



HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Adapted from "How to Study the Bible"
Robert M. West, Barbour Publishing Inc, 2007.

"Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed." – Acts 17:11-12 NIV

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." – 2 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV

"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." – Acts 4:13 NIV

PREPARATION: *Readying our Hearts for Bible Study*

- We approach God's word 1) *dependently* and 2) *purposefully*.
- Depending on the Holy Spirit. Depending on mature believers.
- Purposefully to 1) *settle our own salvation*, 2) *grow spiritually*, 3) *receive blessing and encouragement*, 4) *receive personal guidance*, 5) *defend ourselves against the devil*, 6) *effectively teaching God's truth to the next generation*, 7) *be able to counsel others*, 8) *be able to speak with unbelievers about Christ*, 9) *be able to verify the teaching of others is truth* and 10) *present ourselves approved to God*.

INTERPRETATION: *Discovering What the Bible Means*

- Bible Study: One interpretation; many applications. Worth the Investment. Watch out for false teachers.
- There are three steps in "Inductive" Bible Study: Observation, Interpretation, Application
 - **Observation:** What does it say? What is the actual content in the text? Use these six questions:
 - **Who?** Who was writing? To whom was the message originally written? Who are the people involved in the scenario?
 - **What?** What's happening? What's said? Is it a command, exhortation, rebuke, question, answer, prayer, quotation, something else? What's the main point? What key words or phrases are used? What's the context? What literary style is being used? Is it 1) narrative, 2) conversation, 3) parable, 4) prophecy, 5) poetry, 6) letter or a 7) sermon?
 - **When?** Are there time references? Are there words related to the past, present, or future? Look for words like after, until, then.
 - **Where?** Are there locations mentioned – towns, roads, rivers, mountains, regions or other landmarks?
 - **Why?** Are there any clues about why things are being said or done?
 - **How?** Is there an explanation about how things are done?
 - **Interpretation:** What does it mean? Or task is to discover the original intent and meaning of the author.
 - **The Literal Principle** – We interpret the Bible using the normal meaning of words while recognizing figures of speech like symbolism, allegory and metaphor. God doesn't "hide" messages. He intends for us to understand his word.
 - **The Historical Principal** – The Bible must be understood in its historical setting before it can be fully understood in our contemporary setting. We ask, "What did the author mean by what he wrote?"
 - **The Contextual Principal** – We interpret a verse using the verses that surround it. We interpret a chapter using the chapters that surround it. We interpret a book using the whole counsel of Scripture.
 - *Find out the general theme of the book.*
 - *Determine the emphasis of each chapter and how it relates to the book theme.*
 - *Find the paragraph divisions and how they relate to the thrust of each chapter.*
 - *Dig into the verses to get each one's main idea and how they relate to each other.*
 - *Go deeper into verses by doing word studies.*
 - **The Compatibility Principle** – We compare verses or passages of Scripture with other Scripture to see how they fit together. The Bible is the best commentary on the Bible. Scripture doesn't contradict Scripture. If our interpretation contradicts what the Bible says clearly elsewhere, we need to change our conclusions.
 - **The Grammatical Principle** – Recognizing parts of speech and the way they relate to each other can reveal a lot about the text. Look for words like therefore, and, but, that, for, because, and if.
 - **Application:** What does it mean to me? How does it apply to my life?
 - Only after we have discovered what Scripture truly means, can we apply it to our lives. Application, however, is not an optional part of Bible study, but a necessary part of Bible study.

CLASSIFICATION: *Examining Bible Study Methods*

- It is important to strike a balance between 1) Old Testament & New Testament 2) Doctrine & Christian Living.
- **Six important Bible Study Methods:**
 1. **The Expository Method** – Studying individual Bible books verse by verse, using the observation, interpretation and application guidelines. This method is more work, but leads to greater understanding in the long run. (A commentary is a helpful tool for this method.)
 2. **The Survey Method** – Studying a Bible book as a whole to become acquainted with general information rather than the details of each verse. Investigate subjects like the author, where he’s writing from, his style of writing, the theme, important topics, who it was written for and the issues the recipients might have been facing. (Bible encyclopedias, dictionaries and Bible overviews are helpful tools for this method.)
 3. **The Topical Method** – Studying a specific topic from the Bible we’re interested in studying. We want to accumulate all the Bible says about it and then organize the information. (A Bible concordance is a helpful tool for this method.)
 4. **The Biographical Method** – Studying the life of an individual person in the Bible. (A Bible concordance is a helpful tool for this method.)
 5. **The Word Study Method** – Studying a specific significant word in the Bible to understand its meaning and usage better. (A concordance and a word dictionary are helpful tools for this method.)
 6. **The Devotional Method** – This type of study is less technical than others and is primarily for personal inspiration and encouragement to deepen our relationship with God. Bible reading, prayer and perhaps reading a devotional book are normally part of devotions.
- Reading through the whole Bible should be a goal for every Christian.
- The ACTIVITY of Bible study is more important than the METHOD of Bible study. Just do it!

COLLABORATION: *Using Bible Study Helps*

- There are many helpful tools to make your Bible study time more profitable.
 - **Study Bibles** – These are Bibles with a wealth of additional study notes.
 - **Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias** – These have more than just definitions of words. They contain brief articles on major Bible subjects with helpful explanations and scripture references.
 - **Exhaustive Concordances** – Lists every single reference where a Biblical word is found.
 - **Topical Bibles** – Lists significant Biblical words alphabetically and gives select references to where the word is used. Larger subjects are broken down into subcategories so you can find verses with a particular emphasis.
 - **Expository Dictionaries** – Examines the original Greek or Hebrew words and gives a definition and explanation.
 - **Bible Atlases** – Contains maps, charts and diagrams to illustrate the geography and events of the Bible.
 - **Commentaries** – Commentaries give a verse-by-verse or a section-by-section explanation of books of the Bible. Some are more technical in nature, working closely with the original languages, some are expository, give an overview and explanation of meaning, and some are devotional, emphasizing lessons for Christian living.
 - **Recorded Sermons** – Listening to recorded sermons is a good way to increase your knowledge of the Bible.
- **Recommended Bible teaching podcasts:**
 - Charles Swindoll: Insight for Living
 - Ravi Zacharias: Let My People Think
 - John Piper: Desiring God
 - Matt Chandler: The Village Church
 - Beth Moore: Living Proof
 - James MacDonald: Walk in the Word
 - John MacArthur: Grace to You
 - Hank Hannegraff: the Bible Answer Man
- **Useful Websites for Bible Study:**
 - Bible Gateway: biblegateway.com
 - Blue Letter Bible: blueletterbible.org
 - Bible.org: bible.org
 - Bible Study Tools: biblestudytools.com
 - Discipleship Library: discipleshiplibrary.com
 - Precept Austin: preceptaustin.org

A Simple Inductive Method:

Use “GULSA” and “SPECK” to study the passage:

What does this passage say about GOD?

What does this passage say about US as people?

What do you LIKE about the passage?

How would you SUMMARIZE the passage?

How can we APPLY this passage? *Is there a...*

S- sin to confess

P- promise to claim

E- example to follow

C- command to obey

K- knowledge to gain