

How to Study the Bible in 3 Steps



Step 1: Observation—What does the passage say?

Step 2: Interpretation—What does the passage mean?

Step 3: Application—What am I going to do about what the passage says and means?

Step 1: Observation

Observation is the first and most important step in how to study the Bible. As you read the Bible text, you need to look carefully at what is said, and how it is said. Look for things like:

Key Words or Ideas (What's the main thing the writer is trying to get across?)

Literary Form (Some of the Bible was written as history, some as poetry and some as letters. That impacts how you interpret it.)

The Big “W” Questions (Who's speaking? To Whom? What? Where? For What Purpose?)

Step 2: Interpretation

Interpretation is discovering the meaning of a passage, the author's main thought or idea. Answering the questions that arise during observation will help you in the process of interpretation. Five clues can help you:

Context. You can answer 75 percent of your questions about a passage when you read the text. Reading the text involves looking at the near context (the verse immediately before and after) as well as the far context (the paragraph or the chapter that precedes and/or follows the passage you're studying).

Cross-references. Let Scripture interpret Scripture. That is, let other passages in the Bible shed light on the passage you are looking at. At the same time, be careful not to assume that the same word or phrase in two different passages means the same thing.

Culture. The Bible was written long ago, so when we interpret it, we need to understand it from the writers' cultural context. **Conclusion.** Having answered your questions for understanding by means of context, cross-reference, and culture, you can make a preliminary statement of the passage's meaning. Remember that if your passage consists of more than one paragraph, the author may be presenting more than one thought or idea.

Consultation. Reading books known as commentaries, which are written by Bible scholars, can help you interpret Scripture.

Step 3: Application

Application is why we study the Bible. We want our lives to change; we want to be obedient to God and to grow more like Jesus Christ. After we have observed a passage and interpreted or understood it to the best of our ability, we must then apply its truth to our own life.

You'll want to ask the following questions of every passage of Scripture you study:

How does the truth revealed here affect my relationship with God?

How does this truth affect my relationship with others?

How does this truth affect me?

The application step is not completed by simply answering these questions; the key is putting into practice what God has taught you in your study!

