

Galatians information

3:30-4:10 Explain MDM, do observation

4:10-4:40 Context and Structure

4:40-4:55 Break

4:55-5:35 Themes

5:35-6:15 Application

6:15-6:30 Break

6:30-7:30 Group Dynamics

Explaining MDM:

- Process
- Think about a story or a conversation you have with friends. What happens 20 mins in is usually related in some way to what happened at the start. It relates back, it refers back, assumes knowledge. But the way we tend to read the Bible is bitsy, dipping in and out.
- MDM is an attempt to avoid two pitfalls:
 - 1. Superficiality – one of the worst things is when someone reads for 2 mins and says 'got it'.
 - 2. Inaccessibility – the other problem is when people think the Bible is so obscure, or dense or mysterious that they can't understand it at all, or without 'expert' help.
 - But this is an attempt to let the Bible speak for itself.
 - And to teach people to do the same. That's the only thing that will be with them at 4am when they are having a panic attack.

Reading Galatians using the Manuscript Discovery Method A Leaders' Guide

Three warnings:

1. Expert syndrome

You are not the expert! When using the MDM, it is especially important that the leader doesn't supply ANY ANSWERS (except to technical questions like 'what are we doing next?').

Your job is to encourage the group members to look for the answers in the text themselves, and to facilitate discussion that will get people thinking and engaging.

The big strength of MDM is that it teaches people skills that enable them to read the Bible for themselves. You will undermine this if you give them the answers.

If someone asks a question in the beginning sessions, say 'that's a really good question. What would we need to do to answer it?' then write the question up on a big bit of butcher's paper. You can refer back to these questions in the last few sessions, and see which have been answered through your work together.

2. Discouragement

MDM is a bit anti-Gen Y; it's a kind of 'slow-burn', delayed-gratification exercise.

The purpose of the structure is for understanding to build slowly and carefully, layer upon layer.

The result can be deeply satisfying and encouraging, as people realise that they can understand the Bible on a profound level, based on their own (and the group's) engagement with it.

But the process can feel hard-going and slow for some. Anticipate this and encourage the people in your group who are struggling with it.

3. Academic blinders

Although we are spending a lot of time *reading* and *thinking*, this is not a purely academic exercise! We *don't* want to come away from this with skills and knowledge so we can feel smart. We want to come away with skills and knowledge so we can honour the power, richness, beauty, truth, and intent of God's word, and by that be made more like Jesus, and help others do the same.

Session 1

OBSERVATION (40 minutes)

What's it about?

This session is about observation – noticing what is really in the text, to whom the text is written, and why.

Why it matters:

Good observation is vital to good interpretation and application.

What to do:

Essentially make sure people are reading, observing and engaging with Ephesians. This session may be a bit slow for some people, but it is important regardless! Too often, we don't pay enough attention to what is actually in the text, so we miss vital clues that help us in understanding and responding to it.

Often we rely on other things - like leaders, commentaries, study Bibles, vague random thoughts and general Bible knowledge - to answer our questions about Bible texts, rather than looking to the text itself for the answer. Obviously, it's important and helpful to look to each of those things in our Bible reading. But they should *never replace* actual engagement with the Bible itself.

So it's important to have put people away study Bibles, and just use the printed text that you'll have provided.

In this session, it is important that people only look to the text in order to respond to the questions.

To help your group to do this, some good responses and questions include:

- 'Where did you see that in the text?' (A good thing to ask whether it's in the text or not!)
- 'Why do you say that?'
- 'What do others think – do you think that's what that verse/phrase is saying?'

1. Read through Galatians – the whole thing – without looking at paragraph divisions or passage numbers.

- a. Note initial reactions to the book.
- b. Read through again and write down everything you find on:
 - i. God
 - ii. The author
 - iii. The recipients of the letter.
 - iv. The reason this book has been included in the Bible/purpose statements within the book.
- c. Note any initial questions you have for the book so far.
- d. Note any repeated words/phrases/themes. You could use highlighters to note those.

Authorship and Date

Written by Paul around 50 AD (about 15-20 years after the death of Christ).

Historical Setting

- Addressing social and racial division in the churches of Galatia. A group of teachers in Galatia insisting that the Gentile Christians practice all the traditional Mosaic ceremonial customs as the Jewish Christians did.
- Cultural divisions and disunity were due to a confusion about the nature of the gospel. Christ + anything else. To lose the gospel is to lose Christ himself.
- Christians need to relearn and reapply the gospel to their lives – not just for non-Christians. Galatians is all about that. Paul's solution to the problems in the Galatian churches is not 'be better Christians' but to live out the implications of the gospel.
- Our problem: not only failing to obey God, but also relying on our obedience to make us acceptable to him (and others).
- The gospel is the way that anything is renewed and transformed by Christ – whether a heart, a relationship, a church, or a community.

"The gospel of justifying faith means that while Christians are, in themselves still sinful and sinning, yet in Christ, in God's sight, they are accepted and righteous. So we can say that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope — at the very same time. This creates a radical new dynamic for personal growth. It means that the more you see your own flaws and sins, the more precious, electrifying, and amazing God's grace appears to you. But on the other hand, the more aware you are of God's grace and acceptance in Christ, the more able you are to drop your denials and self-defenses and admit the true dimensions and character of your sin."

Tim Keller

Introduction to Galatians and "The Works of the Law"

- *The law in general or the particularly Jewish-markers?*
- *Legalists or nationalists?*
- *Salvation by works or racial and ethnic exclusivity?*

Answer: Not really two separate things. What is underneath both? What is at the heart of both? Nationalism is a form of legalism, self-salvation.

Session 2

CONTEXT and STRUCTURE (40 minutes)

What's it about?

This session is about context and structure – understanding where this passage fits within Galatians and the Bible in general, and how Paul's argument is structured to make his point.

Why it matters:

Understanding these things helps us discover and honour the actual intent of the Bible passage. It's a God-centred, text-centred rather than me-centred approach to Bible reading.

When people start to understand these things, their interpretation of the smaller chunks within the book becomes more sophisticated and accurate; they understand the main thrust of the whole book and they understand where the narrative or argument is heading and how the smaller chunk fits within that.

What to do:

When it comes to breaking the book into chunks and figuring out main points, there will be some members of your group who will be HATING it. It will feel much too pernickety for them. But resist the urge to rush over this part! It's an important skill to be able to discern a main point, especially when it comes to considering application. Push the gifted people in your group to be *specific* about the main point (the temptation is to give a main point that could apply to any other Bible book, like 'God is generous', whilst missing what the unique or specific point of *this* passage is).

Keep asking: *What is particular about this passage?*

Encourage debate/discussion within the group about paragraph divisions. Working through why we might choose to divide 'here' rather than 'there' gets people thinking hard about logical and thematic connections.

Session 2 *Getting a Feel for the Themes, Logic and Narrative*

Read through Galatians again, carefully.

As you read, do three things:

1. Break the book into smaller sections. Give each one a heading which describes the main point of the section. As you work through this, you will start to see the development of the logic or the narrative.

2. How do these smaller sections fit together? (ie. How do they each contribute to the message of Galatians?)
3. Note which concepts, words, themes or phrases occur the most in each section.
Use the coloured highlighters/textas to indicate repeated themes and words.
4. What title would you give that would sum up the message of Galatians?
5. Try to draw a flowchart or other diagram to represent the logic/flow of the book.

*Are there any other Bible passages or ideas that relate closely to Galatians? (e.g. any Bible verses that are quoted, or that quote Galatians). How do these contribute to your understanding of the book?

Session 3

THEMES (40 minutes)

What's it about?

This session is about themes. What are the big issues the passage touches or teaches on?

You would have gotten a big picture sense of themes from the previous session, but this session focusses on the details.

Why it matters:

This session helps people to start to see how the Bible weaves together all sorts of different themes, and teaches some skills for making sense of them. For example: *what does 1 John teach about love? What does James teach about faith?*

What to do:

This session could be your reflective introvert's dream, if they are given enough time to think properly!

Encourage people that this exercise will enable them to become an expert of sorts on the theme in the book.

If it looks like there will be some group members who will be less confident about this exercise, pair them with someone else (but be careful that their partner is not too dominant).

Note: Sometimes different words might be used to describe the same theme (ie. Generosity, mercy, and grace are different words that express a similar theme). Help people if they are getting stuck because they are thinking too narrowly about the exercise.

Session 3 - Your Research Project

Pick one of the major ideas/themes you found in session 3.

Read through Galatians again, slowly.

As you are reading, note everything that Galatians says about that theme.

(You will probably need more space than is provided here!)

Why does the book teach this theme? How does this theme connect with the big message of the whole book?

How would the original hearers/readers of the book have responded to this teaching? How would it have helped them?

How do you see this theme in the rest of the Bible? Is it something that is developed or reshaped?

Everyone should share their findings with the group (if time).

Session 4

APPLICATION (40 minutes)

What's it about?

The last session is all about application.

Now that we understand the passage well, this session will help us to work out how to respond.

Why it matters:

According to James, faith without deeds is dead. Our observation and interpretation of the Bible is intended to help us actually apply it well.

This is where all of the previous sessions have been heading! The work you have done will have little value if it doesn't inspire people to change in response to God's word!

What to do:

Help people avoid hypothesising their applications. Encourage them to be practical and specific.

Don't phrase application as 'what *might* we do *if we were* to apply this?'

Instead, ask 'what do we need to do in response to this?'

	!	?	X
	Necessary	Possible	Impossible
Head			
Heart			
Hands			

The head, heart and hands

It can be helpful to divide the implications into three sections:

- **Head** Based on this passage, what can you *know* about God, about people, about us? About the world, the future?
- **Heart** What could you *feel* after understanding this passage? What do we *hope for* out of this passage? How is this passage *good news* for us?
- **Hands** What *must you do* after understanding this passage (necessary application)? What *could you do* (possible application)? What might someone do that would be a total misunderstanding of this passage (impossible application)?
Note: this must never become separate from the gospel... from the good news.

The possible, necessary and impossible application

- *Necessary applications* are things that must follow from the passage. For instance, after reading Exodus 20:13 we must conclude that it is wrong to kill people for no good reason.
- *Possible applications* are things that we could do as a result of this passage. For instance, after reading Matthew 23:29 (love your neighbour as yourself) we might decide to give money to Anglicare. But not every one will give money to Anglicare. Others might join a Love Your Neighbour team to sleep over at the local homeless shelter. These are all good things, and *possible* applications of the passage.
- *Impossible applications* are things that you might think are logical applications of the passage, but you'd be totally wrong. For instance, you might read Genesis 17:10 and conclude that all males in the church should be circumcised. You'd be wrong, because you have misunderstood the passage in its context.

Golden Rule: The gospel always powers our application

How would you encourage people to give more money away?

Guilt Is that God's money in your pocket?

Grit This is what we need to do. Just do it.

Gullibility If you do this God will bless you.

Gospel ?

Example A: Money

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. – 2Cor. 8:9

Money		
What do I believe about God?	God doesn't care about me	2 Corinthians 8:9-10
What do I believe about other people?	They are competing for limited resources, and so are a threat to my security	Genesis 1:27 (see also 1 John 4:20)
What do I believe about the world?	The world is a hostile place where you have to look after yourself	1 Timothy 6:17

What do I believe about the future?	The future is uncertain, all that matters is the here and now (or, I can control the future)	Matthew 6:19-21
What do I believe about myself?	I deserve better	Ephesians 2:1-8
Natural behaviour	= Greed, envy and stinginess	= Contentment and generosity

Tim Keller writes this:

In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, Paul wants the people to give an offering to the poor. But, he doesn't put pressure directly on their will, saying, "I'm an apostle and this is your duty," nor pressure directly on their emotions, telling them stories about how much the poor are suffering and how much more they have than the sufferers. Instead, Paul vividly and unforgettably says, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

Paul brings Jesus' salvation into the realm of money and wealth and poverty. He reminds them of the gospel. Paul is saying, "Think of Jesus' costly grace until you are changed into generous people by the gospel in your hearts." So the solution to stinginess is a reorientation to the generosity of Christ in the gospel, where he poured out his wealth for you. Because of the gospel you don't have to worry about money: the cross proves God's care for you and gives you security. Because of the gospel you don't have to envy anyone else's money: Jesus' love and salvation confer on you a remarkable status – one that money cannot give you."¹

¹ Gospel in Life, 25.

Example 2: Sexual immorality

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. 19 Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. 1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Paul could have blasted the Corinthians for their sexual immorality using a range of tactics – guilt, fear of punishment, scaring them with horrible diseases... but instead he motivates them with the gospel.

Group Dynamics

4 basic ideas:

1. Question structure. Shape around personality profiles. Get them to line up across the room in terms of preference (speed, starting or finishing, loud or quiet, detail or big picture, tell others or be told)
2. Seating
3. Group life cycle and trust bubble (think about past groups you've been in – what grew and deflated the bubble? Pose some hypotheticals: What's likely to deflate? What's likely to build? What steps could you take?)
4. Expectations: not everyone has to talk equally.

3 other tips:

1. Speak louder and softer
2. It starts outside GG time
3. Have back up questions.