

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

from

FAITH MAKES SENSE

The Bible is a collection of 66 books, written at different times, in different places, to different audiences. In order to study the Bible, a student must first seek to understand what the original author wrote to the original audience. Only then can the student explore how the original interpretation may apply today. Here is a simple four-step method for studying the Bible. The “S.O.I.L. Method” stands for selection, observation, interpretation, and life application. One simple mistake to avoid is moving too fast. The Bible is a rich and deep book, and you won't be able to take it all in at once. Here's a rough breakdown of how much time to allocate to each step in the process:

10% - SELECTION, 50% - OBSERVATION, 30% - INTERPRETATION, 10% - LIFE APPLICATION

1: SELECT THE TEXT

The goal of this step is to learn as much as possible about the selected text for study. This means focusing on the text as the object. What can we discover about the selected text as a whole? Here are some example questions:

1. Who was the original author of this text?
2. Who was the original audience?
3. Where does this text fit into the whole Bible's story?
4. What comes before and after the text?
5. When did the events of this text take place?
6. What is the literary genre of the text?

3: INTERPRET THE TEXT

The goal of this step is to focus on making sense of the observations from step two. Now that you have a list of observations you've “seen,” we need to begin to understand what these observations mean. Here are some example questions:

1. Literary Questions:
 - a. Are there key words, terms, or themes?
 - b. Does the original language reveal anything?
 - c. Are there words used elsewhere in the Bible?
2. Historical Questions:
 - a. When did this passage take place?
 - b. Where did this passage take place?
 - c. What is the political landscape at the time?
 - d. Where is this passage in the big Bible story?
3. Theological Questions:
 - a. What does this passage teach about God?
 - b. What does this passage teach salvation?
 - c. What does this passage teach about man?
 - d. What does this passage teach about the Church?

2: OBSERVE THE TEXT

The goal of this step is to interrogate the text and look for the ‘who,’ ‘where,’ ‘when,’ and ‘what’ details. This step is all about “seeing” what is there. Don't try to make sense of it yet, just look and see what you can find. Here are some example questions:

1. Who?
 - a. a single name: David, Abraham, Peter
 - b. a people group: Jews, Gentiles, Egyptians
 - c. an implied group: everyone, angels, soldiers
 - d. a person's title: pharaoh, pharisee, servant
2. Where?
 - a. city/country: Jerusalem, Judea, Canaan, Rome
 - b. location: upper room, Jordan river, Temple
3. When?
 - a. a time: 9 in the morning, the 6th hour
 - b. festivals: pentecost, sabbath, passover
 - c. implied time: next day, evening, immediately
 - d. event time: when he heard, after saying
4. What?
 - a. objects: sheep, bread, stones, water
 - b. actions: sat down, taught, baptized, fought
 - c. Themes: prayer, forgiveness, sin, grace

4: APPLY THE TEXT

The goal of this final step is to ask how the text could apply to one's personal life. This is the only step that has the ‘modern’ perspective in view. Here are some example questions:

1. How can this passage apply to my life today?
2. What principles in the text can apply to modern life?
3. Does the passage teach anything for the Church?
4. Does the passage touch any social issues today?
5. Can I share encouragement from this passage?

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