

A Guide to Support the Direct Study of the Bible: Text-Based, Learning-Centered, and Prayer-Saturated

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We often speak about “teaching the Bible” as if it were a single action. In fact, it is more like a sport, a category that contains many options. In the category of sport we have basketball, baseball, soccer, long-distance running and a myriad of other activities. Likewise in the category of teaching the Bible we have lecture, media-oriented presentations, interactive online approaches, discussion-based presentations, experiential teaching methods and the list goes on. This guide has been prepared to introduce a type of Bible teaching designed for classes and small groups and which emphasizes the direct study of the biblical text, with a focus on promoting student learning and meditation on the text.

Three Guiding Commitments

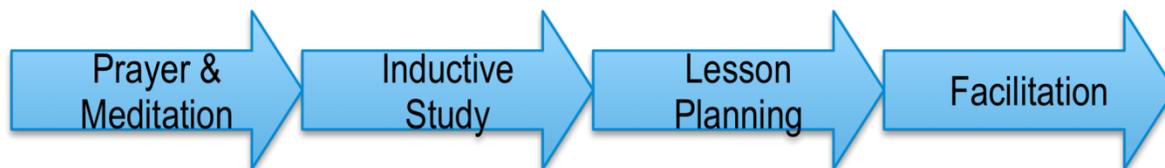
This approach to teaching the Bible is deeply committed to participants directly studying the Bible and to a learning-centered orientation. When I speak about direct study of the Bible, I’m referring to the learners being guided through activities to directly study the biblical text. This means learners will be wrestling with the meaning and application of the text directly as opposed to a more presentation-oriented style, where the teacher lectures on the message and meaning of the text while the students indirectly consider the text through the teacher’s study. The difference can be compared to that of a traveler who tours and experiences the Grand Canyon first hand rather than watching a travel documentary about it.

My interest in direct study of the Bible grows out of the very nature of the Bible. In my theological tradition we speak of the “verbal inspiration” of the Bible. This affirms that the Holy Spirit’s inspiring work over the content of Scripture extends to the very words. In this divine-human process of writing Scripture the very words, not just the ideas or doctrines, are seen as the very Word of God. If inspiration took place at the level of the big idea then it would be fine for learners to study the bible indirectly, through the study of others, but since all of the Bible is the very Word of God there are benefits of attending carefully to the very words of the text. Also the direct study of Scripture can be a means of grace—a way of opening oneself to God’s strengthening power.

John Wesley described “searching the scriptures” through “hearing, reading, meditating” as one of the important means of grace. The Bible is an important spiritual tool and we learn to use tools not just by observation but through actual practice. In the process of this direct study of the Bible, the learners have the opportunity to meditate on the Bible and to pray about it—practicing using it as a spiritual tool.

The overarching educational purpose of the teacher/facilitator in a direct Bible study should be to foster the students’ learning of and engagement with the text. However, some teaching orientations are teacher-centered, meaning that the teacher controls the content and often does most of the talking in the class (such as in most lecture classes). Other teaching orientations are learner-centered which means the questions or interests of the learners are in the driver seat (open free-ranging discussions). Such classes are often discussion oriented with the students most interested in what was discussed; at times this approach can amount to little more than a “pooling of ignorance.” Another popular orientation for Bible teaching is a subject-centered approach. Often this approach results in a teacher who is focused on “covering the content” of the Bible with a fast paced, content-heavy presentation with media and printed materials. However, while the Bible should determine much about the teaching session, when the goal ends up being “covering the content,” the Bible can become another textbook rather than the actual living Word of God. Direct Bible teaching seeks to have the teacher constantly asking what can I do to foster the students’ learning and application of the Bible.

The Basic Moves in Teaching



We know that 90% of an iceberg is out of sight below the surface of the water, and in teaching much of the work is out of sight of the learners. Careful and thoughtful preparation takes a great deal of time, and the facilitator does it out of love for the students, a concern for the craft of teaching, and a desire to teach with spiritual integrity and authority. A century ago E. M. Bounds famously made this point by asserting that “prayerless preaching kills.” He emphasized that Bible preaching and teaching that have their origins solely in the mind of the teacher might well become an instrument of the teacher’s pride, or worse. The teacher’s spiritual life is an intensively personal treasure, but it is not ultimately private, because one’s spiritual integrity deeply affects how and what one teaches. Jesus told a parable about the blind leading the blind and then made this point: “Everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher” (Luke 6:40, NIV). Our out-of-sight work (how we live and our prayerful study) affects our learners.

We know from research that a physician’s personal health habits (exercise, diet, weight) affect what topics they bring up with patients and their credibility when they do so. Likewise, a teacher’s depth of character and what they prize will affect what they select to emphasize and their ability to speak with first-hand credibility. We can speak of Bible teaching as a self-implicating practice. We need to be personally shaped by and engaged with what we teach because at the end of the day this work is more about the shaping of a soul than the delivery of information. As has been

noted about teaching Christian spirituality, “when all is said and done, the message cannot be separated from the medium.... While sufficient informational knowledge is critical, it is not sufficient simply to impart correct information...”¹ We desire to influence our students to flourish spiritually, but we must remember that “You can’t give away what you don’t have.”

These four aspects of teaching are shown in this diagram in what could be said to be their logical order, but not necessarily their temporal order. As I prepare to lead a Bible study on Psalm 1, I begin to deliberately engage the text at a prayerful and personal level and to try to understand what it means. I do this by reading it carefully, but I might want to consult a simple commentary to get an overview. As I perform my personal inductive study of the passage, I note the structure and the opening parallelism, and this affects the richness of how I pray about the passage when I meditate on it. As I begin to plan my study, I realize that I have “far too much what for the when.” I am not certain of what to cut out, so I go back to my inductive study and ask what is most important to the meaning and message of this Psalm. So, we start with prayer and meditation as a theological commitment to what our study will be like, but these stages affect all the others.

Prayer and Meditation is a process of formational reading that emphasizes a slow and prayerful dwelling with the text. This process begins with careful reading and “light study” and then invites one to meditate on the text in a prayerful manner. Throughout the process of prayerful reading and meditation we are encouraged to pause and be present to God and appreciate his truth, his very real presence, and loving grace.

Inductive Study refers to a systematic study of the Bible which seeks to move from the text and its context to an understanding of its message and meaning. The emphasis is on the direct study of the text, seeking to draw out the meaning rather than imposing a doctrinal proposition or the work of a commentator onto the text. It also emphasizes the appreciation and savoring of the beauty and literary qualities of the text.

Planning is where one takes the soul work and product of one’s study and seeks to figure out what activities the students should engage in so that the text’s message can be encountered in a spiritual and transformative way. I place the emphasis in this guide on planning more than presentation. In the friendly and supportive environment of a small group or class, it is the preparation far more than the presentation that will help the session soar.

Facilitation, is the actual leading of the study with the goal of promoting a careful and life giving engagement with the Scriptures. Direct Bible study is intended as a radically democratic approach to the study of the Bible, which respects the studied and text-derived insights of its members as they are led by a spiritually engaged, humble, respectful, and skilled leader. I’ll present some features of what it looks like to lead, with the commitment and character that the teacher brings to the session being much of what is needed. I have listed some of the teaching virtues that are needed to facilitate direct Bible study in a life and community transforming way.

¹ Liebert, Elizabeth, and Andrew Deeter Dreitcer. 1995. “The Spirituality of the Teacher.” *The Way Supplement* 84, 46.

Leading Direct Bible Studies

The Leader Creates a Space

- For Learning
- For Listening (to the Bible, to others, and to God)
- For Loving

Teaching Commitments

- Learning-Centered - The emphasis is one providing the materials and experiences that will help the members learn.
- Safety - Learners must feel safe in order to engage with other learners, teachers and the Bible. The class/group atmosphere and activities must create a safe environment for learners to be open enough to deeply engage the Scripture. Safety is not the same as comfort--for challenge must be present for growth to happen--but support must be evident as well.
- Sound Relationships - This is both a characteristic of the group and something that the leaders should model by showing respect and interest in the views of all involved in the study.
- Praxis - This involves providing group members opportunities to act upon what they are learning and then reflect on their actions with the opportunity to try again.
- Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes (KSA) - We are seeking to promote a deep holistic learning that involves: knowledge (cognition), attitudes (affection) and skills (psychomotor). Design learning tasks to involve these three domains.
- Relevance and Immediacy - Content needs to be immediately applicable, useful and meaningful (relevant) to the context of the learner in order for learning to occur.

Vital Skills

- Open Questions - These are an essential intellectual tool for small group Bible studies. These are thought-provoking questions that can't be answered by a "Sunday School answer" nor can they be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."
- Silence - Small group studies need space for people to ponder and look hard at the text to see what it means. The leader needs to be wise in welcoming and using silence, but not confusing it with disengagement or group confusion.
- Weaving - The conversation strands and themes are woven together in an organic way into a coherent and purposeful conversation.
- Diagnosing - The leader is able to understand the group dynamics and intervene to promote the group's health.

Personal Commitments

- Praying for the group - Bible Studies involve the intellectual, the social, and the spiritual. Our gifting as leaders may favor one of these dimensions, but none of them should be neglected. The leader has a responsibility to pray for group members and to foster a climate of prayer in the group.
- Prayerful study - The leader needs to come prepared for the study with a good working knowledge of the passage. Each study needs to be tailored to the group at this time and in this place, and part of this personalization process should be the result of prayer.
- Purposeful study - There can be a joy in digging into a passage to see what one finds. Along with such joy, the study of a thoughtful leader needs to be done with a purpose as well,

seeking to find what the passage meant and stating that in a clear way that can help guide the learners.

- Intellectual humility - The leader needs to come with a desire to serve the group. You may have found a pithy way of summarizing the passage or found a connection to the topic in your favorite spiritual writer, but it may be best to set all of that preparation aside as a new member haltingly summarizes the passage in a helpful way that renders your gem unneeded. "Pray for doubt," that you will not be so assured of your understandings that you squelch other members and fail to be a learner yourself.

Below the Surface: Preparing to Lead

In coursebooks and materials you have been given guidance on how to pray and meditate on your passage, through the practice of *Lectio Divina*, and how to study it inductively. The question here is: how can you take what you have found and experienced through this Bible study and turn it into a lesson that can be used to involve the learners in the direct study of the Bible? I'll present four steps to help guide you through this process.

Get to Know your Learners

In direct Bible study the leaders need to focus on facilitating the member's learning, and a good place to start is by getting to know the learners. You'll generally do this by asking and observing. There are lots of ways of asking; the best are through phone calls and face-to-face meetings where you have the opportunity of hearing more than usually comes through a structured written response.

What to ask about:

- What is your experience in this kind of setting?
- What do you value about this kind of small group or class?
- What makes you a bit hesitant or fearful about this group?
- How do you like to contribute to this kind of gathering?
- What kind of between session work/study do you most enjoy?

What to observe:

- How does the group/class interact with each other?
- Who are the leaders in this group?
- How well does this group stay with hard questions and issues?
- What are their natural ways of being prayerful together?

This step grows out of respect and empathy for those you are leading. You want your lessons to be helpful for them, and the best way is to design them with the group in mind.

Consider the Setting

Winston Churchill quipped that “We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.” Our settings do influence the way a group learns and functions. You have probably heard a team leader, whose group seems stuck in a rut as they work on a project, say, “I just need to get them off site to do some creative work.” The setting influences us, and this step asks the group leader to think about the settings and possible tweaks that can be made to it.

Some simple changes that can help set the climate:

Lighting - You want adequate lighting for all group members to be able to easily read the text. Consider reducing the lighting during a time of prayer and meditation.

Seating - Provide adequate seating that promotes group discussion.

Symbols and opening and closing activities - What symbols will provide continuity from meeting to meeting and provide visual reminders of what the group is about? Perhaps a candle, an open Bible, and a cross.

Refreshments - Eating together fosters community. Think about how you want to do this so the food does not become a distraction or conversation topic. Consider having the refreshments at the end of the study.

Time is an important consideration, not only the time of day when a study meets, but also how the group wants to structure the time. A common problem for Bible studies is a well-studied leader who provides far “too much what for the when” and greatly diminishes the effectiveness of the study. Look and see how much time you really have during a typical meeting and plan accordingly.

Deciding “WHAT” to Teach

Here we come to what might be seen as the tricky part of direct Bible study preparation. We’ve emphasized that this approach to Bible study is radically democratic. This means that we really want to honor what learners in our groups or classes find. So we have a leader who has prayerfully prepared by studying the passage and has some sense of its meaning and message. It might look like the role of a leader is to covertly bring the Bible study members to her point of view. Absolutely not. Yet, this is not to be merely a pooling of ignorance or a time when the most vocal member influences the group. Instead, the leader uses their study to write questions and develop and design learning tasks which will help the members uncover what the leader sees as the meaning of the passage. This is done with great intellectual humility, recognizing that through the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the life experience and insights of the learners, they may come to a different, better, or deeper reading of the text than the leader did in preparation.

The leader needs to come into the design process with a clear understanding of five things:

1. Where does this passage fit into the grand narrative of God’s work in human history?
There is a grand story of God’s self-disclosure and redemption being told in the pages of the Bible. Where does this passage fit into this grand narrative: Creation; Fall; Israel; Jesus; Church; New Creation?
2. What is the big idea of this passage?

3. How is this passage organized, and what are the artistic elements that need to be noted and savored?
4. What is the universal human experience in this passage?
5. Where is the gospel present in this passage?

Designing a lesson for student learning

As a leader you have come to a sense of the structure and meaning of the passage, and now it is time to design learning tasks that will help the learners encounter the text and learn from it. As you begin to plan you should be asking, What do the learners need to do in order to learn from this passage?

Design Step 1. Backwards Design (By the end of the study the members will have...

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You have a sense of what you did in your study, prayer and meditation that was helpful. For example, this may have been a passage that came alive through careful observation of the characters and the setting. If that is the case, you will want to see that your group has a chance to do some sustained observation of the passage. In this step you just sketch out some reminders of what you want to make certain that the group does; you will later design the specific learning tasks. In this step, think Big Picture.

First (WHAT) - What is this study about? By the end of the study the members will have studied how God shows himself to be trustworthy.

Second (BPG—Backwards Planning Goals) - You will want to write about five statements of what you think the learners need to experience to “get the passage.” When you look at it this way, it is quite sobering how focused your study needs to be.

By the end of the study the members will have read through the passage and underlined all the time words, locations, and mentions of travel.

By the end of the study the members will have written observations about the characters and setting of this story.

By the end of the study the members will have arrived at an answer to the question "What is this story an example of?"

By the end of the study the members will have named two ways that characters trusted God in this story.

The WHAT and your five BPGs will guide the development of your study. When you finish your planning you should be able to show how the members will have done all our BPGs, with the study always pointing to the WHAT.

Design Step 2. Write Learning Tasks

For the group members the learning tasks will seem like what a direct Bible study is all about. The leader, however, will realize that these tasks are just the tip of the ice—they flow out of

your study and personal preparation. A learning task is an activity that helps the learners learn. They should be written as a script of what the leader might say or what the learners will read.

Opening Movement - This activity is designed to invite people into the sacred and relational space of the small group study. In many groups this is an activity that has been established over time. It need not take a great deal of time. It figuratively draws a circle around the group and reminds people to enter into this moment and to be present to God, to the text of the Bible, and to one another.

Learning Task: Anchor - The ANCHOR connects the topic of the study to the learner's experience.

This is not an ice breaker that just gets people talking, but a carefully designed activity to connect the WHAT of the Bible study with the learner's experience. This learning task helps establish the relevance of the WHAT, creates a sense of safety as people realize they have something to say, and generates trust as others share about their experiences.

Some general advice:

Not every study needs to begin with an anchor. If this is an ongoing book study where the same theme is present in every study, there may be no need to use an anchor for each lesson.

Watch the time.

Make sure the anchor really draws people into the lesson.

Be careful with the use of media. First, the music or video you select may be very meaningful to you, but it may not be part of your group's experience; second, playing media and properly debriefing it always takes time.

An anchor can be an invitation for people to personally reflect on a topic without asking them to talk about it. For example, the WHAT of the passage is "The power of forgiveness." The learning task could be, "Think about a time when you have experienced the power of forgiveness. Pause and think of some of the lasting fruit of this act." An anchor that calls for a public response may take up all the time of the study, which is not necessary bad, but one needs to ask if that is why people have gathered and if there is enough trust to handle what might be said.

Examples:

Anchor Learning Task on 1 Corinthians 12

What in your experience has helped make a church healthy? Or On a large sticky note name a way that you have benefited from other people's gifts in the church. We'll post these on the board and give you an opportunity to explain your response.

Learning Task: Observation

Careful observation is the heart of inductive study. What becomes very important is for the leader to think hard about what is important to observe. For example, you might have the group mark up their text with colored markers indicating the verbs and prepositions, but when all is said and done these might not help one grasp the meaning of the passage. Think back to

what you found helpful in your study and ask your group to do something similar (also, your task should complete one of your BPGs).

Observation Learning Tasks (Generally two to three)

Read the copy of the passage and do the following. 1. Draw a horizontal line across the text to divide it into its sections; 2. Circle all the coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so); Write down a word in the margin that describes the tone of the passage in verses 1-6 and 12-15.

On the poster paper write down all the characters in the passage.

In pairs: 1. Find all the places (cities and geographic features) in the text; 2. On the map mark all these places; 3. Show the route Abraham traveled in our passage.

Learning Task: Interpretation (one or two)

The purpose here is to help the group state the meaning of the passage. We always have two levels of meaning at play as we seek to do this. There is the message of the passage and then its place in the larger story of redemption. Consequently, the interpretive learning task asks the members to do more thinking and analysis than other learning task types.

Interpretative learning task (1 Cor 12) - The subject of this passage is spiritual gifts. To answer what is Paul saying about spiritual gifts, we need to place the passage in its context. With a partner answer these three questions and then we'll discuss what we found.

First, where does this passage fit in the grand narrative of Scripture (Creation; Fall; Israel; Jesus; Church; New Creation)?

Second, what problems or issues is Paul addressing in this passage?

Third, what does Paul see as the purpose of spiritual gifts?

Design Step 3. Gospel-Centered Application

The good news of the gospel is many, many things and at its heart is an affirmation that apart from God we are unable to heal ourselves. The last thing people need to hear from a leader week after week is now "be sure to do this." The Scriptures call us to action, to love, to forgive, to testify of Christ, to pray, but the "ought" of Scripture always needs to be placed in the clear "is" of the Bible—the enabling means of the indwelling Christ and power of the Holy Spirit must be emphasized.

As a leader you should assume that every passage has a formational purpose: "Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way" (2 Tim 3:16, Message).

Truly formational Bible study leadership is 1. aware of the aspects of our brokenness and the fallen condition that necessitated the writing of the passage; and 2. uses the message of the text to show how the gospel (sin, redemption, the reality of our union with Christ, and restoration

through grace) and especially the work of the Holy Spirit addresses aspects of sin and brokenness. Brokenness and our fallen condition is more comprehensive than just sin. The reality of grief, the presence of illness, longing for the Lord's return in the midst of social upheaval and injustice, the need to know how to pray, and the desire to be a better spouse or parent are all needs that result from our brokenness which Scripture addresses.

The application learning tasks are a bit less scripted than what we have seen so far. These are leader notes and suggestions that will need to be altered in light of how the study has unfolded and how members have responded to the material. The leaders should realize that a Bible study or class is one event in the spiritual formation journey of a learner. We are helping people along the journey and sometimes there are dramatic insights, times of deep repentance, and profound change, but often our growth looks like slow plodding forward. The leaders need to prayerfully discern what should be offered by way of application. Constant overselling of the importance of "the truth of a passage" can be disheartening. The leader has a pastoral task in gospel-centered application to invite people to respond to the truth found in the passage through the enabling of the Holy Spirit and by grounding this application in the gospel's grace.

Here are the marks of gospel-centered application.

1. Prayerful discernment as to whether the group needs a word of challenge or a word of support. Generally you will only have time to do one of these well. The word of support is the word of encouragement found in the passage—"remember that Jesus said 'I will not leave you as orphans,' we are his beloved children..." and the word of challenge, that word of correction found in Scripture—"In our passage James wrote about the quarrels and dissensions that plagued the church and his terse assessment is 'You do not have because you do not ask God' that should cause us to ask about how prayerful are we." Pray before and during the study for wisdom about what this group will most benefit from hearing by way of connection of life.
2. What aspect of our fallen humanity does this passage most directly deal with? We need to look and see what is universal in the passage (e.g., sibling rivalry, loss of hope, competition in ministry, the attraction of virtues in the midst of personal brokenness) and prayerfully make connections between the fallen condition in the passage and the lives of our members. Encourage the participants to enter into the depiction of the tragic without being preachy. Let the power of the text convey its truth—let them see the tension contained in the sibling rivalry of Joseph's brothers or the pain implied in the life of the wayward women of Proverbs 7.
3. What is the gospel truth for this situation? We always teach passages in the context of the whole Bible, so a passage that has a seemingly harsh word of judgment is to be placed in the larger context of God's care for his children. Without this kind of contextualization we can end up with a human oriented self-improvement project. Contained in any "ought" of the bible (e.g., Do not steal, love your neighbor, forgive) is the the "is" of a God indwelling believers and the ministry of the Spirit, the example of Christ, the wisdom and support of the Christian community, and a host of other resources that always make discipleship a team sport.

4. What kind of application can you do right here and now in the study? We learn best when we can actually practice what we have learned in our context. While in the study we often are not able to feed the hungry and confront oppression, we can do things that will make acts of love and altruism more likely. Begin to think that APPLY takes place in the study and AWAY is the homework assignment. Here are some simple actions you can do right in the study that will pay longterm dividends.
 1. Savor a truth. Taking time to sit with a truth will help take it from our short term memory buffers into long term memory. Have people journal or just imagine the beauty of a truth (e.g., Paul's joy at the Philippians helping him financially, the images used in Psalm 19 to picture the value of Scripture). Guide members to picture the truth, then perceive its beauty and then open their hearts to it and take it in.
 2. Post it. In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, the Israelites were instructed to write the law "on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Dt 11:20, NIV11). So the law was to be ubiquitous, ever present before their eyes. While we can habituate to such posting, their presence can help draw us back to important truths. The idea is to fill our living spaces with the Word of God in a way that we are reminded of it. A generation ago the homes of Christians were filled with kitschy plaques and embroidered Bible verses on the walls, and we are poorer for having abandoned that practice. In the study have members write out a verse on index cards and sticky notes with a passage for their living spaces, cars, and work places.
 3. Memorizing. Memorizing Bible passages can afford a great opportunity to meditate in a very rich and powerful way. In an age of ubiquitous books and electronic texts it is easy to dismiss memorization as a relic of the bygone days, but a memorized text has a different relationship to the one who has acquired it. And it is available at all times and places for recall and pondering. Here you gently recite it to yourself, again try saying it out loud whenever possible. The memorization can take place over a several week period of time. As members meditate encourage them to pay attention to what impresses them and then return to the words, truth, or image and stay with it for a while as they gently repeat it and ask questions.
 4. Ministering the truth of the passage. A dimension of our Bible teaching goal is to enable our students to be able to use the Bible as the spiritual tool that it is. So we teach not only the content of Scripture, but how to use it as a guide for prayer, as a place to meditate, as a way of discernment and a source of spiritual refreshment. Be open to ways that the Bible could be used in ministering to the members of the group by other members. They could pray Bible based prayers for one another, they could meditate on a passage, they could speak truth from the passage to one another. Let them practice actually using the Bible in the group.

In a gospel application the leader seeks to discern what aspect of the gospel is most clearly present in the passage and then asks "how should I lead the group to respond to this passage in light of the gospel?" The learning task needs to cover three things: 1. What aspect of our fallen humanity does the passage deal with? 2. How does God address this problem? 3. How should we respond to God's gracious remedy?

You'll probably fulfill this learning task by reminding the group of some of the things they have discovered so far, or by telling them of what you learned through your study and by having them discuss some aspects of God's gracious remedy.

A Sample Study from Psalm 1

[Explanatory text is highlighted and bracketed]

First, a summary of my personal study of Psalm 1

Where does this passage fit into the grand narrative of God's work in human history? Like many Psalms the immediate context for its writing is not given. However, we know that it was placed at the beginning of the Book of Psalms, which is an intentionally designed collection, so it forms a kind of introduction to the Psalter. In terms of the grand narrative it falls into the "Israel" period, and there is a clear connection to Jesus because we know as a righteous Jew he would have prayed the Psalm regularly, and that by the number of times he cites the Psalms they were important to him.

What is the big idea of this passage? For poetry, this question is often best answered by asking, "What is this Psalm a picture of?" It is a picture of the righteous person. While there is a strong contrast in the Psalm, it is not merely a depiction of two ways, but celebrates the person living the godly life.

How is this passage organized and what are the artistic elements that need to be noted and savored? This brief passage can be divided into two or three sections. It begins with this memorable parallelism in which we are told about the godly person by what he does not do. There is some very memorable and evocative imagery that is well worth savoring.

What is the universal human experience in this passage?

[We are looking to build a bridge between our time and the world of the text by seeking out what we share. In looking for the UHE, it is worth being quite encompassing with both concrete ones (e.g., thirst, being sleepy) and more existential ones (e.g., lack of faith, fear, guilt), so the connections between "the then and there" and "the here and now" is rich.] Examples include the activities of the ungodly, of wicked advice, cynicism and scoffing; delight in things of God, meditating/thinking about Scripture, the life of a tree (deeply rooted, bearing fruit, withstanding drought); the good life resulting in a kind of prosperity, the fruit of an ungodly life is insubstantial; having the spiritual confidence to stand before God, and being known by God.

Where is the gospel present in this passage?

In Psalm 1 we saw the Psalmist describe two ways of living. It was God's design in creation that we would all follow the path of righteousness, but this passage clearly shows the presence of a path that lacks shalom and wholeness [this explanation accomplished part 1]. The Psalmist suggests that part of God's provision to help people walk in the way of life is to meditate constantly on Scripture [part 2]. What are some ways that you can grow in this gracious practice of mediating on God's word? How does the indwelling of the Holy Spirit help us with this [part 3]?

The emphasis with direct Bible study is to encourage the learners to directly encounter the biblical text through the learning tasks. In facilitating the study the leader needs to keep the BPGs in mind and be flexible as the group begins to place a different emphasis on the study. The goal is not for the members to duplicate your experience of prayerful study, but for them to encounter the text with integrity and to ascertain and apply its message and meaning.

Lesson

Opening Movement.

Light a candle.

We'll stand in a circle and pray this prayer that is written on a large piece of poster paper.

"Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."

1. Learning Task: Anchor.

There is a picture in this Psalm of a deeply rooted tree thriving in a drought. What is your experience with a deeply rooted plant surviving in severe weather?

2. Learning Task: Observation

Read the printed copy of Psalm 1 and do the following.

1. Draw a horizontal line across the text to divide it into its sections;
2. Circle all the images. An image is any word that names a concrete thing (such as tree or house) or action (such as running or threshing). Any object or action that we can picture is an image.

3. Learning Task: Observation

Using the T-Chart we have posted on the wall, we'll write down characteristics of the godly person and the ungodly person.

4. Learning Task: Interpretation

Poets communicate through images. We are going to look at a few of the key images that you found earlier. Images require two activities from us as interpreters. The first is to experience the image as literally and in as fully a sensory way as possible. The second is to be aware of the connotations or overtones of the image. When we stop to reflect on the image of water, for example, we find that it connotes such qualities as refreshment, sustenance, and life. So for each image we'll: 1. Jot down some aspects of the literal image; 2. Ask if it has a positive or negative association in this psalm; 3. Note some of the connotations of this image. [I suggest that the leader select 3 or 4 images—tree, chaff and law should be used.]

Learning Task: Interpretation

Here are some questions to help us wrestle with the meaning of the passage. Seek to find the answer in this passage.

What does it mean to meditate day and night?

What does it mean for the righteous person to prosper in all he does?

What is the tone of how the psalm ends?

5. Gospel-Based Application.

In Psalm 1 we saw the Psalmist describe two ways of living. It was God's design in creation that we would all follow the path of righteousness, but this passage clearly shows the presence of a path that lacks shalom and wholeness. The Psalmist suggests that part of God's provision to help people walk in the way of life is to meditate constantly on Scripture.

What are some ways that you can grow in this gracious practice of meditating on God's word? How does the indwelling of the Holy Spirit help us with this?