

How to Study the Bible

The goal of good Bible study is to learn *what* the Bible is saying and *how* it applies to your life.

"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" James 1:22 (ESV)

Once you know the passage you want to study simply observe, interpret, and apply.

These three steps will help get the word into your life.

1. Observe the passage by asking the question: "What do I see?"
2. Interpret the passage by asking the question: "What does it mean?"
3. Apply the passage by asking the question: "What do I do?"

Just answer the questions as you study your passage.

SELECT A PASSAGE

Select 3-10 verses dealing with the same topic. Think about why you want to study this passage.

OBSERVE THE PASSAGE BY ASKING QUESTIONS.

All observations are valuable. Write them down. Use the following list of questions as a guide.

- Who is writing or speaking and to whom?
- What is the passage about?
- What are the commands?
- What are the promises or cause/effect relationships?
- What are the repeated words and ideas?
- What problems were the recipients facing?
- Where does this take place?
- When does this take place?
- Why does the speaker or author say/write what he does?
- What do I learn about God?

- What do I learn about Jesus?
- What do I learn about the Holy Spirit?
- What do I learn about me (or mankind)?

Write out any additional observations or insights from the passage. This may include contrasts, lists, comparisons, etc.

INTERPRET THE PASSAGE

WHAT IS THE "BIG IDEA" OF THE PASSAGE – YOUR THEME?

This can most readily be identified from the commands and the repeated words and ideas in the passage. Often there will be one command in the passage with several motivations.

In one phrase sum up the main thought of the passage. Make sure your theme is large enough in scope to include all the author is saying in the passage. It's often the biggest point that is being made. It often requires you to step back and look at the passage as a whole.

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS YOU RAISED IN THE OBSERVATION STEP

Put your answers in the form of an outline. Take your main theme and break down the passage into sub points under the theme. These sub points form principles of life and ministry. A principle is defined as a timeless lesson in the way God works or is doing things in the world.

To develop each principle (each point in your outline) you will want to EXPLAIN IT (interpretation), ILLUSTRATE IT (from the Bible or personal examples of how this principle worked out both positively and negatively) and APPLY IT (not every point will have specific application). You may want to do this on a separate sheet of paper.

For example, you may be studying Luke 10:38-42, the passage about Jesus visiting the home of Martha and Mary. The passage is about choosing what is best for your spiritual life. The author is saying that sitting at the feet of Jesus is best. Now, how does each verse fit into the theme? This is where interpretation comes in. Martha is distracted by busyness. Busyness robs from our spiritual life. Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to Him. Sitting and listening to Jesus is always a priority in our spiritual lives. Jesus says make time to sit and listen.

STEPS TO INTERPRETING THE PASSAGE

To help you interpret the passage, answer like the ones listed below. Use as many or as few as you need to.

- What are the meanings of the words?

- What does the immediate context suggest? (preceding and succeeding verses)
- What does the broader context suggest? (chapter and book)
- What do other cross references suggest?
- What is the cultural meaning? (What did it mean to those to whom it was originally addressed?)
- What do commentaries suggest?

APPLY IT TO YOUR LIFE

This is where you purpose to do what God has taught you through bible study. (James 1:21-25, Mt. 7:24-27) It is through applying the Word that God changes our lives.

Application does not happen by osmosis, but by intent. God enlightens us from the Word, we enact the application with our wills, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to carry out these choices. It is usually best to concentrate on applying one principle at a time. The goal of all application is to glorify God by becoming more like Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:16 -- "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for:

TEACHING: What did I learn?

REPROOF: Where do I fall short? Why do I fall short?

CORRECTION: What will I do about it?

TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS: How can I make this principle a consistent part of my life?