

One of the noblest pursuits a child of God can embark upon is to get to know and understand God better. The best way we can accomplish this is to look carefully at the book He has written, the Bible, which communicates who He is and His plan for mankind.

There are many ways we can study the Bible, but one of the most influential and simple approaches to reading and understanding God's Word involves three simple steps:

Step 1: Observation—What does the passage say?

Step 2: Interpretation—What does the passage mean?

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

Let's dive into each step of studying the Bible.

Step 1 of Bible Study: Observation

Observation is the first and most crucial step in how to study the Bible. As you read the Bible text, you must look carefully at what is said and how it is said.

- **Look for: Terms, not words.** Words can have many meanings, but terms are words used in a specific way in a specific context. (For instance, the word *trunk* could apply to a tree, a car, or a storage box. However, when you read, "That tree has a very large trunk," you know exactly what the word means, which makes it a term.)

- **Structure.** If you look at your Bible, you will see that the text has units called paragraphs (indented or marked ¶). A paragraph is a complete unit of thought. You can discover the content of the author's message by noting and understanding each paragraph unit.

- **Emphasis.** The amount of space or the number of chapters or verses devoted to a specific topic will reveal the importance of that topic (for example, note the emphasis of [Romans 9](#) and [Psalms 119](#)).

- **Repetition.** This is another way an author demonstrates that something is important. One reading of [1 Corinthians 13](#), where the author uses the word "love" nine times in only 13 verses, communicates to us that love is the focal point of these 13 verses.

Step 2 of Bible Study: 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 (called "the five C's") can help you determine the author's main point(s):

- **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. 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 we need to understand it from the writers' cultural context when we interpret it.

● **Conclusion.** Having answered your questions for understanding using 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 present 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 of Bible Study: Application

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

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

- How does the truth revealed affect my relationship with God?
- How does this truth affect my relationship with others?
- How does this truth affect me?
- How does this truth affect my response to the enemy, Satan?

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.

Although you cannot consciously apply everything, you're learning in Bible study at any given moment, you can intentionally apply something. And when you work on applying a truth to your life, God will bless your efforts by, as noted earlier, conforming you to the image of Jesus Christ.