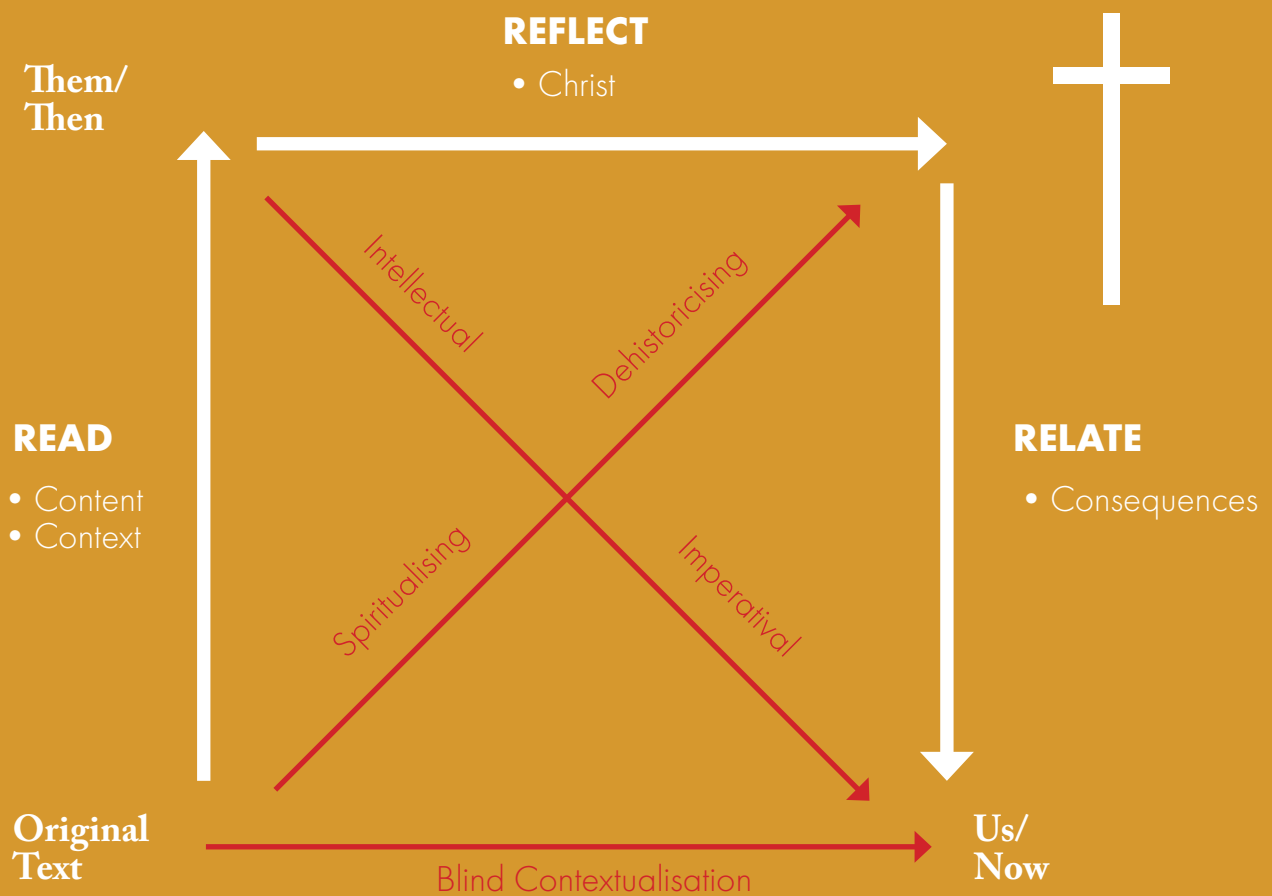


Diagram 2: : Preparation pitfalls. (Adapted from Expository preaching, David Helm, see annotated bibliography).

- **Blind Contextualisation**

- When the themes and issues of today control your understanding of the text

- **Spiritualising/Dehistoricising**

- Going prematurely from text to Jesus without understanding first what it meant to the original audience

- **Intellectual**

- When you don't get past the read phase, and focus so much on the them/then, that the bible study feels like a dry, academic history lesson

- **Imperative/Moralism**

- When you focus on imperatives and commands apart from the biblical and theological context, you end up with moralism and without grace

POST SCRIPT 2:

Giving your study

- Notice how your study follows the basic Read, Reflect, Relate sections of your preparation

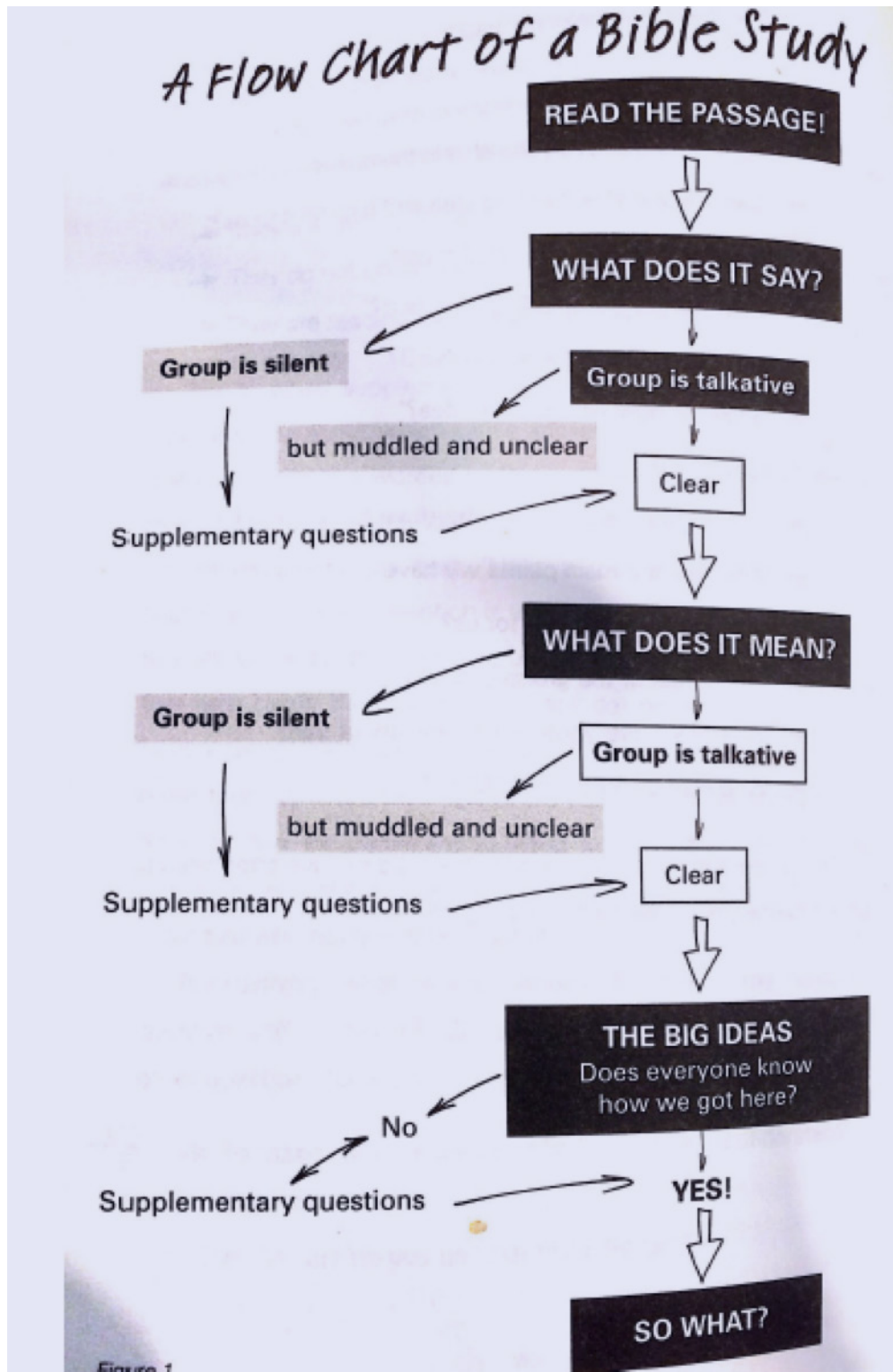


Diagram 3: A flow chart of a bible study. (From *Unleash the Word*, Karen Soole, see annotated bibliography).

POST SCRIPT 3:

Question Bank

Below are some helpful types of questions to include in your bible study

Closed question	Is...Do...?
Open question	How, Why, What, When, Who
Icebreaker question	How is your week going? Things to thank or praise God for over the last week?
Intro question	Introduce the main idea. Makes a bridge from real life to the passage. A teaser.
Comprehension question	What does the passage say about...? What stands out to you as we read those scripture verses?
Summary question	In your own words, what is the overall message of this passage?
Opinion question	Where do you stand on this issue? How would you feel?
Analysis question	How does this work? What does God say about this? Why do think the Lord thought it was necessary to include these verses in the Bible?
Synthesis question	How does this passage confirm / challenge our views on us, God?
Reflection question (Encourages talking about themselves in the context of Biblical truth)	Have you had someone in your life that modeled the principles in this passage? Explain. Can you think of a situation or circumstance in your own life where you experienced what these verses are teaching? What are some of the benefits of applying this verse to our life?
General Application question	What are some obstacles to applying this verse to our life? Is/Has anyone recently struggled with...? As we've been discussing this, how is God challenging you / what is the Holy Spirit showing you personally?
Application question (head)	What do you now know that will help you love Jesus more?
Application question (heart)	Is our attitude aligned with Jesus? What motivates us to act?
Application question (hands)	What do I need to do this week? What do I need to stop doing?

Short Annotated Bibliography:

- **Unleash the Word. Studying the Bible in Small Groups, Karen Soole**

A valuable resource that goes into a bit more detail about the nuts and bolts of preparing and leading a study. It's short, concise and includes some helpful diagrams, sample studies and questions.

- **Growth Groups, Colin Marshall**

A 10-week training course in how to lead small groups, covering more ground than just the nuts and bolts of small group leading. Great for those who want to dig a bit deeper.

- **NIV Proclamation Bible**

A great resource with helpful articles, including how to find the 'melodic line' of a book. Also, every book of the bible is prefaced with a short article about the book's melodic line (overall message) and basic structure.

- **Expositional Preaching, David Helm (IX Marks series)**

Don't be put off that it's about preaching! It's a simple and clear book, just over 100 pages long. All the principles apply to the 'preparation journey' outlined in this presentation. It guides you through, in more detail, each of the three stages (Read, Reflect, Relate) in this training video.