

Inductive Bible Study

**Inductive Bible Study Method is a method of studying the Bible through a system of steps that help us grasp what a book's author intends for us to learn and apply. The focus of the method is in Observation technique as detailed below. I have personally found it very helpful to have some guidelines and ideas that help and motivate me to know where I am going and how to get the most out of what I am reading. The following will help explain the process, but ask a staff member for more details as needed.*

- Here are some quotes establishing an overall thought in studying the Bible:
 - “God is building a kingdom of redeemed people for Himself.” *Unknown author*
 - “Establish thy word as that which produces reverence in thee.” *Unknown author*
 - “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12

- ✓ What is the theme of these quotes? What is similar?

These quotes serve to communicate that the Bible is doing something! It is moving, living, powerful and purposeful. We should never approach the Bible as a benign object, rather as a living object used by God to move us and change us and build His kingdom on Earth.

Inductive Bible study method

- ✓ Which is the most difficult of the following: Observation, Interpretation, Application below?

Perhaps observation is really the most important, if we would do it well, it would leave far less to interpretation and even figuring out how to apply, the application will jump out at us as we observe well.

- ✓ Which is the one we do the most poorly?

Especially of late, there has been widespread interpretation which has been done very poorly and has become very dangerous...‘Jesus Seminar’, Open Theism etc. Once again, if we would observe well, context, genre, intent, we would need to interpret far less and application would become compellingly apparent.

**We need to focus on Observation as the key to studying the scriptures. There are commentaries written by far smarter and more educated people to help us interpret well. Focus here on Observation.*

1. Observation

- **Context-** *One of the central tasks of observing well is to be aware of the context in which a portion of the Bible was written; (or any piece of literature for that matter.) The context in which a letter or book was written helps us decipher the author's potential intentions. If we can determine the writer's intentions, it helps us see what he is actually saying and leads to interpreting well and also applying well. Thus there are many contextual issues to become familiar with as you observe a book of the Bible well: time, place, culture, and setting of the particular writing to name a few. On an even broader scale,*

we must also look at where the writing takes place in light of the whole history of scripture. As you look at the particulars of a certain book, find out where that book fits in compared to what all of scripture has to say about God outworking of His divine plan. In light of that greater picture, this quote is worth reading:

**"Scripture- the Old and New Testaments- is the story of creation and new creation. Within that, there is the story of covenant and new covenant. When we read scripture as Christians, we read it precisely as people of the new covenant and of the new creation. We do not read it, in other words, as a flat, uniform list of regulations or doctrines. We read it as the narrative in which we ourselves are now called to take part. We read it to discover "the story so far" and also "how it's supposed to end." To put it another way, we live somewhere between the end of Acts and the closing scene of Revelation. If we want to understand scripture and to find it doing its proper work in and through us, we must learn to read and understand it in the light of that overall story....*

...It is the story of how God's kingdom was established on earth as in heaven in and through the work of Jesus, fulfilling Israel's great story, defeating the power of evil, and launching God's new world.

As we read the letters, we must remind ourselves that these are the documents designed to shape and direct the community of the new covenant, the people who were called to take forward the work of new creation.

As we read Revelation, we must not allow the wonderful heavenly vision in chapters 4 and 5 to lull us into imagining that this is the final scene in the story, as though the narrative were simply to concluded with the redeemed casting their crowns before the throne. This is a vision of present reality, seen in its heavenly dimension. We must read on to the end, to the final vision of Revelation 21 and 22, the chapters that give final meaning to all that has gone before and indeed to the entire canon.

Likewise, when we read the Old Testament, we must read it- as it manifestly asks to be read- as the long and winding story of how God chose a people to take forward his plan to rescue creation, not the story of how God had a shot at calling a people whom he would save from the world and how this was aborted, forcing him to try some things else (a caricature, I know, but one many will recognize). And this means that through the Old Testament must be read as part of "our story" as Christians, we must not imagine that we are still living within that moment in the story. The story itself points beyond itself, like a set of parallel lines meeting in the infinitely rich narrative of the gospels and the sudden outburst of new life in Acts and the letters.

-Surprised by Hope, NT Wright pp. 281-282

➤ We must study whole books to understand the message in its context

Illustration: *reading a letter from a girl/boyfriend. What if you read the middle paragraph sentence that says 'I can't stand you, I don't want to be around you!' You call the friend and cuss them out and break up! They e-mail you, (you won't answer the phone of course...) and in words of tears ask, 'didn't you read the sentence before that?' It read, 'I love you! I can never imagine saying '.....'!*
Context!

Read it all in one sitting, don't just read the middle and use 'tweezer theology' (plucking some bit out ignoring the surrounding context) or you may end up getting the wrong message!

"Whenever we pick up the Bible and read it, even in a contemporary version like the Good News Bible, we are conscious of stepping back two millennia or (in the case of the OT) even more. We travel backwards in time, behind the microchip revolution and the industrial revolution, until we find

ourselves in an alien world which long ago ceased to exist. In consequence, the Bible feels odd, sounds archaic, looks obsolete and smells musty." John Stott

**Therefore, a system of studying the Bible that looks for contextual clues to the author's intentions is very important. The inductive Bible Study Method is just that.*

Study Process:

1. First time read through 1x in one sitting to gain a broad feel of the letter.

2. Read through 2nd time and begin recording the following in a journal: Who, What,

Where, When, Why

- *Who: Paul (vs.1)*
- *Where: From prison in Rome*
- *When: About A.D. 60*
- *What: How to live in Christ as the unified Church*
- *Why: There seemed to be a significant problem arising between the Jews and the Gentiles. Probably the Jews, those that had the 'first right' to Christ, treated the Gentiles as second class believers. (Where do you see evidence for this in the text?)*

3. Read through 3rd time focusing on a search for THEMES.

Ask: what do you know about themes in Ephesians? Any verses or sections you know of?

Themes of Ephesians: *Unity of Jews/Gentiles, Spirit Filled life, Grace, Responding to God's grace through obedience through the Spirit.)*

**A key to studying a Pauline letter is discovering its theme. Ephesians has a very specific theme and reason for which it was written. You must search for the theme and begin to grasp what Paul says in light of that backdrop. Read Eph 2:11-22 and you will see it. The theme has everything to do with Jew and Gentile unity in the church. The Jews thought they were special and had more of a right to God due to their special historical relationship as God's people. The Gentiles were treated as second class Christians in the church. Paul is writing this letter to restore unity and right foundation to both sides...therefore everything can be seen more clearly in the letter through this lens and you can understand and apply the text more accurately to Paul's and God's intentions.*

Why is Eph 1:1-14 there? -To establish the common foundation amongst Jew and Gentile.

Why is 2:1-10 there? -To establish that they both come from slavery to death and are both now freed by grace! So on and so on. You might ask throughout the study...'why is this here in light of the theme?' If you are confused about a section....remember the theme to help interpret it.

- ✓ *In light of the main themes, why might Paul have written chapter 1?
(Common foundation for Jews/Gentiles creates unity)*
- ✓ *How about Chapter 2:1-10?
(Common foundation of death to life by grace creates unity)*
- ✓ *How about Chapter 6?
(The armor of God context is really to do battle against disunity!)*

4. Observe Repeated words, Transition words.

Ask: What are some transition words and why might they be important? ie. therefore, so, for etc.

-Paul is usually making a strong point with transition words...ie. Chp 4:1...'Therefore'....in light of Chp 1-3..... He goes on to give his ethics of living the Christian life, but all in the context of his first three chapters and the 'therefore' alerts us to the connection.

Ask: What are some repeated words that you have seen in Ephesians? In Christ, grace, life. Death; these all point to significant themes Paul is addressing and thinks are very important.

5. Observe Questions, Confusing statements and ideas.

Write down the questions and ideas that you want to pursue more at a later time.

6. Look for a Controlling verse

Select a verse that you could memorize that summarizes the book well. Perhaps Eph 2:8-10? This will help you remember the theme of the book and help you hold onto the main message and even help you live and apply. 5 years later you will be able to grasp some of what you have studied as you memorize the controlling verse.

7. Outline main sections

This and the following step are the meat of what you will spend time on in the Inductive Method. Outlining is key to gaining a grasp on the intention of the author of NT writings.

If you were to use roman numerals in an outline, how would you arrange Ephesians? Perhaps there are 4 main sections...5, 6...How would you outline it and what would you call each section? (this helps gain an overall view of the letter and helps put the details in each section in the larger context of what Paul is intending to write.)

9. Outline further detail

If you chose 4 main sections...now outline each section in further detail.

10. Diagram

Create a grammatical diagram for sections that you really want to dig deeper into. Write down each sentence in a hierarchical structure which shows which are the main phrases of emphases and which are the subordinate phrases. For example, Paul may pray a prayer lasting 5 verses. However, he may only pray for three main things. It is helpful to highlight those three main things and see how the other words serve to give more weight and foundation to those three. In this way it helps you see Paul's message clearly, hold onto the information more succinctly and apply more readily. I do this for each main section that in particular challenges or intrigues me. (For information on diagramming ask a staff member).

11. Do word studies

Choose a key word and dig deeper to gain a fuller understanding. 'In Christ' is mentioned 31 times in Ephesians...Paul may be telling us something! Try and dig deeper to understand that phrase better. Use cross references to other letters, look it up in a commentary you own or on-line, look the words up in a dictionary...may not apply to this phrase... This will help you grasp the word and meditate on its significance.

12. Create a Chart

5 Years later, what will you remember from the letter? Creating a chart can give you a quick glance overview and refresh your memory years later. Begin with your outline of the main sections. Ephesians probably has two main sections...#1- from chapters 1-3 might be called 'Being'. #2- from chapters 4-6 might be called 'Doing'. Put those headings at the top of a chart. Section 1 may have 3 subheadings....#1- Chp 1:1-2:10, Identity in Christ, #2- Chp 2:10-22 Unity in Christ, Chp 3:1-21 Purpose in Christ. Place the titles you choose under the main heading. Then briefly outline each of the 3 headings you just chose under them. Do that for all the sections you come up with. Finally, under the whole chart, write out your controlling verse. You have now created a chart that you can quickly glance at and remember all the work you have done in the book. At this point you will really 'own' the book for yourself for years to come.

2. Interpretation

What is the Author's Big Idea (ABI) given the context in which the passage is found? All interpretation must be done in light of the ABI. Use commentaries to get a wide range of opinions about confusing questions. (Try BibleGateway.com for a sampling of commentaries for free.)

3. Application

- **View of God:** What have I learned about one of the persons or all of the Trinity? What do I need to believe about God? What am I not believing about God? What are the ramifications in my life of not thinking rightly about God?
- **Action:** What should I do according to the Bible? Is there a command to obey?
- **Character:** What should I be? What must I change if I am to be holy? How can I become more like Christ? Is there a lesson to learn? Is there a sin to confess?
- **Goals:** To what causes should I devote my life energy? What can I do to change the world so it conforms to God's plans?
- **Discernment:** How can we distinguish truth from error? How can I gain discernment? How can I gain wisdom from God and the church?
- **Meditation:** Ask God to reveal where He wants you to apply the passage you are studying. Memorize a section to remember and allow it to permeate your heart and mind.

*Assignment:

- Read article: 'The Music of the Gospel' by Keith Johnson
- Read Ephesians in one sitting all the way through

Suggested Reading: How to Read the Bible for all its Worth, Fee/Stuart; God's Big Picture, Vaughan Roberts