

Tools for Mastering God's Word

Types of Bible Study



Overview

This document will provide a very limited introduction to Bible Study. Entire books have been written about the approach to and conduct of Bible Study. This is a meager attempt to get you started studying scripture on your own. This document will discuss

- the tools you will need.
- the general approach to Bible study.
- the key elements of any study.
- various types of Bible study.

Tools

You will obviously need paper and pen to record your work. In addition, you should secure the following reference materials.

Bible

In many languages, numerous translations of the Bible exist. You should use a Bible that is the most accurate translation of the original languages. Using paraphrase translations may mislead you as you attempt to understand the meaning of the text you are studying. If more than one translation is available, use the additional translations to help clarify difficult passages.

Dictionary

Use a dictionary that accurately describes the meaning of words in your language.

Bible dictionary

A bible dictionary describes terms and practices in the Bible. It is normally arranged alphabetically to make it easy to find the information you are seeking. A Bible dictionary will define terms and describe places and practices that were common in the Old and New Testament.

Bible Atlas

A bible Atlas helps you understand the geography of the Bible. Often, Bibles will have maps in the back pages as a reference. Other more detailed materials are also available which will help you understand the geography of your study.

Concordance

A Concordance lists each word used in the Bible in alphabetical order. Under each word is a list of verses where that word is used. Concordances are very useful in finding passages that corroborate and define the verses being studied.

Commentary

A commentary is the result of someone else's study. You should refer to commentaries as a last step in any study of the Bible. Reading what someone else wrote before you have done your own study will influence your conclusions prematurely.

Approach

Each type of bible study will follow the same basic approach.

Get the Overview

You want to first get an overview focus of your study. Getting an overview involves reading **at one sitting** the entire text being studied. You may want to re-read the entire text numerous times until you get a sense of the intent and nature of the information.

Study the details

After you get the overview, you want to begin taking an intensive look at small sections of the text. You want to take each piece apart, examine and meditate on it and record what you find. This can be a very extensive effort taking many days or even weeks, depending upon the length of the text being studied. Try to focus on a particular segment of the study in one session. That is, delving into the details may take many sessions each of which focuses on a small portion of the overall study.

Summarize your findings

Spend time at the end bringing the pieces back together again with the key teachings from the text being studied. Compare what you found with the conclusions that others have drawn.

Key Elements

Every type of study will utilize the same basic elements described below.

Observe

Observation is the first and most important element in Bible study. The intent is to document what the author was trying to say to the original readers. **A Bible text can never mean to you what it did not mean to the original readers.** So, it is absolutely essential that you understand what the author intended the original listeners to hear.

There are many different things to be observed in a passage:

- Key words – words that are repeated or emphasized in the passage
- Admonitions – advice and/or warnings the writer gives
- Reasons – often an admonition will come with an explanation
- Cause and effect – Is there a relationship between one thing and another in the passage?
- Contrasts – does the writer compare or contrast things in the text?
- Illustration – what use does the writer make of illustrations?
- Repetition – look for words or phrases that are repeated
- Lists – are there lists of things in the passage that relate one to the other? Is there progression in the list?
- Questions – look for questions that the writer raises.
- Connectors – *And, but, if, for, therefore, in, into, with, in order that* are all important elements.

- Grammar – *Verbs, nouns, pronouns, adverbs and adjectives* all play an important part in the communication of truth. Look at verb tenses and the use of pronouns.
- Guide words – question *who, what, when, where, why, and how*.

Interpret

Once you have observed the passage, you want to understand the meaning. The object is to discover what the author meant when the text was written. You should not begin interpreting until you have finished observing.

Interpretation involves understanding and discerning the meaning of the text.

- Use a dictionary to define words. Often the dictionary will shed light on key words and phrases used in the text.
- Compare other translations of the Bible to get a different view of the passage. This is where paraphrased versions become helpful.
- Use cross-references from other Bible passages. A Biblical truth in one place may shed light on another passage. Often, you'll find many cross-references; too many to use effectively. So select those that most nearly reflect the truth you are studying.
- Use other helps such as an atlas, Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia to understand the environment in which the text being studied was written. Try not to use a commentary. If you do use a commentary, use it as a last resort.
- Summarize your conclusions

Apply

Application is taking the truth you have uncovered and make it useable in your setting and circumstances. Guidelines for applying God's word are in a separate document in the Tools Section of the www.vDRC.org website.

Types

Book Studies

Book studies have as their goal the revelation of the truths contained in a particular book. Book studies consist of a number of individual studies which have as their focus portions of the book. Generally a book study will include the following study groupings:

- Overview – understand who wrote it, when it was written, to whom it was written, main themes, keywords and a general summary of the various chapters.
- Chapter Studies – select a whole chapter or a portion of the chapter and go verse by verse through the steps of observing and interpreting. Identify an application for each portion studied. Chapter studies may involve many segments, with subsequent studies focusing on the next portion of text. Continue these segments until all of the chapters have been studied.
- Conclusion – Bring together the results of each chapter study in the book and record the key teachings of the book.

Topical

A topical study has as its focus the understanding of a particular subject or topic in scripture. The intent of this type of study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the teachings of scripture on a particular subject.

In this type of study find all of the words or synonyms of words that relate to that topic. Then, using a concordance, look up each reference in the Bible that uses that word. As you record your observations, you will find some natural categories of use for that word in the scripture. Group like verses together in the categories that you determine are appropriate.

Go through all of the words and synonyms you have identified making appropriate groups for similar ideas.

Observe and interpret by the category groupings that you have developed. Identify the teachings of that topic and record your conclusions.

Then determine how that teaching applies in your environment and circumstances.

Character

The intent of a character study is to gain insight into the strengths and weaknesses of a particular biblical character.

Find all of the references to that person in the Bible by using a concordance. Then, as you read the passages related to that person's life, record their strengths and weakness from a character point of view.

Draw conclusions about the person based upon your evaluation and compare that with any Biblical references to their character.

Write a summary statement about their strengths and weaknesses, highlighting examples from the text you studied.

Determine how you can apply the lessons from their life in your own environment and circumstances.

Chronological

Some portions of the Bible lend themselves to chronological study. That is, a study about time. This is particularly beneficial in Genesis through Chronicles. The intent is to identify the timeline of events. As you look at the amount of time that transpired between events, observe the circumstance of the times and the events that went on in that time space.

Another much broader chronological study would be to find the point in time that each of the Major and Minor Prophets lived in the context of the History books of the Old Testament. Tying their message to the events recorded sheds much light on the message the prophet delivered.

The same techniques of observation and interpretation are needed in this type of study. Summarize your findings and determine how the truths you uncovered relate to your circumstances and environment.