

How to Study The Bible

As we grow in Christ, 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 NIV).

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

Navigator Dwight Hill has broken this method into seven steps. Try it out on one of the short epistles—1 Thessalonians, Philippians, Colossians, or 1 or 2 Timothy.

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 that will provide some of this information. A Bible dictionary or online commentaries 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.

Here is an 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 . . ." (1 Timothy 1:1 NIV).

Personal Paraphrase:

Paul, a proclaimer of Jesus Christ, 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 some questions you have about the passage, or unfamiliar or confusing terms that you come across.

Example:

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 Christ to spread His message.

4) Cross References

Make a note of any similar or related passages that come to mind while you're reading, paraphrasing, and asking questions about the passage. Consult a concordance, other study guides, or footnotes to collect related passages you may not have thought of.

How to Study The Bible

Example:

Apostle: 2 Corinthians 1:1

God my Savior: Luke 1:47; Titus 1:3

Christ our hope: Colossians 1:27

5) Insights

If an observation occurs to you that relates to any part of the passage or its background, be sure to write it down.

Example:

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

After completing your own analysis, consult a Bible commentary for additional insight. 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.

6) Personal Application

Here is a possible application of 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 this verse-by-verse analysis of the chapter, assign it a title and identify a key verse or verses. This will help solidify the message of the chapter in your mind. Write a summary paragraph outlining the thesis of the chapter. Repeat the process for subsequent chapters. When the book is completed, give it a collective title.

Sadly, mediocrity is a hallmark of our age. Consider breaking that pattern and setting some high goals for your spiritual growth.

For example, you might say that within the next 10 years you will have studied a certain number of the books of the Bible in this manner—spending perhaps three hours a week to study (which is not to be a substitute for your “quiet time”—that is separate).

Motivational writer and speaker Zig Ziglar said, “Aim at nothing and you are sure to hit it.” Let's aim high in our goal to know God and be transformed by His Word. There is nothing greater.

“What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8 NIV).

Sources:

- Discipleship Journal, Issue 90 (1995).
- Facts of the Matter, a publication of The Navigators. Written by Dwight Hill.

<https://www.navigators.org/resource/how-to-study-the-bible/>