

FIVE REASONS TO STUDY THE BIBLE INDUCTIVELY

Why we study the Bible the way we do.

1) Engaging Both Mind and Heart Leads to Transformed Lives

To study Scripture is to cross cultures into a foreign, ancient land and expect God to be present to us here today. Inductive Bible study is a method of inquiry that helps bridge that gap between the ancient text and our modern world. Participants encounter God as they seek him through an investigative process that removes obstacles and softens hearts to receive the message.

Julia was a non-Christian who had just started attending a Bible study in her sorority. When her group studied John 1, Julia felt like Jesus was speaking directly to her: “Come and see.” Before the next week’s study, Julia was so intrigued that she went through the library inviting everyone to come with her. One student came along that night, got involved in the group, and later that semester started following Jesus.

2) A Level Playing Field Fosters Effective Outreach

The inductive method creates an environment where participants from various backgrounds and levels of experience with Scripture can study together. A freshman who has never read the Bible can study alongside a seminary professor, and both will enjoy the experience and learn from one another.

Younger generations, often distrusting authority and rejecting what is preached at them, can thrive with inductive study because the method harnesses their questions and curiosity to drive the discovery process. For cultural groups who have not traditionally been welcomed to write commentaries and other tools for biblical study – like women, people of color, non-English speakers, etc. – the inductive method invites their unique perspectives and creates a space where each community can be heard.

During a study of the Matthew 1 genealogy, an African American woman was brought to tears as she encountered God. She had always wanted to know her own genealogy, but the history of slavery had rendered that hope impossible. The same list of names that many might see as boring, this woman saw as a precious gift to be cherished. Her voice and perspective blessed the group with deeper insight and challenged them to value the text on a new level.

3) Scripture at the Center Cultivates Deep Discipleship

Some church leaders wonder what might happen to the beliefs of their congregation if Bible study were to happen without senior leadership present, but using the inductive method to study the Bible helps prevent heretical messages from taking hold in a group. Inductive Bible study encourages questions and then drives the participants to answer those questions from the Scripture itself, challenging one another when any interpretation seems to stray from the text.

With the inductive method, we study Scripture on Scripture’s terms, not our own. Scripture (not the leader of the Bible study) sets the agenda, and the community responds by seeking to understand, trust, and obey. Keeping the Bible at the center attracts both Christians and non-Christians to dig in because studying the text within its context makes for a vibrant and interesting discussion.

A skeptical student wanted no part in the “theories” of her InterVarsity staff, who had been trying to explain the gospel message to her. Yet this same student was excited to study a story about Jesus from Scripture, draw connections, and share what she liked about Jesus. Inductive study can disarm a skeptical generation as they discover the truth of God’s word and are drawn into the narrative for themselves.

4) An Active Learning Environment Produces Devoted Followers

This younger generation is hungry for spiritual experiences that are relevant to their daily lives, and inductive Bible study is a living encounter with Jesus that is both spiritual and fun. Investigating Scripture with curiosity shifts the participants from passivity to active involvement. Inductive study is a hands-on, interactive experience. Even those who have been inoculated against the truth of Scripture by past study can gain a fresh desire to read the Bible when offered the freedom to investigate for themselves.

Additionally, some college students have shared that learning the inductive method has helped them become better students in their classes. Participants learn how to study a source document by uncovering the context of the original audience, exploring how the author’s message would have been understood, and then discerning how to apply that message to their own lives.

An atheist student was investigating the crucifixion narrative in Luke 23 and boldly remarked, “Clearly, the people who were sneering at Jesus, taunting that he saved others and should save himself if he really is God’s Messiah, don’t know Jesus. They can’t imagine that Jesus cares more about saving others than he cares about himself.” This sort of insight comes naturally even to non-Christians in the inductive Bible study setting because they are invited to approach the text with active curiosity.

5) Multiplied Influence Builds Strong Community

The inductive method teaches how to study Scripture personally and communally without having to rely on the latest and greatest materials being published. Participants can easily progress from membership to leadership of a study because the method prepares them to take next steps on their own. The method is reproducible and puts the initiative into the hands of the participant. Furthermore, the communal nature of InterVarsity-style inductive study strengthens the community and prepares participants for healthy interactions around the Word in other settings.

Christine struggled to find Christian community during her first semester on campus. There was no InterVarsity at her school, but she heard about the Urbana Student Missions Conference from a friend back home. During Urbana, Christine encountered Jesus powerfully through studying the book of Revelation inductively. Christine left Urbana with an unshakeable conviction: “I think Jesus wants me to do this with others on my campus.” After a 1-hour coaching session, Christine texted a group of friends and invited them to study the book of Matthew with her every week. By the end of second semester, Christine’s group had blossomed into sixteen students (both Christians and non-Christians) who were meeting regularly to encounter Jesus and to respond to him with their lives.