

PETER ROENNFELDT

The Importance of Discovery Bible Reading in Households of Faith

Discovery Bible Reading is a simple, reproducible process that fosters discipleship: disciple-making, spiritual growth, maturity, and biblical literacy. It is innovative, non-threatening and easy to use, with in-built protection against heresies and conspiracies. Pastors and leaders cultivating multiplying missional communities are enthusiastic about it, and it is increasingly seen as a feature of worship in *households of faith*.

“Literally anyone can do it,” Eunice Winship, who facilitates a *household of faith* in her home each Sabbath, explains. “It is really effective when introducing Jesus to those who have never read the Bible, as well as for people of other faiths, our children, young people, and mature believers.”

“It is truly amazing,” Eunice adds. “My husband—who has not been a regular church attender over the years, and two others new to faith, are leading out in Discovery Bible Reading.” Participants are meeting Jesus and growing in their relationship with him. “It is a beautiful thing,” she says. “Questions are raised, challenges and struggles are discussed, and our lives are being changed.”

Dale Stephenson, senior pastor of Crossway, Australia’s largest Baptist multi-campus church with eight campuses, sees the “Bible Discovery Method” (as he calls it) as the way to unstick “the point of paralysis” in churches—where participation in mission is reduced to “just being able to invite someone to something.” “No books (are) involved except the Bible, and you discover things together,” Stephenson explains—emphasizing that “making disciples should be so simple that anyone, anywhere, anytime, can do it” (in Green 2023).

Where to Start?

Very few know much about Jesus today, and most are wary of church and being preached at. However, if you have a relational connection, and you invite a friend to your *household of faith*—explaining that you simply read through Bible books—you may be pleasantly surprised at who will accept your invitation.

If you are wanting to start a new Discovery Bible Reading group, with a view of launching a new *household of faith*, first identify *persons of peace*. Jesus used this type of language when sending out the 72 to multiply disciples (see Luke 10:1-9). Persons of peace are hospitable and willingly engage in conversation.

Jesus spoke of how to connect in all cultural and social environment with these key people. First, he said, *eat* their food—and listen to their stories. It starts with food—eating their food and listening to their challenges and brokenness. Second, *heal*, encourage, and support them—sharing that God is deeply interested in them. And thirdly, *tell them* God’s kingdom and presence “is near” (Luke 10:8, 9).

These steps—taking time to eat and listen; healing and encouraging them; and sharing God’s care for them—will reveal where God is already actively at work, and you can then join him “in the work he is already doing by inviting that *person of peace* to read the Bible with you” (Stephenson in Green 2023).

We have learned that Mark’s gospel is a good place to start. It is the shortest gospel, easy to read and interesting, and a great introduction to Jesus for friends and colleagues who have little biblical knowledge or background.

After Mark, you could go to John’s Gospel for an introduction to all the essential ideas of the Christian faith, and then Acts—the inspiring account of the early believers empowered by the Holy Spirit, multiplying disciples and churches to fulfil God’s mission. These three—Mark, John, and Acts—are available as an attractive compilation entitled *Discover Jesus* (see Signs Publishing Company).

There are 66 Bible books to explore, so there is no need for reading guides. Just read the Bible. When about to start a new Bible book, one in the group could research the background to that book—who wrote it, when and why?—and share a short introduction. A great resource for this is the *Filament Bible* app, which provides a historical background, and a wide range of maps, videos, devotional and study material.

How Does It Work?

Some will have a favourite Bible, and a variety of translations enriches discussion. However, introduce those new to Bible reading to an easy-to-read translation¹—either paper or downloaded onto smart devices. Also, have a supply of Discovery Bible Reading bookmarks outlining the process—available free in a variety of languages and styles from www.following-Jesus.com, with some designed specifically for children.²

The process is simple—integrated into the time set aside for sharing, listening to music, singing, and stories for children, food, fellowship, giving and serving—with the Lord’s Supper or Agape meal a regular, perhaps even weekly, feature of eating together.

Discovery Bible Reading Process

1. Read each Bible book from beginning to end—the way they were written to be read. While this process can be used to explore any verse, passage or chapter, its impact is greatest when each book or letter as a complete whole is read.

2. Start with a simple prayer. If our prayers are too complicated, we *teach* people not to pray for fear they will not use the right words. On the bookmark, we have this prayer: *Dear God, please guide us. Thank you.*

3. Start at the beginning of the Bible book and read one section or story at a time. If the section is very short, it is better to read two sections.

4. Read the section twice—reading from beginning to end—with another retelling the story in their own words. Never read one-verse-at-a-time around the circle, and the one retelling does not explain the passage but simply recalls it. In this way all those in the group, including those new to Bible reading, become familiar with the story. A child might be one reader, with an adult the other. This creates a basis for shared conversations.

5. In *Discovery Bible Reading* we then discuss the scripture, using the same five discussion questions each time.

Five Discussion Questions

1. What is new to us?
2. What surprises us?
3. What do we not understand?
4. What will we each apply or obey this week?
5. Who will we share with, and what will we share, this week?

These are very direct questions to which all, including unchurched people, can relate easily. At first some church people may feel these questions are not spiritual, but most quickly find that these non-religious questions lead to very deep discussions.

The “Bible Discovery Method” follows a similar process. “You read a short passage . . . a couple of times out loud. Then,” Stephenson explains, “you retell the passage from memory collectively and ask, ‘What stands out for you?’” Also, it is “important to provide an appropriately calibrated challenge such as, ‘What could we do differently in our lives with what we’ve discovered today?’” (Green 2023)

Another tool that can help is to give each person a *Discovery Bible Reading* bookmark and encourage different ones to ask the questions each time. In this way, each one also learns to share faith.

It is important to respect the time constraints agreed by all in the *household of faith*. Usually, 20-30 minutes works well, but the time needs to be agreed upon. The time can also include *conversational prayer*, perhaps closing with the prayer on the bookmark: *Dear God, thank you for your Word. Help us to follow you. Amen.*

Strengths of Discovery Bible Reading

Discovery Bible Reading allows the Holy Spirit to be our teacher. Your friends will experience what Jesus is really like, become believers in the fellowship of a small supportive faith community, and be able to share with others using this same simple process.

Discovery Bible Reading cultivates theological thinking. This was a strength of New Testament churches. Let me explain. Early believers were devoted “to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42), the two historic realities of faith: (1) Calvary—Jesus came in the flesh, died for our sins, and rose from the grave; and (2) Pentecost—Jesus ascended, is at the Father’s right hand, but present by his Holy Spirit and returning in glory. Every aspect of life, and all biblical stories and prophecies, were seen through these truths. This is theological thinking—and is what *households of faith* do in Discovery Bible Reading.

Discovery Bible Reading fosters spiritual growth and biblical literacy. Participants are not spectators, just listening—but actively engaged in growing in their understanding of God. Rather than disconnected verses, perhaps on a screen, all have their Bibles open—reading Bible books in context. Even for church attenders, this can be new. Unlike brief social media messages, they engage deeply with God’s Word.

Discovery Bible Reading encourages participation. Like physical exercise, participation strengthens and sharpens our experience with God by refreshing and revitalizing our relationship with him. Inviting friends who are not yet followers of Jesus is a vital component of this journey—and all will be able to participate. Sharing faith is essential for our spiritual health.

Discovery Bible Reading equips disciple-makers. This is Bible *reading* rather than *study*, which implies a teacher with the answers. It is simple, natural, and reproducible; literally, anyone-can-do-it at no cost. Each time it is used in your *household of faith*, all involved are being equipped to use it with their friends.

Discovery Bible Reading allows for questions to go unanswered. No one has answers to all questions, and nor does the Bible. If there is something that is not understood, we do not argue or conjecture. A fear of questions for which there is no answers, inhibits many from sharing their faith. But simply thank each other for their insights—and the best answer is always, “Let’s keep reading.”

Discovery Bible Reading facilitates the use of spiritual giftedness. When Jesus ascended, he gave gifts to his church. In each *household of faith* these will be apostles (those more specifically sent to initiate new groups, church plants and multiplication), prophets (with spiritual discernment), evangelists, pastors (or shepherds) and teachers. These equip and build each other up for God’s work, cultivating unity and maturity “in the Lord” (Eph 4:7-13).

The apostle Paul emphasized that participation protects a church from immaturity, from being “tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching” and being “influenced” by those who “try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth” (Eph 4:14-16). Discovery Bible Reading creates an environment for conversations, growth, and participation—providing protection from heresy and conspiracies.

Learning from the Past

The Great Awakening and Great Advent Revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries were some of the most significant since New Testament times. The “keystone” for the Methodist movement was a simple process of weekly Bible reading, prayer, and fellowship that John Wesley called “class meetings”—led by people in their communities, using standard discussion questions all could follow (Bevins 2019:104, 105).

Sadly, denominations birthed during that time, and in the subsequent charismatic movements of the 20th century—in the broad category of what could be called evangelical-type churches—have been easy targets for a rash of conspiracy theories. Why is this so?

It is worth reflecting upon several possible reasons:

First, the revivals that birthed these churches were largely anti-intellectual and anti-scientific, fostering a spirit of individualism (distrust of others); immediacy (past faith is suspect so choose now); dogmatism (a convincing simplicity), and anti-traditionalism (they are of *Babylon*) (Noll 1994:59-64). These tend to isolate people from others of faith, leaving the unscrupulous to promote conspiracies—to gain adherents and their money.

Second, fascination with speculative end-time scenarios such as Dispensationalism, the Secret Rapture, and the idea that Israel with America would figure large in these events, leaves a church vulnerable to grasping the next exciting theory.

To start with, a careful progression of Bible reading was fostered. For example, Adventists—from the Great Advent Revival—found within the flow of the end-time messages of Revelation 14:6-13 a frame for a comprehensive six-stage evangelistic approach.

1. The context and interests of those receiving the messages were considered. Then, the priorities were:

2. The good news or “eternal gospel” of Jesus (verse 6).

3. Practical Christian living—how to “fear God,” pray and read his Word (verse 7).

4. Distinctive teachings, including judgment and worship (verse 7).

5. Then, prophetic warnings of attacks upon God’s people (verses 8-11).

6. With the call to faithful obedience and disciple making (verses 12, 13) (Roennfeldt 2015:24-27).

However, over time this comprehensive message has been truncated, producing an abbreviated message of judgment and law with undue attention upon the trinity of evil—dragon, beast, and false prophet. Such a narrow focus then becomes a platform for every possible apocalyptic twist and turn, and every conceivable conspiracy.

Third, an evangelistic method that unduly emphasized *new secret information* that others do not have or know, along with a demand for results, cultivates an environment where conspiracy theories flourish.

In the New England States—where in the 19th century all attended weekly worship services, Bible classes, and prayer meetings—the questions that shaped evangelism were, “What message would be most effective? What do people most want to hear? What can we say that will both convert the people and draw them to our particular church?” (Noll 1994:67).

As the decades pass, this individualistic revivalism that is suspicious of others, has a fascination with speculative end-time scenarios and an evangelistic approach largely obsessed with information others do not have, creates a breeding ground for every heresy and conspiracy imaginable.

Couple this with a void of biblical literacy, knowledge, understanding or experience with Jesus—with the 24-hour social media and video messaging, but very little Bible reading—and the warning lights should be flashing, with sirens blaring.

Read Your Bible Again

When visiting a friend of many years, he excitedly told me of the latest news feeds, asking: “Have you heard of what the Pope is doing? Are you aware of his latest secret decrees? Have you seen . . . ?”

My friend was unaware that each time he showed an interest, the internet served him even more startling and dramatic *secret information*. Social media algorithms create what you might call an echo chamber, that is a place where you receive information that reinforces what you have shown an interest in and want to hear again . . . and again . . . and again. He was an easy target for the latest conspiracy theories.

When he paused, I suggested, “Perhaps it would be good to simply close your tablet and open the gospels. Why not stop, and start reading the story of Jesus again?” His wife breathed a sigh of relief, responding, “Now, that would be a good idea!”

In your households of faith, it is important not to be hijacked into following one person’s hobbyhorse. Avoid a diet of YouTube videos featuring a particular speaker claiming access to secret information about end-time events. Remember, heresies come from bad preaching, not from Bible reading, so keep reading—following the theme of each Bible book.

For more in depth Bible teaching and the study of complex themes, including the prophetic chapters of Daniel and Revelation, invite your pastor to teach for a few weeks, or request that your pastor recommend a good Bible teacher to share a short series of seminars—but then get back to Discovery Bible Reading.

Discovery Bible Reading provides an environment for the Holy Spirit to work in households of faith, generating theological thinking, spiritual growth, and biblical literacy. It encourages participation, equips, and releases disciple-makers for God’s mission, facilitates the use of spiritual gifts for Christian maturity, and protects against heresies and conspiracy theories. It introduces new people to Jesus and encourages believers to be faithful to the inspired Word of God and the testimony of the apostles.

Tell others of this Bible reading plan. Invite others to join your household of faith. Give each person a bookmark and encourage them to form other groups—multiplying Discovery Bible Reading groups and households of faith.

Church at Home

Households of faith are not the only way to think of church. However, the “two or three” gathered in Jesus’ name is the basic unit of church and unless church is built and multiplied at this level—upon Jesus as the foundation “rock,” using the gospel “keys” to unlock God’s kingdom to our families, friends, and communities—it cannot fulfil its purpose of accomplishing God’s mission.

The increased interest today in churches at home—whatever the reason—presents the whole Christian church with significant opportunities. Mission agency and denominational directors, together with local church ministers, pastors, and leaders, need to be on the front foot—enthusiastically engaging with and multiplying households of faith. This time the idea of church at home might not just be an aberration or passing fad—but a return to an essential frame for mission, for the gospel to go to all.

Some Discussion Questions

1. Who could you team up with to start a Discovery Bible Reading group?
2. Read *If You Can Eat . . . You Can Make Disciples* and then discuss it as a team?
3. Using the three-step process Jesus outlined in Luke 10:8-9, who could you connect with to begin a Discovery Bible Reading group?
4. How could your household of faith use the Discovery Bible Reading process?

Endnotes

¹ Peter Roennfeldt, *Enjoy the Living Word*, Signs Publishing, 2021, for an overview of inspiration, manuscripts, how the Bible books were chosen, and the story of translation.

² Download free *Discovery Bible Reading* bookmarks from <https://www.following-jesus.com/resources/>.

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Peter Roennfeldt (DMin)—pastor, church planter, city-evangelist, missionary, seminary director, teacher, and pastor-to-pastor, has lived in four countries—equipping and coaching church planters and movement practitioners in over 60 countries, and leading hundreds of pastors on study tours through the Bible Lands. As well as initiating Discovery Bible Reading, he has produced Conversation Guides for disciple-making, church planting teams, and movement leaders, and is the author of 12 books (see <http://www.newchurchlife.com/> www.facebook.com/newchurchlife and for books and videos www.following-jesus.com).