

Handout #1- Bible Study Methods  
7 PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE STUDY

**1) Interpret the passage in light of its context.**

What is the context of a passage?

- OT or NT?
- In which section of the OT or the NT is your passage? Eg- Pentateuch, Gospels, Pauline epistles?
- What was the theme of the book where the passage is found?
- What is the theme of the chapter in which your passage is found?
- What are the verses just before and just after your passage saying?

PRACTICE:

- Exodus 32: 31-34
- Psalm 51
- Zechariah 4:6
- Matthew 5:48
- Philippians 4:13

**2) Interpret the passage according to the correct meaning of the words.**

- What do the key words mean?
- Try to understand what the Hebrew or Greek word which is translated means.

PRACTICE:

- Exodus 32: 31-34
- Psalm 51
- Zechariah 4:6
- Matthew 5:48
- Philippians 4:13

**3) Understand the grammar in the passage.**

- What tense are the verbs?
- Understand the adjectives, pronouns, etc. and how they relate to the other words in the passage.

PRACTICE:

- Psalm 23- Notice how the writer switches from talking about God in vs 1, 2,3, 6 to talking to God in verses 4 and 5.
- Eph 5:18
- Matt. 7:7
- Mk 2:5- Their faith.

**4) Interpret the passage according to the author's original intention.**

- Who was the author?
- What was his purpose in writing? What was he originally trying to say?
- Who were the people who received the letter-the recipients? What did it mean to them?

PRACTICE –

- Deuteronomy 28
- Matthew 5:3-10
- Rev. 7:1-4,
- Rev. 13:18.

**5) Interpret the passage in light of the historical, cultural background. In other words, ask yourself what did this mean in that historical, cultural era?**

PRACTICE-

- Genesis 22. It is helpful to know that some of the gods of the people of Abraham's day demanded child sacrifice.
- John 13:3-5, 14-15
- Luke 9:59-60- know the cultural practice of staying with family until the parents die.
- 1 Cor. 8:1-13- Food offered to idols.

**6) Interpret scripture by Scripture. Remember that Scripture will never contradict Scripture.** If it seems to, then your interpretation is wrong. Some parts of scripture are paradoxical- they seem to contradict but yet they are two important truths.

PRACTICE -

- Acts 19:6, Acts 10:46- What are the tongues the Luke is speaking about? Use Acts 2 to help you understand and explain what tongues or languages, because the same Greek word translated tongues in Acts 19:6 And 10:46 is also found in Acts 2. In Acts 2 we can see that Peter is speaking of a known language, not an unknown prayer tongue.
- What is the relationship between faith and works in Bible? Do Paul and James contradict each other? Ephesians 2:8-9 and James 2:14-18.

**7) Interpret the scripture literally unless it is obvious that it is to be understood symbolically.**

PRACTICE:

- Eph 5:22-24- interpret it following the above principles.
- Rev 14:1-5

Extra Practice:

- Daniel 8:1-12. This is obviously symbolic language and the interpretation can be difficult. Having a commentary can be helpful.
- Matthew 25:1-13. Most parables have one main meaning and the meaning is given directly or indirectly in the context. Some parables like the parable of the 10 virgins are obviously symbolic. This parable teaches the need to be ready, to have the Holy Spirit in our lives when Jesus, the bridegroom, comes for His church.

Handout #2 Bible Study Methods  
Three powerful steps to studying the Bible

**I. STEP ONE: OBSERVATION -- What is the passage actually saying?**

- A. Pray asking the Holy Spirit to help you.
- B. Read the passage through 2-5 times.
- C. Try to understand the whole chapter or that part of the book first before you try to understand the passage you are studying.
- D. Focus on the essential truths, the core ideas in the passage. Don't get sidetracked on issues that take away from the main meaning of the passage.
- E. Ask key questions
  1. What is the scripture actually saying? Ephesians 2:1-2
  2. What does it not say? Ephesians 2:8-9
  3. What is the tone of the passage? Galatians 1:6-8
  4. Is there a command or rebuke or encouragement or simply stating what happened? Galatians 5:24-26
  5. Is there a flow of ideas in the passage? Does one thing lead to another? Romans 7:14-25
  6. Ask yourself- why did the writer compose this section of scripture? What was God's purpose in inspiring the author to write like this? What did the original readers think the author was saying? Hebrews 11
  7. Ask the 5 W and the H questions.
    - a. Who? wrote it, spoke it, about whom, to whom is he speaking?
    - b. What? are the main events, the major ideas, the major doctrines, is he talking about, is his purpose in saying that?
    - c. When? was it written, did this event take place, will it happen, did he say it?
    - d. Where? was this done, was this said, will it happen?
    - e. Why? was this written, was this mentioned, was that not mentioned, was so much written about this?
    - f. How? can we do this, is this truth illustrated?
- F. Look for certain key words or phrases that are repeated, that is probably significant. I Corinthians 13.
- G. Remember that sometimes prophecy has a double fulfillment, once when it was fulfilled shortly after it was spoken, and

sometimes a further fulfillment at the end of time when Christ returns. Joel 2:28-32

PRACTICE: Exodus 3:1-15

**II. STEP TWO: INTERPRETATION -- WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**  
**Interpretation comes out of your observations**

- A. Interpret according to the original situation in which it happened.
    1. Who was the passage written to?
    2. Who wrote the passage?
    3. What was the original circumstance when the passage was written?
  - B. Interpret according to the context
  - C. Interpret the passage in light of the whole Bible. Your interpretation will not contradict the clear meaning of the rest of the Bible.
  - D. Interpret according to the kind of language being used
    1. According to the grammar
    2. According to the words.
    3. Literally or symbolically? Sometimes a passage can have a both a literal and a symbolic meaning. See the lesson on types.
- PRACTICE: Exodus 3:1-15

**III. STEP THREE: APPLICATION -- What are we supposed to do?**

Information without application produces frustration.

Information with application produces transformation.

- A. Look for principles we can apply.
- B. Apply the truth of the passage in your own life first.
- C. Then apply the truth in the life of those you are leading. Application answers the question how. The passage gives the principle. Then you need to ask how that principle can be applied practically in your local culture and context.

PRACTICE- assign the following passages to individuals or small groups of 2-3 to make observations from the passage based on what they learned in this lesson. The following are suggested passages.

1. Exodus 3:1-4:17;
2. Psalm 1;
3. Acts 9:1-19;
4. I John 1:5-2:2