

Inductive Bible Study

One primary goal for the "homework" portion of this course is that we would all develop habits that deepen our relationship with God. If we merely learn some skills or gain knowledge, we've missed the mark. Instead, we urge you to think of your Bible Study time as a Conversation, not an Assignment. Therefore, the first thing you will be asked to do each week is **Pray** and then **Read** the focus passage. When we remind you to pray, it's not an item to be checked off a list. Prayer is our side of the conversation with God. We approach God, and He speaks to us. We respond to what He says. He speaks some more. Sometimes we don't understand what he's saying. So we ask. It's a conversation.

The format for the weekly assignments will follow the **Inductive Bible Study Process**. This basically means that through our homework we will be learning and practicing the skills we need to look into God's Word, accurately discern what it means, and live our lives accordingly. That, in a nutshell is what "Inductive Bible Study" is all about. You can think of it as a process in three stages: Observation, Interpretation, and Application

Observation

The first stage in the Inductive Process is Observation. At this stage, we really focus on what the Bible says. We read a passage of scripture and ask the question, "What do I see?" As you read the focus passage each week, engage not only your mind but also your imagination in the process. Read even familiar passages as if you were seeing them for the first time, and as if they were written TO YOU (which they were!) Then...

Write a list of observations. Work your way through the passage one sentence or one verse at a time, listing whatever you observe. When you see something, add it to your list. Keep in mind; no detail is too small or too obvious. Here are some things to look for:

1. Repetition is a way of communicating emphasis. If a word or phrase is repeated, it's probably important.
2. Commands, warnings, or promises.
3. Lists. (Like the Fruit of the Spirit, or the qualities of Love)
4. Key terms. Look for words that seem important or "key" to the meaning of the passage. They point to the main idea being stated.
5. Connections. What is the relationship between ideas in the passage? Watch for words that link one thought to another. For example:
 - "and & likewise" show a comparison
 - "or & but" show a contrast
 - "therefore & so that" show a result of something
 - "because & since" show a reason for something
 - "if...then" indicates a conditional statement
6. Verb Tenses. Is the writer talking about something that has already happened, something that will (or might) happen in the future, or something that is presently true?

7. Questions are a great way to hone your powers of observation. Practice mentally asking questions as you read. For example, you may ask, "Who, what, when, where, why?"
- Who is speaking, or listening? Who is writing, or reading? If this is a story, who are the main characters?
 - What is happening? What objects are being described or used? What is the conflict? What is the problem? What is the occasion?
 - When did this happen? What happened before, or after? What time of day is it? What time of year is it? What else was going on at the time?
 - Where is the action taking place? (Inside, outside, on a mountain, by the sea, on a wall, in a city, in the country...) Can I find this place on a map?
 - Why are these events happening? Why is the speaker saying what he is? Why is the writer writing? Why are the people sad? ...or happy? ...or angry?
 - Bombard your passage with questions. If you aren't sure what something means, make a note of it. (For example, "What does this word mean?" or, "Who is this person that's mentioned?") Questions count as observations!

Interpretation

The next step of the Inductive Bible Study Process is Interpretation, where we ask the question, "What does it MEAN?" In asking that question we need to be careful that we are not asking ourselves "what does it mean—to me?" We all have a tendency to read the Bible and believe we can understand it in any way that feels good to us. But that is NOT what is meant by "Interpretation" in Inductive Bible Study Process. The writers of Scripture (both the Divine Author and His human instruments) had a particular meaning in mind when they wrote. Interpretation involves asking, "What did the Author mean to communicate here?" We answer that question by drawing meaning from what we have observed. After bombarding a passage with questions and picking it apart, you'll be ready to...

Sum It Up: Look back over all your observations of the passage and summarize it in one or two sentences. For most people this is challenging at first, but it gets easier with practice.

Application

The Bible says, "...don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves." (James 1:22, NLT) In the third stage of Inductive Bible Study we ask the question, "How does it work?" It's not enough to know what the Bible says, or even what it means. If it makes no practical difference in our lives we might as well study Geology or Basket-weaving. Application is really the main point of Bible Study. Each week, you'll be asked to consider what you will do with the timeless truth you have seen in God's Word. Many people find it helpful to use the acronym, **SPECK**, as a guide.

When we SPECK a passage we ask, is there...

- S-** a SIN to avoid or repent?
- P-** a PROMISE to claim?
- E-** an EXAMPLE to follow?
- C-** a COMMAND to obey?
- K-** KNOWLEDGE of God to believe?

Strive to find personal applications that are **"SMART"**:

- *Specific*—not be abstract or vague, but practical and concrete.
- *Measurable*—action items that allow you to measure success or completion. Who will hold you accountable, and when?
- *Attainable*—goals that are realistic. Don't set yourself up for failure by being overly ambitious or idealistic.
- *Relevant*—to your individual situation. Do things that really matter to you...not your friend, your mother, or that blogger you like.
- *Time-Bound*—goals that extend "for the rest of my life" can be overwhelming.

One caution: The decisions we make to line our lives up with the truth we see in God's Word are called personal applications because they are just that—personal and individual—they do not necessarily work for all people. How you will apply the truth of scripture to your life may look different from how a teenager in Moscow or a monk in the Middle Ages would. That is a difference in personal application, not timeless truth. The life-change God desires in you is not necessarily what he wants for your best friend. Missing this point is what can lead us into legalism.

If this seems like a lot to take in, remember we'll be practicing these things for the rest of our study, and everything gets easier with practice. You'll be with friends who are learning along with you and encouraging you. Do what you can, and come back next week ready to share what you saw.