

MANUSCRIPT BIBLE STUDY HOW-TO GUIDE

Studying Individually or Communally

Purpose:

- To grow in intimacy with God and others through Scripture
- To grow in Christ-like character through Scripture
- To grow in empowerment for mission through Scripture

How to Study:

- Pray that God would meet you as you study!
- Read the passage with fresh eyes and an open heart and mind.

1. Observe [see the text] – What is the author saying?

- a. Print the text, double-spaced, and use colored pencils or pens to note:

CONTENT	CONNECTIONS	ENTERING THE STORY
Characters Relationships Locations Time	Actions and Reactions Repeated Words Comparisons Contrasts Cause and Effect General to Specific Specific to General Climax Conditions	Imagine you are a character in the story... What do you see, smell, hear, taste? What are you feeling and experiencing?

- b. What genre of literature is this? (there may be more than one in the passage)
 Narrative – Dialog – Poetry – Letter/Epistle – Gospel – Law – Prophecy
- c. Mark all logical connectors – therefore, because, since, for, so that, but, etc.
- d. Divide the text into sections or units of thought. Breaks are usually indicated by a change in location, time, theme, thought, action, characters, or speaker. Title each of your sections.
- e. Note anything unexpected or unusual in the text.
- f. If you are studying a New Testament (NT) passage, are there any Old Testament (OT) references or allusions? Look them up! Read the whole passage, not just the specific verse or phrase. How does referencing this OT passage add to or clarify what the NT author is saying?
- g. Is there anything in the text that raises a question for you or fuels your curiosity? That intrigues, perplexes, or troubles you? Write a question that would help you dig into that tension!

2. Interpret [discover and understand the text] – What does the author mean to communicate?

- a. What connections and patterns did you observe running throughout the text? Use the best or most interesting of your observations to develop questions that will help you dig into the text.
- b. Look at the grammatical connections you found and formulate questions about them. Why does the author repeat this word? Why is this contrast here? What themes or meanings do these connections point to? What meaning is the author bringing out with each of the main connections? Try starting questions with “Why” or “How” (not “Who/What/Where”).
- c. Refine your questions. Example from Mark 1: Why does Jesus say, “The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel”? → *becomes* → What exactly is it about the Kingdom of God being at hand that should lead people to repent and believe in the Gospel?
- d. Focus on the most significant questions – those which arise from the text, are most interesting, generate thinking and discussion, highlight tensions, and cover large portions of the text.
- e. Formulate answers to the most significant questions you have asked.
 - Look first at the text itself. Read it again carefully with your questions in mind.
 - Look at the literary context, what comes immediately before and after this passage.
 - Use a Bible dictionary or regular dictionary to define words, phrases, and concepts you don’t understand. Look at a map to understand geographical context.
 - Use a background commentary to study the social and historical context of this passage.
 - If you are studying a New Testament passage, look again at the Old Testament references and allusions that you found when you were observing.
- f. Ask yourself the “big question” about this passage – What does it seem that the author intended to communicate to the original readers? What seems to be central to this passage? Why is this passage included in this book of the Bible? Write what you are grasping as a core message in an overall, integrative sentence. Be able to explain from the text why this is your interpretation.

3. Apply [respond to the text] – How does this text speak to your story?

- a. How do you sense that God is speaking to you through this passage?
- b. What part of your life is connected to your core message from this text?
- c. How are you experiencing what a character in the story is going through?
- d. Is there a promise to trust, a command to obey, or an example to follow or avoid?
- e. Are you sensing any deeper insights into God or your experience with God?
- f. What specific actions are you going to take in response to what God is saying to you?
- g. If you are studying in a group, what action will you take together, in response to what God is saying to your community?

Resources for Reference and Further Study

The 30-Minute Bible: God’s Story for Everyone

The Bible Study Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to an Essential Practice

The Fire of the Word: Meeting God on Holy Ground

The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament / New Testament (reference)

Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes: Patronage, Honor, and Shame in the Biblical World

The Story of God, the Story of Us: Getting Lost and Found in the Bible