

The Swedish Method

As far as I can tell, the name ‘Swedish Method’ was first attributed to this simple Bible reading approach by Ada Lum, an IFES staff worker and Bible reading enthusiast of many decades. She named it in honour of the Swedish student group where she first saw it used.

Starting a Bible reading group using this method requires a minimum of resources and preparation, and can be highly rewarding as it leads readers to confront the Scriptures directly.

Begin by praying, asking God to speak through his word. Then read a short Bible passage aloud (10-15 verses is ideal). Instruct each person to go back over the passage on their own while being on the lookout for three things:



A light bulb: This should be something that ‘shines’ from the passage—whatever impacts most, or draws attention.



A question mark: Anything that is difficult to understand in the text, or a question the reader would like to ask the writer of the passage or the Lord.



An arrow: A personal application for the reader’s life.

They should write down at least one thing next to each item. Allow people time to savour the text and explore it at their own speed. This usually takes about 10 minutes in silence.

Afterwards, get each reader to share one of their ‘light bulbs’ with the group. Spend some time discussing these, if your group is keen; it’s always interesting to discover what has impacted different members.

Then, in the second round, ask them to share one of their questions raised by the passage. Often it is best to invite the person who raises the question to propose an approach to answering it, and generally encourage that person towards further investigation. Alternatively, any member of the group can respond to the question, provided the answer appears in the passage under consideration or in a previous section of the book that your group has already covered.

In the third round, ask each person in your group to share one of their applications as it applies to their own life. Then, to conclude, pray: invite people to lead in prayer as they please; no-one should feel pressured to pray. Invite a suitable person to close the time of prayer; this avoids embarrassment for newcomers, makes it clear when the prayer time is finished, and prevents prolonged, uncomfortable silences.

If your group contains fewer than five people, ask them to share two or three ‘light bulbs’, questions and applications each. You can then discuss these things according to the time available.

After the meeting, you may wish to address the questions again. However, in the meeting itself, it is important to seek to avoid arguing, falling into the trap of ‘sharing ignorances’ and imposing an answer by appealing to human authority.

The philosophy behind this style of Bible reading is to promote good observation of the text, group participation and self-guided discovery. Each person has the opportunity to discover for themselves what God says. In principle, no-one answers the questions unless they are about something simple, like the meaning of a word. The idea is that the questions motivate investigation on the part of the person who raised them. It is also important to avoid anyone ‘grabbing the microphone’ and jumping on the poor new person present; instead, it is impressive to witness the capacity that even non-Christians have to understand the Bible when God speaks to them!