

The Techniques of Study

3 Simple Steps for Studying the Bible

Course Overview

On this course you will learn:

- The first roadblock to overcome so you can successfully learn anything.
- The three barriers to study that can prevent your understanding of a subject—and the precise tools to overcome these barriers.
- How to learn and fully understand any subject you choose.

Simply reading (Roadblock #1) the Bible is not the same as studying. Christianity holds that the Bible is the divine word of God and therefore deserves respect (Roadblock #2). The Bible is one of the most misinterpreted (Roadblock #3) books ever written, and most people find it to be very hard to understand. A long time and many cultures were involved between the time of the Bible's composition and the modern age. If you struggle with where to start with your Bible reading, how often to read your Bible or how much to read at one sitting, or how to get things out of it, this lesson can help.

One of the noblest pursuits a child of God can embark upon is to get to know and understand God better. The best way we can accomplish this is to look carefully at the book He has written, the Bible, which communicates who He is and His plan for mankind.

3 Simple Steps for Studying the Bible

There are a number of ways we can study the Bible, but one of the most effective and simple approaches to reading and understanding God's Word involves three simple steps:

Step 1: Observation—What does the passage say?

Step 2: Interpretation—What does the passage mean?

Step 3: Application—What am I going to do about what the passage says and means?

Step #1: Observation

Observation is the first and most important step in the process. As you read the Bible text, you need to look carefully at what is said, and how it is said. Look for:

- *Terms, not words.* Words can have many meanings, but terms are words used in a specific way in a specific context. (For instance, the word *trunk* could apply to a tree, a car, or a storage box. However, when you read, “That tree has a very large trunk,” you know exactly what the word means, which makes it a term.)
- *Structure.* If you look at your Bible, you will see that the text has units called paragraphs (indented or marked ¶). A paragraph is a complete unit of thought. You can discover the content of the author’s message by noting and understanding each paragraph unit.
- *Emphasis.* The amount of space or the number of chapters or verses devoted to a specific topic will reveal the importance of that topic (for example, note the emphasis of [Romans 9](#) and [Psalms 119](#)).
- *Repetition.* This is another way an author demonstrates that something is important. One reading of [1 Corinthians 13](#), where the author uses the word “love” nine times in only 13 verses, communicates to us that love is the focal point of these 13 verses.
- *Relationships between ideas.* Pay close attention, for example, to certain relationships that appear in the text:

—Cause-and-effect: “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things” ([Matthew 25:21](#)).

—*ifs* and *thens*: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land” ([2 Chronicles 7:14](#)).

—Questions and answers: “Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty” ([Psalms 24:8](#)).

- *Comparisons and contrasts.* For example, “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you...” ([Matthew 5:21](#)).
- *Literary form.* The Bible is literature, and the three main types of literature in the Bible are discourse (the epistles), prose (Old Testament history), and poetry (the [Psalms](#)). Considering the type of literature makes a great deal of difference when you read and interpret the Scriptures.
- *Atmosphere.* The author had a particular reason or burden for writing each passage, chapter, and book. Be sure you notice the mood or tone or urgency of the writing.

After you have considered these things, you then are ready to ask the “W” questions

Who? What? Where? When?

Who are the people in this passage? What is happening in this passage?

Where is this story taking place? When in time (of day, of the year, in history) is it?

Asking these four “W” questions can help you notice terms and identify atmosphere. The answers will also enable you to use your imagination to recreate the scene you’re reading about.

As you answer the “W” questions and imagine the event, you’ll probably come up with some questions of your own.

Asking those additional questions for understanding will help to build a bridge between observation (the first step) and interpretation (the second step) of the Bible study process.

Step #2: Interpretation

Interpretation is discovering the meaning of a passage, the author’s main thought or idea. Answering the questions that arise during observation will

help you in the process of interpretation. Five clues (called “the five C’s”) can help you determine the author’s main point(s):

- **Context.** You can answer 75 percent of your questions about a passage when you read the text. Reading the text involves looking at the near context (the verse immediately before and after) as well as the far context (the paragraph or the chapter that precedes and/or follows the passage you’re studying).
- **Cross-references.** Let Scripture interpret Scripture. That is, let other passages in the Bible shed light on the passage you are looking at. At the same time, be careful not to assume that the same word or phrase in two different passages means the same thing.
- **Culture.** The Bible was written long ago, so when we interpret it, we need to understand it from the writers’ cultural context.
- **Conclusion.** Having answered your questions for understanding by means of context, cross-reference, and culture, you can make a preliminary statement of the passage’s meaning. Remember that if your passage consists of more than one paragraph, the author may be presenting more than one thought or idea.
- **Consultation.** Reading books known as commentaries, which are written by Bible scholars, can help you interpret Scripture.

Step #3: Application

Application is why we study the Bible. We want our lives to change; we want to be obedient to God and to grow more like Jesus Christ. After we have observed a passage and interpreted or understood it to the best of our ability, we must then apply its truth to our own life.

You’ll want to ask the following questions of every passage of Scripture you study:

- How does the truth revealed here affect my relationship with God?
- How does this truth affect my relationship with others?
- How does this truth affect me?
- How does this truth affect my response to the enemy, Satan?

The application step is not completed by simply answering these questions; the key is putting into practice what God has taught you in your study. Although at any given moment you cannot be consciously applying everything you're learning in Bible study, you can be consciously applying something. And when you work on applying a truth to your life, God will bless your efforts by, as noted earlier, conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ.

What Book to Start with first?

Consider reading John first. It's best to start with John, as it's the easiest Gospel to read, identifies who Jesus really is, and prepares you for the other 3. It would help to read it 2 or 3 times to get a good understanding of the author, topic, context, and characters. Read 3 chapters per day. Concentrate on your reading. and be patient.

- When you're done with John, move on to Mark, Matthew, and Luke. As those tend to be the next easiest material. Read all the books - one after the other- until you have read all the Gospels.
- When you're done with the Gospels, consider reading the letters from Romans to Jude. Because Revelation is pure prophecy not covered in the New Testament, stay out of there for now. When you get a good familiarity with the major prophets, then tackle Revelation. Then read the rest of the New Testament books as a matter of choice.

Have a Bible notebook/journal. This will keep you accountable to reading everyday. Also, ask yourself questions and write them down in your Bible notebook. Use the "who", "what", "when", "where", "why", and "how" formula for your studies. For instance, "Who was there?", "What was happening?", "Where is this happening?", "How did it turn out?". This simple formula will make the story make sense.

Highlight important stuff or things you really like in your own bible. But don't do this if it belongs to someone else.

Follow the references in your Study Bible back to the first time it was used. This is where a chain reference Bible is essential.

Find a Bible study group. Find a group of people that you can study with. The text is very complicated and having some help to get through it will be very important. They will also help keep you motivated and inspired.

Move on to the Old Testament. The Old Testament is compiled in the order for convenience, not chronology. You can read it by groups to make things easier. There are 929 chapters in the Old Testament. If you read 3 per day, you will have read it in 10 months.

- Read Genesis. This is the creation and the early relationship with God.
- Move on to Exodus through Deuteronomy. This is the Law.
- Read the history books. Joshua through Esther.
- Following the history section, read the books of wisdom and poetry.
 - Job, often said to be the oldest book, shows how one man's relationship with God and man went, and is full of lessons on how it could have gone better. It's a great lesson on what God expects of man.
 - The Psalms is the writings of a king of Israel who was a man after God's own heart despite the fact that he was not only a sinner, but a convicted killer.
 - The Song of Solomon, also known as the Song of Songs, was written by King Solomon in his youth. It was a work of poetry by a young man in love. King Solomon was the wisest and wealthiest man in the world.
 - Proverbs was King Solomon's writings as an adult when he was King of Israel, and was learning his hard lessons.
 - Ecclesiastes was King Solomon's lamentations of a man who had spent his life on riotous living, many wives, concubines, wine, women and song. Ecclesiastes is the book of lessons of what not to do.
- Following the books of wisdom and poetry, get started in the 5 major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, & Daniel.
- Move on to the 12 minor prophets to finish the Old Testament.