



entrust⁴

Multiplying Leaders for Multiplying Churches

Discovery Bible Study

**An Introduction to Bible Study Methods
with Emphasis on:**

Studying the Bible Inductively

Facilitating Small Group Bible Studies

Delivering Bible Messages

010.121.01



Multiplying Leaders for Multiplying Churches

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Introduction to This Module

Discovery Bible Study was developed by Entrust as part of a training program to help prepare people for ministry within their local church. It is based on lecture notes taken in classes taught by Howard Hendricks at Dallas Theological Seminary, which became the basis of his book, *Living by the Book*.¹ We are indebted to Dr. Hendricks for his permission in adapting his material for this workbook.

In this module you will learn and practice basic skills needed for helping yourself and others grow in the understanding of God's Word. Discovery Bible Study builds on the basic concepts outlined in Entrust's Facilitator Training module. Because we believe that small groups provide the most effective learning and relational environment, we designed this module to be used within a small group for maximum interaction and coaching opportunities.

Discovery Bible Study is primarily centered on learning and using an inductive Bible study method, but it also includes: (1) practice in writing lesson plans, (2) honing your facilitation skills of small group Bible studies (using a Scripture passage and a lesson from the included topical study, *Character of God*) and (3) developing a short message from your study. The assignments included in the workbook are designed to be completed before the group meets. This will promote maximum group discussion and learning. It is suggested that you record your answers in a separate notebook. **Plan on approximately 50 hours of pre-work for the entire module**, keeping in mind that not all the lessons have the same amount of pre-work. (This includes the *Character of God* study found at the end of this workbook.)

When you have completed this module, you will be able to:

1. Study the Bible Inductively.

The main skill learned in this course is how to study the Bible responsibly and enthusiastically, using a systematic method. You will learn three major steps to understand the passage being studied: observation, interpretation, and application, which together we call inductive Bible study. Throughout these lessons there are many opportunities to practice these skills. As you gain skill in using the steps of inductive Bible study, you

will strengthen your own ability to feed yourself from God's Word, as well as your ability to use the Scriptures correctly to teach, disciple, counsel, and lead others. All participants who have a desire to teach or preach will benefit from the systematic study of God's Word as it is presented here. You will learn to interpret a passage within its context and to see the larger picture that results when you carefully compare Scripture with Scripture. Ultimately, that will produce sound teaching and ministry that is solidly anchored in God's Word.

2. Facilitate a Small Group Bible Study.

You will be given additional practice in facilitating small groups, both with your assigned Scripture passage and with a topical study of one of the attributes of God. As you study these lessons together, you will experience the dynamics of a small group and see it led by an experienced facilitator. The skills you learn will allow you to facilitate a group in your church using the *Character of God* study.

3. Develop and Deliver a Message.

Though we believe that real discipleship happens in a facilitated, interactive learning and relational context, sometimes a lecture-style type of teaching is needed. We want you to develop this skill so that it is practiced in a way that invites listeners to think along with you, rather than to listen passively. So, the final part of this workbook deals with becoming an effective teacher, writing lessons, and developing a short message.

Our hope is that you will grow in confidence in your own study of the Word of God, as well as be able to pass on these skills to others.

Workbook Icons



Assignment: a question or study that focuses on course content. Written responses are required and should be recorded in a separate notebook.

1A

Personal Reflection: an instruction to reflect on scriptural truths or character traits or both as they relate to one's walk with God. The focus is on personal application. A written response may be requested.



Adoration: an instruction to worship the Lord with reference to course content. The focus is on God. No written response is required.

ENDNOTES

¹ Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book* (Chicago: Moody, 2007).

Lesson 1: Introduction to the Discovery Bible Study Method

Lesson Outline

- Why Study the Bible?
- Why Study in Small Groups?
- What is the Discovery Bible Study Method?

Lesson Objectives

When you have completed this lesson you will be able to

1. Summarize the value of studying the Bible.
2. Explain the benefits of studying the Bible in small groups.
3. Identify the three basic steps of the Discovery Bible Study method.

One of the questions we are continually faced with in this increasingly secular age is “Why study the Bible?” “What relevance does it have to us?”

Why Study the Bible?

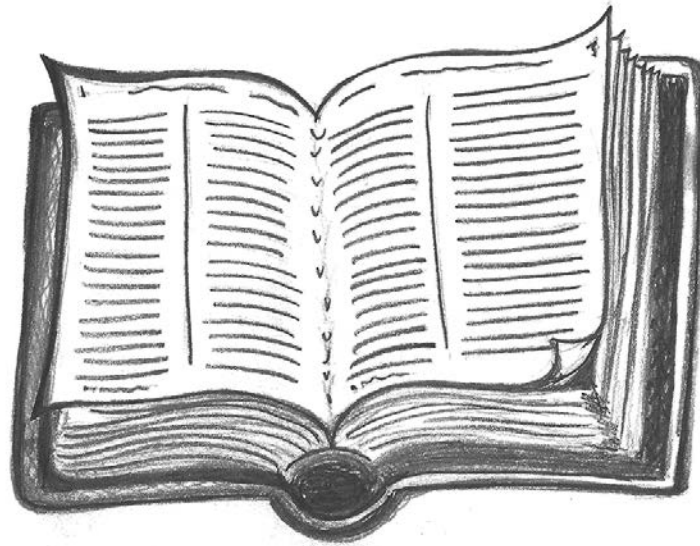
The Bible is a collection of 66 books in one volume, written over a period of more than 1,600 years, penned by more than 40 human authors who came from a variety of backgrounds, and yet it is unified in its message. It is the trustworthy and reliable revelation of God about who he is and how he relates to people. The Bible reveals things to us that we could not know ourselves without this revelation. It is not speculations or theories. It does not contradict itself but is thoroughly consistent. It is the result of a partnership between God and human beings; God inspired and superintended the writing through the individual personalities of the authors.



Look up 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and 2 Peter 1:19-21. What do they teach about God’s Word and its human authorship?

How does Bible study differ from other ways we have experienced Scripture? Many of us have had encounters with God’s Word in various forms: yearly Bible-reading plans, memorizing Scripture passages, and meditative reading. These methods all have their place in our Christian journey. But in the midst of our fast-paced lives, we often settle into quick, sporadic, and haphazard reading of God’s Word. We turn our time in God’s Word into another spiritual exercise that is to be checked off our list.

In this Discovery Bible Study module, you are about to experience the benefits of intentionally slowing down and digging deep into God’s Word, allowing the Holy Spirit to speak directly to **you** as you study. And if we are to take seriously Jesus’ charge to train disciples, we not only need to learn to feed **ourselves** from the Scripture, but we also need to be able to teach **others** how to study.



A. Why We Should Study the Bible Ourselves

While not everyone in the world has access to every Bible study resource, some people have access to the following: fill-in-the-blank study guides, topical studies (the included *Character of God* study is an example), biblical character studies, concordance studies, word studies, book studies, evangelistic studies, and/or

video lectures. With the growth of the Internet, more resources are becoming more available all the time.

Most of the Bible study materials we have access to have been researched and published by popular Christian writers and speakers. In an age when our personal time seems to be vanishing, why should we do our own study when we can just read what has already been written by others?

1.2

- a. How have you experienced the difference between just reading and trying to apply what others have researched versus doing your own study on a particular topic or skill?
- b. How might each method be helpful at different times of your life?

It is a great privilege to be able to study the Scriptures on our own. Many people believe that only a pastor or trained seminarian can really study and understand the Scriptures well, but in reality, the Word can be understood by everyone who uses good principles of Bible study. God guides each of us by his Holy Spirit to understand his Word. It was written to be understood as we pursue God. All believers have the Holy Spirit living in them, and he is the revealer of truth (Jn 14:26; 16:13).

While Scripture can be understood by anyone, it is also a skill that must be learned and that will improve with practice. The Discovery Bible Study method is a tool that enables us to dig deeper into God's Word for ourselves and discover his truth both personally and in community.

B. Why God Gave Us His Word and the Benefits of Studying It


There are many reasons why God gave us his Word and therefore many benefits we can derive from studying it, including the following:

1. **To reveal himself to us.** There are truths about God that we cannot know apart from his written Word. Learning

about God through the study of Scripture can create a more intimate bond between us and God.

2. **To reveal his plan of redemption.** Knowing his Word helps us understand and accept God's forgiveness offered to us through Christ's death on the cross (Acts 4:12).
3. **To transform our lives and help us become more like Jesus.** The Word is one of God's primary tools for **spiritual growth** (1 Pet 2:2; Rom 8:29).
4. **To help us obey him.** In the Bible, God has revealed himself and his will for us. Studying his Word helps us know his will and obey him (Ps 119:9–11, 40:8; Deut 29:29).
5. **To help us become spiritually mature.** Through the constant use of Scripture, we can become trained, in time, to distinguish good from evil (Heb 5:11–14), one of the characteristics of a mature Christian.
6. **To train and equip us to accomplish his purposes.** When we know his Word, God can use us to do his will and to teach the Scriptures to others (2 Tim 3:16–17).
7. **To help us evaluate whether or not someone's teaching is true.** Like the Bereans in Acts 17:11, we can compare what people say with Scripture to make sure that their words are true.
8. **To give us encouragement, peace, comfort, wisdom, and guidance.** Psalm 119 and Psalm 19:7–14 list these and other benefits of God's Word.
9. **To expose our sin.** The Word is profitable to correct and reprove us (2 Tim 3:16–17). Scripture helps us realize when we are wrong or disobedient.
10. **To give us God's commands and principles.** God has given us commands and principles to live by that lead toward health and life.
11. **To give us examples to follow.** The Scripture is full of stories about people who followed and obeyed God faithfully. We can also learn what to avoid by looking at the negative examples in the Bible.
12. **To give us his promises.** The Bible tells us what we can expect from God and what we can rely on him to do.

1.3

- 
- a. Note three or four benefits of studying God's Word either from those listed above or others you have experienced that are meaningful to you. For each benefit explain why it is meaningful.
 - b. How do you think you might experience these benefits in greater measure?

C. Some Perspectives to Keep in Mind

While you are working through the Discovery Bible Study method, it will be helpful to keep in mind the following:

1. **Remember that studying takes effort.** It is a discipline requiring work. The more effort you put into Bible study, the more you will benefit from it. Developing your skill in studying the Bible requires practice, patience, and perseverance. You **can** do it! This course will help you, especially as you practice the new skills together with your group.
2. **Approach God's Word with an open heart and mind.** When studying a passage or book, do not assume that you already know what it says. Pray that the Lord help you understand what is in the passage. Allow God to give you a fresh perspective and a deeper understanding of his Word.
3. **Be willing to accept and obey the truth you discover.** Ask God to give you a heart to obey before you begin your study. God's design for believers is for them to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29). He may not reveal some truth to you if you are not willing to act on it. Matthew 13:10–17 tells to whom God reveals his mysteries.
4. **Depend upon the Holy Spirit for understanding.** Always begin your personal and group study with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to help you understand the passage you are studying. Remember that God's Spirit was given to help you understand his Word (John 14:26 and 16:13).

5. **Develop realistic expectations as you begin to study the Scriptures.**
 - a. Do not underestimate yourself; if you can read, you can study the Bible! Everyone can use the Discovery Bible Study method. And we can all improve our Bible study skills with practice.
 - b. Do not overestimate what you can accomplish in the time you have; do not set your goals too high. Be realistic in how much of the Bible you can actually study at one time. The important thing is not how much you study but that you keep studying regularly, growing in both the knowledge and the application of what you learn.
6. **Keep in mind the possible uses of what you are learning.** On one level, this Bible study method will help you read and study more meaningfully and responsibly in your private study and devotions. But you will also be learning to develop lessons for small group Bible studies, as well as learning to give talks based on your studies. These new skills could lead to many mentoring opportunities. Realize, too, that many published Bible studies were written by people like you who observed a need to lead others into study of the Bible. Because you are aware of the people in your own culture and the kind of issues they deal with, God may be leading you to help grow them in meaningful ways in their relationship with him.

**1.4**

- a. Reflecting on the six perspectives above, which ones are especially challenging for you? Why are they challenging?
- b. How might you begin to implement them as you progress in your spiritual life?

Why Study in Small Groups?

Many people enjoy coming together around a fire, perhaps in the cool of the evening, to warm themselves. As the fire burns, if a piece of wood is moved to the side and no longer has contact with the other sticks, it will become dim, turn gray, and stop burning. It loses its glow and heat because it is no longer touching the other pieces of wood. So too, if we are connected with others in a small group studying the Bible, we are on fire. If we move away from the group and become isolated, our fire, our growth, our encouragement is gone, and we become like ashes, without life.

A. What Is a Small Group?

We will start with a suggested definition of a small group:

A small group consists of 3-12 people within the local church or community of faith, gathering voluntarily and intentionally, meeting regularly with the shared goals of mutual Christian growth and fellowship.

1.5



- a. What do you think is the significance of each aspect of this definition?
- b. What would you add or change in the definition of a small group?

B. What is the Historical Biblical Precedence?

For centuries all over the world believers have experienced the life-changing and life-sustaining impact of committed small group meetings around the Word of God. Discussing God's Word in small groups, rather than just listening to someone talk about it, has revolutionized the lives of many believers over the years. It has given them deeper understanding and more effective application of

the Word in their relationships with God and others. Small group Bible study is very likely the most effective type of discipleship that we can experience as we participate in fellowship around God's Word, challenging and encouraging each other in meaningful ways.


As you learned in the *Facilitator Training* workbook, small groups are not a new idea, but rather they are a biblical expression of the nature of God and of the community for which we were designed. Through the years small groups have been the primary means of multiplying the church, especially in cultures that face opposition to the faith.

In this Discovery Bible Study module you will have the experience of digging into the Scriptures alone as you work through these lessons at home, and then the opportunity of sharing discoveries with one another as you meet together in small groups.

C. What is the Value of Small Group Study?

Many Christians believe they already study the Bible because they attend church services and listen to good biblical sermons. While there is much benefit to learning this way, there are some differences in how we learn and change within a small group versus a large group or church service.

1.6

- 
- a. How have you benefited from being a member of a small group in any setting?
 - b. What do you observe to be the benefits of a small group versus a congregational or large group setting? Specifically, how does a small group setting impact:
 - 1) Participation?
 - 2) Relationships?
 - 3) Leadership Development?
 - 4) Peer Discipleship?
 - 5) Accountability?
 - 6) Outreach?

What Is the Discovery Bible Study Method?

Before we introduce the Discovery Bible Study method in detail, consider an analogy that provides an overview or roadmap for the next three chapters.

An archaeologist studies the life and culture of people who lived long ago. He or she begins by surveying an area to determine if it is a place where discoveries are hidden below the surface. If the information indicates the site may have important findings, excavation will be done next.

First, large equipment is used to remove the top soil. Further excavation is done carefully with hand tools. The location of objects is carefully recorded along with the location of nearby objects and features. Great care is taken to note what was built in an area and what was there naturally.

The site is divided into sections and each section is carefully explored, with every finding numbered and recorded, photos taken, and recording sheets filled out indicating all of the details. Finally, all the findings are analyzed in a variety of ways. Artifacts are cleaned, catalogued, and compared with other artifact collections. They are dated and their composition is studied.

The analysis leads to conclusions about the people who lived there and their way of life. Without the extensive work of surveying, excavating, recording, and analyzing, there would be no treasures or knowledge of an earlier era discovered.

1.7

- a. Imagine yourself as the archeologist who makes a significant historical discovery. Contrast your feelings and involvement in the project with those who only read about it.
- b. How might this analogy speak to the benefits of a methodical studying of the Bible versus a casual reading of it?

Using a method simply means that you will follow certain steps, in a particular order, to achieve good results. Effective Bible study requires a method or strategy that increases and improves your discoveries. As you use this orderly process to study Scriptures, you will gain more insight and receive much greater satisfaction from your efforts.

Discovery Bible Study, like the analogy above, is all about discovering the treasures that can be unearthed in God's Word. These treasures are uncovered by asking basic questions associated with each step.

The following is a brief description of the three steps of observation, interpretation, and application.

A. Observation

The first thing you will want to do is get the big-picture overview of what you are studying, giving you a preview of where you will be digging (to use the archeology analogy). This is part of surveying the territory, and it will require reading the section several times to become familiar with it and to determine what the main themes or topics of the passage are.

Next, you begin to drill down in your observations, moving from the main topics and themes to the actual facts that can be observed. What facts are given in the text? Every detail is important to the passage in some way. Look only for the facts contained in the text itself. Notice the specific details and words that the author uses.

Observation's Basic Question:

What are the facts?

B. Interpretation

In the second step—interpretation—you are discovering what the facts mean. Often when we read the Bible, our tendency is to jump immediately to this step. Before you can understand what the passage means, however, you must learn to observe what it says. Interpretations of a passage must always be based on the facts you find within that passage. Consequently, you will probably have to break some old habits.

You discover what the text means by using good principles of interpretation that are thoroughly explained in the interpretation lesson. These principles keep you anchored in the truth of the passage rather than ascribing your own meaning to the passage. Another helpful step of interpretation is to seek to understand the author's intentions. This step keeps you from misinterpreting the content of a passage.

Interpretation's Basic Question:

What do the facts mean?

C. Application

Third, you will take your discoveries thus far and consider how to apply them to your life. This final step calls for action. Here you are looking for concrete ways you can integrate the general principles of Scripture into your daily life. You must decide what you will **do** in response to the truths you have discovered. Ask this question: How will my life be different because I have understood what the Scripture teaches?

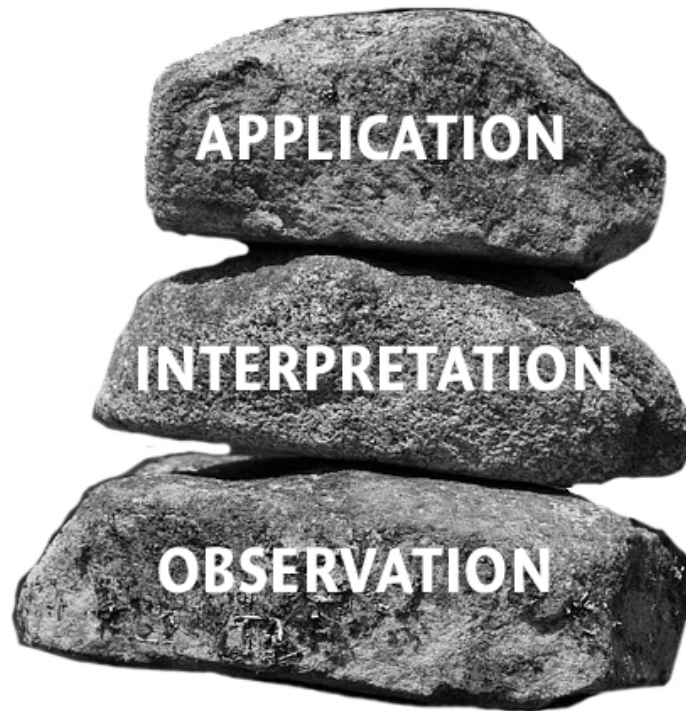
Application's Basic Question:

How does this discovery apply to my life?

Every time you come to God's Word, you must read it thoughtfully and carefully to see what is there. Then you must ask and answer basic questions that will help you discover what it means. Third, you consider how to apply it to your life. Below, the basic questions are summarized along with their associated steps:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1. What are the facts? | (Observation) |
| 2. What do the facts mean? | (Interpretation) |
| 3. How does this discovery apply to my life? | (Application) |

As you might remember, these three steps are parallel to the three types of questions you learned to ask in the facilitator training studies. You progress from the initial step (bottom) of observing the facts, next to interpreting those facts, and finally to applying these interpretations to your own life. There is a definite movement and order to them, starting from the bottom and moving to the top (like stairs), as illustrated below.



That is the Discovery Bible Study method in summary . . . simple, right? While applying the three questions to passages could be done in a quick and simple fashion if you are very limited in time and resources, in this course we are going to dig for some deeper truths like our archeologist. This work will require the use of some special equipment that will reveal treasures that would not be discovered by a quick skimming of the surface. So roll up your sleeves and get ready to dig for treasure with your fellow Bible study participants. This section has contained a quick overview of the Discovery Bible Study method which the next three lessons will cover in detail.



Meditate on the fact that God's Word is available to you. Thank him for his Word, for the Holy Spirit's guidance in understanding it, and for your mind and heart that enable you to study it, to probe for its meaning, and then to apply it to your life.

Summary

In this lesson we laid some ground work for reasons why we, as Christians, would want to study the Bible, and we gave a rationale for studying it in a small group context. We also gave a quick overview of the Discovery Bible Study method. In the next lesson you will begin to study and apply the first step of the method: observation.



Begin working on the *Character of God* topical Bible study at the back of your workbook, starting with the introduction. Highlight your favorite verses in the study or add some of your own. We will discuss our discoveries in our time together.

1.9



a. Later in the module, after you have learned the Discovery Bible Study method, you will practice your facilitating skills (and afterwards, develop a message) on one of these following passages assigned to you by your module facilitator. Feel free to note which one, as a reminder:

- Philippians 1:1–11
- Philippians 1:12–26
- Philippians 1:27–2:4
- Philippians 2:5–18
- Philippians 3:1–14
- Philippians 4:4–19
- (other?)

b. After completing the lessons in the *Character of God* topical study (found at the end of this workbook) as part of your pre-work, you will also be facilitating a discussion on one of these lessons, assigned to you by your module facilitator.

Jot down your lesson number here: _____

1A



As we begin to study God's Word together, ask yourself how this process is affecting you. The point is not just to learn a method but to allow the Holy Spirit to use the whole process to transform you into the person God created you to be. And how God could be leading you to help others experience this kind of life change in your own setting. Begin to think about opportunities you might have to pass on this experience by establishing a small group Bible study after this training.

Note:

In studying God's Word, it is important that you use a translation that is as faithful as possible to the original text. Examples in English are the New King James and the New American Standard. The New International Version and English Standard Version are reliable but do engage in some paraphrasing. Paraphrases like The Message, The Living Bible, and The Amplified Bible are general considered not good Bibles for first-hand study.