

# Inductive Bible Study

God's eternal, inerrant Word is your guidebook for all of life, and inductive study gives you the key to understanding that guide. Inductive study, a method that brings you directly to the Word of God apart from another's understanding or interpretation of the text, involves three skills: **observation**, **interpretation**, and **application**.

## OBSERVATION *discover what it says*

### 1 Begin with Prayer

Prayer is often the missing element in Bible study. You are about to learn the most effective method of Bible study there is. Yet apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, that's all it will be—a method.

### 2 Ask the "5 W's and an H"

As you study any passage of Scripture, train yourself to constantly ask: **Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?** These questions are the building blocks of precise **observation**, which is essential for accurate **interpretation**.

## The Inductive Marking Approach

IN THE EPISTLES, MARK EVERY REFERENCE TO THE AUTHOR IN ONE COLOR, AND EVERY REFERENCE TO THE RECIPIENTS IN ANOTHER

Chapter 5 Theme Be Humble & Sober; Resist & Stand Firm

5 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, 2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness;

3 nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

5 You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble.

6 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

7 casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.

8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

9 But resist him, be firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

10 After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

11 To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

12 Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!

13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greeting, and so does my son, Mark.

14 Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.

Peter  
1. exhorts the elders, v.1  
2. a fellow elder, v.1  
3. witness of Christ's sufferings, v.1  
4. partaker of the glory to be revealed, v.1  
5. regards Silvanus a faithful brother, v.12  
6. has written to them briefly, v.12  
7. calls Mark his son, v.13

IDENTIFY LISTS

MARK KEY WORDS AND SYNONYMS, SUCH AS GOD, CHRIST, DEVIL, SUFFERING

MARK CONTRASTS

MARK TERMS OF CONCLUSION

MARK COMPARISONS

MARK EXPRESSIONS OF TIME

DOUBLE-UNDERLINE IN GREEN ALL GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS

MAKE LISTS FROM KEY WORDS AND PEOPLE—COMPILE IN THE MARGIN

### 3 Mark key words and phrases (see figure at left)

A key word is one that is essential to the text. Key words and phrases are repeated in order to convey the author's point or purpose for writing. For example, notice that some form of the word **suffering** is used three times in 1 Peter 5. Key words can be marked using symbols, colors, or a combination of the two.

### 4 Make lists

Making lists can be one of the most enlightening things you do as you study. Lists reveal truths and highlight important concepts. 1 Peter 5:2,3, for example, contains a simple list regarding the role of the elder, shown by numbering the items in the text. It is also helpful to make a list of what you learn about each key word or person you mark.

### 5 Watch for contrasts and comparisons

Contrasts and comparisons use highly descriptive language to make it easier to remember what you've learned. For example, Peter compares the devil to a roaring lion in verse 8. Peter also contrasts God's attitude toward the proud and the humble.

### 6 Note expressions of time

The relationship of events in time often sheds light on the true meaning of the text. Marking them will help you see the sequence or timing of events and lead to accurate interpretation of Scripture.

### 7 Geographic Locations

Often it's helpful to mark geographical locations, which tell you where an event takes place.

### 8 Mark terms of conclusion

Words such as "therefore," "thus," and "for this reason" indicate that a conclusion or summary is being made. You may want to underline them in the text.

### 9 Identify chapter themes

The theme of a chapter will center on the main person, event, teaching, or subject of that section of Scripture. Themes are often revealed by reviewing the key words and lists you developed. Try to express the theme as briefly as possible, using words found in the text.

# INTERPRETATION *discover what it means*

While **observation** leads to an accurate understanding of what the Word of God *says*, **interpretation** goes a step further and helps you understand what it *means*. As you seek to interpret the Bible accurately, the following guidelines will be helpful:

## 1 Remember that context rules.

If you lay the solid foundation of observation, you will be prepared to consider each verse in the light of the surrounding verses, the book in which it is found, and the entire Word of God. As you study, ask yourself: Is my interpretation of this passage of Scripture consistent with the theme, purpose, and structure of the book in which it is found? Is it consistent with other Scripture about the same subject? Am I considering the historic and cultural context? Never take a Scripture out of its context to make it say what you want it to say. Discover what the author is saying; don't add to his meaning.

## 2 Always seek the full counsel of the Word of God.

When you know God's Word thoroughly, you will not accept a teaching simply because someone has used one or two isolated verses to support it. You will be able to discern whether a teaching is biblical or not. Saturate yourself in the Word of God; it is your safeguard against wrong doctrine.

## 3 Remember that Scripture will never contradict Scripture.

Remember, all Scripture is inspired by God. Therefore, Scripture will never contradict itself. Sometimes, however, you may find it difficult to reconcile two seemingly contradictory truths taught in Scripture, such as the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Don't take a teaching to an extreme that God doesn't. Simply humble your heart in faith and believe what God says, even if you can't fully understand or reconcile it at the moment.

## 4 Don't base your convictions on an obscure passage of Scripture.

An obscure passage is one in which the meaning is unclear or not easily understood. Because these passages are difficult to understand even when proper principles of interpretation are used, they should not be used as a basis for establishing doctrine.

## 5 Interpret Scripture literally.

God spoke to us that we might know truth. Therefore, take the Word of God at face value—in its natural, normal sense. Look first for the clear teaching of Scripture, not a hidden meaning. Understand and recognize figures of speech and interpret them accordingly.

Consider what is being said in the light of its literary style. For example, you will find more similes and metaphors in poetical and prophetic literature than in historical or biographical books. Interpret portions of Scripture according to their literary style.

Some literary styles in the Bible are: Historical—Acts, Exodus; Prophetic—Revelation, Isaiah; Biographical—Luke; Didactic (teaching)—Romans; Poetic—Psalms; Epistle (letter)—2 Timothy; Proverbial—Proverbs

## 6 Look for the single meaning of the passage.

Always try to understand what the author had in mind when you interpret a portion of the Bible. Don't twist verses to support a meaning that is not clearly taught. Unless the author of a particular book indicates that there is another meaning to what he says, let the passage speak for itself.

# APPLICATION *discover how it works*

The first step in application is to find out what the Word of God says on any particular subject through accurate observation and correct interpretation of the text. Once you understand what the Word of God teaches, you are then obligated before God to accept that truth and to live by it.

Scripture will always teach what is right, show us where we are wrong, how to correct, and train us in right living; so that we are complete, fully equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

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