

# **A Basic Bible Study Method**

**A 4-Step Process**

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1. **Observation** - just look at the passage to see what it is there.
2. **Interpretation** - what did the author mean by what he was saying and how would the recipients have understood it. (there is only one correct interpretation)
3. **Application** - Take the truth and apply it. What does it teach us about God? What does it teach us about ourselves? And with that knowledge how should I now live differently?
4. **Correlation** - Developing the mind of Christ. Building a library of understanding.

*Personal Bible study has one aim - "Life Change!"*

### **STEP ONE: OBSERVATION: What do I See? What is there?**

**Psalm 119:18 - "Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law."**

#### **A. QUESTIONS? QUESTIONS? QUESTIONS? WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN? WHY? WHEREFORE?**

The ability to see is a developed process - Sherlock Holmes said - "You see, but you do not observe."

- **Key ability** - Learning how to read better. "How to Read a Book" by Mortimer J. Adler
- **Key Gift** - The Holy Spirit's role in illuminating the Scriptures

#### **B. Things to look for:**

- |                            |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Literary form           | 2. Author                      |
| 3. Setting                 | 4. Key words                   |
| 5. People involved         | 6. Geographical setting        |
| 7. Repeated Themes         | 8. O.T. references in the N.T. |
| 9. Repeated words          | 10. Things that are alike      |
| 11. Things that are unlike | 12. Things that are emphasized |
| 13. Atmosphere             | 14. Theme                      |
| 15. Grammatical Structure  |                                |

## **STEP TWO: INTERPRETATION: "What did he mean by what he said?"**

Here you ask and answer the questions, What did the writer mean? How would the recipients of the letter have understood it? *Your central quest is for meaning.*

**Why we have to work hard to get a proper understanding:**

### **Barriers to Interpretation:**

The Cultural Gap  
The Grammatical Gap  
The Literary Gap  
Figures of speech

### **A. SOME METHODS OF INTERPRETATION**

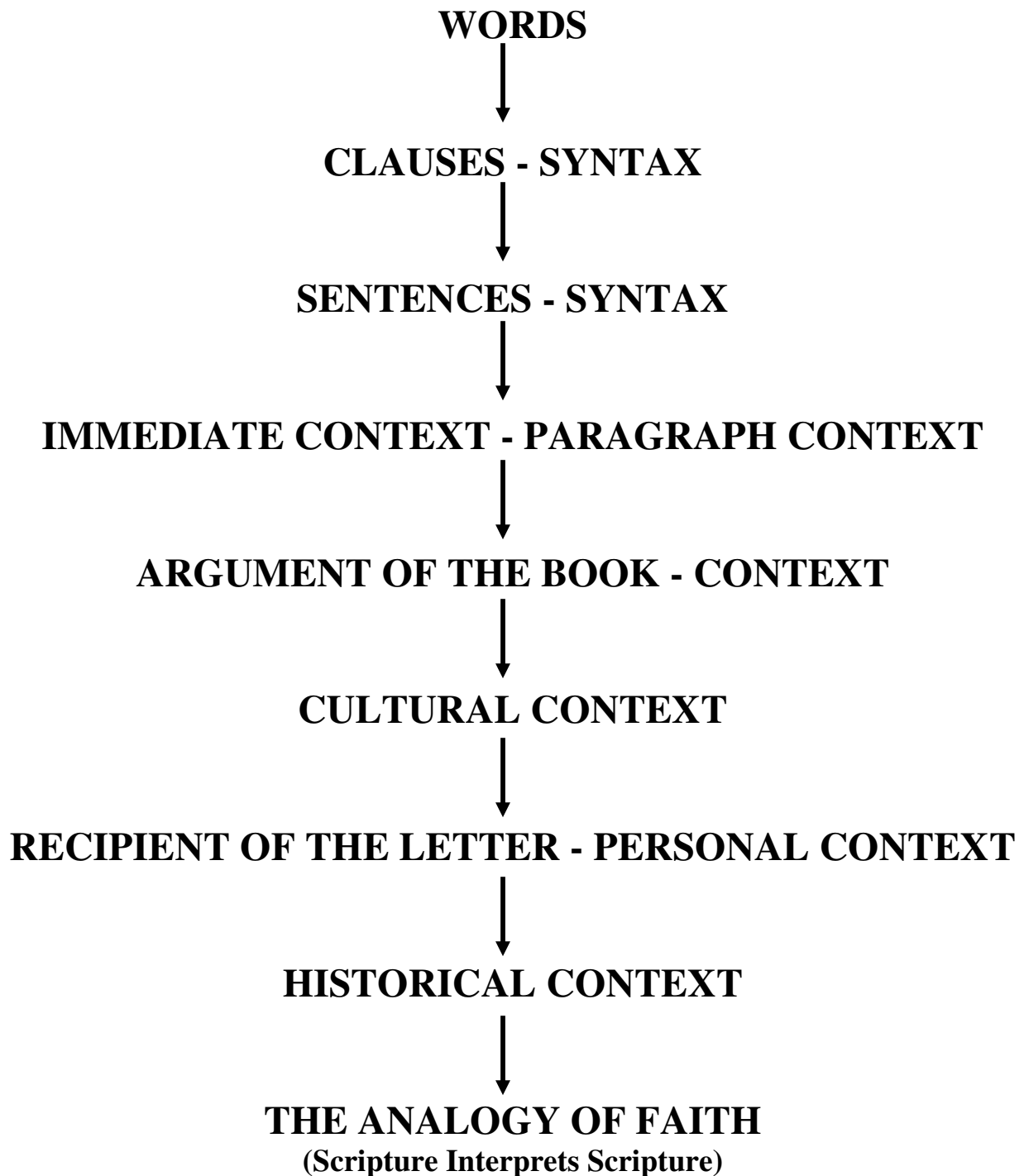
1. **Allegorical** - The Bible is a spiritual book full of allegory or spiritual hidden meaning.
2. **Traditional** - How the church has interpreted it (i.e. Roman Catholic view)
3. **Rationalistic** - No miracles, it has to be scientific, we have to be able to understand it through human reason.
4. **Subjective** - What does it mean to me? (Neoorthodoxy)
5. **Historical-Grammatical-plain literal** - Allowing the words to speak for themselves as we would in normal usage of words in literature.

### **B. THE PROCESS OF PLAIN LITERAL INTERPRETATION**

**1. Plain Literal Interpretation Defined:** Whenever we read a book, an essay, or a poem we presume the literal sense in the document until the nature of the literature may force us to another level. This is the only conceivable method of beginning or commencing to understand literature of all kinds. Always take a passage in its plain literal sense unless there is a good reason for doing otherwise. When people communicate they always have one thing in mind that they are trying to communicate.

2. **Two Types of Literal**
  - i. Plain literal
  - ii. Figurative literal
3. **Steps in the Process**
  - i. Words
  - ii. Clauses
  - iii. Sentences (1-3 = Syntax)
  - iv. Immediate Context
  - v. Argument to the book (larger context)
  - vi. Who was it written to
  - vii. Cultural context
  - viii. Historical context
  - ix. The Analogy of Faith (Scripture interprets Scripture)

# The Process of Plain Literal Interpretation



## SOME HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS OF INTERPRETIVE STEPS

### STEPS FOR A WORD STUDY

#### I. Necessary Tools:

##### A. *Concordance*

1. New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance or
2. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance

##### B. *N.T. Word Studies*

1. Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words
2. Lawrence Richard's Expository Dictionary of Bible Words

##### C. *O.T. Word Studies*

1. Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (T.W.O.T.)

##### D. *Topical Bible*

1. Nave's Topical Bible
2. Topical Analysis of the Bible by Elwell

#### II. Steps in a Word Study

1. Select a key word (from observation phase)
2. Go to a concordance
  - i. Find the term in the concordance
  - ii. Check number next to term
  - iii. Turn to dictionary at end of concordance
    - a) O.T. words = Hebrew dictionary
    - b) N.T. words = Greek dictionary
  - iv. Find number in dictionary and determine Hebrew or Greek word.
3. Use Richards/Vines to look up Hebrew or Greek term found in concordance dictionary.
  - For O.T. terms use number index in T.W.O.T. to look up term.
4. Topical Study - Look word up in Nave's Topical Bible and study words in other passages.

\*Admittedly, word studies involve effort and time. However, the "payoff" is well worth the struggle. Often understanding a word's meaning in a certain context will open up the passage to you. Keep plugging, the result will be "learning to live according to Scripture."

### **STEP THREE: APPLICATION: "How does it work?"**

To much Bible study begins and ends in the wrong place: It begins with interpretation and it also ends there. We need to be reminded; start with the question - "What does it say?"[Observation] Then move to - "What does it mean?"[Interpretation] And then finish with - "How does this work?" [Application]

#### **Truth Is Meant to Be Attractive:**

Psalm 1:1-3; 119:1-7

We must allow God's word to get into us, to make a permanent difference in our character and conduct.

#### **Four Substitutes for Application:**

1. We substitute interpretation for application  
We settle for knowledge rather than experience. From cover to cover the Bible teaches that the moment you know God's truth the ball is in your court; you are responsible for putting it into action. (cf. Jas. 4:17; Lk. 6:46)
2. We substitute superficial obedience for substantive life-change.  
We apply truth where we are already doing a good job. We don't look deeply at ourselves.(Eph. 4:25)
3. We substitute rationalization for repentance.  
Most of us have a built-in early-warning system against spiritual change. The moment truth gets too close, too convicting, an alarm goes off, and we start to defend ourselves. Our favorite strategy is to rationalize sin instead of repenting of it.
4. We substitute an emotional experience for a volitional decision.  
In other words, we study the word of God, we emote under impact but we make no real change (Jas. 1:21-25).

#### **We Need To Look in The Mirror**

The apostle James asks a penetrating question the first chapter of his book: Does the word work? Answer; Yes, it does, if it is received (v. 21). He uses an interesting word. It basically means to put out a welcome mat. Do you welcome the truth into your life? Do you invite it in the door and let it do its work on you? (cf. 1:23-25)

#### **Four Steps in Application:**

##### **1. Know**

1<sup>st</sup> Step - **Know the text.** You have to know the interpretation of the biblical text. Application is based on interpretation, so if your interpretation of a passage is wrong, your application will likely be faulty.

2<sup>nd</sup> Step - **Know Yourself.** In 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul warns Timothy, "Pay close attention to yourself and your teaching." Notice the order: yourself first, then, to the communication of that truth to others. Why? Because if you don't know yourself, it's difficult to help other people apply the Bible to their lives.(cf. Rom. 12:3)

##### **2. Relate**

Once we know the truth of the word of God we must relate it to our experience. Take a spiritual inventory of your life. (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17)

##### **3. Meditate**

We saw that meditation was a useful step in observation It is absolutely essential to the step of application. Remember Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:1-2? Both of those passages said that the key to spiritual prosperity is to meditate on the word day and night. In other words, we're to weave Scripture into the fabric of everyday living.

##### **4. Practice**

The ultimate goal of Bible study is to practice the truth, to have the truth transform our lives. Paul uses athletic language all through his writings. He calls us to run the race to win the prize. The prize is Christlikeness. To win the prize we must practice. That is the call of God on our lives. That is what He saved us for - "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son," Rom. 8:29

## PRINCIPLES IN APPLICATION OF BIBLICAL TRUTH

*Application/Obedience* is the process whereby the interpretation of the Biblical Text is evaluated and principles or timeless truths are drawn from the Scriptures and applied to SPECIFIC SITUATIONS in MY LIFE through the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination. Application/Obedience is the next progression in inductive Bible study following the first two steps of: 1. Observation and 2. Interpretation.

### I. DETERMINING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CULTURAL/TEMPORAL TRUTHS AND PRINCIPLES/TIMELESS TRUTHS.

**A. *Cultural/Temporal Truths*** - are those truths which specifically apply to the culture within which they were written. A key question in gaining any biblical truth is, "what did it teach?" If it teaches something related to the specific culture within which it was written, it is probably temporal.

Suggestions for determining Biblical truth which may or may not be transferable to our culture:

1. Certain situations, commands or principles pertain to an individual's specific non-repeatable circumstances. These are non-moral, non-theological subjects and therefore non-transferable. e.g.: Matt. 21:2-3 - Jesus' need of a donkey; 2 Tim. 4:11 - commands for Timothy to bring Paul's cloak; Heb. 7:12 - Change of priesthood-change of law.
2. Certain situations or commands which are repeatable or continuous. These are moral and theological topics. They are repeated elsewhere in Scripture and are transferable. e.g.: Prov. 3:5-6 - Acknowledge Lord & live according to Scripture compare to 2 Tim. 3:16-17; John 3:3 - One must be born again - compare with 1 Peter 1:3; 1 Peter 5:6-7. Also Old Testament themes that are taught in the New Testament.

**B. *Principles/Timeless Truths*** - Are those which transcend time and culture. They find their source in the unchanging God; His character, desires, and expectations from His people. Key question in timeless truths are:

1. What does the text teach [interpretation]?
2. Does this teaching relate to God's character?
3. Does this teaching relate to man's character?
4. Does this teaching relate to our revelation in Scripture of Jesus?

An example of a principle/ timeless truth stated in Scripture is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

### C. *Warnings in Formulation of Principles/Timeless Truths*

1. Going beyond normal interpretation (allegorizing, spiritualizing or just coming off the wall.)
2. Turning temporal truths into principles/timeless truths (remember temporal truths are for the historical culture, not today.)
3. Excluding or omitting principles / timeless truths.

## II. EVALUATION AND EXAMPLES

### A. *Evaluation*

This phase of the study seeks to determine the difference between a principle/timeless and cultural/temporary truth. In Scripture there are often 'cultural trappings' which are not applicable to our society and close evaluation of the text helps you to distinguish what is and is not applicable for today's society.

### B. *Examples: Principles/Timeless Truths*

The principles/Timeless truth is the formulation drawn from the interpretation.

<b>Observation</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Principle/Timeless Truth</b>
Numbers 15:32-36 An Israelite who gathers wood on the Sabbath will be stoned.	If an Israelite does not follow God's command explicitly, God will discipline him for disobedience.	God disciplines disobedience in believers.

### ***Application/Obedience***

Today I will: 1) realize God hates disobedience and I will honor the requests of my boss at work with a proper attitude today.  
2) not respond in anger when I am asked to do something I believe is insignificant like carrying boxes for the other office employees.

The principles/timeless truths are derived from your observations and interpretation of the Biblical text. Your applications of these principles is through the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination of the principle [the word of God] to *specific situations in your life*.

**C. Application/Obedience** - are the principles/timeless truths stated to motivate a person to specific actions or obedience.

A definition for application/obedience could be: "A basic way to implement the principle/timeless truth in my life." After formulating the principle/timeless truth, the question becomes "What does it mean for me today?" It becomes a "now" statement.

In the formulation of a principle you should specify cause and effect. Here are a few suggestions which are helpful in the formulation of principles.

- a) Make it an action statement; "I should...."
  - b) Make it a cause-effect statement; "If \_\_\_\_\_ then I will..."
  - c) Make it a simple statement of truth; "God wants me to ..."
  - d) Make it a statement of fact: "I now know this \_\_\_\_\_ about God."
1. Obedience defined - "My personal putting into practice, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the principles/timeless truths of Scripture in *my specific life situations*."
  2. Method to follow ....**Be Specific In Your Applications/Obedience**
    - a) Ask "**WHAT**" will you have to subtract from your life to obey?
    - b) Ask "**WHAT**" will you have to add to your life to obey?
    - c) Next ask, "**HOW**" will this addition or subtraction be accomplished?"  
**BE SPECIFIC!!!**
    - d) Then ask, "**WHEN**" will this addition or subtraction be accomplished?"  
**BE SPECIFIC!!!**
    - e) Follow through and **EVALUATE** your application/obedience.  
**BE SPECIFIC!!!**

### **III. PROPER AND IMPROPER MEANS OF APPLICATION/OBEDIENCE**

- A. The Improper Way - Attempting to obey God's truth in your own power. Attempting to obey the word of God without the Spirit of God is fleshly legalism [see Paul's letter to the Galatians].
- B. The Proper Way - Is to depend on God's Spirit to illumine His word in your study, showing you the specific application of God's word/Truth in your life setting. God's word and Spirit must operate together for any believer to accomplish God's purposes (Col. 1:28-29).

**IV. APPLICATION/OBEDIENCE: ABUNDANT LIVING... SET FREE!!!**

This is the point where life becomes the adventure God intended. The fruit of the believer's study is illumined and experience in their life. This is the juncture where knowledge (Biblical truth & intellect) becomes wisdom (the application/obedience of Biblical truth to specific situations) through the Holy Spirit's illumination. The application of Biblical truth to specific situations allows the believer to be saved from the power of sin and Satan's lies and experience the abundant life.

**STEP FOUR: CORRELATION: "Developing a Biblical World View"**

This is the life long journey of developing a Biblical world-view. It is learning to live according to Scripture.

Correlation is taking the truth you have learned from the inductive study of Scripture, categorizing it, and seeing how it interrelates to the overall teaching of that particular subject at hand. A person needs to coordinate their findings to gain a complete concept of the message of the Bible. This is a lifetime process.

**I. THE GOAL OF CORRELATION**

- A. Develop a Biblical Theology - As one correlates different topics they begin to develop a Biblical theology on that issue. Remember: The Bible is interrelated and all of theology is interrelated.
- B. Develop a Biblical View of Life - Correlation will enable you to develop a Biblical view of life. It will strengthen your movement from particulars (induction) to generalization (broad). God's word will begin to be weaved into the fabric of your life and applied in various and specific situations.

**II. TYPES OF CORRELATION**

- A. Theological Topics

The categories are arranged according to major theological topics:

- |                                     |                              |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1) Bible (Bibliology)               | 4) Salvation (Soteriology)   |
| 2) God (Theology Proper)            | 5) Church (Ecclesiology)     |
| 3) Sin-Angels-Satan<br>(Angelology) | 6) Last Things (Eschatology) |
|                                     | 7) Man (Anthropology)        |

**III. HOW TO CORRELATE**

- A. After your movement through the inductive method develop cross references (need concordance) on the topic under study.
- B. Topical Studies - Use a good concordance or Elwell's Topical Analysis of the Bible
- C. Check Systematic Theologies to make sure your work is not heretical.
  - Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology ; IVP 1994
  - Swindoll, Charles & Zuck, Roy. Understanding Christian Theology; Thomas Nelson Publishers 2003
  - Erickson, Millard J. Christian Theology. Baker Book House, 1985
- D. Recognize Correlation is a lifetime task - Remember this formula  
Work + Time + Obedience = Maturity and Understanding of the text.