Inductive Study Method

The inductive study method is a way of engaging the Bible in a methodical manner. It facilitates the individual disciple’s learning and growth, leading him or her to form his or her own conclusions about the text. It also provides a framework for anyone to study scripture, be they an academic or someone with little hermeneutical training.

When we study scripture inductively, we examine the details of the text and form an interpretation of the whole based on those details. It takes seriously the value of each word, zeroing in on a passage and interpreting it strictly within itself. The inductive method is an active and rational engagement with the Word of God in a way that helps a disciple understand the central idea of the passage.

Studying the Bible inductively follows a simple, three step pattern: observe, interpret and apply. Simply put, we observe the details of a passage. In light of those details, we interpret the passage, and we apply the interpretation to our lives.

“The more you continue to read Scripture, the more you begin to think as He thinks and act as He acts. And that’s how, over time, you gain the wisdom of the ages.”
Wayne Cordeiro

“How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”
Psalm 119:103

“To get the full flavor of an herb, it must be pressed between the fingers, so it is the same with the Scriptures; the more familiar they become, the more they reveal their hidden treasures and yield their indescribable riches.”
John Chrysostom

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.”
Jeremiah 15:16
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**Observe**
The observation stage is like inspecting a home. Begin your examination with the foundation. Then take a look at the structure and finally inspect the details. Document your observations as specifically as possible.

**Foundation**
Read the passage from start to finish. Then read or skim the book to understand the context of the passage.

**Atmosphere**
What is the general atmosphere or tone of the passage? For example, is it encouraging or rebuking? Is it foreboding, uplifting, peaceful, etc.?

**Where, when, who, and what**
Where and when does the passage take place? Who wrote it? Who is the audience, and who is the passage about? What are the events around the passage?

**Structure**
Examine the passage’s structure. Divide it into sections and title each section.

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**PASSAGES TO BEGIN STUDYING THE BIBLE INDUCTIVELY**

- Genesis 1:1-2:3
- Genesis 3
- Genesis 11:1-9
- Exodus 6:1-12
- Deuteronomy 6
- Joshua 1
- Judges 2:6-23
- 1 Samuel 8
- 1 Samuel 16:1-13
- Psalm 1
- Psalm 139
- Jeremiah 29:1-23
- Ezekiel 37:1-14
- Mathew 4:18-24
- Matthew 16:13-20
- John 20:11-19
- Acts 1:1-10
- Romans 8:31-39
- Galatians 5:13-26
- Hebrews 11:1-12:3
- James 2:14-26
Inductive Study Method

**Details**
With the foundation and structure observed, we turn to the finer details.

**Repetition**
Note any repetition of words, phrases or ideas.

**Progression of ideas**
Is there a natural or logical progression of ideas?

**Contrasts, comparisons and illustrations**
Observe any contrasts, comparisons and illustrations.

**Lists**
Are there any lists in the text? How are they ordered?

**Reasons and results**
Note any descriptions of reasons and results or cause and effect.

**Advice, warnings and promises**
Does the text have any stated or implied advice, warnings, or promises?

**Questions**
Pay attention to any questions – answered or rhetorical – in the passage.

**Grammatical construction**
Is there anything to note in the grammar of the text?

**Emphatic statements**
Are there any emphatic statements in the passage?

**Key Words**
In light of what you have observed thus far, are there any words critical to the meaning of the text?

**Key Verse**
Which verse is central to the passage?
Inductive Study Method

Interpret
Review your observations and see where they are pointing. In light of the observations, what is the passage saying? What is the common thread in the details you observed, the consistent message in the text?

Keep in mind:
• Stay close to the Holy Spirit. Interpretation happens in conversation with the Spirit.
• Keep to your observations and not preconceived ideas about the text.
• The central idea may not incorporate every detail you observed.

Central idea of the passage
Summarize the interpretation of the text in a one or two sentence statement. Write the central idea of the passage.

Apply
In light of the central idea of this passage, how will you respond? Is there something you will start doing, continue doing or stop doing? How does the central idea impact your relationship with God? Do not take this step lightly. We don’t interact with scripture strictly for knowledge. We read because of the relationship it cultivates. It is from and into this relationship that God speaks through scripture.

WHY TO PRACTICE THE INDUCTIVE METHOD

The inductive study method is a framework for studying scripture that can be practiced by anyone.

If you find yourself drawn to rational disciplines rather than the more contemplative, the inductive method may be a fruitful practice for you.

The inductive method takes seriously every part of the text from the author and audience down to the specific words used.

The inductive method allows the disciple to interpret scripture for him or herself allowing for more substantial learning and deeper communion with God.

RESOURCES

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery by Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman

Precept Ministry’s Inductive Study Guide http://precept.org/data/sites/1/PDFs/PMI_IBStudyOverview_v2.pdf