

Why Discovery Bible Studies?

Discovery Bible Studies aren't a "silver bullet" or solution to everything, but it is the *most fruitful method* we know of to make disciples who make disciples. The simplicity of DBS can obscure its depth.

1. How to make DBS ineffective

DBS is very flexible, and people modify it in creative ways to suit their purposes. We have learned a lot about these modifications from people we've taught in the past. Here are some of the top ideas for making a DBS not-a-DBS:

1. Fellowship is so much fun. No need to start the DBS on time – or ever!
2. Skip over the uncomfortable bit when people can't remember what they're thankful for. Just skip that question.
3. Stop asking "What did you obey? / 'I will...'" and "Who did you tell?" This just leads to awkward silence.
4. Stop asking people to re-tell the story in their own words. After all, nobody wants to look stupid!
5. The questions "what does this say about God / people" is so superficial. Just tell them the answer. They won't discover deep truths on their own anyway.
6. Start preaching / teaching the Bible! After all, you know the Bible and theology better than the others!
7. Show your expertise in linking today's passage with other passages in the Bible.
8. Skip asking people to make "I will..." statements. It just makes people uncomfortable to think they actually have to obey Jesus.
9. Don't let them pray in groups of two or three. This puts young Christians in an uncomfortable situation.

The authors have observed that Christian small groups who eagerly embrace the Discover Bible Study (DBS) approach in their small groups, soon start leaving out important sections, because they are inconvenient or make some group members feel uncomfortable.

2. Sections of DBS and the goal or effect of each

DBS Section	Goal / Effect of the section
What are you thankful [to God] for? Groups of believers can bring in a time of worship, communion, and prayer here.	To start off by focusing on God. This can replace singing if there is no gifted musician in the group. Unbelievers often start realizing that they do have things to be thankful for, and it prepares them for worship later on.
From last week, what did you obey ? (<i>I will</i> statements).	To remember the previous week's lesson, and our response to it. Helps build integrity as people start actually doing what they say they will. It helps take the gospel outside the church through obedience to Jesus.
Who did you tell about last week's lesson? Did you share the gospel with anyone?	To aid in multiplying to create more groups. It helps make Christians more than "Sunday Christians."
Read this week's passage. Preferably not the group leader.	To keep the focus on the Word of God. Involving non-leaders early on reinforces the idea of "whole body ministry," not just ministry by the "clergy."
Group tries to retell the passage in their own words. Help one another to remember. There should be no interpretation of the meaning at this point.	To help people pay attention to what they hear. By gently asking the group to try to re-tell it as best as they can remember, people learn to pay more attention. It demonstrates the value of group memory. It helps them remember the text better, so it'll be easy to retell to others outside the group.
Re-read the passage, ideally from the same translation as the first reading.	To check if they missed a piece in the retelling part. Also helps people to remember the passage better.
"What did you learn about God ?"	To help people discover who God really is. While the question sounds overly simple, it is actually a deeply theological question. People tend to think about God either as angry and/or remote and uncaring, rather than as a loving Father to His children. Over a series of DBSes, people will gradually develop an accurate understanding of God.
"What did you learn about people ?"	To help people discover for themselves how people really are. Again, a simple but deep theological question. People tend to think of themselves either too highly ('I am a good person') or too lowly ('I am a worm and don't deserve God's mercy'). Multiple DBS studies will show that while we were born sinners, God loves us and wants to adopt us as His children.
Other questions like: What stood out for you in this passage? What surprised you? What does it mean to you? How did you feel when you heard this passage? (like/dislike) Can you identify with the passage and why? Does this kind of thing still happen today?	Optional questions such as these can be used to probe deeper than the previous two questions. Care should be taken to ask open questions such as these, rather than closed (yes/no) questions. This helps people discover God's word for themselves.

DBS Section	Goal / Effect of the section
How will <i>I</i> obey? [in the coming week] ‘ <i>I will ...</i> ’	Develop the group as disciples through mutual accountability and accountability to God. These “I will...” statements should not be generalizations like “men should care more for their wives,” but rather “this week I’ll be more kind to my wife.” It helps take the Good News into the world, not just keep it in church.
Who am I going to tell ? (this lesson/ the gospel, or about DBS.)	To create and maintain an outward focus , not just inward. To help multiply disciples.
Share struggles /stresses/needs–how can the group help?	To make Christianity practical in the real world. To help obey the “one another” verses. The group can offer practical help to other group members, or to the community. We do this at the end so there is ample time to address personal issues. This provides fuel for prayer.
Prayer: For a group of believers: The group splits into subgroups of two or three to pray for one another. In a discovery group for unbelievers, the leader will pray for the group.	Groups of two: To help shy people and new believers learn to pray in front of others. To help group members to get to know one another better by rotating these groups each week. People tend to open up more if praying with just one other person than with the whole group. New believers can learn to pray out loud in this way.

Note: the accountability parts should not be done harshly, but in a spirit of love and care. Stress that we obey Jesus, because we love Him (John 14:15, 21, 23, Luke 11:28, John 15:10), and we share what we’ve learned with others, because this is what He wants (Matthew 28:19). Remind the group that their first point of accountability is to God, not the group.

3. How DBS differs from other kinds of Bible studies

Many Christians can’t see the difference between DBS and other Bible study approaches. Here are some key areas where other approaches differ:

Other Bible studies	DBS	Goal / Effect of proper DBS
Teaching-based.	Discovery-based.	Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the DBS group self-discovers Bible facts while answering questions like ‘What does this say about God/people?’
Individual learning.	Group learning through discovery.	
Led by a study leader or teacher.	Led by a facilitator.	DBS groups tend to start more groups (multiplication), because it’s easy to train facilitators. Other Bible studies stop happening if the leader isn’t available.

Other Bible studies	DBS	Goal / Effect of proper DBS
Needs a trained Bible teacher and/or gifted teacher.	A relatively unskilled facilitator.	Because of the simplicity of DBS, most Christians who want, can become facilitators. This empowers more people to minister.
For the most part, participants are passive learners.	Most participants are active contributors to the discussion. Lots of interaction and building on the ideas of others.	Modern educational theory shows that the more people talk and interact over a subject, the more they learn. Add synthesis, application and accountability to the mix, and it's dynamite (Steinhaus, 2021).
People tend to mostly listen passively, and seldom reveal their inner struggles.	People tend to open up and share their deepest struggles.	Intentionally builds relationship with God and one another.
Have little or no accountability.	Accountability to one another and to God.	People are held accountable to God and one another for their actions <i>outside</i> the group.
People learn about the Bible.	People learn about the Bible and how to apply it in their lives.	DBS meetings tend to lead to vibrant, interactive groups.
Tend to be dry unless the leader is exceptionally gifted.	Tend to be vibrant and fun with lots of interaction.	Leads to growing disciples of Jesus.
Driven by the teacher (mini-sermon).	Driven by questions (like Jesus did) (e.g. Mat 16:15, Mat 5:13, 5:46-47, 6:25-31, 7:3-, 9:5 and many more).	The only non-evangelistic sermon in the Bible by someone other than Jesus led to the event described in Acts 20:9.
An uninformed teacher could teach heresy.	Tends to be self-correcting, because the Bible is the authority.	Surprisingly, the DBS approach seldom leads to heresy, as group members simply ask 'where does it say so in the Bible? If what you say is so, let's do a DBS on the relevant passage.'
Bible studies tend to be focussed inwardly only (personal development).	DBS are focussed on the Kingdom: making God my personal King, and seeing how we can help grow the Kingdom.	'How will I obey?' focusses inwardly on personal growth. 'Who am I going to tell?' outwardly on growing the Kingdom.
Prayer is mostly led by the leader.	Split into subgroups of two or three who pray for one another.	Shy/quiet people pray freely with just one other person, but seldom in a group. New believers learn to pray from their partner. The subgroups differ each week, so people get to know each other better.

An unexpected spin-off of group DBS studies is that some Christians start applying the principles during their private Bible studies. They read a passage, then ask themselves "What does it say about God?" "What does it say about people?" They also apply ideas to their own personal prayer from what they learn from other people during the two-by-two praying at the group study.

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