

HOW TO INDUCTIVELY STUDY THE BIBLE

To grow as Jesus-followers, it's important that we learn to dig into the Word of God for ourselves and not depend solely on the instruction of others. Consider the challenge from the writer of Hebrews:

"Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." (Hebrews 5:13-14)

One of the best ways to get to the "solid food" of the Word is inductive Bible study. The inductive method makes observations on a passage and then draws conclusions based on those observations. Commonly, this method is defined by three parts: observation, interpretation, and application.

EIGHT STEPS OF INDUCTIVE STUDY

1. Background

First, do a basic background study on the book: Who is the author? Why was it written? Learn the historical background, dates, key people, and so on. Some Bibles have summaries at the beginning of each book provide some of this information. A Bible dictionary or commentary can also be helpful.

2. Personal Paraphrase

Starting with the first chapter, write out each verse or section of verses in your own words. This will help you understand each verse in wording that makes more sense to you.

Example using 1 Timothy 1:1 . . .

Original Verse - "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope . . ."

Personal Paraphrase - Paul, a proclaimer of Jesus, obeying the instructions of God who is the One who saves us, and of Jesus Christ who is our hope . . .

3. Questions and Answers

Write down questions you have about the passage and any terms that are unfamiliar or confusing to you. And then go find the answers and write those down.

Example using 1 Timothy 1:1 . . .

Q - What does the word "apostle" mean? What does it mean to be one?

A - The Greek word Apostolos comes from the verb apostello, which means "to send forth." So, to be an apostle means to be someone who is sent forth . . . in this case by Jesus to spread His message.

4. Cross References

Make a note of any similar or related passages that come to mind while exploring this one. Consult a concordance, study guides, or footnotes to collect related passages you may not have thought of.

Example using 1 Timothy 1:1 . . .

Apostle - 2 Corinthians 1:1

God my Savior - Luke 1:47, Titus 1:3

Christ our hope - Colossians 1:27

5. Insights

As your studying, if an observation or insight occurs to you relating to any part of the passage or its background, be sure to write it down.

After completing your own analysis, consult a Bible commentary for additional insights. Seeking out other believers' insights about the passage can provide a broader, more solid understanding of the passage than you might be able to come to on your own. Remember, don't go to commentaries first; start by making your own observations.

Example using 1 Timothy 1:1 . . .

Paul was commanded by God to be an apostle; it wasn't something he decided to do on his own.

6. Personal Application

Using all you've learned up to this point, take some time and think through how you're going to personally apply this verse to your life.

Example using 1 Timothy 1:1 . . .

Just like Paul, I need to recognize that I am tasked with being Christ's ambassador, authorized and sent out with a divine message. I can only be effective in my mission if I am aware of my status as a divinely appointed witness.

7. Title and Summarize

After completing your analysis of the verse(s), assign it a title and write a few sentence summary. This will help solidify the message in your mind.

8. Read the Living Word with Emotion

Don't stifle the living Word by reading it void of its emotion, mood, or context. Commit to reading the Word like a life-giving spirit. Take all the information you've learned, and mark up the passage to read it out loud as if you were the author speaking to a captive audience hanging on every word to survive, find hope, or know God. Read it to draw people into the passion of the passage.
