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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 Timothy 2:14–19, 3:16

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

Students will work on memorizing Psalm 19:7–9.



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 apply it to our lives. Drawing ideas out of the text by asking good questions and understanding context will help us avoid the twisting of God's Word to suit our own desires.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Bible Study Guidelines Bookmark

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Students will make a Bible Study Guidelines bookmark that summarizes the steps in inductive Bible study.

- Print the Bible Study Guidelines bookmarks from the Resource DVD-ROM onto cardstock, and cut apart 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 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 which can lead to the dangers of compromise and distorted conclusions.

In order to properly exegete a passage, we include 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. For example, we 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.

- ? Can anyone remember the passages in Psalms we looked at that describe God's Word? *Psalms 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 everyone looks 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."*



► As students come into the classroom, they should find and mark Hebrews 4:11–13 and 2 Timothy 2:14–19 in their Bibles.

► Have each student work with a partner to memorize Psalm 19:7–9. Give each pair a 3 x 5 card with the verse. Students take turns quoting the verse to their partner. The partner uses the card to check for accuracy.



Studying God's Word

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

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

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.*

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

Hebrews 4:11–13

Hermeneutics:
principles for
studying the
Bible

In this passage, 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 recognize what type of literature is being used and any figures of speech, 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

Refer to the Bible Study poster to remind your students how to dig deeper into God's Word by asking the right questions.

The first step in inductive Bible study is to observe the text. We are going to start by asking some simple questions. This will help us to carefully observe the text and avoid adding our ideas into the text. So look at this passage with me.

? **Who is writing this letter and who is it written to?** *The author is unidentified, but many scholars believe it was the Apostle Paul. The author is writing this letter to Jewish Christians. We know this is the audience because of the title of the book.*

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

? **What form of literature is Hebrews?** *This is an epistle—a letter written to Christians to encourage them and provide doctrinal teaching and correction.*

? **Another question we want to ask is, what is the historical context of a passage? How about this one?** *It was written in the first century, possibly around AD 64, about 30–35 years after the crucifixion.*

? **In verse 12 what does the phrase “Word of God” 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.*

? **Are there other passages of Scripture that would 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 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. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that usually means one thing is used to mean another, making a comparison.*
- ? 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

The second step in inductive Bible study is to interpret the text. 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 interpreting everything symbolically. 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 probably 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. *Write the words "exegesis" and "eisegesis" on the board.*

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. Importing our modern or personal understanding of a word or concept into Scripture is dangerous because it can lead to false conclusions. Our desire should be to remain as true to the original meaning as we can.

Exegesis: drawing the meaning out of the text

Eisegesis: importing our ideas into the text

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 are 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 is the historical context of this passage? *It was written in the first century, possibly around AD 66, about 30 years after the crucifixion.*
- ? 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—being sure to use them only as a last resort when we are struggling with a passage or digging much deeper into the text. Commentaries are just an expert's opinion, and may or may not be correct.

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” (NASB). *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 expression.

- ? 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. If students are unsure, review the meanings of the words eisegesis and exegesis.*

Discover the Truth

2 Timothy 3:16

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 there are four distinct reasons that Scripture has been given to us. *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.*

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. Asking ourselves questions related to these four areas will help us put the text we are studying to work in our lives.

- **Doctrine:** What fundamental teachings have I learned from this passage?
- **Reproof (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, knowing that God will forgive me (1 John 1:8–9)?
- **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?





Bible Study Guidelines Bookmark

MATERIALS

- Pens
- Bookmarks

INSTRUCTIONS

Pass out one Bible Study Guidelines bookmark to each student. Review the steps of the hermeneutic process with students by guiding them to fill in the three steps to studying Scripture.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

? Who can tell me the three major steps we take in studying a Scripture passage? *Observe, interpret, apply.*

Our first step is to observe. When we observe we ask questions.

? What kinds of questions should we ask when we read the Bible? *Who, what, when, where, why, how. Refer to the Bible Study poster and point out answers.*

Write the question words on the six blank lines on your bookmark.

? Then what is the second step? *Interpret.*

That's right, interpret. Fill in the missing word to the question we ask to interpret: "What does this passage _____?" *What does this passage "mean?"*

That's correct. We study to learn what the passage means.

? And what is the final step? *Apply.*

? What question should we ask to apply the passage to our lives? Put the missing word in the blank. *What does God want to "change" in my life?*

You can keep these Bible Study Guidelines bookmarks in your Bible as a handy reminder of the questions to ask whenever you study Scripture.



Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

The final step to inductive Bible study is applying the truths we have learned to our lives. We started this lesson talking about how we interpret the Bible. God has communicated to us in a clear manner, and He wants us to understand His revelation to us and how 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 with your particular class.

- ? How will this lesson impact the way you study the Bible? *Allow for discussion.*
- ? How would you explain the difference between exegesis and eisegesis in your own words or in an analogy? *Allow for discussion.*
- ? What are the positive and negative aspects of having access to several different Bible translations? *Allow for discussion.*
- ? 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).*
- ? Thinking about the three steps of the inductive study method, which step offers the most opportunity to twist the Scripture or add personal ideas into the text? How can you guard against that? *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? *Many students may indicate they have never been taught how to study the Bible.*
- ? 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. There are many software programs and online resources that can help in study as well.*



MEMORY VERSE

Psalms 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.

- Praise God for His unchanging character.
- Thank God for His justice and mercy toward sin.
- Ask God that each person would have boldness to share the hope of Christ with others.
