

How Do I Study the Bible?



"Bible study is like eating peanuts. The more you eat, the more you want to eat."

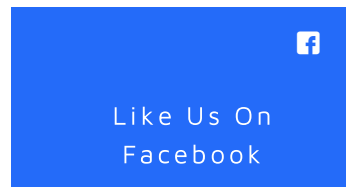
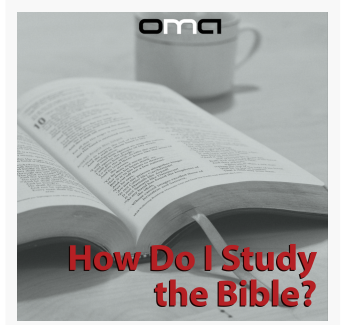
 Paul Little

A wise man once said, "Give a man a fish and you'll feed him a meal. Teach a man to fish and you'll feed him for a lifetime." I've always resonated with that statement. And such a quip applies directly to studying the Bible. Many people are content to depend on others for their spiritual meals, but in a culture like ours, where the Bible is readily available and there are so many tools at our disposal, there is no excuse for Christians to not know the skill of preparing their own scriptural meals. This isn't to shun teachers. We should all be learning from gifted teachers. But we should also be learning the art of Bible study for ourselves.

During my time at Dallas Theological Seminary, I had the privilege to take Bible study methods (aka hermeneutics) under Howard Hendricks, affectionately referred to as "Prof." He structured his course around three primary words: *observation*, *interpretation*, and *application*. When studying the Bible, if you can grasp these three words, you'll be well on your way to becoming a better student of Scripture.

Observation Stage

First, let's consider *the observation stage*. Observation seeks to answer the question, "What do I see?" It's been said the difference between a good student and a bad student of Scripture is simple—the good student simply *sees* more. He's developed his observation skills. The psalmist was mindful of this, saying, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (Psalm 119:18).



POPULAR TOPICS

- apologetics
- apologia
- apologist
- Atheism
- atheist
- belief
- Bible
- Bobby Conway
- Brett Kunkle
- Christ...
- Christi...
- Christian
- Christian (Adherents)
- Christian Apologetics
- Christian Apologetics (Literature)
- Christianity



To help us develop our observation skills, Prof had us read Acts 1:8 and write down twenty-five observations. Once we finished this agonizing task, we turned the assignment in only to have him hand it back and say, "Now go make twenty-five more." What was he doing? He was increasing our observation skills. Imagine that—fifty observations from one verse.

Now, you might ask, "What are we *looking* for?" That's a great question. I developed an acrostic to help you navigate the observation stage.

Here it is:

Observe prayerfully.

Begin your study by seeing the big picture.

Select key word(s).

Explore any commands to follow.

Record any warnings given.

Venture to find the promises proclaimed.

Ask and answer questions that are naturally raised in the text.

Target key people and places.

Inspect for contrasts and comparisons.

Overview your discoveries in light of the broader context.

Note words that are repeated and emphasized.

Select the style of literature (e.g., apocalyptic, poetic, historical).

Interpretation stage

Once you've completed your thorough observation(S) of a passage, you're ready to move to the *interpretation stage*.

I cannot stress it enough that we aren't in a position to provide an interpretation until we first complete the observation stage. *Observation prepares the way for interpretation.*

Paul exhorts us in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." Though Paul was addressing Timothy as a pastor charged with teaching the Word, we too must seek to accurately handle Scripture.

Christianity (Religion)

Cold Case

Christianity crossexamined.org Doubt

(Quotation Subject) Evangelism

Faith Frank Turek God God

(Deity) Gospel J. Warner Wallace

Jason Jimenez Jesus ... Jesus

Christ (Deity) life charlotte

life fellowship minute New

Atheism... New Testament Norman

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Minute

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The Bible The Bible (Religious

Text) Theism Witness

Worldview



The question we are seeking to answer in interpretation is, "What does the text mean?" I encourage you at this stage to read your passage in several different translations. Furthermore, be sure to purchase a good Bible dictionary, a Bible atlas, a Bible handbook, some commentaries covering the book you're studying, and a concordance. All of these tools combined will enable you to get at the authors intended meaning, which is the key to interpretation. If you're a software junkie and don't want to deal with a bunch of books, check out the resources provided by Logos Bible Software at www.logos.com.

Application Stage

At last, once you've made observations leading you to a proper interpretation, you're now ready to enter the *application stage*. There's one interpretation (from God's perspective) and many applications. Application is crucial. Through application, we build a bridge from the ancient text to our current context. Application asks the question, "How does it work?"

James the apostle was a great pragmatian. He said, "But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves" (James 1:22, NLT). Prof told us about a student who said to him, "I've been through the Bible twelve times." Prof replied, "That's great. But the real question is, how many times has the Bible been through you?"

Next time you study your Bible, try this three-staged approach and never forget that the Bible is meant to be more than studied—it's meaning to be *lived*.

Thought to Ponder

We need to approach the Bible the way a doctor approaches his patient. First, he asks some observation questions before he interprets what's wrong. Once the diagnosis has been made, he's now ready to provide an application (a course of treatment).

Memory Verse

"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law" (Psalm 119:18).

Question to Consider

What would you think of a doctor if you walked into his office and he handed you a prescription without first assessing your condition?



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