

How to Study the Bible

“Do not read to satisfy curiosity or to pass the time, but study such things as move your heart to devotion.” Thomas Kempis

Hebrews 4:12 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.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Method #1: Inductive Bible Study

The inductive Bible study method is a method that is a good place to start. Here's how it works:

1. Select a passage to read (usually around 8-10 verses, but can vary)
2. Have a pen and notebook ready to use
3. Read the passage carefully asking yourself the questions “What?”, “Now what?” and “So What?”

What?

In other words, what exactly is the author saying? Don't worry about interpreting it yet, simply try to figure out exactly what is being said. Some questions to help you in this

On the background of the text...

- 1) Who is writing and/or speaking?
- 2) To whom is it written or taught?
- 3) When does this take place?
- 4) Where does this take place?
- 5) What issues are the recipients facing?

Then, focusing more on the actual text. **(Note: it is very helpful to mark your Bible)**

- 6) What are the commands?
- 7) What are the promises?
- 8) What are the cause/effect relationships?
- 9) What words or phrases are repeated?
- 10) What conjunctions are used and why?
- 11) What ideas are repeated?
- 12) What does this passage say about God?
- 13) What does this passage say about Jesus?
- 14) What does this passage say about the Holy Spirit?
- 15) What does this passage say about people?
- 16) Write out any additional information including contrasts, lists, comparisons, etc.

Now What?

After figuring out what the passage is saying, you are now ready to interpret the passage. Here are some questions to help guide you

- 1) What point is the author trying to make?

- 2) If I had to summarize the theme of this passage in one sentence what would it be? Write this down in your journal.
- 3) What appears to be the key verse(s) in the passage? Why?
- 4) What is the meaning of the key words or phrases?
- 5) What does the immediate context (verses before and after the passage) suggest about the meaning of this passage?
- 6) What does the broader context of the book suggest about the meaning?
- 7) What do cross-references suggest? (Cross references are found in the margins of many Bibles)
- 8) What is the cultural meaning? In other words, what did this mean to the original audience?

If you would like to dive deeper it would be helpful to read a Bible commentary alongside

So What?

You are now ready to apply this passage to your life, which ultimately is the most important step. Some questions to consider are...

- 1) What did I learn from this passage?
- 2) Where do I fall short?
- 3) What changes do I need to make?
- 4) How has my view of God changed?
- 5) How does this affect how I serve those around me?
- 6) What does this mean for the different roles I find myself in (child, parent, student, worker, friend, sibling)
- 7) Write down and memorize the key verse in the passage. A good way to do this is by writing down the verse on a note card and bring it with you throughout the day (or post it in a place that is always in front of you)
- 8) Spend time praying that God would allow you to apply this passage to your life.



Method #2: Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a sacred way of reading and meditating on Scripture. (In fact, lectio means “reading” and divina means “sacred”) It was formalized by St. Benedict in 540 in his book The Rule of St. Benedict, written from his monastery at Monte Cassino (between Rome and Naples).

It is where you come to the Bible and simply allow it to speak. You come expecting it to be what it says it is, a living word written to you so you leave all of your questions, analytical tools, aside and simply meditate on it.

Tony Jones, says it is where we “come to the Bible naked, so to speak, and let ourselves be clothed by God’s word. We come neither as a Bible scholar nor a teacher getting ready for a lesson; [we don’t] have to stop every two verses and answer questions in a study guide. No, [we] read the Bible as a sacred object, as a living, dynamic revelation of God to [us]. And [we] read a complete section repeatedly and slowly, waiting for the revelation to be made known.”

There are six movements to *lectio divina*...

Preparation (silencio)

After choosing a passage of Scripture (usually no more than 6-8 verses in length), spend a few moments in silent preparation. This allows you to become quiet in God's presence and frees you from the busyness and distractions of life. It also allows you to focus our desire on God. It would be helpful during this time to close your eyes and pray something simple such as, "Here I am".

Read (lectio)

Read the passage slowly once or perhaps twice. The mood should be gentle and reflective, allowing for the Word to sink in. Listen for a word or phrase that seems addressed specifically to you. Reflect on this word. It may help to repeat it to yourself, reflecting on how it is written to you, the "beloved" of God. Following the reading allow for a period of silence so those listening can allow the Word to sink in (at least a few minutes).

Reflect (meditatio)

This movement answers the question, *How is my life touched by this word?* Read the passage aloud again and listen for how this word connects with your life. Ask the questions,

What in my life right now needs to hear this word?

(If it is a story ask...)

Where am I in this scene?

What do I hear as I imagine myself in the story or hear these words addressed specifically to me?

How do the dynamics of this story connect with my own life experience?

Again, following the reading allow for a time of silence so that you can explore your thoughts.

Respond (Oratio)

Read the passage again. This movement asks, *What is my response to God based on what I have read or encountered?* Following a time of silence, pray as spontaneously and naturally as possible. The goal of this movement is to allow the feelings and emotions that flow from this word to come out in prayer. Explore the emotions that the text has aroused including love, peace, anger, confusion, conviction...be honest and real.

Rest (Contemplatio)

Read the passage one last time, this time simply allowing people to find peace and rest in the word of God.

Resolve (Incarnatio)

Conclude your time by writing down how you will resolve to bring this word with you in your daily life. It may help to have a symbol, or write down a word to take with them.