



HOW
TO

STUDY

YOUR
BIBLE

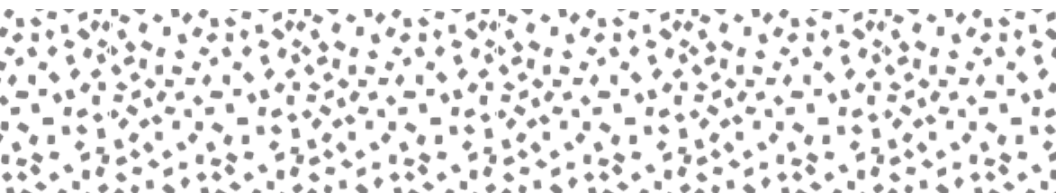


embrace



HAVE YOU EVER wanted to know the Lord and hear His voice? More likely than not, this has been your desire. Often, we spend time in Scripture reading, but not deeply studying what the words are conveying, the context and setting of the book we are reading, or making application of the text. Our study of Scripture should lead to heart transformation as we view who God is and who we are in light of His character. His desire is for us to grow into His likeness.

The following items are tools to use in the inductive study of Scripture. The suggested technique requires time to learn and implement, and should not be an end in and of itself.



OBSERVATION

This is the first step in this three-fold technique. Observation is the step that takes the most time and you should allow time and space to observe the text. The overarching question this step answers is, “What does the passage say?”

PRAY.

It would be easy, but not wise, to approach the study of Scripture in our own wisdom and knowledge. If you are a believer in Christ Jesus, the Holy Spirit indwells you (Eph. 1:13-14) and will “guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come” (John 16:13, NASB). Therefore, it is imperative to begin your study of Scripture in prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to guide and direct you and show you truth from the Word of the Lord.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT.

The context of the passage of Scripture you are studying is important. Understanding the context helps you see the big picture of what you are reading before you begin looking at the more precise details. When looking at the context of the passage you are about to study, here are some helpful questions to ask:

- Who wrote this passage of Scripture?
- Who is the audience?
- Where is the passage of Scripture placed? What is happening?

One of the easiest and most effective ways to continue to understand the context of the passage is to read, and continue re-reading, the entire book where the passage is located. The more you engage in this, the more familiar you become with the setting, repeated themes of the book and placement of the passage.

BEGIN ASKING INVESTIGATIVE QUESTIONS.

Often when we hear a story from someone, we begin to ask questions to get the facts and important information. We can use these same questions as we study passages of Scripture. These include “The 5 Ws and an H.” In this part of study, you want to be very cautious to guard against interpreting before you have started observing. One of the ways to prevent this is to use the words that are in the passage you are studying to answer the 5 Ws and an H.

- **WHO?** – Who is speaking? Who wrote it? Who is mentioned (the major characters) in the passage? Who are the recipients and about whom is the author speaking?
- **WHAT?** – What is taking place? What is happening? What are the major events? What are the major ideas? What are the major teachings and what are these people like? What is being said? What does the author of the passage talk about the most? What is his purpose in saying the things he is saying?
- **WHERE?** – Where is all of this happening? Where are the locations that are mentioned? Where will things happen?

- **WHEN?** – When will things take place? When are things taking place? Are any time factors mentioned? When was the text written? When was it said? When will it be done?
- **WHY?** – Why will these things take place? Why are they currently taking place? Why was there a need for this to be written? Why was this mentioned? Why should they do something in particular?
- **HOW?** – How will all of this happen or come about? How is this illustrated?

LOOK FOR AND BEGIN MARKING KEY WORDS AND PHRASES.

A key word or phrase is one that the author uses repeatedly in a significant way. Key words are those that, if removed from the passage of Scripture, would cause the passage to lose its meaning. A key word or phrase is also a word that answers one of your 5Ws and an H questions. You can mark key words and phrases in such a way that it distinguishes them in the passage of Scripture.



Look at the example below from John 15:1-11:

¹“**I** am the true **vine**, and **My Father** is the vinedresser.

²Every **branch** in **Me** that does not **bear fruit**, **He** takes away; and every **branch** that **bears fruit**, **He** prunes it so that it may **bear more fruit**. ³ You are already clean because of the word which **I** have spoken to you.

⁴ **Abide** in **Me**, and **I** in you. As the **branch** cannot **bear fruit** of itself unless it **abides** in the **vine**, so neither can you unless you **abide** in **Me**. ⁵ **I** am the **vine**, you are the **branches**; he who **abides** in **Me** and **I** in him, he **bears much fruit**, for apart from **Me** you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not **abide** in **Me**, he is thrown away as a **branch** and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. ⁷ If you **abide** in **Me**, and **My** words **abide** in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ **My Father** is glorified by this, that you **bear much fruit**, and so prove to be **My** disciples. ⁹ Just as the **Father** has **loved Me**, **I** have also **loved** you; **abide** in **My love**. ¹⁰ If you keep **My** commandments, you will **abide** in **My love**; just as **I** have kept **My Father's** commandments and **abide** in **His love**. ¹¹ These things **I** have spoken to you so that **My** joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”

In the passage of Scripture above, we have marked key words and phrases as follows:

- vine
- branch
- bear (much) fruit
- abide
- love(d)

We marked all the references to Jesus, including the pronouns and the references to His (My) Father. This helps each of the words stand out within the text.

LIST WHAT YOU LEARN ABOUT EACH KEY WORD OR PHRASE.

For each of the key words or phrases that you have marked, write what the text says about those words. Again, use the words that are used within the text itself as you write down information about the key words. Here is an example from John 15:1-11 using our key word abide:

ABIDE – abide in Jesus and He in us (vs. 4); as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can I unless I abide in Jesus (vs. 4); the one who abides in Jesus and He in us bears much fruit because apart from Him we can do nothing (vs. 5); if anyone does not abide in Jesus, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up (vs. 6); if I abide in Jesus, and Jesus' words abide in me, ask whatever I wish and it will be done for me (vs. 7); abide in His love (vs. 9); if I keep His commandments, I will abide in Jesus' love, just as He has kept His Father's commandments and abides in His love (vs. 10).

This passage of Scripture has much to say about abide. Writing out what the text says about the word helps you remember what the text says and internalize the information.

LOOK FOR CONTRASTS, COMPARISONS, TERMS OF CONCLUSION AND EXPRESSIONS OF TIME.

In the passage of Scripture you are studying, how are things the same or how are they different? Examining the text for words such as “therefore,” “for,” “so that” and “for this reason” are some of the words and phrases that help you identify when these things are taking place. For example, when you see the word “therefore” in the text, you need to look back at what the author has said previously to understand the greater context of what he is about to say.

Look at the John 15:1-11 passage again and see the contrasts, comparisons, conclusions and expressions of time in what Jesus said:



¹ “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.
² Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. ⁷ If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. ⁹ Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”

These verses mostly contain comparisons and contrasts. These include the following:

- Every branch in Jesus that does not bear fruit, He takes away; every branch that does bear fruit is pruned so it may bear more fruit (vs. 2).
- As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can a disciple (this is to whom Jesus is speaking) unless they abide in Him (vs. 4).
- The one who abides in Jesus, and Jesus in him, bears much fruit for apart from Him, one can do nothing. The one who doesn't abide in Jesus is thrown away as a branch and is gathered and cast into the fire and burned (vv. 5-6).
- Just as the Father has loved Jesus, so also has Jesus loved us (vs. 9).
- If His disciples keep Jesus' commandments, they will abide in His love, just as Jesus has kept His Father's commandments and abides in His love (vs. 10).

DETERMINE IF THERE ARE MAJOR CHARACTERS, DOCTRINES OR EVENTS.

Good observation and careful reading of the text will help you see these things. For example, in the verses from the John 15:1-11 passage, the major characters mentioned are Jesus, His Father (God) and Jesus' disciples. From this passage we also see the oneness of the Father and the Son; the Son's love for His disciples and His Father's love for Him. We also see one of the "I Am" statements that is recorded in John's gospel – "I am the true

vine.” Additionally, the text shows the importance of resting and trusting in Christ for Him to work through the believer. Finally, in these 11 verses, the reality of heaven and hell is shown. Jesus says the one who abides with Him is a branch and is not thrown away and dried up, then cast into the fire and burned.

DETERMINE THE CHAPTER THEME.

What is the overall theme you could give the chapter? Let the chapter speak for itself to accurately describe the chapter.

INTERPRETATION

Interpretation is the step in the technique that will enable you to begin to determine what the text means. Careful observation of the text will help lead to accurate interpretation.

Following are useful principles of interpretation:

REMEMBER THAT CONTEXT RULES.

Context is “that which goes with the text.” Any interpretation must be considered in light of the surrounding verses, chapters, book in which it is found, and the entire Word of God. Ask yourself if your interpretation of Scripture is consistent with the theme, purpose and structure of the book in which it is found. Is your interpretation consistent with other Scriptures about the same subject, or is there a glaring difference? Are you considering the cultural and historical context of what is being said?

ALWAYS SEEK THE FULL COUNSEL OF THE WORD OF GOD.

What does Scripture say about the same topic in other places of Scripture?

REMEMBER THAT SCRIPTURE WILL NEVER CONTRADICT SCRIPTURE.

Scripture will interpret Scripture. All Scripture is God-breathed and inspired by God. Scripture will never contradict Scripture.

DO NOT BASE YOUR DOCTRINE ON AN OBSCURE PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE.

An obscure passage is one where the meaning is not easily understood. Doctrine should be based on the clear repeated teachings in Scripture.

INTERPRET SCRIPTURE LITERALLY.

God has spoken to us through His Word so we can know truth. Take the Word of God at face value, in its natural, normal sense. Look for the clear teachings of Scripture, not some hidden meaning.

LOOK FOR THE AUTHOR'S INTENDED MEANING OF THE PASSAGE.

Let Scripture speak for itself.

CHECK YOUR CONCLUSIONS BY USING RELIABLE COMMENTARIES.

No one person has a corner on the truth. It is at this part in the process that you can use a commentary. However, it is important that the commentator is handling the text correctly.



APPLICATION

Application is the last step in this technique and is the one that allows the learner to put the Scripture into action in their daily lives. Here are questions you can ask yourself as you seek to apply the verses of Scripture:

WHAT DOES THE PASSAGE TEACH?

Is this passage of Scripture teaching something that is general or specific? Is what is being taught only applicable to specific people or to a cultural problem of the day? Is the teaching only applicable to a certain time in history? Has the teaching been superseded by a broader teaching?

DOES THIS SECTION OF SCRIPTURE EXPOSE ANY ERROR IN YOUR BELIEFS OR BEHAVIOR?

Are there any commandments that you have not obeyed? Are there any wrong attitudes or motives in your life the Scriptures bring to light?

WHAT IS GOD'S INSTRUCTION TO YOU AS HIS CHILD?

Are there any new truths to be believed? Are there any new commandments to be acted upon? Are there any new insights to be pursued? Are there any promises to be embraced?

WHEN APPLYING SCRIPTURE, BEWARE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Applying cultural standards rather than biblical standards.
- Attempting to strengthen a legitimate truth by using a Scripture incorrectly.
- Applying Scripture out of prejudice from past training or teaching.

OBSERVATION

+ INTERPRETATION

+ APPLICATION

= TRANSFORMATION

BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

WEBSITES

Blue Letter Bible – www.blueletterbible.org

Bible Gateway – www.biblegateway.com

BOOKS

How to Study Your Bible, Kay Arthur, David Arthur and Pete DeLacy

The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words, James Strong, ed.

Women of the Word, Jen Wilkin

Women's Evangelical Commentary: Old Testament, Rhonda Harrington Kelley and Dorothy Kelley Patterson, eds.

Women's Evangelical Commentary: New Testament, Rhonda Harrington Kelley and Dorothy Kelley Patterson, eds.

How to Read the Bible for All It Is Worth, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart

Living By the Book, Howard Hendricks and William D. Hendricks

The Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, James Strong, ed.

*Information for this handout was adapted from Kay Arthur, David Arthur, and Pete De Lacy, *How to Study Your Bible: Discovering the Life-Changing Approach to God's Word* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers), 2010, and the *Inductive Bible Study Overview* handout published by Precept Ministries International.

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