

Building Your Own Bible Study

What is Inductive Bible Study?

The What and Why

An inductive approach to Bible study means you don't start with a topic and then try to find verses that relate. Rather, inductive study focuses on a passage of the Bible and moves toward these two goals:

1. Discover what a biblical author intended to communicate to the original audience.
2. Encounter Jesus and be transformed by his Word.

We recommend inductive Bible study because:

- This method keeps the biblical text front and center.
- Inductive Bible study lets everyone experience the joys of learning about God through his Word.

Elements of Inductive Bible Study

The Format



Observe – What's There?

"Observations" are things you notice about what the text actually says that everyone else looking at it can see and agree on. Asking "Where is that in the text?" can be a helpful way to keep on track and not jump ahead to interpretation and application.



Interpret – What Does it Mean?

Interpretation focuses on asking questions of the text. What did the author want the audience to know and do? Why was this passage written? Good interpretive questions build off key observation. After you ask, find the answers from the text. Once you finish, try summarizing the passage in one sentence.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR	HOW TO FIND THEM
Facts	Who, What, When, Where?
Voice / Audience	Who is speaking / writing to whom?
Setting / Characters	Where and when is this taking place? Who is involved?
Repetitions	What words and phrases are repeated?
Contrasts	What words or ideas are contrasted?
Theme / Motif	What ideas are prominent?
Logical Relationships	Keywords: if . . . then, therefore, for, because, since, etc.
Cause and Effect	Keywords: therefore
List of Things	Commands, attributes, etc.
Questions / Problems	What remains puzzling to you as you read the text carefully?

TIGHT INTERPRETATION QUESTIONS

These help you get to the heart of the text:

- **Text dependent** – Make sure the passage and context can be used to answer the question.
- **Interesting** – Choose questions that capture the attention of the group and create energy.
- **Generate discussion** – You experience the fruit of the diverse experiences and perspectives in your group.
- **Highlight tension** – This could be tension in the text or different perspectives in your group.
- **Tie sections together** – This helps you dig deeper into the passage as one section builds on another.



Apply – So What?

In application, we actively respond to what God says in Scripture. It's hard to fully understand the Word until we embody what we learned, which is why it's important to circle back to the application even after the Bible study.

SHARP APPLICATION QUESTIONS

These help apply the core message of the text to your small group and you:

- **Specific** – Helps you and your group know exactly what to do.
- **Honors the text** – Reflects the true implications of the passage.
- **Accountability** – Gives you something to share with someone that you want to do or work on.
- **Risky** – Stretches you to do something, where the end result isn't certain.
- **Prayerful** – Asks God for conviction and the help we need to act on his Word.

Leading Others

Pacing and Timing

Here are some recommendations:

- **Utilize camps and conferences** where you can spend extended sessions in inductive Bible study.
- **Choose shorter passages of narrative genre.**
- **Move on when your group is about 90% done** with a section. It's great to finish feeling like there is more to be discovered, but still have takeaways.
- **Pacing is more art than science.** Each study will take its own unique shape depending on the group and passage, and it's important not to rush or to run out of time for application.
- **Assume you won't answer everything.** Let the group know you won't have time to answer every question. Unanswered questions can generate curiosity to read the Bible outside of small group.
- **Discern your context.** We recommend 30 – 75 minutes, but there is no right or wrong length for a Bible study. You can discern with God and ministry coaches what is right for your context.

Sample 60-minute Small Group

10 mins	Personal Check-ins
2 mins	Intro
5 mins	Individual study
10 mins	Share observations & questions
20 mins	Answer interpretation questions
3 mins	Summary & core message
10 mins	Application

Troubleshooting Common Challenges

- **Too much silence**
 - Rephrase the question. Is the answer obvious, or the question confusing?
 - Have them first share in pairs
- **Participant who dominates the conversation**
 - Direct questions to others: "I'd love to hear from someone who hasn't shared yet."
 - Outside of the study, ask the person to be mindful of making space for others
- **Conversations get off on tangents**
 - Agree as a group to humorously flag each other to stay on topic
 - Gently re-gather attention and restate the question
- **Theological questions that go beyond the passage**
 - "That's an important question, but this passage doesn't get at it directly. Let's set it aside for now and maybe go there another time when we can look closely at passages that are focused on that question."
- **Answers don't have a biblical basis**
 - "Interesting; where do you see that in the text?"
- **Visitors**
 - Have everyone introduce themselves, not just the new person
 - Consider the level of sharing you are asking of someone who is new
- **Your groups expects you to be the expert**
 - Remind them that, in this format, it helps for everyone to contribute
 - Summarize other's answers rather than answering the question yourself



Praying Paul's Prayer

Take a few minutes and use Colossians 3:12-17 to pray for yourself and your community.

Related Resources

- [Pacing Templates for Bible Study](#)
- [Bible Study Bookmark \(Inductive Method\)](#)
- blueletterbible.org – Read, search, and study the Bible
- biblegateway.com – Searchable online Bible with study resources

Book Recommendations

- [New Bible Dictionary](#). Marshall, I. Howard, et al. . IVP, 1996.
- [How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth](#). Fee, Gordon, & Douglas Stewart. Zondervan, 1993.
- [The Bible Study Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to an Essential Practice](#). Olesberg, Lindsay. IVP, 2012.
- [Misreading Scripture With Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible](#). Richards, E. Randolph & Brandon O'Brien. IVP, 2012.

Recommended Courses

- [Facilitating Great Discussions](#)
- [Inviting Well](#)

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