

How to Study the Bible

Compiled by Pastor Mike Atkinson, Agape Outpost Chapel, 2008

Introduction

Why study the Bible?

1. Bible study is essential to growth. 1 Peter 2:2
2. Bible study is essential to spiritual maturity. Hebrews 5:11-14
3. Bible study is essential to spiritual effectiveness. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

“The Scriptures were not given to increase our knowledge but to change our lives.”

—D. L. MOODY

Inductive Bible Study

Inductive Bible study is using one’s mind to love God’s Word, by studying it to understand and apply it to our daily lives. Inductive Bible study can be summed up by three words: Observation, Interpretation, and Application. It answers the following:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
 - How am I encouraged and strengthened?
 - Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
 - How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
 - What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
 - How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
 - What can I model and teach?
 - What does God want me to share with someone?



Getting Started:

1. Schedule a regular time. (30 minutes to two hours)
2. Keep a notebook.
3. Get the right tools.
4. Pray before study. Psalm 119:18

Tools:

1. Study Bible (i.e. Thompson Chain-Reference, The Open Bible, Computer Bibles)
2. Several recent translations. (for word studies King James, NKJV or New American Standard)

*the NIV is more a paraphrase therefore is not good for word studies.

3. An Exhaustive Concordance
4. A Bible dictionary and/or Bible encyclopedia.
5. Topical Bible
6. A Bible Handbook.
7. Commentaries
8. Internet-based tools: (if you are online while reading this you can click on the following links to go to those websites.)

<http://www.intervarsity.org/biblestu/page/inductive-bible-study-hints>

<http://www.maninthemirror.org/biblestudy/series.htm>

<http://www.godsquad.com/discipleship/inductive.htm>

<http://www.crosswalk.com/>

<http://www.searchgodsword.org/>

9. Computer software tools: Logos; WordSearch; Online Bible



12 Proven Bible Study Methods

1. The Devotional Method
2. The Chapter Summary Method
3. The Character Quality Method
4. The Thematic Method
5. The Biographical Method
6. The Topical Method
7. The Word Study Method
8. The Book Background Method
9. The Book Survey Method
10. The Chapter Analysis Method
11. The Book Synthesis Method
12. The Verse-by-Verse Analysis Method

Whatever method we use, we still answer the three Inductive Bible Study questions: What does it say? (Observation); What does it mean? (Interpretation); What must I do? (Application)

Book Study Method

A text without a context is a pretext. In other words, if we don't understand the overarching understanding and purpose of the writer of a Scripture passage, and pull out individual verses or passages, we can do damage to the meaning of the text, making it to say whatever we want.



The best way to understand the context of a passage is to read and study the entire book to get the author's "big picture" before we look at the details of an individual verse or passage.

Remember, there are three main steps to a inductive Bible study:

1. Observation --What do I see?
2. Interpretation -- What does it mean?
3. Application -- How does it work?

Step 1. Observation--Read

1. Read Thoughtfully
2. Read Repeatedly
3. Read Patiently
4. Read Selectively --Who? What? When? Where? Why? Wherefore (so what?)
5. Read Prayerfully
6. Read Imaginatively



7. Read Meditatively

8. Read Purposefully -- look for the aim of the author. What is he "getting at"?

9. Read Acquisitively -- read it to retain it.

10. Read Telescopically -- view the parts in light of the whole.

More On Reading Selectively and Purposefully

Read Selectively --Who? What? When? Where? Why? Wherefore (so what?)

Always ask these questions as you read the text, answering as many of them as possible. Understand however, that not all Bible books contain within them the answers to who wrote to whom, when it was written and so forth. This then is when you should consult some of the other tools, such as a Bible Commentary, study Bible, etc., for answers. For this study I have provided you with the background information on 1 John.

Read Purposefully -- look for the aim of the author. What is he "getting at"?

We believe that when God inspired the biblical authors to write the Scripture, He gave them specific words and thoughts to communicate (using their own vocabulary) therefore one of the primary ways to discover the purpose of the author is through the grammatical structure.

Verbs: The action words. Note the tense--past, present, future



In the Greek language every verb gives us six pieces of information:

1. Definition

2. Voice: a. Active b. Middle c. Passive

3. Mood: a. Indicative(declarative) b. Subjunctive (probability) c. Optative (possibility--presents possibility --one step removed from Subjunctive) d. Imperative (volition--command--the appeal of will to will)

4. Tense: In English this has to do primary with the function of time, but in Greek the tense of a verb has much more to tell us about the action. The element of tense in Greek is kind of action--not time, but progress.

5. Person--1st, 2nd, 3rd

6. Number --singular, plural

Subject and Object-- The Subject does the acting--the Object receives the action.

Modifiers -- Adjectives and Adverbs

Prepositional Phrases --shows substantive relationship

Connectives -- and, but, therefore

Ten Suggestions from Howard Hendricks

(Living By the Book , chapter 24.)

1. Read the entire section completely. In fact, try reading it two or three times, perhaps in different translations.



2. Identify the paragraphs, and put a label or title on each paragraph. Remember that the paragraph is the basic unit of study. So it's important to grasp the main idea or theme of each paragraph, and then state that in a word or two.

3. Evaluate each paragraph in light of the other paragraphs. Use the six clues you've already learned: things that are emphasized, things that are repeated, things that are related, things that are alike, things that are unlike, and things that are true to life (Hendricks uses this phrase to mean things that show the "humanness" and relevance of Bible characters).

4. Evaluate how the section as a whole relates to the rest of the book, using the same six principles.

5. Try to state the main point of the section. See if you can boil it down to one word or a short phrase that summarizes the content.

6. Keep a list of observations on the section. Better yet, record them in your Bible, using brief, descriptive words.

7. Study the persons and places mentioned. See what you can learn about them that throws light on the section as a whole.

8. Keep a list of your unanswered questions and unresolved problems. Those become avenues for further investigation.

9. Ask yourself: What have I seen in this section that challenges the way I live? What practical issues does this passage address? What change do I need to consider in light of this study? What prayer do I need to pray as a result of what I've seen?

10. Share the results of your study with someone else.



2. Interpretation

We cannot just read and apply Scripture without the middle step of interpretation. Time, cultural distancing, and language, put barriers between us and the biblical writers that must be removed in order to gain a clear understanding of the text. Interpretation is the process of removing these roadblocks, or barriers. The goal of this lesson is to help you begin to understand the uses of some of the Bible tools that are helpful in the process of interpretation. You will also practice using these tools so that you will be comfortable using them on your own.

Language Barriers:

The original text of the Bible was written in three languages; the Old Testament in Hebrew and Aramaic, the New Testament in Koine Greek (common Greek). While we have excellent English translations, there are still some thoughts, ideas, concepts, that cannot be fully understood without extra study. Bible dictionaries and other helps are available to help with the language barrier.

Culture Barriers:

If you have ever traveled overseas or even visited a place with a different ethnic culture than your own, you can begin to imagine how culture affects biblical understanding. Therefore we must "reconstruct" the cultural context in communication, transportation, commerce, agricultural practices, religion, philosophy, etc.,.

Bible Study Tools to help with Interpretation:

Atlases -- maps of Bible lands

Bible Dictionaries --defines biblical words



Bible Handbooks, encyclopedias-- give understanding of culture and customs.

Commentaries -- scholars' study of the text.

Concordances -- useful for finding other passages that contain the same words.

Interlinear texts --translations with the Greek and Hebrew written underneath the English words.

Literary Style

The Literary genre, or style of writing affects the interpretation of the text. For example, apocalyptic (Revelation, some of Daniel, Ezekiel) are to be understood differently than narrative; poetry differently than prophecy, etc.,

The genre of 1 John is called Exposition. This category includes Paul's letters, Hebrews, James, 1,2 Peter, 1,2,3 John, and Jude. Hendricks defines exposition as "Carefully reasoned argument or explanation; well-organized; logical flow; terms are crucial; builds to a logical, compelling climax; the aim is agreement and action." Keep this in mind as you study 1 John, looking for John's reasoning and conclusions. Study the most important terms. Look for lots of application and actions that you find in your study.

3. Application:

The ultimate goal of Bible study should be application, not interpretation. Interpretation is necessary so that we have a correct understanding of how God wants to apply His Word to us.

1. Personal –something **you** can do.



2. Possible--something you *can* do.
3. Practical--something you can *do*.
4. Provable--measurable

The Devotional Method

The Devotional Method of Bible Study involves taking a passage of Scripture and prayerfully meditating on it until the Holy Spirit shows you how you can apply its truth to your life in a way that is personal, practical, attainable and measurable.

Four steps:

1. Pray
2. Meditate --(Observation, Interpretation)
3. Application
4. Memorize

1. Pray:

Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into all truth.

2. Meditating on Scripture:

1. Read it over many times.
2. Visualize the scene or situation. Put yourself in the writer's place.
3. Emphasize each word in the passage one at a time.
4. Paraphrase or put it into your own words.
5. Personalize the passage--put your name in the verses.
6. Trust and Obey--what does this passage say I should believe and do?



7. Pray the passage.

3. Application:

1. Personal
2. Practical--something you can do.
3. Possible--something you can do.
4. Provable--measurable

4. Memorization:

Psalm 119:11 "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against Thee."

Topical Bible Study Method

The Topical Method of Bible Study involves selecting a biblical subject and tracing it through a single book, Old or New Testament, or the entire Bible in order to discover what God says about the topic.

Six Steps for Topical Study*

1. Compile a list of words
2. Collect Bible references
3. Consider each reference individually
4. Compare and group the references
5. Condense your study into an outline
6. Conclude your study

* *12 Dynamic Bible Study Methods* Richard Warren, Victor Books



Suggestions from R.A. Torrey

1. *Be systematic.* Don't try to study the Bible in a haphazard manner which is basically an undisciplined manner. Make a list of all the things related to your topic, and make it as comprehensive and complete as possible. Then take up these items one at a time, studying them in a systematic and logical order.
2. *Be thorough.* As far as possible, find and study every verse that relates to the topic. The only way to know all that God has said on a topic is to go through the entire Bible, finding passages on that topic. Use your concordance to do this.
3. *Be exact.* Try to get the exact meaning of every verse you study. Be sure to examine the context of each verse to avoid misinterpretation. The biggest mistake you must avoid is taking a verse out of its context.

Topical Study Form

Topic:

1. Compile a List of Words:



2. Collect Bible References:

