

## The Inductive Bible Study Method

### A. So what is involved in the inductive study?

1. Seeing the truth for yourself (Observation)
2. Finding out the meaning (Interpretation)
3. Applying that meaning to your life (Application)

### B. The 3 Steps of Inductive Bible Study

#### 1. OBSERVATION

- a. Reading the text several times allows you to dig deeper than the surface reading
- b. It may help to see things clearer by asking ‘Who – What – When – Where – Why – How’
- c. You are looking for the facts (it’s like evidence that supports the truth)

#### 2. INTERPRETATION

##### a. Some General Guidelines:

- Interpret Literally = look for the plain, simple meaning (most Scripture is literal)
- Study within the Context = look what is before and after
- Let Scripture Interpret Scripture = the more Bible you study, the better off you are
- New Testament takes Precedent = we don’t follow everything in the Old Testament because we are under the New Covenant (He brought grace!)

##### b. Some Warning Guidelines:

- Interpret your experience by the Scripture and not the Scripture by your experience
- Be careful not to be dogmatic where the Bible is not
- Determine when a passage is figurative and not literal
- Don’t rationalize away the Scriptures (I know what the Bible says, but...)
- Don’t use culture to interpret the Bible – culture changes but the Bible does not
- Do not over-spiritualize the Scriptures (It says what it says and don’t read into it what is not there) Like John 2:6...

#### 3. APPLICATION

##### a. How should I respond? (Am I going to apply it or ignore it???)

- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a sin to forsake?
- Are there errors to avoid?
- Are there truths to believe?
- Commands to obey?
- Actions to take?

##### b. We need to change to become more like Jesus

### C. Always start with prayer

1. Without prayer, this is just a method, rather than a life-changing experience with God.
2. Remember what Jesus said about the work of the Holy Spirit in John 16:13. This is a spiritual experience (and not just a mental exercise), and the Word of God is powerful! Heb.4:12
3. So ask the Lord, by His Spirit, to lead you into all truth and to open your eyes to see.

---

## TOOL #1. Observation: WHAT DO YOU SEE?

---

- A. Our goal: to find the hidden treasures (Prov 2:4-5)
- B. People spend a great amount of effort to seek for hidden treasures. Some find a treasure and some never find a thing, even though they may have spent their entire life savings.
- C. However, anyone who looks into God's Word and humbly relies on the Holy Spirit for guidance and instruction is rewarded!

### D. Observation involves asking the question, *What do I see?*

- 1. This involves trying to read the Bible as if it were the first time we ever saw it.
- 2. In doing this, we learn how to observe details that will reward us in our search.
- 3. As an example, let's study an object and **see** what details we can find.

### E. Practicing Observation: (Need to use a translation like the NKJV or NASB)

#### 1. Exercise #1: Abraham

- a. What do we know about Terah, the father of Abraham? Josh. 24:2

b. So Abraham could have been worshiping idols for maybe up to 75 years of his life (Gen. 12:4)? With that in mind, look at Acts 7:2. How do you think Abraham felt?

#### 2. Exercise #2: Read Luke 22:39-44

- a. In verse 44, what happened when Jesus prayed more earnestly?

- b. Note that the more you can **see** in the text, the richer your study is going to be.

#### **(Look for those details!)**

- 1) The riches are there. You just have to find them!
- 2) This takes time to do, but it is so valuable, and it will give you a joy that cannot be fully described!

#### 3. Exercise #3: Note the following OBSERVATIONS from Psalm 100:2 “*Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before His presence with singing.*”

- a. It begins with the word ‘serve’ (and it is a command = interpretation).
- b. It says ‘serve the Lord’ (so it is telling us WHO to serve = Interpretation)
- c. It says ‘serve...with gladness’ (so it is telling HOW to serve = Interpretation)
- d. It says ‘come’ (and it is a command also = interpretation).
- e. It says ‘come before His presence’ (so it is telling us WHERE to come = Interpretation)
- f. It says ‘come... with singing’ (so it is telling us HOW to come = Interpretation)
- g. There are two commands in this verse. (a fact = Observation)
- h. ‘His presence’ is referring back to ‘the Lord’.
- i. Since it says ‘serve the Lord’ then it must be possible to serve the Lord.
- j. If serving the Lord is commanded in this verse, then it is implied that the readers are not serving the Lord at present.
- k. If coming before His presence is commanded, then it is implied that the readers are not coming before His presence at present.

- l. If the readers are commanded to serve, then it is implied that they have a choice whether to obey this or not.
  - m. Note that all the Observations listed are able to be proven because they can be seen by anyone who is looking at the text.
  - n. Also note that many more observations could be made as you continue to meditate on that verse under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
4. Exercise #4: Let's make 20 observations from Gen. 19:23-26 (Use back of this paper)
  5. It will not happen all at once, but we can and will develop the skills of Observation if we persevere.
  6. The process begins with slowing down and observing a passage of Scripture in a fresh, closer way, with the aid of the Holy Spirit.
  7. Continue to practice Observation! (and Observations can make us ask questions)
  8. Using Observation, I'm going to ask you some questions from John 6:1-15

---

## **TOOL #2. Interpretation: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

---

A. Sometimes we may not immediately see what the *application* is from our reading of the Bible and we may become discouraged.

1. It may be that the Lord wants us to dig in further before He lets us find the meaning of the passage.
2. To clearly understand what God is saying *to us*, we need the accurate Interpretation, and this may require work on our part.
3. Note that sometimes the interpretation is easy because it means just what it says (like 'Thou shalt not steal'), but sometimes we need to dig deeper.

### **B. Interpretation involves asking the question, *What does this mean?***

#### **1. Some simple rules for interpretation:**

- a. Don't read in what is not there. (Matt. 16:19 – the keys of counseling??)
- b. Interpret the passage literally unless the context suggests otherwise.
- c. If it is needed, check other sources for cultural information.
- d. Pay close attention to grammar:
  - 1) How the words are used
  - 2) How the sentences are put together
  - 3) Different emphases from the wording
  - 4) Note: In case you feel your grammar skills are inadequate, great men and women of the past made up for what they lacked by:
    - a) Zealously studying the Word (and reading a passage over and over)
    - b) Using what helps were available to them
    - c) By relying heavily upon the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (remember that He will not give a meaning that goes against His Word!)
- e. Don't forget to pay attention to the **CONTEXT**:
  - 1) The Context includes:
    - a) The surrounding verses and chapters
    - b) The book in which it is found
    - c) The entire Word of God
  - 2) Ask yourself: *Does my interpretation agree with the context of this passage, chapter, book, and the rest of Scripture?*
- f. Use cross-references if there are any – let Scripture interpret Scripture!

2. A good general rule is to ask, *What did the people in Bible times who first received the news or message understand?*
3. Some good helps: a dictionary, a bible dictionary, Haley's Bible Handbook, a concordance, the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, Vine's Expository Dictionary (word studies), a good Study Bible
4. Some helpful questions you might ask of the text:  
*Are there any problems being addressed in the passage?*  
*Are there any commands, promises, cause-and-effects, repeated words or ideas?*  
*What can I learn about God? About Jesus? About the Holy Spirit? About myself/mankind?*

C. Practicing Interpretation:

1. Exercise #1: Mark 9:35-37
  - a. First, check the context.
  - b. Then do your observations. (You might want to use the back of this paper)
    - c. Are there any words or phrases that may need further research in order to understand? (Are there any helpful or needed cross-references?)
    - d. Any repeated words, ideas?
2. Exercise #2: Mark 10:35-45
3. Exercise #3: 2Tim. 3:16-17

---

**TOOL #3. Application: HOW DOES THE MEANING APPLY TO ME?**

---

A. Accurate application is based on accurate interpretation.

1. Applications are made from the principles which are timeless and transcend social customs.
2. Application is simply becoming 'doers of the Word' (James 1:22).

B. Some helpful guidelines on how to make application:

1. The application must be based on *parallel experiences*. We are asking "How can I identify with what I understand from this passage?"
  - a. For instance, in Acts 16:22-25, Paul and Silas had been beaten and put in prison, but they were still praising God.
  - b. So how can I identify? When things are causing me pain or putting pressure on me, I can still praise the Lord.
2. Our application must be in harmony with the rest of Scripture.
  - a. Be careful not to read into the Bible more than is actually there.
  - b. The more we know of the Bible, the less likely we will be to come up with applications that are contrary to Scripture. (Deut. 23:12-14)
  - c. When making application, keep in mind the needs of the *whole person* - intellectual, emotional, volitional(a person's will), and spiritual.
    - 1) What I mean is that some people just concentrate on the *emotion* of guilt.
    - 2) The Bible focuses more on reaching the *mind* before reaching the *emotions*.
    - 3) When our *minds* and *emotions* are working together, they give balanced direction to our *wills* and can produce a lasting change. (Proverbs are a great example of this.)
  - d. Also, when making application, keep in mind that we need change (growth) in *all areas of our life* - home, job, social life, school, etc.

3. When something you are studying makes an impression on you, stop and allow God to speak to you. (\*\*When it comes to Application, we are asking the Holy Spirit, “What do You want me to learn/do with this?”)

C. Review:

**OBSERVATION** involves asking the question, *What do I see?*

**INTERPRETATION** involves asking the question, *What does this mean?*

**APPLICATION** asks the question, *What does this mean to me?*

---

### **OBSERVATION: A Closer LOOK**

---

- A. Accurate Interpretation and correct Application are based on good Observation.
  1. So it's extremely important to develop your observation skills.
  2. It takes time to become efficient but it becomes more natural the more you do it.
- B. Begin with prayer, asking the Lord to open our minds to understand. (Luke 24:45)
- C. Pay attention to 'words':
  1. Words of CONTRAST: (showing things that are different or opposite)
    - a. The word 'but' can be a clue – 2Tim. 1:7
    - b. Thoughts can also show contrast - 1 Thess. 5:5
    - c. Other possible clue words: 'however' or 'nonetheless'
  2. Words of COMPARISON: (showing things that are similar or alike)
    - a. Some clue words: 'like' or 'as'
    - b. What truth is found in this comparison? 2 Tim. 2:3
  3. Words showing TIME or SEQUENCE:
    - a. Some clue words: 'then' or 'after this' or 'until' or 'when'
    - b. Which time words are in Col. 3:4?
  4. Words indicating a CONCLUSION or SUMMARY: 'therefore' or 'thus'
  5. Words indicating a RESULT or PURPOSE: 'for' or 'so that' or 'that' or 'for this reason'
  6. Exercise #1: Find all the clue words in 2 Tim. 1:3-12

D. Use your Observation skills to answer this question: Did Samuel really appear in 1 Sam. 28:7-25

E. Let's do some more work using OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION: Don't forget to take note of the clue words! Ephesians 1:3-12

---

### Using OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

---

Answer the following questions by finding the answers that God gives in His Word. *(These also happen to be questions and answers that you can use to help someone who is searching for truth!)*

1. How can I know that God exists?

John 1:18

John 14:9

John 20:28-31

Romans 1:20

John 8:47 (& John 10:27)

2. How can I know that the Bible is true?

Ps 119:160

Ps 33:4

John 17:17

1 Thessalonians 2:13

2 Timothy 2:15

James 1:18

Ephesians 1:13

3. If a person does the best he can, will he go to heaven?

Ephesians 2:8-9

Romans 3:20, 27-28

Romans 4:2-5

2 Timothy 1:9

---

### Using APPLICATION

---

1. Some questions to ask for APPLICATION:

*What can I learn from this passage about God:*

God the Father?

God the Son?

God the Holy Spirit?

*What can I learn from this passage about me:*

A Command?

A Promise?

A Truth to Absorb?

2. Remember:

*TO KNOW* – Is there something God wants me to know, some truth or principle?

*TO FEEL* – Is there something God wants me to feel? (Maybe sorrow over sin?)

*TO DO* – Is there something God wants me to do or to avoid, some command?

An Exercise for APPLICATION: Psalm 73 (May write on back)

---

**Putting it all together: OBSERVE      INTERPRET      APPLY**

---

USE THIS PASSAGE: *Titus 2:11-14*

OBSERVATION (I see?)  
WHAT DOES IT SAY?

INTERPRETATION  
WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

APPLICATION  
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME?