

Inductive Bible Study

by James Stuart Bell and Tracy Sumner



While the deductive method of Bible study involves studying the Bible topically, studying it inductively means taking a passage of Scripture and reading it, pondering it, and asking questions about it until you are able to draw conclusions about what that text is saying in and of itself.

When you use the deductive method of Bible study, you will need a good concordance as well as a thesaurus. (These are available on the internet.) That will allow you to look at synonyms (words that mean the same as the ones you are looking at) as well as variations of particular words and phrases.

If you wanted to do a deductive study on the word “love”, you would search your concordance for that word, as well as variations, and begin looking at the passages and verses that include it. But if you were to do an inductive study, say of 1 Corinthians 13, which has been called the Love Chapter, you would find out how important godly love is and what it looks like — all from reading just one chapter.

The first thing you should do when conducting an inductive Bible study is to simply read what the text says and think about what it means. Ask how this text applies to you and how you can practically and effectively apply this text to your life.

What you observe when you read and study the Bible is absolutely vital because your understanding and application of anything you see or read — including a text of Scripture — will be based upon what you hear it saying. That is why it is so important to take the time during an inductive Bible study to ask God to teach you what He wants you to learn through the particular passage you are looking at.

It is also important that you understand the context of the text you are looking at. Context means everything when it comes to studying anything, particularly the Bible. Without knowing the context, it is impossible to take your studies a step further and understand what a particular passage says in general and what it says to you individually.

When making sense of what a passage of Scripture means, it is always best to look for the obvious. Sometimes what the Bible appears to be saying is exactly what it is saying, and there is no need to read anything else into it. As you read the text, ask the following questions (as well as any others the text might bring to mind):

- Who wrote it, when did he write it, and to whom did he write it?
- Who are the main characters and what are the main events in the text?
- How are the people in the text similar or different from me?

- What is the meaning of the passage?
- What is God telling me and how is He encouraging and strengthening me through this passage?
- What promises can I see in this passage?
- What changes does this passage show me I need to make in my life and how does God want me to make them?
- What sins do I need to be rid of so that I can grow more and enjoy closer fellowship with God?
- What does God want me to share with someone?

When interpreting a passage in the Bible, ask such questions as how, who, what, when, and where. The answers provide the context and lead to deeper meaning. And in terms of applying the passage, this is where you propose to do what God has taught you through these questions and answers. It is through applying the principles you've learned that God changes your life. God enlightens our minds and we apply it with our wills, and the Spirit of God empowers us to carry out these choices.

As you ask yourself these questions, write them — as well as your answers — down in your notebook. Continued studies may change how you answer those questions later on, but that is a good thing. That just means you are gaining a deeper understanding of what the Bible really says.

When you begin your study of the Bible — no matter what method you use — it is important that you ask God to speak to you through what you are reading and meditating on. So go to the source of all Scripture and ask Him to open your heart, your ears, and your eyes to what it is really saying. Remember, in reading the Bible transformationally, one of the primary purposes is to allow the text to have control over us and become a place of encounter with God. It's a discipline of openness to God's control of our lives for God's purposes through the writings of Scripture. It's a discipline that allows the Scriptures to "come alive" in our hearts and transforms us from the inside out.

Book Resource Ideas for the Inductive Method:

How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth by Gordon Fee

How to Study Your Bible: The Lasting Rewards of the Inductive Method by Kay Arthur

Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods: Twelve Ways You Can Unlock God's Word by Rick Warren