

An Easy Way To Study The Bible¹

1. PRAY. Pray before and throughout your Bible Study.

The Bible contains spiritual truth. According to 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:16, people need the help of the Holy Spirit to correctly understand spiritual truth. *“For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.... This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (NIV 1 Corinthians 2:11, 13–14).

Begin in prayer. Then continue in an attitude of prayer as you do the remaining three steps. Ask God for the Holy Spirit’s help so you can correctly understand the meaning of the text. Ask Him what He is saying to you about your life and how He wants you to apply the text to your life today.

2. SAY. What does the text say?

Read the text carefully. *Focus on what the text actually says and write your observations.* A famous author once wrote, *“The pen is the crowbar of the mind.”* Writing your thoughts will stimulate more ideas.

One of the simplest ways is to make a list of observations after reading the text being studied.

3. MEAN. What does the text mean in its context?

The author of every Bible text intended to communicate a specific message to a particular group of first readers. But the author’s language, culture, historical setting, and experiences are very different from ours. Because of these differences, we may misunderstand many Bible texts. Consequently, we should always try to determine what the author intended each text to mean according to its context before applying it to our lives and culture.

What is the *context*? The *context* is the larger body of material surrounding the text. You may use the following as a guide to determine where the written context begins and ends.

Length Of Text	The Immediate Context	The Next Larger Context
Shorter than a paragraph	The paragraph	The topic (identified by subtitles) or the chapter
1 or 2 paragraphs	The topic (identified by subtitles) or the chapter	The section or the chapter
1 chapter or longer	The book division or the book	The entire book

As you gain experience studying the Bible, it will become easier to accurately identify the immediate context and the next larger context.

The following is a simple but very powerful question that everyone can use to help discover the author's intended message.

According to the context, what did the author intend the text to communicate to the first readers?

First: Begin with a summary of the immediate text. Where possible also include the next larger context. (Principle: the larger the context, the smaller the risk of error)

Next: Answer this question, "So, according to the context what did the author intend the passage being studied to say to the first reader?"

Before moving on, write any questions you have about what the text means. It is normal to have questions about what a text might mean. God will use your questions to help you understand the Bible better.

4. APPLY. How will I apply this text to my life today?

While praying, make a practical plan to apply what you have learned from God's Word to your life. The following questions can help you do that:

- Is there a general principle or a specific message?
- What will I do?
- When will I do it?
- Where will I do it?
- How will I do it?
- Is it reasonable? (Will I do it?)
- Is it relational?(Is there someone I can share my plan with?)
- Is it responsible? (I am being led to take more personal responsibility rather than to a place where I can easily blame other people or circumstances for things not going well.)

Review your plan. Is it something you can do today? Does it include a way for you to know when you have completed it? If not, revise your plan.

CONCLUSION

The Bible says we should study God's Word correctly and avoid wrong teachings (2 Timothy 2:15; 3:1-17; 4:1-4). I encourage you to memorize the four words, "pray," "say," "mean," and "apply." Then use these four steps to study the Bible.

1. *Pray:* Pray before and throughout your study of the Bible.
2. *Say:* What does the text say?
3. *Mean:* What does the text mean in its context?
4. *Apply:* How will I apply this text to my life today?

1. PRAY: PRAY BEFORE AND THROUGHOUT YOUR STUDY OF THE BIBLE.

Start by praising and worshiping God. Confess your sins. Ask God for the Holy Spirit's help so you can correctly understand and apply God's Word to your life today. Do not proceed to the next step until you have done this.

2. SAY: WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

All observations should be based on what the text actually says. Write your observations here.

3. MEAN: WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN IN ITS CONTEXT?

Determine what the author intended to communicate to the first readers according to the context. The following questions will help you do this for your text.

What is the immediate context for the text you chose? (Hint: use paragraph breaks, subtitles, and chapter breaks to help you.) _____ . What is the larger context? _____ **Principle:** *The larger the context the less likely you will be lead to error.*

Now read at least the immediate context and answer the following question to the best of your ability. For some texts, you may need to read a larger context. *According to the context, what did the author intend your text to communicate to the first readers?*

Briefly write down any questions you have about what the text means. These questions can be helpful for future study. God can use them to help you understand the Bible better. **Principle:** *Good students ask good questions. Poor students ask lazy questions (they don't think it through to the best of their ability before forming a question – they want others to do their thinking for them)*

4. APPLY: HOW WILL I APPLY THIS TEXT TO MY LIFE TODAY?

Whenever we study the Scriptures we should also determine what God is saying to us personally and make a plan to put that into practice. To do that, you can ask God, "What do You want me to do as a result of my study of Your Word?"

While praying, make a practical plan to apply what you have learned from God's Word to your life. To make a plan, answer the following questions:

- Is there a general principle or a specific message?
- What will I do?
- When will I do it?
- Where will I do it?
- How will I do it?
- Is it reasonable? (Will I do it?)
- Is it relational?(Is there someone I can share my plan with?)
- Is it responsible? (I am being led to take more personal responsibility rather than to a place where I can easily blame other people or circumstances for things not going well.)

Review your plan. Is it something you can do today? Does it include a way for you to know when you have completed it? If not, revise your plan.

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