

Bible Listening Groups

Training Guide



*An interactive workshop for training
listening group leaders and promoters*

Richard Margetts

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The compiler of this workshop guide, Richard Margetts, works with SIL in promoting Scripture Engagement in Francophone Africa. The guide contains contributions from colleagues working in Africa and other parts of the world. Thank you very much to all those who have sent valuable feedback and suggestions, especially to colleagues in Nigeria who were the first to suggest the need for this manual and run workshops using it.

You can find electronic versions of this document in PDF and Microsoft Word formats at <http://www.scripture-engagement.org>, as well as any future updates and translations into other languages.

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What is a listening group?

A listening group is an opportunity for people to get together to listen to a passage from the Bible and talk about it together. This is typically done using an audio recording of the Scriptures which is made available on a memory card or a dedicated audio player.

Many thousands of listening groups are meeting around the world today, hearing the translated Scriptures in a language they understand well, discussing what it means and how to respond. Some participants have been Christians for years yet discover things in God's Word they never had the opportunity to hear before. Others are new to the Bible and enjoy the freedom to ask questions they wouldn't be able to ask in a traditional church service.

Listening groups are meeting in all kinds of places and take different forms. They can be part of a weekly church programme, a method for families to get together for their daily devotions, or a way of inviting neighbours and friends to hear God's Word in an informal setting.

Communities are finding that interacting with the audio Bible in small groups like this is an effective way of facilitating transformational Scripture engagement.

Training overview and objectives

The training workshop described in this guide is for group leaders (those who lead/facilitate the groups) and for group promoters (those who visit groups to encourage them and mentor the facilitators).

1. **WHEN:**

An ideal time for such a workshop would be when new audio Scriptures in the local language have been recorded for a community and when audio players are available. It would work well at the launch of a listening group programme in a region, after some initial promotion work has been done to get churches involved and committed to running groups.

2. **WHO:**

The training is intended primarily for those who have been chosen by their churches to lead listening groups. They could be those who have already started leading a group, or those who are about to start leading a group. In other words, the participants will definitely have the opportunity to put the training into practice after the workshop.

It could also be used as a refresher course for those who have been leading listening groups for some time and who would value more input into how to lead the discussion time well.

In this guide, you'll find elements which focus on the 'why' of listening groups as well as the practical details of 'how' to lead a group.

3. **WHY:**

Promoters and group leaders need to know why they are doing what they are doing. What is the aim of a listening group? How will we know if a group is working well or not? Why are they gathering together to listen? The aim should

be transformational Scripture engagement: that people encounter God's Word in life-changing ways. We want to see promoters, pastors and group leaders who are passionate about people being transformed through hearing, understanding and putting God's Word into practice.

4. **HOW:**

It is vital that participants have plenty of opportunities during the training to practice participating in and leading listening groups. The training should not just be about the theory of Bible listening or the mechanics of how to manipulate an audio player. They need to know how to lead a group well, so there need to be sufficient practice sessions in the training programme.

The training programme is organised to put the emphasis on these objectives, using a participatory style of teaching and learning.

Important Note

Such a workshop can be extremely valuable when you are launching a listening group programme and when you want to introduce the concept to a number of people who are unfamiliar with this way of studying the Bible. However, in order to multiply the number of groups and trained leaders in the future, make sure that the participants do not get the idea that someone has to attend such a workshop to become a listening group leader. Think about how those who receive this training can pass on one-to-one to new leaders what they have have learned. Perhaps they will be able to mentor a member of their own group to become a future group leader.

Sample training programme

The training presented in this manual is based on a three-day workshop. This works well in terms of giving each participant sufficient time to practice leading a group.

Three-day Workshop

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3
08:30 - 09:00	Opening Ceremony Welcome Praise & Prayer Introductions	Praise & Prayer	Praise & Prayer
09:00 - 10:30	<i>Listening Group Demonstration #1</i> Feedback	How to lead a listening group #2 - <i>recap & discussion time</i> How do we lead a good discussion time?	How to lead a listening group #3 - <i>preparation & prayer</i>
10:30 - 11:00	<i>Break</i>	<i>Break</i>	<i>Break</i>
11:00 - 11:55	How to lead a listening group #1 - <i>the main elements</i>	<i>Listening Groups led by participants #2</i>	<i>Listening Groups led by participants #5</i>
12:00 - 12:55	<i>Listening Group Demonstration #2</i>	The qualities of a good group leader	How to start, follow-up and encourage groups?
13:00 - 14:30	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>
14:30 - 15:15	Why have listening groups?	<i>Listening Groups led by participants #3</i>	<i>Listening Groups led by participants #6</i>
15:30 - 16:00	How to use the audio player #1	How to use the audio player #2	Planning & Evaluation
16:00 - 17:00	<i>Listening Groups led by participants #1</i>	<i>Listening Groups led by participants #4</i>	Closing Ceremony

The idea in this three-day programme is to do most of the teaching in the mornings and make the afternoons more interactive with most of the time spent practicing leading listening groups.

If you have fewer than three days available, you could adapt the materials. For example, you could develop a two-day course or four or five afternoons, or two or three Saturdays.

Two-day Workshop

Here is an example of a two-day workshop. Some of the teaching sessions will need to be shortened. There are fewer sessions available for listening groups led by participants, so in order that everyone gets the opportunity to lead you might need to shorten a group time to 25-30 minutes and fit two listening sessions into an hour's slot.

	DAY 1	DAY 2
08:30 - 09:15	Opening Ceremony Welcome Praise & Prayer Introductions	<i>Listening Groups led by participants #2</i>
09:15 - 10:30	<i>Listening Group Demonstration #1</i> Feedback	How to lead a listening group #2 - recap & discussion time How do we lead a good discussion time?
10:30 - 11:00	<i>Break</i>	<i>Break</i>
11:00 - 11:55	How to lead a listening group #1 - the main elements	<i>Listening Groups led by participants #3</i>
12:00 - 12:55	<i>Listening Group Demonstration #2</i>	The qualities of a good group leader
13:00 - 14:30	<i>Lunch</i>	<i>Lunch</i>
14:30 - 15:15	Why have listening groups?	How to lead a listening group #3 - preparation & prayer
15:30 - 16:00	How to use the audio player #1 & #2	<i>Listening Groups led by participants #4</i>
16:00 - 17:00	<i>Listening Groups led by participants #1</i>	Planning & Evaluation Closing Ceremony

1. Opening ceremony

Organise the opening session in a way that is appropriate in your context with welcome, prayer, praise and introductions.

It could be good to invite some local church leaders to this if they are not otherwise participating in the whole workshop. Some of them might want to stay on for some of the morning's sessions. Explain how listening groups fit into the mission of the church in equipping believers and reaching out to the local community.

2. Listening group demonstration #1

You might be tempted to spend the first few sessions on the theory of listening groups before putting it into practice. But how about starting the training with a listening group? After that you can go back, explain and think through what you have just done.

- a. Find an audio recording in a language common to the participants (the local language if it is for a single language group, or the language of wider communication if it is for a multi-language group.)
- b. Set the player to a chapter that might provoke some good discussion, e.g. Luke 15 (the lost sheep, lost coin, prodigal son).
- c. Seat the participants in a circle (if this is appropriate in your context) and place the audio player in the middle of the group.
- d. Explain that we are going to spend the next few minutes listening to a chapter from the Word of God and are going to have the opportunity afterwards to discuss it. Encourage the participants that this workshop is all about teaching a method of engaging with the Bible in which the group members feel free to take part in the discussion. So let us listen well and be ready to get involved!
- e. Ask someone to open in prayer to ask for God's help as we listen (or lead in prayer yourself if that would be more appropriate in your context).
- f. Turn on the player and listen together to the chapter.
- g. Play the same chapter a second time. (This is a very valuable step, to ensure we hear it well. Luke 15 is about 5 minutes.)
- h. Now ask someone in the group to retell what they have heard in their own words. Others can complete what they have missed out.
- i. Lead the group in an open discussion by asking questions like:
 - What struck you particularly from what you heard? (something you liked, something you were surprised by, something that seemed hard to understand...)
 - What do we learn about God/Jesus in what we heard?
 - What do you think God is saying to the people in this passage?
 - What do you think God is saying to you/us today in what we heard? How should we respond?
- j. Close in prayer.

3. Feedback from listening group

Divide the participants into groups and ask them to discuss the following question:

- What are some of the advantages of studying God's Word in a listening group? Make a list of as many as you can think of.

The groups should then come together and report back on what they have found.

Here are some possible responses:

- It gives access to the Bible to people who cannot read.
- People can ask questions about things they do not understand. This is not something that is not so easy to do during a main church service.

- People hear more Scripture than they would in a typical church service.
- It helps people think about personal application.
- It helps people reflect together on application to their church and community.
- The discussion keeps people awake.
- It gives another way of meeting together outside of the main Sunday meeting, e.g. midweek.
- Over a period of several weeks, people can listen to whole books of the Bible, and the whole New Testament in a year. Many Christians have never read/heard whole books of the Bible, since all they hear is selected portions chosen by the preacher on a Sunday.
- It doesn't need to be led by a pastor or someone who knows how to preach.
- People who wouldn't normally come to church might be interested in taking part in a listening group: it is more informal and they can ask questions.

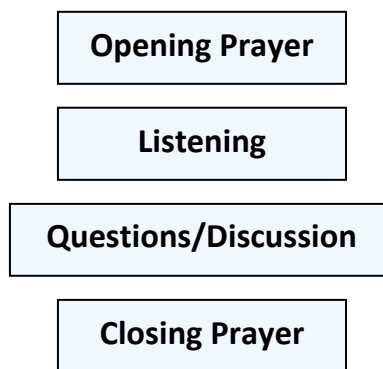
If some of these suggested advantages are relevant in your context and have not been mentioned, ask questions and prompt the group to suggest them.

4. How do we lead a listening group? #1

In this session we look at the main elements of a listening group.

Present the different steps interactively, with participation from the group, writing each step on the board. Ask questions like: "What do we do first?", "And then what do we do?", "Yes, but what do we need to do before we do that...?", "How do we finish?", etc.

You should get something like this:



If appropriate, you could get the participants to suggest a symbol or action to represent each of these steps, such as an ear for listening.

Now we will focus on some of these steps in more detail. Over the course of the training, we will discuss each of the steps, and we will add some additional steps that might be useful.

LISTENING

Here we need to ask:

- What are we going to listen to?
- How much are we going to listen to?
- How are we going to listen to it?

What are we going to listen to?

A typical listening group will listen systematically through a book or books of the Bible. You will not be choosing 1 Corinthians chapters 3-5 one week, Matthew chapter 4 the next and Revelation chapters 5-7 the third week. Instead, each time you meet you'll be carrying on from where you finished the previous week.

For example:

Week 1: Matthew 1-4

Week 2: Matthew 5-7

Week 3: Matthew 8-10, etc.

Some listening groups, if they have the whole audio New Testament, will go from Matthew all the way through to Revelation in this way.

Alternatively, you could have listening groups that listen through just one book of the Bible over a few weeks, or a series of Bible stories.

In some contexts, churches follow a lectionary of readings or the denomination has chosen to focus on a particular book of the Bible. In such situations it would be good to discuss the extent to which listening groups could follow this.

How much are we going to listen to?

Ask:

- What did we listen to in our demonstration listening group this morning?
- Why did we only choose a small section?

How much to listen to will depend on the aim of the group. If your objective is to listen to the whole New Testament in a year, you will need to listen for about half an hour a week. That means several chapters each time you meet.

But you might find that half an hour of listening is too much content for your group to take in during one group meeting, especially if you want to listen to the same passage a second time. In such a case it would be better to go more slowly and take, for example, one chapter or one section per week.

The amount people can take in will depend on the kind of content they listen to, as well as their familiarity with the Scriptures. It might be easier for the group to listen to longer sections of narrative (such as Old Testament stories or the gospels), but they might find it harder to concentrate for longer sections of Paul's letters.

For example, it takes around 25 minutes to listen to the whole of Ephesians. You need to ask whether your objective is to give the group an overview of the whole book in one session, or whether you want to take it more slowly and spend a session on each chapter.

3 John	■	3 minutes
Jude	■	7 minutes
Revelation	■■■■■■■■■■	1 hour 30 minutes

Q. If you only have the book of Mark available in audio, how many weeks would you take to listen to it? How many minutes per week?

- The recording of Mark’s gospel is around 1 hour 45 minutes. You might decide to listen to it over 7 weeks, approximately 15 minutes per week, choosing to break at sensible places. Or since Mark has 16 chapters, you could listen to two chapters a week for 8 weeks, or one chapter a week for 16 weeks.
- Do not forget that it is useful to play the audio twice during a listening group. If you do this, a 5 minute portion will take $5 \times 2 = 10$ minutes in total.

Remember when you make your choice that it is not just a matter of getting through the recorded books of the Bible as quickly as possible.

How are we going to listen to it?

Ask:

- When we listened to the passage in the group this morning, how many times did we listen to it? Why do you think this is helpful?
 - People might not have a printed Bible to refer to for the discussion time. They need to hear it a second time to keep as much of the passage as possible in their minds.
 - It keeps the whole group together.
 - If some are still not understanding, you could listen a third time.

If people have their own printed copy of the Scriptures, they might want to follow along as they listen. Listening groups can facilitate literacy in this way and help people to improve their reading fluency.

Some groups like the opportunity to interrupt the listening time to ask a question (putting their hand up to ask the leader to pause the audio). Others prefer to leave the questions until the listening time is finished.

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of the discussion time is to get the group participants engaging with what they have heard, asking and answering questions, and discovering together the meaning of the Bible passage and its application for today.

We want to have an interactive time of open discussion. To facilitate this, the leader could ask some very open questions such as:

What do you think about what we've heard? Do you have any questions to ask or comments to share?

Or the leader could choose instead to ask a series of questions, to guide the group participants step by step through the passage. In this training workshop, we will focus on this approach. Here are some key questions the leader can ask of any passage:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who would like to retell/summarise in their own words the Scripture passage/story we have just listened to?
2. What struck you particularly from what you heard?
(something you liked, something you were surprised by, something that seemed hard to understand...)
3. What do we learn about God (or Jesus) in what we heard?
4. What do you think God is saying to the people in this passage?
5. What do you think God is saying to you/us today in what we heard?
How should we respond? (as individuals, as a family, as a church, as a community?)

Make a copy of these questions on small pieces of card which can fit into a Bible or New Testament and give one to each to the workshop participants. The idea is that these are open questions to provoke discussion. We are not looking for questions with yes/no answers or single phrase answers. It is not an exam or a Bible quiz.

We will come back to look at these questions again in a later session but in summary it is a simple inductive Bible study outline: what does the text say? (*observation*) what does it mean? (*interpretation*) and how should we respond? (*application*).

The group leader's role is to facilitate the discussion. They need to resist the urge to preach a monologue and give a long exposition of the passage. Group leaders who are preachers can find this hard, so they need to watch themselves closely. There is certainly a place for preaching in church but the focus of a listening group is to get the participants involved as much as possible in discovering for themselves what God is saying to them. In the session 'How to lead a good discussion time' we will return to questions like "How

can we avoid the discussion getting diverted away from talking about the passage?”, “How can we avoid participants introducing heresy?”, etc.

5. Listening group demonstration #2

Lead the participants in another listening group, perhaps from the chapter following on from the chapter you listened to in the first demonstration listening group. Make sure you include each of the elements you described in the last session on *How to lead a listening group*.

From time to time, you might want to add a question or commentary on some of the things you are doing.

All the remaining listening groups in this training workshop will be led by the participants.

6. Why do we have listening groups?

In this session, we will look at the purpose of a listening group. If we are really clear on why we are running a listening group, it will help us in the way we run it.

Bible verses

See Romans 10:17:

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

If the workshop participants are familiar with the Bible, ask them to suggest other verses or passages that support spending time listening to God’s Word.

For example:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Different types of group

Let us look at three scenarios, illustrating different kinds of group:

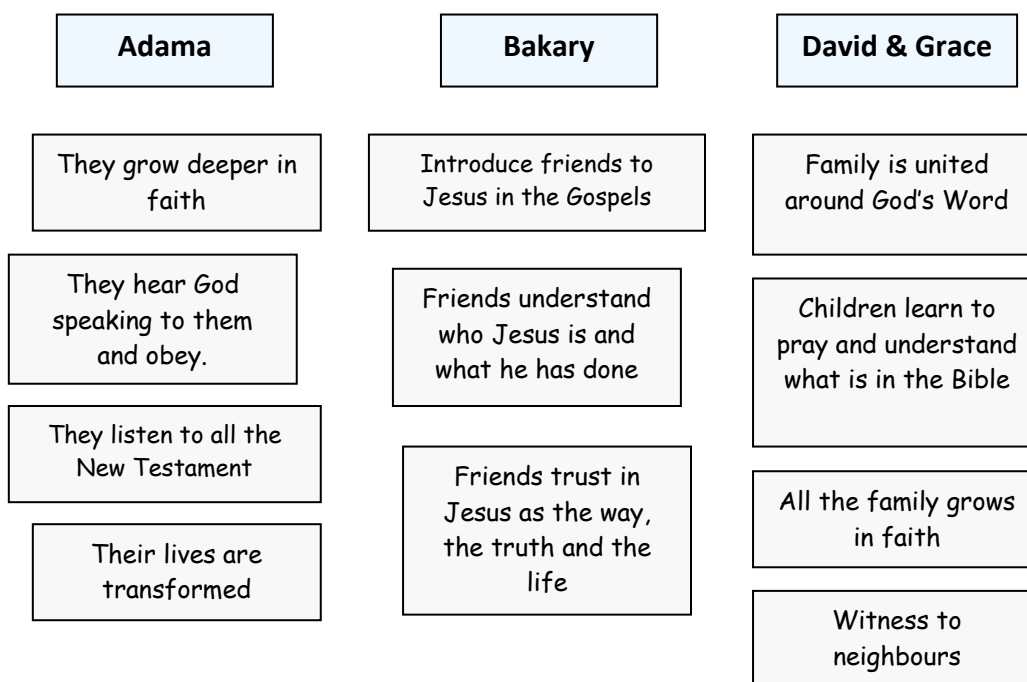
- **Adama** would like to see the believers in his church growing deeper in their faith. He advertises the listening group during the church announcements and gets a group together which starts off with 9 men, 4 women and 8 teenagers. They are committed to listening through the New Testament in their language.
- **Bakary** has a group of 5 friends that are interested in finding out more about Jesus. They wouldn’t normally step inside a church building and they do not know much about the Bible.

- **David** and his wife, **Grace**, have a large extended family, with 8 children living in their home. They have a listening group together three times a week, and sometimes their neighbours join them.

Question

What is the aim of each group? In other words, what do we want to see happening in the lives of the participants as a result of the listening group?

Ask the participants to write an aim for each group on pieces of paper. Place these under each group, look at them together and talk about them.



- Where would be a good place for each of these groups to meet?

Why might a home be a good place for some types of listening group? (People can feel more free to discuss and ask questions than they would if sitting in a church building.)

- When would be a good time for each of these groups to meet?

Listening groups in your context

Ask:

- Why would you want to have listening groups in your situation? Who would be part of them? Where would the groups meet? When would they meet?

- Are there places where the group members are naturally meeting together already? (e.g. children after school, youth in the evenings, church members after service).
- As well as starting listening groups for Christians, what opportunities could there be in your context for listening groups for those outside the church?

Important

The role of a listening group leader is not simply to go through the process of running a group. You need to think about why you are doing what you are doing.

7. How to use the audio player #1 – Basic instructions

Some listening group programmes make use of dedicated audio players such as the Proclaimer¹, the MegaVoice Envoy², the Papyrus³, the Audibible⁴ or the Saber⁵. If this is the case for you, it might be worth including a practical session or two on how to use and take care of the player, especially if the group leaders will be using them for the first time.

If the listening groups are using memory cards with locally available radios, audio players or telephones, the amount of training you need to give will depend on how familiar the group participants already are with the players and handling MP3 files.

The session could include:

- How to turn on/off the player.
- How to play, pause, stop.
- How to go back/forward a chapter.
- How to select specific books and chapters.
- How to change the volume and set it at the right level for the group (i.e. loud enough, but not annoyingly loud).
- How to ensure the player is charged sufficiently before the listening group meeting.

For this session, consider the age of the workshop participants: are they younger or older people? The younger people are likely to find it easier to learn to use the players.

It can be helpful to draw a large scale picture of the audio player on the blackboard so that participants can see the buttons clearly.

¹ The Proclaimer audio player is available from Faith Comes By Hearing, <https://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com>

² The Envoy audio players are available from MegaVoice, <http://www.megavoice.com>

³ The Papyrus audio player is available from Renew World Outreach, <http://www.renewoutreach.com>

⁴ The Audibible is available from Davar Partners International, <https://www.davarpartners.com>

⁵ The Saber is available from Global Recordings Network, <http://globalrecordings.net/en/saber>

Distribute a few players amongst the participants and ask them to follow your instructions, e.g. finding certain books/chapters, turning on/off, pausing, etc.

8. Listening groups led by participants

Now is the time for the participants to practice leading a group.

Depending on the number of participants, split up into smaller groups for this so that everyone gets the opportunity to practice leading a group during the training workshop.

Inform the participants in advance when they are going to lead the group, so they can have time to prepare. Select the most experienced participants to go first. Here is an example with 3 groups, 6 participants in each, taking a chapter of Mark's gospel for each session.

Time	Text	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Day 1 afternoon	Mark 1	Kwame	John	Samuel
Day 2 morning	Mark 2	Rose	Marcus	Grace
Day 2 afternoon 1	Mark 3	Philip	Moses	Peter
Day 2 afternoon 2	Mark 4	Larry	Elizabeth	Sophie
Day 3 morning	Mark 5	Timothy	Joy	William
Day 3 afternoon	Mark 6	Beatrice	Kudjo	Joseph

The workshop facilitators should be spread among the groups and give feedback to the trainee leader when the group has finished. Before giving your opinion, ask the leader:

- How do you feel about how you led the group? What do you think went well?
- What do you think you would change? What would you like to do to make it better next time?

You could also invite the group members to give feedback:

- What went well? What suggestions could we make for next time?

This feedback time could also be done when the groups are all together.

9. How do we lead a listening group? #2

Recap:

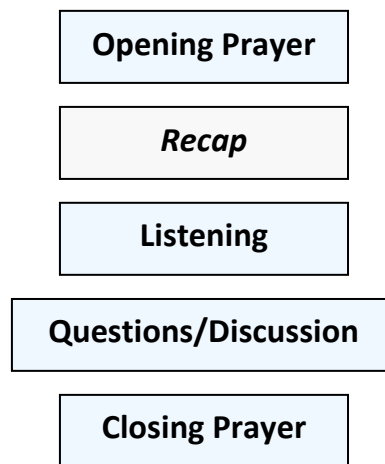
- *What are the main elements of a listening group?*
Put the four elements on the board (Pray – Listen – Discuss - Pray).
- *What kinds of questions do we ask in the discussion time?*
Put them on the board.

RECAP

Explain: What we have just done is to recap what we have already learned. This can be helpful in a listening group too. After the opening time of prayer and before you start listening to the text of the day, you can have a time to recap.

The listening group leader should ask their group:

1. “What do you remember from last time?”, and
2. “How has God used it in your lives?” (as individuals, as a family, as a church, as a community).



THE QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION TIME

In this session we want to look more closely at the questions/discussion time, since this is a vital part of the listening group. If it was just a ‘listening’ group, people could do this on their own with earphones in their ears, but what we are looking for is a ‘listening and discussion group’, as people engage with the Scriptures *together*.

Q. What are the five questions a facilitator can ask in a listening group? Can you remember them without looking?

Looking deeper at the questions

Let us look again at the questions we ask, starting with the first one:

1. Who would like to retell/summarise in their own words the Scripture passage/story we have just listened to?

Q. What is the aim of question 1?

- It ensures people have heard what the passage is saying and are interacting with it. If someone was day-dreaming instead of listening, it is another opportunity to hear the content.
- Repetition is important especially in oral cultures.
- The questions get everyone involved. The retelling of the passage starts with one person but becomes a group exercise as others fill in the parts of the story they remember.
- We can't jump to application until we know what is being said.
- This is an **observation** question – the first step in an inductive Bible study.

Then the second question...

2. What struck you particularly from what you heard? (something you liked, something you were surprised by, something that seemed hard to understand...)

Q. What is the purpose of question 2?

- It encourages people to engage with what they've heard, to share their initial reactions and thoughts.
- It reveals some of the main teachings of the passage, including those which the group finds the most challenging and convicting.
- It encourages people to ask questions in order to understand. Others in the group can help them discover the answer.
- There might be words or concepts that people do not understand. This is sometimes the case if they are listening to translated Scriptures in a slightly different dialect from their own.

In some cultures, people will be reluctant to admit that they do not understand something. You could ask, "Is there anything that you want more information about?" or "Was there anything that was new to you, or different?"

3. What do we learn about God (or Jesus) in what we heard?

Q. Why is it important to ask question 3?

- It focusses our minds on God and helps us to learn about him.
- If we are listening to one of the gospels, we need to remember that the gospel writers had as their aim that we know Jesus and trust in him: "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:21)
- If we are listening to a Bible passage about one of the heroes of the faith (Abraham, Moses, David, etc.) it reminds us to look beyond the man and see the God who is working out his plans and purposes in the world.

And then the final two questions:

4. What do you think God is saying to the people in this passage?
5. What do you think God is saying to you/us today in what we heard?
How should we respond? (as individuals, as a family, as a church, as a community?)

Notice the difference between questions 4 and 5. Question 4 is about what God was saying to the people in the passage, such as Jesus' disciples, the crowds, the believers in the church in Corinth, etc.

Q. Why can it be good to ask this before we move on to ask about what God is saying to us today?

The final question, question 5, is an **application** question, relating the passage to our lives today.

Q. Why are application questions important when we listen to God's Word?

See James 1:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it – not forgetting what they have heard but doing it – they will be blessed in what they do. (James 1:22-25)

Be specific in your application

It is good to be as specific as we can with the application and not be satisfied with answers from participants such as "We must obey God more." In what ways *specifically* should you and I obey God this week? What will I do differently this week in response to what I have heard? How will I think differently this week in response to what I have heard?

In Bible study contexts, some like the acronym S.P.E.C.K to help with finding specific application points:

- **S** – is there a **sin** to confess and/or avoid?
- **P** – is there a **promise** from God?
- **E** – is there an **example** to follow?
- **C** – is there a **command** to obey?
- **K** – is there **knowledge** to retain?

This, of course, is a memory aid for literate people in English rather than for listening groups in oral cultures in other languages, so it is not something you are likely to be able to use directly. It does however give us some idea of the kinds of application we are

looking for. How could you draw out specific responses in a listening group context? If you find it helpful, you could think of a memory aid in your language.

Be both personal and community focussed in your application

Group facilitators should encourage the participants to think seriously and to reflect on how God is speaking to them personally, resisting the temptation to point the finger at others, thinking “that is a message that so and so needs to hear!”.

But as well as asking, “how does God wants me to apply the lessons of this passage in my own life”, it is good to consider:

- “How does God want our family to put this into practice?”
- “How does God want our church to put this into practice?”
- “How does God want our local community to put this into practice?”
- “How does God want our nation to put this into practice?”

10.How to lead a good discussion time

Discussion in groups

The leader’s role is to encourage the group to engage with the Bible passage by facilitating a good discussion.

Discuss:

1. What kinds of things can the leader do to encourage a good discussion?
2. What should they avoid doing?

Make a list of each.

Here are some possible answers:

What can the leader do?

- Ask open questions that encourage people to speak up.
- Be enthusiastic and animated, demonstrating passion for God’s Word.
- Listen carefully to people.
- Keep people focussed on the passage they have heard.
- Encourage people to think of matters of application: i.e. how does this text apply to us here, today?

What should the leader avoid doing?

- Ask closed questions (yes/no questions, single answer questions, questions that already imply the ‘right answer’, etc.)
- Preach a sermon, giving a long monologue.
- Put people down in front of others.
- Not leave enough time for discussion.
- Forget to lead the group in applying the message.

- Give the impression he/she has all the answers.

Discussion in groups

What could a leader do in the following scenarios?

- a) **Bakary** finds that when he asks questions in the group he is leading, two people do all the talking and the other seven people do not say much.
- b) **Rose** finds that in her group there is someone who asks questions that are not related to the text they have just been listening to. The group gets distracted and diverted from talking about the passage and talk about other things.
- c) **Philip** finds when he asks his group about how the Scriptures speak into their lives, they respond in very general terms, e.g. “We must trust God more. We must serve God...”
- d) **Joseph** finds it hard because people in his group keep asking questions about the Bible he doesn’t know how to answer.
- e) **Joy** is hesitant about giving the members of her group complete freedom to make comments about the Bible because she fears that some will say things that are not in accordance with sound doctrine.

Write these on separate cards and give them to the participants to discuss in groups. Feel free to change the names of the people in the scenarios to local names.

Come together to share responses and advice with each other.

Remember that people are different in the way they think through things. Some people think as they talk about what they are thinking. Others think quietly in their heads and need more time to think before they speak.

There are also cultural reasons why some people will speak up more than others, especially in groups with both men and women, with people from different age-groups or people with very different social status.

Questions

- What kinds of cultural patterns do you see when a mixed group of people from your community gets together to discuss something? (Who speaks first? who stays quiet? etc.)
- What does this mean for the way you run listening groups? In what situations might it be better to have separate men’s and women’s groups, a group for young people, etc.? What are the advantages of having everyone together?

11. The qualities of a good group leader

In this session, using Bible study, discussion and drama sketches, we want to look more closely at what makes a good group leader.

Sketch

With some volunteers, act out a few minutes of a listening group where you are deliberately being a bad leader (not listening, looking bored, being frustrated with people, preaching, not handling the audio player well, arrogance, lack of concentration, etc.).

Ask for feedback from the group as to what went wrong.

Cultural note regarding sketches:

“In West Africa, actors teach through drama by making fun of the opposite characteristic of whatever characteristic they value. They teach mainly through humor and negative example. If people value courage, for example, they may dramatise a story about a cowardly hunter... If the trainer gives only a positive example, participants would probably find that boring. At least some parts of sketches have to be funny or they're not considered good.” (Michelle Petersen). If acting out a bad example is not appropriate in your culture, choose a different scenario for the sketch.

Bible verses

Look up the following verses that Paul writes to the believers in Colossae:

- Colossians 1:9-12
- Colossians 2:1-8
- Colossians 3:12-17
- Colossians 4:2-6

What help do these passages give in showing us some of the qualities we would want to see in a listening group leader?

Discussion in groups

What are the qualities of a listening group leader who leads their group well so that the participants do not want to miss being together?

Here are some possible answers:

A good leader...

- is sincere in his/her faith
- cares about and prays for the members of his/her group
- is motivated, enthusiastic about God's Word
- has a good reputation in the church and community
- is humble and willing to learn
- is a good listener, encouraging others to speak, and doesn't feel like he/she needs to talk all the time
- notices when someone is absent and visits them
- well prepared

- willing to say when he/she doesn't know the answer to a question, and ready to go and find the answer from someone else (e.g. a pastor).

Note that in comparison, we want to avoid being leaders who...

- see the listening group as just a job we have to do
- lack enthusiasm and joy
- display poor time management
- do not really care about the group members
- want the group to know that we know a lot, instead of facilitating discovery of truth by all group members
- forget why the group exists.

Questions

Q. Has anyone been in a small group with a really good small group leader? What did you appreciate about them?

Q. Can a new/young believer be a good group leader? In what kinds of group might this work well? How could you help a such a new believer become a good group leader?

Discuss these issues further and pray for each other.

12. How to use the audio player #2 – Additional instructions

In this second practical session on how to use the audio player, you could look at:

- How to solve basic problems (disconnected batteries, insufficient charge, etc.)
- How to protect the machine from damage (rain, dust, small children playing with it, etc.). Can the player be left outside to charge when it is raining?
- Rules about who is responsible for the player, keeping it safe, keeping it in good working order, etc.
- What happens if the machine breaks down?
- Who owns the player? Who has the right to loan it to others? What happens if it is no longer being used by a group?
- What happens when the group has finished listening to the content?
- If relevant, how can the group get hold of additional content for the player, i.e. additional books of the Bible, Old Testament portions, etc. when they have been translated and recorded? Does the player have to be returned to a central office, or can additional books be sent out on memory cards?

13. How do we lead a listening group? #3

Recap:

Q. What are the main elements of a typical listening group meeting?

Put each of the elements on the board and emphasise the importance of each.

Q. What would happen if we missed out one of the elements? e.g. what would happen if we missed out 'Recap', or we missed out 'Discussion', etc.?

We will now focus on some other elements of a good listening group.

PREPARATION

Q. Before the group begins, what does the leader need to prepare/organise?

A few days before:

- Make sure people know the time and place.
- Listen in advance to the passage the group will listen to.
- Review the questions they will ask the group. (Although there is a set of recommended questions, they may work better if they are slightly adapted to fit the particular passage. eg. What can we learn about God? vs. What can we learn about Jesus?)

On the day:

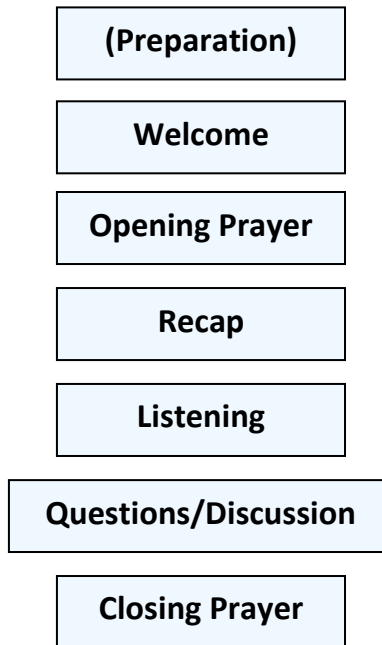
- Make sure the audio player is charged and at the right place to begin listening.

Before people arrive:

- Arrange the seats: what would be a good seating arrangement? (to ensure everyone hears well, and to encourage participation in the discussion)

Q. When people begin to arrive, what does the leader do?

- Greetings, making people feel welcome.



OPENING TIME OF PRAYER

For the opening time of prayer, instead of asking just one person to pray, here is something else you could try:

1. Go round the group and ask each person to mention (briefly) one thing for which they want to thank God.
 - When everyone who wants to share has said something, praise God together for these things.
2. Go round the group and ask each person to mention (briefly) one thing they are concerned about for which they would like people to pray.
 - When everyone who wants to share has said something, pray to God together for these things.

Q. What do you think are some of the advantages of praying in this way?

This is especially good in listening groups where there is no local church or prayer meeting. It is teaching both 'adoration' and 'petition' and can encourage new believers to pray.⁶

⁶ See Paul Watson, 'Small Groups That Have the DNA of a Disciple-Making Movement', <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/small-groups-that-have-the-dna-of-a-disciple-making-movement> (accessed 13 July 2016)

Another thing you'll want to pray about is for the Lord's help as you listen to today's passage, that he would open your eyes to what he wants to say to each of you through his Word.

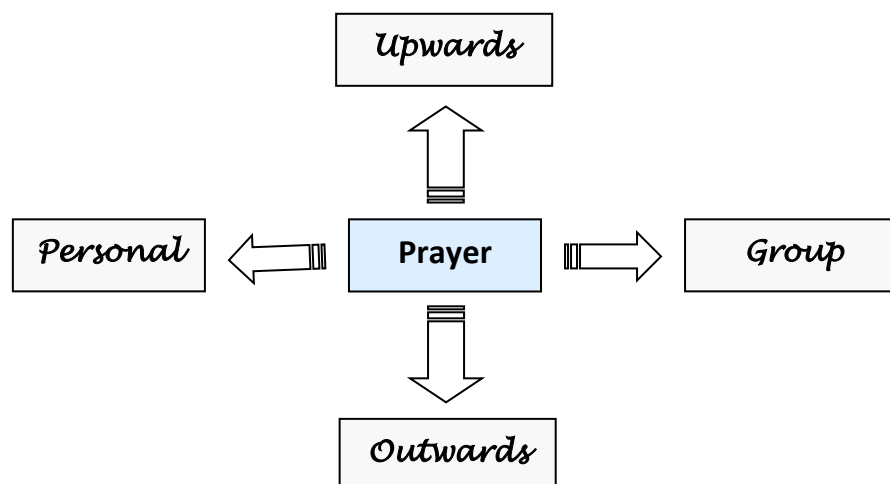
“Open my eyes that I may see
wonderful things in your law.” (Psalm 119:18)

CLOSING TIME OF PRAYER

Q. Why is it good to spend time in prayer at the end of the listening group meeting?
What kinds of things would you pray for?

Be specific in prayer:

- Think upwards – what can we praise God for in response to what we have heard and discussed?
- Think personal – what specifically do we as individuals need to pray for in response to hearing God's Word today?
- Think group – what specifically do we as a group/community of believers need to pray for in response to hearing God's Word today?
- Think outwards – how specifically can we be a blessing to others who are not in this group? Pray for opportunities to share what we have learned today with others. Can we pray for specific people and places where there is as yet no listening group, where we will commit to praying that a new group will be started?



Q. Have you ever been in a meeting where the closing prayer is rushed because people are getting restless and want to finish the meeting? Why does this happen? What can a leader do to avoid this happening?

Q. What would you do about prayer if most of the participants in the listening group are not Christians?

14. How to start, follow-up and encourage groups?

This session is especially relevant to those who have the role of 'promoters' or 'colporteurs', responsible for encouraging a number of existing groups and for starting new groups.

Use this session to discuss the strategy for starting new groups, encouraging existing groups and knowing what to do when they finish listening to all the available audio recordings.

Starting new groups

- Who should be involved in starting new groups? What is the local church pastor's role regarding the groups?
- How do we identify those who should be group leaders? How will they be trained?
- If there are a limited number of audio players, how do we decide where the priorities are?
- How could we overcome the limited number of audio players? For example, can some of the smaller groups play the audio files on their phones? Can cheap radio/speakers be bought in the local shops which take a USB memory stick or memory cards?

Encouraging existing groups

- Why would we want to visit existing groups?
- What kinds of challenges could negatively affect the groups?
- Why might a group stop meeting? How would we respond to such situations?
- How can we go on mentoring leaders (including those who have attended this workshop), encouraging them to be faithful and motivated in what they are doing?
- How can group leaders get together from time to time to share experiences and challenges?
- How can groups be encouraged to think about where they could plant a new group? Are they actively praying for such an opportunity?

Groups that are finishing

- What options for continuing can we suggest to groups that have completed the current listening programme? Can they start from the beginning again? Go more slowly? Focus on specific books?
- How could friends, neighbours and other family members get involved in listening? What about a listening group in your home?
- Where in our region would it be good to start a listening group? E.g. a village/hamlet where there is currently no church.

15. Planning and Evaluation

You can use this session for the participants to fill in the **Workshop Evaluation** and **Listening Group Planning** forms.

Please see the end of this guide for sample forms. You can adapt these for your context.

16. Closing ceremony

The closing session is a time to recap and conclude, giving participants the opportunity to share their reflections on the training. It is also a time to encourage, pray for and commission the listening group leaders and promoters as they head out to put their training into practice. For this it is often appropriate to invite local church leaders to attend.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Cor. 15:58)

Workshop Evaluation Form

1. What are the most important things you have learned from this course (try and list at least three things)?
2. How well did the workshop facilitators lead the training? How could they improve the way they do things in future workshops they lead?
3. Is there anything else you would like to learn about listening groups that was not taught in the course?

Listening Group Planning Form

Group leader's name:

Phone number:

Email address:

Area:

Church:

Your Bible listening group:

Purpose:

For whom:

Where will you meet:

When (day, time, duration):

How many people: