



USING THE INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY METHOD

STEP 1) OBSERVATION

Observation answers the question: *What does God's Word say?* (Not what you *think* it says...but what does it *actually* say?) What do you see in the actual content in the text?

Before we consider what the text means, we must ask what it says. This means *reading and re-reading* a text until we become acquainted with it. Observation is the process of seeing and taking notice of things as they really are in the passage you're studying. You want to look for facts like a detective uncovering clues by asking good questions of the Scripture using "who, what, when, where, why, and how" questions. Soak up as much as you can and write down your observations and facts; this takes time, so look carefully and don't rush through it.

Consider who, what, when, where, why and how...

- Who is writing? To whom are they writing? Who are the people involved in this scene?
- What is happening in this scene? What's being said? Is there a lesson to learn? Is there a command to obey? Is there a promise to claim? Is there a sin to avoid? Is there a blessing to enjoy? Is there an exhortation, a rebuke, a question, an answer, a prayer, a quotation of another passage of Scripture? What's the main point? What key words or phrases are used? What's the context? What literary style is being used? Is it narrative, conversation, parable, prophecy, poetry, a letter, or a sermon?
- When? Are there any references to time or date; any words related to the past or future? Look for words like after, until, then...
- Where? Are there any locations mentioned—towns, roads, rivers, mountains, regions, or other landmarks?
- Why? Are there any clues about why things are being said or done?
- How? Is there an explanation about how things are done or a process or any cause-and-effect statements? How is Jesus reflected in this passage?

STEP 2) INTERPRETATION

Interpretation answers the questions:

What does God's Word mean?

What did God mean by what He said?

Our goal is to discover the original intent and meaning of the author. Paul writes, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). In the original Greek language, "correctly handles" literally means "cutting a straight line". As in cutting material in a straight line in order to make a garment or a tent, our interpretation of Scripture needs to be precise and accurate so that it will all fit together without contradiction.

- Don't overanalyze the "main things and the plain things"
- A golden rule of interpretation: "*If the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense or it will result in nonsense.*" D. Cooper, Biblical Research Society

STEP 3) APPLICATION

Application answers the question:

What does it mean to me?

Bible study doesn't end with interpretation; it continues to the question, *So what?* The goal of studying the Bible is not only to gain information but also to **experience transformation**: A changed life!

Once we've completed the observation and interpretation steps, we can now apply the lessons from the passage and put God's Word into practice in our life. The benefit of Bible study comes in *obeying the voice of God*—receiving what He has said and putting it into practice. These questions in the form of an acronym can help you apply the Word to your life:

S – Is there a **sin** for me to avoid?

P – Is there a **promise** from God for me to claim?

E – Is there an **example** for me to follow?

C – Is there a **command** for me to obey?

K – How can this passage help me to **know** God or Jesus Christ better?

STEP 4) RESPONSE

Response answers the question:

How will I apply God's Word to my life?

Here's where we get very specific and give some feet and legs to our lesson. Remember that you're not simply filling in the blanks on a lesson page or making note of another great lesson. You're responding to God, and your response should be motivated by the fact that God loves you, and your desire to please and glorify Him.

Be specific in your personal response to the Scripture: *When will I apply this to my life? How will I apply this to my life and in what area of my life? With whom?* You may also want to date your response and have someone hold you accountable to follow through with it.

"Biblically speaking, true learning only takes place when it changes the way you live!" ~ John Tolson

Inductive Bible Study Methods adapted from writings of Kay Arthur, Howard Hendricks, Robert M. West, Anne Graham Lotz, The Navigators Bible Study Handbook, and Dr. John F. Tolson.