

BIBLE STUDY METHODS

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I. OBSERVATION

“When the Psalmist prayed, ‘Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law’ (Psalm 119:18), he was praying for the powers of observation.”

In order to *observe*, you must learn to read!¹ Have you ever studied a particular passage of scripture and by the time you finished it you can’t remember what you just read? There are at least two reasons for why we often fail to get everything that we should out of our Bible Study.

- 1) We don’t know how to read properly.
- 2) We don’t know what to look for.

Our culture has made a radical shift in the last century from a *word-based* culture to an *image-based* society of viewers. The medium of our time is television, not books. Consequently, unlike our forebears a few generations ago, we don’t know how to read. If you don’t know how to read, you may have a diploma, but you don’t have an education. Yet God sent His word to us in the form of a Book. **Revelation presupposes the ability to read!** On eleven different occasions Jesus asked the most well educated people of His day, “Have you never read”? Of course they had. They just didn’t have the inclination to really see and understand what they read.

Therefore you must learn to read. For starters, try to learn to read better and faster. This is important because your ability to observe is directly related to your ability to read. If you don’t read well, you will not do well in the observation phase. Also, learn to read as for the first time. It is often said that familiarity breeds contempt. Well, it also breeds ignorance. You can’t come to a passage with the attitude, “I already know this one.” You must come to every text as if you’d never seen it before. This is a discipline that you have to develop. So here are a some tips to increase your observation powers when reading.

First of all, read the Bible thoughtfully. Don’t let your mind go numb while your eyes pass over the words. It’s possible to read something and not be paying attention. Make sure you are thoughtfully engaged while you read the Bible.

Second, read the Bible repeatedly. Periodically, take time to read entire books at one sitting. The majority of the books in the Bible are no longer than two or three ordinary columns in the newspaper, so you can handle the read. Start at the beginning and read it all the way through.

Third, read the Bible patiently. Don’t give up if you don’t see immediate results. Develop stamina in your study. Work with one book for a month. A month will give you time to read it through several times, observe structure, identify key terms, investigate central characters, do some background work with secondary sources, and make some practical application. Get an overview of the book first, then focus in on the details.

Fourth, read the Bible inquisitively. You should keep in mind six key questions anytime you read a text: who, what, where, when, why, and wherefore. Asking these kinds of questions should become second nature to you. Concerning “who,” you should ask, “Who are the people involved here? What do they say? What is said about them?” Concerning “what,” you should ask “What’s happening? In what order? What is the author’s point?” Concerning “where,” you should ask,

“Where is the action taking place? Or where is the speaker writing this piece of work?” This is why maps are important in your Bible Study. Concerning “when,” you should ask, “When did these events take place? When in relationship to other parts of scripture? When was the writer writing?” The “why” question is the question that digs for meaning. This question becomes more prominent in the interpretive phase. “Wherefore” asks “So what? What difference would it make if I were to apply this truth?” Remember, the Word of God was written not to satisfy our curiosity, but to change our lives. This is a preliminary step; it’s not the final stage of application. Just keep this question in mind during the observation process.

Fifth, read the Bible prayerfully. Don’t think of the Bible and prayer as separate disciplines. Learn to turn the scriptures into prayer. Saturate your study with prayer. After all, you are completely dependent upon the Lord for everything, especially spiritual understanding. Moreover, only the Lord can give you a heart that is submissive to His word. So acknowledge your dependence upon God by keeping yourself ever before the Lord in prayer.

Sixth, read the Bible meditatively. We often don’t take time to meditate anymore because we are too busy. Yet meditation is a priority in scripture.

Joshua 1:8- “This book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it {When?} day and night, {Please note} so that you may be careful to do {not to know} according to all that is written in it...”

Proverbs 23:7- “For as {a person} thinks within himself, so is he.”

Psalms 1:1,2- “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.”

Psalms 119:97- “O how I love Thy law! It is my **meditation** all the day.”

Psalms 19:14- “May the words of my mouth and the **meditation** of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

Seventh, read the Bible telescopically. Read the parts in light of the whole. So much of Bible Study today consists of dissecting passages into detailed verse by verse divisions, but that kind of analysis is only half the job. You must be able to synthesize the whole.

Finally, read the Bible purposefully. Purposeful reading looks for the aim of the author. There isn’t a word in scripture that is there by accident. All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable to the man of God (2 Tim 3:16-17). Every word contributes to meaning. So try to discern the author’s meaning by observing his *structure*.

The basic structural units of a book from smallest to largest are as follows: word, phrase, clause, sentence, paragraph, segment, subsection, section, division, and book. Not all books of the Bible are big enough to contain segments, subsections, sections, and divisions. A short book like Philemon breaks down as follows: words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and book.

In order to make observations about structure, you have to understand that there are two kinds of structure: *grammatical* and *literary*. Grammatical

structure refers to the structure *within* a paragraph. Literary structure refers to structure *between* paragraphs. Grammatical structure concerns the relationships among words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Literary structure concerns the relationships between segment, subsection, section, division, and book. The following graph illustrates the two different kinds of structure and how each relates to one another.

Grammatical Structure

(The structure *within* a paragraph, primarily gives *meaning*.)

- a. Word
- b. Phrase
- c. Clause
- d. Sentence
- e. Paragraph

Literary Structure

(The structure *between* paragraphs gives *unity* to an account.)

- f. Segment
- g. Subsection
- h. Section
- i. Division
- j. Book

More will be said regarding structure in the outline below.

Before studying any unit of scripture, you will greatly benefit from reading the whole book one time through before studying the particulars. If the book is too long to read in one sitting, you should at least read the chapters that surround the passage that you are studying.

Your study of a unit of scripture begins by observing terms, structure, literary form, and atmosphere.²

A. Observe the Terms

“A term is a given word as it is used in a given context. It [a term] therefore has only one meaning, whereas the same word may have several. For instance, the word ‘trunk’ may mean the main stem of a tree, the main body of anything, the proboscis of an elephant, or a box or chest. Though in all these cases the same word is used, “trunk” is one term when it signifies the main stem of a tree and another when it denotes the proboscis of and elephant.”³

1. Identify Routine and Non-routine Terms

List the non-routine terms in your passage that you will have to come back to for further study. The routine terms are those terms whose meaning is obvious and which are not very significant for understanding a passage. There are three kinds of non-routine terms: those that are difficult to understand, those that are critical to the meaning of the passage though maybe not hard to understand, and those that express profound concepts (like *justification*, *transfigured*, or *propitiation*).

2. Identify Literal and Figurative Terms

List the figurative terms in your passage that you will have to come back to for further study. A literal term is one that is meant to convey its primary or usual meaning. A figurative term is one that is symbolic and which expresses a secondary idea distinct from its usual meaning.

3. Identify the Grammatical Significance of the Terms

Write out how each term functions grammatically in the sentence. This can be done by making a list of the words and their function or by making a sentence diagram. Grammatical categories for terms include nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections, and articles.

B. Observe the Structure

This phase of the observation process examines the relationships between the various terms. In studying the Bible, the basic structural unit that one studies is the *paragraph*. As stated above, there are two kinds of structure: *grammatical* and *literary*. Grammatical structure refers to the structure *within* a paragraph. Literary structure refers to structure *between* paragraphs. Grammatical structure concerns the relationships among words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Literary structure concerns the relationships between segment, subsection, section, division, and book.

1. Take note of the structure within a paragraph (grammatical structure).

Note the relation of *subject* to *verb*. The subject may be a noun, pronoun, infinitive, gerund, or dependent clause. Note the relation of *verb* to *predicate*, which may involve a direct object, indirect object, predicate noun, predicate adjective or adjectival clause, or an adverb or adverbial clause. Note the relation of *modifier* to *modified*, including adjectives, participles, adverbs, articles, demonstrative pronouns, prepositional phrases, and adjectival and verbal clauses. Note the relation of *preposition* to *object*. Note the relation of *pronoun* to *antecedent*. Note the relation of *independent clauses* in compound sentences and the relation of *dependent clauses* in complex sentences. The relation between the different types of clauses are indicated for the most part by *coordinate* and *subordinate* connectives (some dependent clauses are prepositional phrases). These types of connectives are categorized as follows: temporal or chronological, local or geographical, logical and emphatic. When studying a passage, categorize the

connectives contained in it. The following chart will be helpful to that end.

KINDS OF CONNECTIVES

Category	Connective	Example from Scripture
Temporal or Chronological	after as before now then until when while	Rev 11:11 Acts 16:16 John 8:58 Luke 16:25 1 Cor 15:6 Mark 14:25 John 11:31 Mark 14:43
Local or Geographical	where	Heb 6:20
Logical		
Reason	because for since	Rom 1:25 Rom 1:11 Rom 1:28
Result	so then therefore thus	Rom 9:16 Gal 2:21 1 Cor 10:12 1 Cor 8:12
Purpose	in order that so that	Rom 4:16 Rom 5:21
Contrast	although but much more nevertheless otherwise yet	Rom 1:21 Rom 2:8 Rom 5:15 1 Cor 10:5 1 Cor 14:16 Rom 5:14
Comparison	also as as...so just as...so likewise so also	2 Cor 1:11 Rom 9:25 Rom 5:18 Rom 11:30-31 Rom 1:27 Rom 4:6
Series of Facts	—and first of all last of all or	Rom 2:19 1 Tim 2:1 1 Cor 15:8 2 Cor 6:15
Condition	if	Rom 2:19
Emphatic	indeed only	Rom 9:25 1 Cor 8:9

2. Take note of the structure between paragraphs (literary structure).

This stage of observing structure takes note of the relationship between paragraphs. Paragraphs are related to one another according to set laws of structure. The following chart will illustrate the laws of structure that govern the relationships between paragraphs.

THE LAWS OF STRUCTURE⁴

LAW	SIGN	DESCRIPTION	KEY TERM	E.G.
Cause & Effect		One event, concept, or action which causes another	therefore, so, then, as a result	2 Sam 11
Climax		A progression of ideas which climb to a certain high point then descend		2 Sam 11
Comparison		Identifying two or more elements which are alike or similar	like, too, also, as	Ps 1:3
Contrast		Identifying two or more elements unlike or dissimilar	but, yet	
Condition		One thing can or must happen as a result of or as conditioned by another	if...then	Rom 8:9
Correlation		The indication that certain elements has/have relation to others	as...so, and	Eph 5:24
Explanation or Reason		The explanation of an element	because, for	Mk 4:13-20
Interchange		When the action, conversation or concept moves to another then back again		Gn 37-39
Introduction or Summary		Opening or concluding remarks on a subject or in a situation		Gn 2:1
Pivot		A change in the direction of the flow of the context...a minor climax		2 Sam 12:19-20
Proportion		Emphasis is indicated by the amount of written space given to a concept		Gn 1 & 2
Purpose		The intention of the author is clearly stated	that, so that, in order that, <i>or</i> to	
Question & Answer		The use of question and/or question and answer		Mk 12
Repetition		Terms or phrases used repeatedly		Heb 11
Specific to General		Progression of thought from specific to general or the reverse.		Acts 1:8 to book

To observe the laws of structure between paragraphs, draw a chart that has one column for each paragraph that you are studying. Give a title to each paragraph and a brief description of what's in the paragraph. Then use the above categories to label the relationships between the paragraphs. If you are examining a larger unit of scripture, follow the above directions using chapters instead of paragraphs.

When you analyze literary structure, be aware of the kind of material that the author is using to effect structure. There are at least five different kinds of material that an author uses to structure his account:

biographical, geographical, historical, chronological, or ideological/logical.

a. Biographical Material

Persons are often used to effect structure in a text. For instance, Genesis 12-50 focuses on the lives of four patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

b. Geographical Material

Places are also used to effect structure in a text. For instance, many commentators think the synoptic gospels are arranged according to a geographical structure: Jesus' birth and ministry in Galilee, His move south into Judea, and final ministry further south in Jerusalem.

c. Historical Material

Events are often used to effect structure in a text. For instance, in John there are seven key miracles that effect structure in that gospel.

d. Chronological Material

The *time* element may be employed to effect structure. A chronological structure might be marked by the repetition of key terms like, "Then..., Then..., Then..."

e. Ideological or Logical Material

Ideas are used on many occasions to effect structural relations. Most of Paul's letters are unified in this regard. Paul makes logical arguments in his letters to make his points.

As you begin to observe the laws of structure between paragraphs, take note of what kind of material you are dealing with. Is it biographical, geographical, historical, chronological, or ideological/logical?

C. Observe the Literary Form

Take note of what literary form (or genre) you are dealing with. The literary form of the material will radically affect one's interpretation. There are at least five kinds of literary forms in the Bible.

1. Discourse and Logical Literature

This category includes all writings that involve a presentation of ideas in argumentative form. The epistles, some of the prophetic

sermons, and the longer discourses of Jesus may be placed in this classification.

This type of literature appeals primarily to the intellect. This material has a logical development. In order to interpret it correctly, one must take note of the author's rational method.

2. Prose Narrative

This is the most common literary form in the Bible. It communicates theological history in the form of stories and biographical sketches.

This type of literature appeals primarily to the imagination and the emotions of the reader. Therefore, to understand it requires using one's imagination. It should also be remembered that prose narrative often contains some details which are not too significant for exposition, but rather just give color to the story. Therefore, when one approaches prose narrative, one must be careful to press unduly every detail. One should make a distinction between that which is essential and that which is ornamental.

3. Poetry

Scriptural poetry has three main characteristics. First, it utilizes figurative language. Second, it is emotional in nature. Third, it employs a literary device called parallelism. There are various types of parallelism (synonymous, antithetic, synthetic, etc.).

Therefore, one should remember that the poet employs flexible language and that he expresses feeling rather than rigid logical concepts. For this reason, one will treat the Psalms much differently than the letters of Paul. Poetry often employs highly figurative language rather than logical arguments as are found in Paul's writings.

4. Drama and Dramatic Prose

This is closely related to poetry. The dramatic method involves the personification, particularization, and vivid description of events or ideas for the sake of their moving effect. In view of these facts, one must determine whether a writer is speaking in terms of actual history or whether he is using the dramatic approach to make more striking the truth he is conveying.

5. Parabolic Literature

The parabolic form employs the use of analogy. It uses a story to illustrate a spiritual truth. Thus a parable consists of two parts,

the spiritual truth that is being illustrated and the brief narrative that is placed beside to illustrate it.

One should not press every detail of a parabolic story to correspond to a spiritual truth. Usually, a parable only makes one main point.

D. Observe the Atmosphere

The fourth element in the observing process is that of atmosphere. By atmosphere is meant the underlying tone or spirit of a passage, which though intangible, is nevertheless real. Some of the moods by which a portion may be characterized are those of despair, thanksgiving, awe, urgency, joy, humility, or tenderness.

At times the mood of a passage cannot be determined until the reader has engaged seriously in the process of interpretation. On the other hand, it is often true that thorough observation will reveal its underlying atmosphere. In any case, until one has discovered the mood of a portion of Scripture, one has not come into vital contact with its author's mind and spirit.

It should be noted that some passages may involve a combination of various moods. In fact, there may be a drastic change of atmosphere within one unit of Scripture. Therefore, one should be careful to observe all of the atmospheric elements of a passage.

II. INTERPRETATION⁵

There are three major phases of interpretation: the definitive phase, the rational phase, and the implicational phase. The definitive phase involves the discovery of the basic meaning of the particulars in a passage. The rational phase consists of identifying the reasons why Biblical statements are made and the purpose for their being stated in their given context. The implicational phase involves identifying truths that are implied by the explicit biblical principle. The three phases of interpretation are realized through three concrete steps: asking interpretive questions, giving interpretive answers, and integrating and summarizing conclusions.

A. Ask Interpretive Questions (definitive phase)

There are three basic interpretive questions: “What does this mean?,” “Why is this said and why is this said here?,” and “What does this imply?” These questions correspond to the three phases of interpretation. There are four subordinate questions that must also be asked. The first one is the *identifying* question, “Who or what is involved?” The second one is the *modal* question, “How is this accomplished?” The third is the *temporal* question, “When is this accomplished?” The fourth is the *local* question, “Where is this accomplished?”

All of the above questions should be applied to each of the four phases of observation—that is, the observation of terms, structure, literary forms, and atmosphere. So, for instance, for each non-routine term that one observes one will ask, “What does this mean?,” “Why is this said?,” and “What does this imply?” Also, for each non-routine term one will ask any of the subordinate questions that are relevant.

INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS

Basic Questions	
Definitive	“What does this mean?”
Rational	“Why is this said and why is this said here?”
Implicational	“What does this imply?”
Subordinate Questions	
Identifying	“Who or what is involved?”
Modal	“How is this accomplished?”
Temporal	“When is this accomplished?”
Local	“Where is this accomplished?”

B. Give Interpretive Answers (rational phase)

1. Do a word study of key terms

a. Consult Concordance

Make sure that you use a concordance that corresponds to the particular translation of the Bible that you are using. Hopefully, you will work with the New American Standard Bible and will therefore use a NASB concordance.

New American Standard Updated Edition Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. Edited by Robert L. Thomas. Updated by W. Don Wilkins. Anaheim, California: Foundation Publications, 1998. (ISBN # 1-5813-5046-5)

b. Consult Dictionary/Lexicon

Look at a dictionary or lexicon of biblical words to help determine a given word's meaning in a given context. There are many resources one can use to this end. For the English reader, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* is an excellent resource. Also, one's concordance will contain a dictionary of Greek and Hebrew words.

Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words. Edited by W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996. (ISBN # 0-7852-1160-8)

If one reads Greek and Hebrew, then he should make use of the appropriate Greek or Hebrew lexicon. The two standard works are as follows.

Bauer, Walter, ed. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. Revised and edited by Frederick William Danker. Previous editions edited by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. (ISBN # 0-226-03933-1)

The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon. Edited by Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1906. Reprint, Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997. (ISBN # 1-56563-206-0)

c. Consult Translations

It is helpful to compare various translations of the passage you are studying. The major translations that you will want to consult are as follows: New International Version, New American Standard Bible, King James Version, New King James Version, and New Revised Standard Version. These translations and others can be located online at <http://bible.gospelcom.net>.

After completing these three steps, conclude your word study by writing out a detailed definition of the word's meaning in the present context.

2. Note the grammatical significance of key terms

One must take note of a term's grammatical relationship to the rest of the terms in the sentence. If the term is a verb, note the tense, voice, mood, person, and number of the verb. If the term is a pronoun, identify the pronoun's antecedent. If the term is a noun, note whether or not it is singular or plural, etc.

The key verb in Romans 5:1 illustrates the importance of noting a key term's grammatical significance. "Having been *justified*" is a past, passive, participle. A passive verb means that the subject of the verb receives the action of the verb; the subject doesn't perform the action. Therefore, in Romans 5:1 it is clear that the subject "we" does not do the justifying. The "we" receives the action of being justified. God is the active agent in justification.

3. Note the impact of context on the term or passage's meaning

Remember that the context of each term in a book is the book itself. Your interpretation of individual terms and passages must cohere with the larger meaning of the whole book. Always keep the big picture in mind.

4. Note the impact of the literary form on the term or passage's meaning

As noted above, you should pay due regard to the literary form (or genre) you are dealing with. The literary form of the material will radically affect your interpretation. There are at least five kinds of literary forms in the Bible: discourse/logical literature, prose narrative, poetry, dramatic prose, and parabolic literature. Each of these forms utilizes language in distinct ways. In order to interpret correctly, you must be aware of these conventions.

5. Note the impact that atmosphere has on the term or passage's meaning

Sometimes noting atmosphere is critical to understanding a given text. For instance, in Romans 9-11 Paul makes clear the underlying tone of the entire unit lest it be expounded apart from his controlling attitude and thereby misinterpreted.

“1 I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed, [separated] from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom 9:1-3).

Apparently, Paul wants it unmistakably understood that all he is about to say grows out of a grave concern and a self-sacrificial love in behalf of Israel. He is saying in effect, “Let nothing that I say be construed otherwise. There is nothing in my heart of hatred or bitterness or belittlement.” Understanding this atmospheric element, will help in discovering the connotations of Paul's statements in these chapters, some of which consist of strong condemnations of Israel.

6. Try to understand the author's perspective and how that affects the term or passage's meaning

In order to understand a text's meaning, you must discern what the author's intention is. Unless you put yourself in the author's shoes and see things from his perspective, your interpretation will eventually falter. We are interested only in what the author meant to communicate; the author's meaning is the only valid meaning of a text.

7. Note the relevant historical background of a passage

Bible dictionaries, Bible atlases, and commentaries aid one in learning about historical backgrounds. The *New Bible Dictionary* is a great one-volume resource for historical backgrounds, and the *Macmillan Bible Atlas* is great for learning biblical geography.

Marshall, I. Howard; A. R. Millard; J. I. Packer; and D. J. Wiseman, editors. *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd edition. Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996. (ISBN # 0-8308-1439-6)

Aharoni, Yohanan and Michael Avi-Yonah, editors. *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 3rd edition. New York : Macmillan Publishing Co. ; Toronto : Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1993. (ISBN # 0-0250-0605-3)

8. Locate the passage's place in the progress of revelation

When interpreting scripture, one must understand that the Bible was not given by God all at once. Rather, God revealed the Bible progressively over time. If this is true, one should never read the Old Testament as if it were the New Testament, any more than one should read last year's newspaper as if it were today's paper. Of course the Old Testament still has value, but in the progress of revelation, the things written early are partial and preparatory, whereas the New Testament is the final fulfillment. If this is so, then it is essential that you never interpret the incomplete as if it were complete. One should always guard against reading the New Testament into the Old Testament.

9. Compare the term or passage to other passages of scripture

The best interpreter of the Bible is often the Bible itself. Let other relevant texts of the Bible inform your understanding of the text under consideration. Use a concordance and topical index to compare scriptures to one another. Here's one excellent resource for this purpose:

The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge. Edited by Jerome H. Smith.
Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992.
(ISBN # 0-8407-7694-2)

10. Consult commentaries

Consulting a few good commentaries is important in the interpretive process. Looking into other people's work serves two purposes: first, it confronts one with certain interpretive factors that may have been overlooked or misapplied; and second, it reveals the most if not all of the interpretive options for a given text.

Notice that this phase of interpretation comes near the end of interpretation after you have done all your work. Don't neglect your own study of the text and rely solely on commentators.

C. Integrate and Summarize Conclusions (implicational phase)

There are various techniques that may be used to integrate and summarize the meaning of a passage. Here are a few suggestions.

- 1. List the main truths that have been found in a unit of Scripture**
- 2. State the major theme of the passage by the use of a descriptive title**
- 3. If one is dealing with a segment, give an interpretive title to each paragraph in the unit**
- 4. Outline the passage (paraphrase, topic, logical)**
- 5. Make a chart of the passage**

III. APPLICATION

The majority of people who study the Scriptures get logjammed in the step of interpretation. In the first place they begin there, which is a major mistake. And furthermore they stop there, which is an even bigger mistake. The result is that they acquire mountains of information about the text, and lots of speculation about what it means. But what difference does it make in their lives? To them, the Bible becomes a collection of theological brain-teasers, rather than a road map for how to live. This is a tragedy because the Word of God does not bear fruit when it is understood, but only when it is applied. That's why James exhorts us to "receive the word implanted" (James 1:21). In other words, let God's truth take root in your life. How? By proving yourself to be a *doer* of the word, not merely a *planter* (James 1:22).

Application is the most needed step of the Bible study process. All of what goes before is in view of this step. Here we ask not "Does it work?" but "How does it work?" Understanding the text in interpretation is simply a means to a larger end—*practicing biblical truth in day-to-day life*. Observation plus Interpretation without application equals abortion. In other words, every time you observe and interpret but fail to apply, you perform an abortion on the Scriptures in terms of their purpose. The Bible was written not to satisfy your curiosity; it was written to transform your life. The ultimate goal in Bible study is not to do something to the Bible, but to allow the Bible to do something to you, so truth becomes tangent to life. You see, we frequently come to the Bible to study it, to teach it, to preach it, to outline it, everything except to be changed by it.

Titus 1:1 provides a clear statement of the purpose of Scripture. Paul describes scripture as "the truth that leads to godliness" (NIV). Then in chapter 2 he gives a specific case in point. "Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (Titus 1:9, NIV). According to Paul, applying the word of God makes it attractive to others. There's nothing more loathsome to hear than one who dogmatically affirms the truth of scripture but is yet unchanged by it. Likewise, nothing makes the truth more attractive than one whose life has been changed by it. We need to understand that there is an inherent danger in Bible study; it can degenerate into a process that's intellectually fascinating but spiritually frustrating. You can get mentally excited about the truth yet fail to be changed by it. So we have a challenge before us—the Application of Scripture.⁶

A. Know

The first step in application is to *know* the interpretation. First you've got to know the interpretation of the biblical text. Application is based on interpretation, so if your interpretation of a passage is incorrect, your application will likely be incorrect also. If your interpretation is correct, you have a possibility that your application will be correct.

Keep this thought frontal in your thinking: *Interpretation is one; application is many.* Although there is only *one* valid meaning in any given text (that is, the author's intended meaning), there will potentially be *many* valid applications of that text. There is only one ultimate interpretation of a passage of Scripture. The text doesn't mean one thing today and something else tomorrow. Whatever it means, it means forever. You will never cease the process of applying that truth to your life. So be careful how you interpret.

B. Relate

The second step in application is to *relate* the interpretation to real life. Christianity can well be described as a series of new relationships. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come." In application, look for areas in which you can relate the Word to life.

1. A New Relationship to God

For instance, Ephesians 2 says that you who were once far off have been now brought near by the blood of Christ.

2. A New Relationship to Yourself

For instance, Romans 6 is an exposition on how you have been identified with Christ.

3. A New Relationship to Other People

4. A New Relationship to The Enemy

You are no longer sons of the devil, but his enemy.

5. A New Relationship to Your Sin

6. A New Relationship to God's Promises

7. A New Relationship to God's Commands

C. Meditate

The third step in the process of application is to *meditate*. Remember what is prescribed for us to do in Joshua 1:8 and Psalm 1:1-2. Both texts talk about meditating "day and night." This is an absolutely essential to the step of application. True meditation is pondering the truth with a view to letting it help and readjust our lives.

D. Practice

The fourth step in application is to *practice* what you have learned. You must obey all that God commands you to do. There are at least nine questions that will help you to determine how best to put God's word into practice.

1. **Is there an example for me to follow?**
2. **Is there a sin to avoid?**
3. **Is there a promise to claim?**
4. **Is there a prayer to repeat?**
5. **Is there a command to obey?**
6. **Is there a condition to meet?**
7. **Is there a verse to memorize?**
8. **Is there an error to mark?**
9. **Is there a challenge to face?**

¹ These opening paragraphs are an adaptation of Howard Hendrick's material (Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1991]).

² The method outlined here is an adaptation of Traina's material. Much of the material here is taken word for word from Traina (Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study: A New Approach to Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980], 27-88).

³ Traina, 34.

⁴ Howard G. Hendricks, "The Laws of Structure" in DTS Class Notes for the course Bible Study Methods & Hermeneutics (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996).

⁵ The method outlined here is an adaptation of Traina's material. Much of the material here is taken word for word from Traina (Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study: A New Approach to Hermeneutics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980], 89-200).

⁶ All three of these opening paragraphs are an adaptation of Howard Hendrick's material. Much of it quotes Hendricks directly (Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1991]; Howard G. Hendricks, "The Laws of Structure" in DTS Class Notes for the course Bible Study Methods & Hermeneutics [Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996]).