

Following up the sermon in small groups

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The norm in our church has been to follow up the Sunday sermon in our small groups with a view to specific application. So the primary focus in the gospel communities is *not* doing a Bible study on the passage (that work should have been done in the gathering), *nor* recapping what was covered at the gathering (though this may have been done briefly). The primary focus is on exploring *the implications* for our lives and our life together.

Here are some thoughts on how this may be done.

Try to focus on the implications that are specifically relevant to your gospel community. This may not cover all the ideas presented at the gathering or even the main idea. Instead be open to the Spirit so the application is specific to your gospel community. The advantage of applying the Bible teaching in the gospel communities is that we can push application into the specifics of our lives and our life together as a gospel community.

If you are unclear how to follow up the gathering teaching then the following format may help. It is based around two rubrics so it should be easy to remember:

- **head, hands, heart**
- **personal, communal, missional**

It could be used cold if a crisis has wrecked your preparation time. But it is designed as a framework that you can elaborate as you tailor it to the passage and the needs of your gospel community.

Start by rereading the passage of the Scripture.

How did the Holy Spirit speak to your heart?

This will help recap what was said and allow those who missed the gathering to catch up. If people's recall is patchy you may want to summarise what was said or you may focus in on one aspect of special relevance to your gospel community.

Phrasing the question this way emphasizes that we are not engaged merely in the process of analysing an ancient text, but a dynamic process in which the living God speaks to his people through word by his Spirit. Quoting Psalm 95, Hebrews 3:7 says, 'as the Holy Spirit says' (present tense). The Spirit not only 'spoke' (past tense) through the original authors of Scripture to ensure their words were God's word without error. The Spirit also 'speaks' (present tense) as we read those words today.

This is also an opportunity to ensure people understand what the passage is saying. You may want to ask whether people have any questions.

What are the implications for your life? Our life together? The world around us?

Our aim is to understand the word (our **heads**) so we can apply it:

- to our lives (our **hands**)
- to our affections (our **hearts**)

The rubric 'head, hands, heart' corresponds to the need when teaching the Bible to:

- make it clear = head

- make it real = hands
- make it felt = heart

(See Tim Chester and Marcus Honeysett, *Gospel-Centred Preaching* from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and [amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk).)

Asking about our life together will draw out the communal implications and the asking about the world around us will draw out the missional implications. God's word does not speak to a Christian ghetto. It is a public word for the world. Asking this question will also help members of your gospel community to share God's with their unbelieving friends and apply it to their work, politics, cultural engagement and so on.

- What are the **personal** implications (for you)?
- What are the **communal** implications (for our gospel community)?
- What are the **missional** implications (for those we want to reach for Christ)?

The use of the word 'implications' rather than 'application' is significant. 'Application' implies a process that we do to make God's word relevant to us. 'Implications' emphasises that God's word is inevitably relevant to us.

Other helpful generic questions are:

- What questions do you have?
- What do you find striking in the passage or story?
- How do you think the first readers or the people involved the story felt?
- How would you have reacted?
- What do we learn about God in this passage or story?
- What do we learn about human beings in this passage or story?
- Where have we seen this in the Bible story before?
- What in this passage points to Jesus or shows our need for Jesus?
- What are the links to our stories?
- When have you faced a similar challenge?
- How are we like the people in the passage or story?
- How does the passage challenge or encourage you?
- How does the passage help us see what it mean to walk in God's ways?
- When might you talk about this passage with a Christian?
- When might you talk about this passage with an unbeliever?

The rubrics '**head, hands, hearts**' and '**personal, communal, missional**' provide a useful pattern or checklist for looking at the word in gospel communities.

Summary

Questions	Checklist
intro	1. How has the Spirit spoken to you through this section of God's word?

head	2. Do you have any questions? (or How would you summarise the message of this section or story?)	Do people understand the passage?	
hands	personal	3. What are the implications for you? (or How does this section speak to your heart or life?)	Do people recognize the <i>personal</i> implications for them as individuals?
	communal	4. What are the implications for our gospel community? (or When might you talk about this section with a Christian?)	Do people recognize the <i>communal</i> implications for us as a gospel community?
	missional	5. What are the implications for those we want to reach? (or When might you talk about this section with an unbeliever?)	Do people recognize the <i>missional</i> implications for those we want to reach for Christ?
heart	6. What gospel motives does this section give? (or How should this section shape our love, hope, fears or desires?)	Are people motivated by <i>gospel affections</i> ?	

Often when asking the six questions above the pattern will be head, hands, heart. In other words, some action will be commended (e.g. sharing the gospel, loving your spouse) and motives will take the form of right affections (love, hope, fear, desires shaped by the gospel). But with some passages the reverse may be the case. What is commended are right affections. The motives will then be (explicitly or implicitly) the right behaviour or emotions (conflict avoidance, reduced anxiety, boldness in witness) that flow from reordered affections.