
How to Read and Apply the Bible

Step 1: Observation

Key Question: *What do I see in the text?*

Note: Much of this lesson material comes from the book *Living By the Book* by Howard and William Hendricks. I commend this resource to you for further study; see the full citation on the course overview.

The Value of Bible Study

- **The Bible is God's Word.**
 - **Habakkuk 2:18-19** ¹⁸ "What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! ¹⁹ Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.
 - **2 Timothy 3:16-18** ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
 - **2 Peter 1:19-21** ¹⁹ And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
 - **Question:** How do these truths affect our attitude as we come to God's Word?
- **Bible study is essential to growth as a Christian.**
 - **1 Peter 2:2-5** ² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— ³ if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. ⁴ As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
 - **Question:** How should this reality affect how we prioritize God's Word?
- **Bible study is essential to spiritual maturity.**
 - **Hebrews 5:11-14** ¹¹ About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. ¹² For though by this time you ought to be

teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, ¹³ for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

- **Question:** How is maturity defined here, and what role does God's Word play in developing maturity?
- **Bible study is essential to spiritual effectiveness.**
 - **2 Timothy 3:16** ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
 - **Question:** What does this verse teach us about God's purpose for us through His Word?
- **Bible study is essential to true wisdom.**
 - **Psalms 1:1-4** ¹ Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. ⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
 - **Question:** What benefits are highlighted in Psalm 1's description of one who treasures God's Word?
- **Bible study is essential to building our faith.**
 - **Romans 10:17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

An Approach to Personal Bible Study

- **Inductive Method:** Inductive reasoning refers to the process of taking specific information and making broader generalizations that is considered likely and/or probable while acknowledging a conclusion may not always be accurate.¹
 - **Example:** I always leave 15 minutes early to get to my appointments on time. My appointment is in 30 minutes. Therefore, I *should* arrive early for my appointment.
- **Study requires effort in a progression:**
 - **Observe** – What do I see in the text?
 - **Interpret** – What does the text mean?
 - **Apply** – How do I respond to the text?

¹ Adapted from <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/sermon/class-1-the-inductive-bible-study-method-part-1/>

Step 1: Observe

- **Goal in Observation: Asking Questions About the Text**
 - Who is the author, who is speaking, who is the audience?
 - What is being said, taught, or acted upon?
 - When is this happening (both immediately and in the grand redemptive narrative)?
 - Where is this occurring?
 - Why is this happening/being said?
- **Five Key Areas:**
 - **Context** – Where is the passage situated in the paragraph, the book, and the grand redemptive narrative? How does this influence what we see? Context will drive not only what we see, but how we interpret it and apply it to our lives.
 - **Terms** – Understanding the words on the page, especially key words that unlock meaning.
 - **Structure** – How has the author constructed the text?
 - **Grammatical** – How are the sentences constructed? What parts of speech are the key words, and how do they relate?
 - **Literary** – How are ideas and themes related within a text? Is there a climax to the narrative? What cause-and-effect relationships exist? Is there a question or problem that's being answered or addressed?
 - Consider diagramming a text, grouping relationships and phrases.
 - **Literary Form** – What genre is the text you're reading, and how does that influence how you understand it?
 - **Atmosphere** – What experientially is going on in the text? Can you put yourself in the shoes of the author and his readers?
- **Eight Things to Look For:**
 - **(1) Things that are Emphasized**
 - **Space Taken** – Consider Jesus' discourses in Matthew.
 - **Stated Purpose** – Consider John 20:30-31.
 - **Ordering** – Consider work being given before the fall (Genesis 1-2).
 - **Lesser to Greater/Greater to Lesser** – Consider 2 Samuel 11-12 and David's sin with Bathsheba.
 - **(2) Things that are Repeated**
 - **Terms, phrases, and clauses** – Consider Psalm 136:1-2; Hebrews 11.

- **Characters** – Barnabas shows up in Acts as a spiritual encourager (Acts 9:27, Acts 11:22, Acts 15:36-39).
 - **Incidents and Circumstances** – Consider the book of Judges; Jesus’ interactions with the Pharisees in Matthew.
 - **Patterns** – Consider types and similarities between historical events and individuals. For example, notice the parallels between the experience of Israel and the life of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel.
 - **New Testament use of Old Testament Verses** – The connections made are intentional on the part of the author and the Holy Spirit.
- **(3) Things that are Related or Connected**
- **Movement from General to the Specific** – Consider Matthew 6:1, then Matthew 6:2-18.
 - **Questions and Answers** – Consider Paul in Romans, i.e. Romans 6:1; Jesus in Matthew 6:27, etc.
 - **Cause and Effect** – For example, consider Acts 8:1 – what “day” and activity motivated the preaching of God’s Word beyond Jerusalem?
- **(4) Things that are Alike**
- **Similes** – Comparisons made with “like” or “as” to emphasize a similarity or relationship.
 - ***Psalm 42:1** As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.*
 - **Metaphors** – Comparisons made without using “like” or “as.”
 - ***John 15:1-2** 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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*
- **(5) Things that are Unlike**
- **Stated Contrasts** – The use of “but” is a clue that a change in direction is coming.
 - ***Galatians 5:19-23** ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

- **Metaphors** – Consider God’s being compared to the unjust judge in Luke 18. How is Jesus using this metaphor to make his argument? Consider when Jesus says “this is my body” and “this is my blood” when instituting the Lord’s Supper. Why does he do this?
 - **Irony** – Irony is an action or situation that seems contrary to what one may expect. Consider the woman with the flow of blood in Luke 8; we would not expect in the midst of the pressing crowd and the urgency of Jairus’ need to see Jesus pause to interact with the woman.
- **(6) Things that are True to Life**
 - What emotions did the people in the text feel?
 - What would the experience in the text have felt like?
 - What questions did the individuals have? What questions would we have had?
 - What temptations were the people facing? How are those similar or different from temptations we face today?
 - How did the people in the text respond? How would I have responded?
 - **(7) Things that are Referenced or Alluded to**
 - Is there a passage of Scripture that’s quoted?
 - Example: Peter references many Old Testament passages in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:14-41).
 - Is there a Scripture or story that’s alluded to?
 - Example: Matthew 12:40 – Jesus refers to Jonah
 - Example: John 12:14 – Jesus alludes to Numbers 21:6-9, and that narrative is key to understanding his point.
 - **(8) Things that are Logically Connected**
 - Are there words like “for”, “therefore”, “because”, or “for this reason” that form an argument or logical connection?
 - Consider Paul’s argumentation in his letters, like Romans (see Romans 1, as an example).

Practice: Romans 8:1-11

Preceding Context:

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.

³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Following Context: