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Studying the Bible

Key Themes

- God's Word is the foundation for our lives.
- God has communicated to us in a way we can understand.

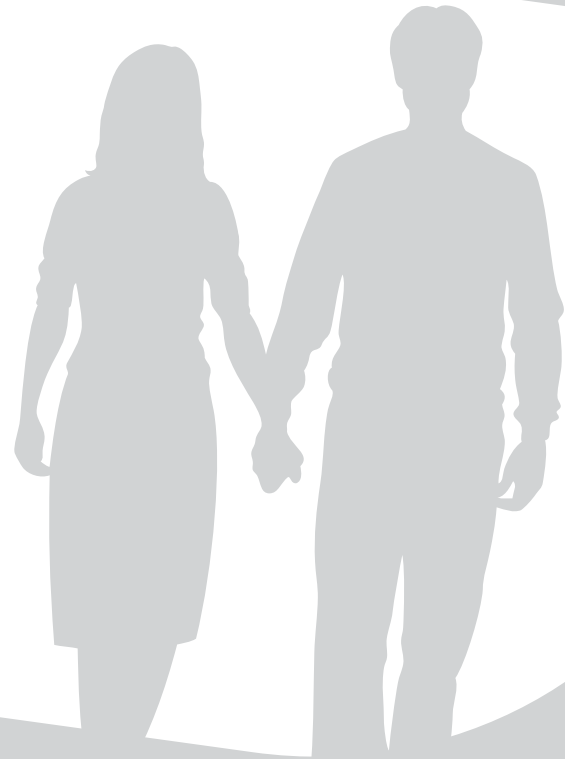
Key Passages

- Hebrews 4:11–13; 2 Peter 1:2–4; 2 Timothy 2:14–19

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify the three parts of the inductive study method.
- Distinguish between exegesis and eisegesis.
- Recognize the importance of careful study of the Bible.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, "What do you know about hermeneutics?" Students will discuss their current understanding of hermeneutics. Be prepared to give a brief explanation of hermeneutics.



Studying God's Word

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The inductive study method is a tool that allows us to understand what Scripture is teaching and to apply it to our lives. Drawing ideas out of the text by asking good questions and understanding context will help us avoid twisting God's Word to suit our own desires.

☐ Study the Prepare to Share section.

☐ Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Inductive Bible Study

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Students will make a quick reference sheet of the inductive Bible study method.

☐ Print one Inductive Bible Study reference sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

God has revealed Himself to us in the words of the Bible—His only written revelation to man. We are called to study diligently what has been revealed and to apply it to the way we live our lives. Within the pages of Scripture, we find many exhortations to use what God has revealed in a way that honors Him.

In the Old Testament, we find examples of the Israelites abandoning what God had revealed to them. As a result, the people of that nation became corrupt.

We see in Nehemiah 8 the reading of the book of the Law of Moses before the assembly of Israel after it had been neglected for so long. Hearing the words, the people again understood what God required of them and sought to live accordingly.

Jesus chided the scribes and Pharisees for their failure to understand what God had revealed. “Have you not read?” was His way of pointing out their misunderstandings (Matthew 12:3–5, 19:4, 22:31). They had added their own ideas into the Scriptures rather than seeking to understand the plain meaning.

As Jesus taught, He constantly referenced the Scriptures as authoritative for guiding our lives. That same idea persisted as the apostles and disciples continued to spread the gospel after Christ’s ascension.

In Acts 17:10–12, we read of the Bereans, who were commended for searching the Scriptures to confirm what Paul was teaching.

In the New Testament epistles, there are many examples of examining the Bible to understand the truth. For example, in Hebrews 4:11–13, we are told that the Bible is like a sword that helps us discern truth from error in our thoughts. And Paul exhorted Timothy to study diligently God’s Word in order to discern what is true (2 Timothy 2:14–19).

We trust that God has revealed to us those things that we need to live lives that honor Him. Peter relates this idea to us in 2 Peter 1:2–4 when he tells us that “all things that pertain to life and godliness” have been given to us “through the knowledge of Him.” How do we know about God? We know primarily by what He has revealed to us in His Word. The doctrine known as the *sufficiency of Scripture* doesn’t mean that the Bible is an exhaustive manual on everything, but that its principles are sufficient to guide us in the different situations we face.

In this lesson, we will teach the three-step inductive study method which will then be used throughout this curriculum to discern what the text of Scripture says. Laying such a foundation is critical if we are to study the Bible in a way that will not distort the text

or make it conform to our thoughts. We are to submit ourselves to the Scriptures, not the other way around.

APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Many people chide Christians for reading the Bible literally. The Bible contains many different types of literature, but all of them communicate God’s truth to us. When we say we take the Bible literally, we really mean that we take it in the sense that it was written. Some sections of Scripture are meant to be read as historical accounts, while others are poetic.

The process of understanding what Scripture says is called *hermeneutics*—a big word describing the process of trying to understand what the Bible means. Learning proper hermeneutics opens a whole new world of truth found in the Bible. There are many different schools of biblical interpretation. These range from liberal approaches (mystical interpretation, naturalistic interpretation, etc.) to the more conservative approach we’ll be using (where ideas are considered in context and Scripture is used to interpret Scripture). This second, more conservative method may be new to you. It is often referred to as the grammatical-historical method of interpretation because it takes into account the grammar and context of the passage as well as the historical and cultural setting of the author and the original hearers. We will call it the inductive Bible study method.

As Christians, we recognize that the Bible is God’s very breath revealing His words to us. As we seek to understand what He has said, we should not import our own ideas into Scripture but rather allow Scripture to inform and evaluate our ideas. Drawing ideas out of the text is called *exegesis* (ex- meaning “out of”), while adding our ideas into the text is called *eisegesis* (eis- meaning “into”).

Take Genesis 1 for example. If we simply read that chapter as it is plainly written, we would conclude that God created the universe in six normal days—an accurate exegesis. On the other hand, if we consider that same text by starting with a belief in evolutionary processes occurring over millions of years, we might be tempted instead to interpret those “days” as long ages. In that case, we would engage in eisegesis since we imported the idea of long ages into the text—a practice that can lead to the dangers of compromise and distorted conclusions.

In order to properly exegete a passage, we follow three essential components in an inductive Bible study: observation, interpretation, and application. These steps can be subdivided in various ways, but we will stick to three basic parts to teach the process.

To **observe**, we simply ask *who, what, where, when, why, and how* questions about the study passage. Who is the author writing to? What words are repeated or emphasized in the passage? Where is the event taking place? When was this written? What type of literature is being used (history, poetry, parable, etc.)? What is the main point of the passage?

By taking time to observe the text, we become familiar with the important words, commands, and main themes that are present. Once we are familiar with the passage, we are ready to interpret what we have read.

To **interpret**, we look at the passage in light of what the rest of the Bible has to say on the same topic. We may identify cross-references, cultural considerations, specific word meanings, context, commentaries, or parallel passages that tell of the same account or provide the same idea. We should be careful during the interpretation stage because there is always the danger of trying to read our own ideas into the text.

After we have observed what the text says and interpreted the key ideas, the next step is to **apply** the Word to daily life. Scripture is full of God's commands to believers to apply what He has communicated—we are to be doers of the Word, not just hearers (James 1:21–24). We know from 2 Timothy 2:14–19 that Scripture is to be the source of truth in our lives.

As we examine various texts, our goal will be to help the students see that the Scripture is profitable to them when they apply the passage's teaching to one or more of the four areas identified in 2 Timothy 3:16–17:

- *Doctrine* (understanding of fundamental beliefs)
- *Reproof* (pointing out sin)
- *Correction* (identifying right actions)
- *Instruction in righteousness* (living by God's commands and principles)

The Word may expose an error in their thinking or a flaw in the way they are living and thus present an opportunity to repent of those sins and to be conformed to the image of Christ.

In summary, right theology leads to right living. We can praise God for the grace He has shown us by saving us and sanctifying us. We can ask Him to mature us and change us into the image of His Son through the power of His Spirit.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Evangelical tradition is built on the understanding that every Christian can read and understand God's Word. The fancy term for this idea is the *perspicuity of Scripture*. The reformers fought to make the Bible available in the language of the people—a privilege we enjoy today—in stark contrast with the teaching of other groups who historically opposed the idea.

The fear that motivated this opposition was that people would take the Bible and misunderstand and misapply it. This has indeed happened on occasion, but those who distort the Scriptures do so “to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:14–18). Many cults and false religions have been founded on careless use or intentional distortion of the Bible. This makes it all the more important that we handle the Word carefully as God would have us do.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Lord, your Word is a precious treasure. Please guide me to rightly study it and to discern your message accurately. And please help me to present this lesson in a way that my students will learn how to properly study your Word. Please help me to be responsive to the guidance I discover and to be willing to turn from any impurities I discover in my life when studied in the light of your guidelines. Draw the students in my class to love your Word, believe it, and allow it to guide their lives.

► **Pace your lesson!** You can use the provided clocks to indicate the time each section should be completed to keep the lesson on schedule. While teaching, you can compare your anticipated times with the actual time and shorten or drop sections as necessary.





Review

Last week we talked about how the Bible should be the starting point for all of our thinking. We looked at several passages in Psalms that described God's Word. *Psalm 19:7–11, 86:11, 119:105.*

? Who can tell me some of the things God's Word was compared to or how it was described? *Perfect, sure, righteous, more desirable than gold, sweeter than honey, a path, a lamp.*

We also discussed how all people look at the world around them. We refer to this as a person's worldview.

? What analogy did we use to describe how we look at the world around us? *Everyone looks through "glasses" of some sort. Christians should be looking at the world through "biblical glasses."*



Studying God's Word

► Write on the board, "What do you know about hermeneutics?" Students will discuss their current understanding of hermeneutics.

Today we are going to look at how to read and study the Bible effectively. Since the Bible is the Word of God given to us, we are responsible for understanding what it has to say to us. The Bible is not open to just any interpretation we want—it has a specific meaning. God has clearly communicated His will to us, and we can come to understand Him as we study Scripture. We will be talking about hermeneutics today. That is just a fancy word for how we study the Bible in order to correctly understand what it teaches.

READ THE WORD

2 Peter 1:1–4

Let's read the following passage together: 2 Peter 1:1–4. *Have someone read the passage as the others follow along. Encourage everyone to bring a Bible and to be ready to use it.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Now that we have read the text, let's take some time to observe what it is saying to us. This process is an important part of understanding what God's Word is telling us. We will be using a three-step process of *observing* what the text says, *interpreting* the ideas, and then *applying* them to our lives. *Write these three steps for everyone to see, or refer to the Bible Study poster.*

This method is called inductive Bible study since we are looking at the specific parts of the text and then drawing general conclusions from the particulars. This makes us listen as the text speaks to us rather than coming to conclusions and then trying to find Bible verses that support our ideas. We always want to start our reasoning from God's Word. Let's start the process with this passage.

Observe the Text

We are going to start by asking some simple questions. This will help us to carefully observe the text and help us avoid adding our ideas into the text.

- ? **Who is writing this letter, and who is it written to?** *The Apostle Peter is writing this letter to other Christians. We know this is the audience because they "have obtained like precious faith" by Christ's righteousness.*

There are many different styles of literature in the Bible. It contains poetry, history, parables, prophecy, and other types of writing.

- ? **What form of literature is 2 Peter?** *This is an epistle—a letter written to Christians to encourage them and provide doctrinal teaching and correction.*
- ? **Are there any phrases or words that are repeated?** *God and Jesus are repeated several times—God is the focus of the passage.*
- ? **What is the historical context of this passage?** *It was written in the first century.*
- ? **What commands, promises, or warnings are in this passage?** *There are no commands or warnings, but there are several promises. Verse 1 talks about the righteousness we have in Christ. Verses 3 and 4 talk of the promises we have been given and the knowledge of God that allows us to live godly lives.*
- ? **What has been given to Christians according to this passage?** *We have been given all things that pertain to life and godliness (verse 3) and great and precious promises (verse 4).*

We can continue to ask lots of questions about the text in order to understand more within the passage, but we will move on for now and continue in the process. The next step, now that we have made observations, is to start interpreting the passage so that we can apply it to our lives. The interpretation process will help us to understand the passage in light of the rest of Scripture and to identify the main idea of the passage. *Refer to the Bible Study poster as you discuss the different parts of the process.*

- ? **Verse 3 uses two pronouns. To whom are these pronouns referring?** *"His" and "Him who" refer back to God—the Father and Jesus in verses 1 and 2.*

In verse 3, we see that God's divine power is the source of the things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him. This raises the question of how we can know about God so that we might understand those things mentioned. To understand what this means, we might ask the following question.

- ? **How do we find "the knowledge of Him [God]"?** *God has revealed Himself in the pages of the Bible. As we study the Bible, we learn more about God and can understand how we are to live. Within the pages of Scripture, we find God's commands and the expressions of His character. As we understand who God is and what He has called us to do, we can live our lives in light of that knowledge.*

This passage contains many more rich truths that we could continue to uncover, but we are going to stop here for now and focus on the main theme we have been looking at.

- ? Based on the little bit of observation and interpretation that we have just done, what is the main theme we can draw from this passage? *Students may see other themes, such as the glory and virtue of Christ allowing us to be partakers in the divine nature, but the theme we are looking at is that we can understand how to live our lives in light of what God has revealed to us in Scripture. We will support this idea as we look at the next two passages. This is part of the doctrine known as the sufficiency of Scripture—one of the cornerstone doctrines of the Christian faith.*

Discover the Truth

Now that we have asked questions about the text, observing and interpreting, let's talk about the main idea of the passage. The idea that God has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness should influence the way that we live our lives.

- ? How do we live our lives in light of this truth from Scripture? *This truth should give us great comfort in knowing that God has communicated with us so that we can live lives that honor Him. We should look to God's Word, trusting that it has answers for the questions we face in our lives. His Word should be the place we look to as the final authority in every area of our lives.*



READ THE WORD

Hebrews 4:11–13

Let's read Hebrews 4:11–13 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

In this passage, we are going to look at two more aspects of the inductive study method. In the previous passage we covered the three basic parts of the method. As we observe and interpret, we are going to look at the importance of reading the text in the way the writer meant the text to be understood. Many people say that they read the Bible literally, but we have to be careful with that idea. When people outside the church hear that phrase, they often use it to mock Christians. So we need to explain the idea better.

Jesus referred to Himself as a door in John 10:7, but we don't think He means He is a literal door with hinges and a handle. To read the Bible literally means we first recognize any figures of speech and what type of literature is being used and then interpret based on those elements. This passage has several figures of speech. Let's see if we can find them and find the plain meaning of the passage.

Observe the Text

- ? **What does verse 12 use the phrase “word of God” to describe?** *This phrase means more than just a single word spoken by God. It is commonly used to refer to the complete revelation of God through history—the Bible.*
- ? **Can any other passages of Scripture help us understand what this phrase means?** *Many other passages use this or similar phrasing to describe the revelation of God. Students may have cross-references or commentary notes in their Bibles. Have them look for other passages (as time allows) that communicate this idea. Some examples: 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Mark 7:13; Luke 4:4; John 10:35.*
- Using other passages to help understand what we are reading is a very important part of Bible study. Examining parallel passages that give another telling of an account or identifying where the same idea or phrase is used leads us to a better understanding of the truths of God’s Word, the Bible. This is referred to as the analogy of Scripture—using Scripture to interpret Scripture. Looking at parallel passages and cross-references is important to fully understand a passage.
- ? **Looking back to verse 12, how is the Word of God described?** *Living, powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword.*
- ? **Does the writer of Hebrews intend for us to think that he is talking about a literal sword?** *This phrase is a form of metaphor since a word cannot be sharp in the same way that a sword is.*
- ? **Are there any other passages in Scripture that compare God’s words to a sword?** *Ephesians 6:17 calls the Word of God the sword of the Spirit. Revelation 1:16 and 2:12 speak of a two-edged sword coming from the mouth of Christ. So we often refer to the Bible, which is the very Word of God, as a sword.*

Discover the Truth

Understanding how different figures of speech are used is important to understanding the meaning of a passage. Other passages of Scripture are often helpful in understanding the plain meaning of the text. Reading the Bible literally means looking at the plain meaning of a passage, not interpreting every word in a strict sense and certainly not allegorizing everything. This is often summarized in the phrase, “If the plain sense makes sense, seek no other sense.” This is a good rule of thumb for interpretation, though not a definite rule.

- ? **In light of what we have just looked at, what is the main theme of this passage?** *God’s Word is the standard for truth, and as a sword can divide physical things, the words of God help us evaluate our actions in light of God’s standard. We will give an account for our actions, so we should look to the Bible for guidance. In the broader context of this passage, Christ has given us hope of salvation through what He has accomplished, and we are to live a life that honors what He has done for us.*



READ THE WORD

We are going to examine one more passage today. Some of you may have part of this passage memorized. As we mentioned earlier, it is important that we let the Bible speak to us rather than adding our own ideas into the Bible. We should not go looking for Bible verses that support our opinions, but we should start from God's Word to inform our thinking—in every area of life.

This is the difference between *exegesis* and *eisegesis*. When we practice exegesis, we are drawing ideas “out of” (i.e., *ex-*) the text. Eisegesis is the opposite idea—adding our ideas into the text. Taking our modern or personal understanding of a word or concept into Scripture is dangerous and can lead to false conclusions. Our desire should be to remain as true to the original meaning as we can.

2 Timothy 2:14–19

Let's read 2 Timothy 2:14–19 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

- ? Who can tell me the three steps we are going to follow as we examine this passage? *Observe, interpret, and apply.*

Observe the Text

- ? Who is the author and audience of this passage? *The Apostle Paul is writing to Timothy to encourage him and give him sound advice for his leadership of the church he is pastoring. The passage does not identify this directly, so it is necessary to look at the opening passage of the book to find this out.*
- ? What type of literature is this passage? *This is an epistle, so we expect to find advice, doctrine, encouragement, etc., depending on the passage.*
- ? Are there any commands, promises, or examples to follow? How about sins to avoid? *Three commands are given in verses 14, 15, and 16, including the consequences of those commands.*

Let's focus on the second command given in verse 15. Paul is using a word picture of a worker. Placing ourselves in the context of the time this was written will help us understand what Paul was trying to communicate. Part of the interpretation step often involves looking at commentaries on a passage. Seeing how various experts have understood the passage can help us since most of us do not have a background in first-century Mediterranean culture and languages. But we have to be careful when using commentaries and be sure to use them as a last resort when we are struggling with a passage or to dig much deeper into the text.

It can also be helpful to read the passage in several different translations to get the sense of the idea being communicated. Compare passages

in various translations and look at how key words are translated. In this verse, the point we want to examine is in the phrase “rightly dividing” (NKJV, KJV). Other translations state this as “rightly handling” (ESV), “correctly handles” (NIV), and “accurately handling” (NAS95). *If time allows, have students read this verse from the various versions. It should be clear that the understanding remains the same, despite the translation.*

Knowing that this passage was translated from Greek, we can look at the original language and see that the single Greek word translated here means “straight cutting.” Some commentators suggest this comes from Paul’s experience as a tentmaker—it was necessary for him to cut the cloth straight. Others suggest it has to do with cutting stones straight so that the building would be square and plumb. Paul clearly knew that Timothy would understand this idiom.

- ? In light of this information, how could we summarize the command given in verse 15? *God is pleased as we work hard to correctly understand what the Bible teaches.*
- ? So, is this verse calling us to eisegesis or exegesis? *Clearly to exegesis—drawing information from the text rather than importing our ideas into it.*

Discover the Truth

From this text, we see a clear call to make sure that we accurately handle and apply what God has revealed to us in the Bible. There is a passage in Scripture that can help us apply these truths in practical ways. 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that Scripture has been given to us for four distinct reasons. *Have someone read the passage aloud. This verse will be explained in more detail in the next lesson, so this is a brief look at the passage.*

2 Timothy 3:16

As we look to apply the truths we find in Scripture to our lives, we can do it in light of these four areas: doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. We can ask ourselves questions related to these four areas to put the text we are studying to work in our lives.

- **Doctrines explained:** What fundamental teachings have I learned from this passage?
- **Errors to be corrected:** Where do I fall short of God’s standards? What errors of thinking or action do I need to repent of?
- **Steps to correction:** What can I do about my errors? Are there steps to correction I can take with the help of the Holy Spirit?
- **Instruction in righteousness:** What steps will I take to make this a consistent part of my actions and thoughts? How do I live my life in light of the truths of this passage?





Inductive Bible Study

MATERIALS

- ☐ Inductive Bible Study Reference sheet for each student
- ☐ Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

Have the students write, in their own words, how to perform each of the three steps of the inductive method you have been practicing. Have the students keep this as a reference sheet in their Bibles. You may wish to refer to this sheet periodically and encourage the students to use it in their own personal study.

If you would like, encourage the students to apply this study method and report back next week on how it changed their study habits.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

Following this inductive method provides safeguards against misinterpreting the Bible or adding our own ideas into it.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

We started this lesson thinking about how we interpret the Bible. God has communicated to us in a clear manner. This is not to say that there is nothing in Scripture that is difficult to completely grasp or that we fully know God, but that we can understand God's revelation to us and relate to Him. The Bible is a rich soil in which we can grow as Christians. Understanding how to dig into that soil is the main goal of this lesson.

We have examined and applied the inductive Bible study method. The goal of this method is to help us draw meaning out of the text of Scripture rather than bring our ideas into the words we find there. This is the difference between exegesis and eisegesis. To give us a framework for this study, we have looked at three steps: observation, interpretation, and application. Let's look at how this applies to our everyday lives.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

Use these questions as time allows and as you see the need for review and refinement with your particular class.

- ? How will this lesson impact the way you study the Bible?
- ? How would you explain the difference between exegesis and eisegesis in your own words?
- ? What are the positive and negative aspects of having access to several different Bible translations?

- ? Whose responsibility is it to make sure you understand the Bible? *The ultimate responsibility is on each individual, but pastors and teachers over the individual are also responsible (Hebrews 13:17).*
- ? Which step of the three steps of the inductive study method offers the most opportunity to twist the Scripture or add personal ideas into the text? How might this mishandling of Scripture affect our lives? *It is most likely in the interpretation step that errors are introduced. If errors are introduced here, the way we apply the Scripture to our lives will be impacted.*
- ? How does this approach compare to other methods of study you have heard about? *Allow for responses.*
- ? What Bible study tools do you have access to that might help you in this process? *Many people will have a commentary from a favorite scholar or concordances to help in cross-referencing passages. Many software programs and online resources can also help in study as well.*

➤ Take time to review the memory verse each week.



MEMORY VERSE

Psalm 19:7–9

The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple;
the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for giving us His Word and for giving us minds that can understand it.
- Ask Him to bless the students as they seek to correctly understand the Word of truth and apply it to their lives.
