

# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

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## DAY FOUR – APPLICATION

Observation is the first step in Bible study. Read and reread as if you are seeing the passage for the first time. Outline it, write it in your own words, and keep a list of questions going. If you rush this step your results will suffer!

Interpretation comes next. Yesterday we looked at general principles of interpretation and some specific ones to help in understanding history passages. In the future we will look at interpreting doctrine, poetry, prophecy and parables. In this article we will go over the final step, after you have interpreted the passage.

Application is the final step in Bible study. After the living food of God's Word is chewed (observation) and digested (interpretation) it is then sent to various parts of the body that need it. Some vitamins, minerals, calories or whatever goes to the muscles, others to the bones, still others to whatever organ is in need of it. So it is with God's Word. The purpose of studying and learning it is to apply it to areas of your life where needed.

The digestion and application of food, as well as Bible truth, is a gradual but continual process. How much you get out of it depends on how well you chewed and digested it. You can't swallow food whole and expect it to do your body much good. Unfortunately many people read a passage and then think about how it applies to them. They don't come up with much, for they have neglected the first two steps. Much of what happens after swallowing is out of your hands. Your body does it. Much of how the Bible is applied is out of your hands, too. Only God's Spirit can really make it work in your life. We must be willing to submit to what God teaches us.

Thus application is very, very important – in its proper order. It is the culmination of the first two steps. From it comes spiritual health and strength, the goal of all eating. Application asks and answers the questions: "How should I respond?", "What should I do with what I've learned?" During the observation and interpretation stages of Bible study you study the Word of God; in application, the Word of God studies you! In the application process you look for principles, suggestions, commands, etc., that can affect your behavior and make you more like Jesus.

**Application Questions:** Carefully apply the passage, looking for any of the following:

- Command to obey
- Example to follow
- Challenge to heed
- Sin to avoid
- Teaching to learn
- Action to take
- Something to pray about
- Promise to claim
- Difficulty to explore
- Portion to memorize

### **An acceptable application**

For an application to be true it must meet the following criteria:

1. It must be *true to your interpretation*. It cannot be forced in, read in, taught in another passage but not this one, or something the original writer would not completely agree with.
2. It must *agree with the rest of the Bible*. It cannot contradict other Bible passages.

3. It must be *specific and measurable*, as all good goals must be. "Be a better person" is not a good application. "Be more patient with my little brother when he interrupts my homework, explaining to him why I can't listen to him right then," is a good application.

### **Learn to obey**

One problem Christians continually face is that of having more abstract knowledge of God than concrete experience with Him. Obedience is the objective of Bible study, and the best student is the one who regularly applies the principles of Scripture to his or her daily life.

#### *In your Spiritual Journal:*

- **God's Word studies you:** The better you know your own strengths and weaknesses, the more sensitive you'll be to Scriptures that speak to your own areas of need. Then, as you study the Bible, you'll find yourself saying, "Yes, I do seem to have a problem with \_\_\_\_\_." If not, you'll find yourself always applying what you study to others, thinking of who could use this passage, and not applying it to yourself. Are you aware of what your strong and weak areas are? It would be good to keep a list in your Spiritual Journal. This is your own private list. Add to it as you discover more about yourself. If you have never done this before, now is a good time!
- **Pray through both lists:** In the strengths list, mark one you haven't been using much lately and ask God to help you use it. In the weaknesses list, mark the one you feel God would first have you work on and improve. By doing this you will find applications that apply to you and not just to people around you. Your physical body knows its weak areas and that is its first priority in applying digested material. The same must happen spiritually.
- **Recording your applications:** Write your applications down on your Spiritual Journal. I save the color red for this, so it jumps right off the page and I don't miss it. Do it any way you like (highlight it, underline it, box it in, put a star by it, etc.) – just be sure to do it. As God works in your life, record what happens. This can be a real encouragement for you and others, it will increase your faith in God, and it can be very helpful in praising God.
- Take our passage, Mark 14:3-11 and go through this application process with it now.