

Inductive Method of Scripture Study

Pray

Pray that God would open up the scriptures to you and invite the Holy Spirit into your reading.

Observation – What Does the Passage Say?

The first phase isn't about interpretation - it's simply about observing what the text is saying. Pretend you're an investigator and you're just gathering the facts. It's critical at this stage not to add anything to the text or take anything away. Avoid the temptation to try to make the text "mean" anything just yet. Observe what's there, and document it.

- Ask the "5 W's and an H" -- Who, what, when, where, why? And how?
- Mark key words and phrases
- Find repeated words and phrases
- Write down your questions
- Words repeated multiple times in a passage
- Anything that can be put into a list
- Words that indicate a change in topic or time
- Words that contrast one thing against another
- Words that indicate cause and effect

Write it all down and once you feel like you have a good idea of what's happening in the text, it's time to move on to the next step: interpretation.

Interpretation – What Does the Passage Mean?

During the interpretation phase we start to look at **what the text means**. Your job at this stage is to discover what the author is trying to communicate. And to do this, you need to look at the context. Here are a few questions you can ask:

- What are the major themes?
- Can you break the text into multiple ideas or sections?
- Can you answer any of your questions?
- What is the author's motivation in recording these stories?
- Are there other parts of the Bible that the author might be referencing or alluding to? What does that reference or allusion say about the meaning of the text?

Here are some helpful guidelines for interpreting scripture:

- Don't "twist" Scripture—meaning, don't manipulate the text to get it to say something you'd like for it to say. This is a dishonest way to interpret the text.
- Look for the plainest interpretation first. Believe that the text means what it says. Sometimes there will be figurative language and confusing imagery, but don't start by looking for hidden meaning. Start with the obvious.
- Scripture interprets Scripture. Allow the Bible to help you understand other passages of the Bible. Where similar words are used, explore the context of each of those instances.
- Start thinking about how this passage connects to the broader themes of the Bible

Application – What Does the Passage Mean for My Life?

We don't study the Bible just to gain knowledge. We study to gain knowledge so we know how to live our lives in light of what we've learned. Now that we've observed and interpreted what the passage has to say, it's time to talk about what it means for us. How do we apply what we just learned to everyday life?

Based on what you've learned, what does this passage mean for you? Here are some questions and considerations for this section:

- What did you personally like or dislike about the text?
- Did any section in particular stand out to you? Why do you think that section spoke to you?
- How can you apply the themes or ideas to your life?
- If you've uncovered truth you've not known or understood before, what does it mean for your life, priorities, and decisions now that you do understand it?
- Are there truths in this passage that come in conflict with how you live your life?

Honest application of the text requires these kinds of questions and the wrestling of ideas when truth causes conflict. It might be tempting to stop at the interpretation phase, but you'll be selling yourself and Scripture short if you do.

Take the time to dive into the application step. It's worth it.