

Bible Study Method

Step 1: Pray that the Holy Spirit would illuminate the timeless truth of God's Word. Also pray that your presuppositions that may not be in line with the Bible would be left out of your study time.

Step 2: If studying a book of the Bible, be sure to read through the entire book beforehand, if possible. If studying an exceptionally long book of the Bible, read at least 4-5 chapters that include the specific passage of study. Print out passage of Scripture to be studied. This can be done by copy and pasting a passage from an online Bible to Word. Preferred translations are literal renderings: ESV, NASB, NKJV.

Phase 1: Observation

- Read through entire passage.
- Using your own system for marking (highlights, color scheme, circling, underlining, boxing, etc.), look for repeated words and phrases, verbs, themes, key words, connecting words.
- Write out observation questions in the margins or on a separate sheet of paper. Keep these questions on the who, what, why, and how of the text at hand trying to ask questions about the meaning of the key words, themes, or the flow of thought made apparent by the author. Try to avoid writing interpretive questions that are beyond simply understanding the text at this point.

Phase 2: Interpretation

- Go back and answer the questions written down in the observation phase.
- First, look up background information on the book of the Bible being studied. In many cases the Bible itself will reveal historical background information helpful for understanding the setting, author, audience, culture, etc. It may be helpful to consult other sources of background information on authorship, purpose, theme, occasion, setting, date, etc. Most Study Bibles contain this information at the beginning of each book. Other resources include The New Bible Dictionary by Wood & Marshall, bible-history.com Sources outside of the Bible can contradict each other, but this is a good exercise to approach the text with some understanding of the original author, audience, and intent.
- Next, answer the questions as best you can using the context of the text. This would be reading the words and phrases with regard to the sentences, paragraphs, surrounding the words or phrases in question. Also, attempt to understand the author's natural flow of thought within the context of the particular book of the Bible as a whole. **CONTEXT IS KEY!**
- Next, take your conclusions or unanswered questions and look for cross-references from the Bible that pertain to the word or phrase looking for confirmations or contradictions. Cross-references can be found in a multitude of resources such as the margin of most Bibles or Study Bibles, The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge by R.A. Torrey, blueletterbible.org **Interpret God's Word with God's Word!**

Phase 3: Application

- Apply the interpreted meaning of the text to a specific situation
- Understand the difference between meaning and application:

Meaning refers to what the original author intended to communicate to the original audience in the text. Since the meaning of the text is tied to the author, it will be the same for all Christians. *Application* refers to the **response** of the individual reader to the **meaning** of the text. Application is bound to the specific life situation of the reader and will vary from Christian to Christian along with some boundaries based on the author's meaning. **Good question:** "What does this text mean and how do I apply this meaning to my life?" **Bad question:** "What does this text mean to me?" The difference between meaning and application is vital.¹

- Pray for understanding and appropriate response (Romans 2:6-13; James 1:22)

Reminders:

- Repetition can lead to competency making the task and discipline of studying God's Word refreshing and joyful.
- Use commentaries and other study resources only to confirm or challenge your conclusions.
- Don't be overwhelmed or discouraged by the time it may take to understand the Bible. Just be committed to being a person whose life is continually shaped by God's Word. Our church, families, city, and world need us to make this commitment.

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! – Psalm 119: 9-10

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. – Romans 12:1-2

¹J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 236.

= verbs

 =key words or phrases

 = repeated words or phrases

 =connecting words: comparison (“like”, “and”, “as”)
contrast (“however”)
purpose (“in order”)
result (“so that”)
cause (“For”, “because”)
explanation (“For”)
inference (“therefore”)
condition (“if”)

Observation

v.1-3:

Interpretation

v.1-3:

Application

What does this passage teach me about God?

How does this aspect of God’s character change my view of self?

What should I do in response?