

Bible Study Methodology

We need to work the Scriptures until the substance of what they are saying is clear. An inductive view of the Bible includes discovering for yourself what's there. In a group setting, try to ask open-ended questions that continually draw people back into the text, so that they can make their own discoveries.

Survey—"taste"

- Read the book or passage, looking it over with a broad "macro" view for main themes.
- Look for: author, occasion, audience, time period/historical context characters, who's speaking, structure that emerges, genre (laws, poetry, narratives, letters, prophecies).
- The book How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth can help when you examine different genres and read for their different meanings. Also, use concordances/ commentaries only after you've checked out the passage for yourself!

Observation—"chew"

- What does it say? This is the "micro" look—look with your mental magnifying glass. Use the 5Ws and an H: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
- Check for: repetition, dialogue, grammar and punctuation, pronouns (who do they refer to?), descriptive words, conjunctions (therefore), contrasts and comparisons, if/then statements, figures of speech, idioms...
- Consider checking different translations
- Craft questions that will get people to observe what's there.

Interpretation—"digest"

- Don't just jump to here, though it's easy—always do survey and observation first.
- What does it mean? Why?
- Correlation: is the image or phrase used anywhere else in the Bible?
- Remember: context is king. The context of a phrase or word is the most important clue to its meaning—look at what's around it. Brand this on your brain: "A text without a context is a pretext for a proof text." (A proof text is a mistake—for example, making Scripture support your ideas.)
- Do word studies—words mean different things over time. What does the Bible mean by a word? How to do a word study: do a range of study to find out what the word can mean. Go broad (how is this word used throughout the New Testament?) or narrow (how is this word used in this book, then verse?). A concordance can be very helpful. See which, if any, understanding of the word then fits the context of the verse or passage you are working through.

Application—"exercise"

- This is where we ask and answer: "so what???"
- Ask: "what do we do with this text?" not just "what does this mean to me?" but also "what does this mean for us, as servants of God, as relating to our neighbors, as stewards of creation?"
- We have to know what the Bible means before we apply it, but we do have to apply it.
- Jesus says that the one who does God's word is like the one who builds his house on a ROCK (Matthew 7:24).