

Living Word Study

The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.
John 6:63c



Many people and ministries use the Inductive Bible Study (IBS) approach.

It is an effective and reliable approach to studying the Bible. It's objective and impartial to any scripture text, and provides an accurate study of God's Living Word—the Bible.

An important emphasis for IBS is reading and rereading the text itself, along with telling and retelling God's story in your own words (IYOW).

Many mistakes in studying the Scriptures are a result of carelessness, which leads to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Other problems come from preconceived ideas and biased views. Careful reading of a text will do much towards preventing these problems.

Telling and retelling the story or text in your own words (IYOW) is also valuable. Putting the text IYOW requires you to think and process what the text actually says.

INDUCTIVE STUDY: draws conclusions from what is *discovered within its own context* and the Bible as a whole.

Text (details) —> Ideas (insight) —> Truth!

Premises or ideas of truth believed need to be the result of thorough reading and studying of the scripture text. Carefully and accurately observe what is actually written in the scripture text before you draw any conclusions about the truth within it.

Inductive study enables you to learn *all* doctrinal topics and subjects within the Bible, as you study the Scriptures from beginning to end within their context.

[This is a very simple “primer” taken from a previously published workbook]

The Basics of IBS

[IBS = Inductive Bible Study]

IBS discovers the Truth in a Scripture Text through 3 basic steps:

1. OBSERVATION

The 1st step of IBS, is a **simple** and **thorough examination** of the written words and phrases of the scripture text. It is the *most important step* in the process. It sounds simple, and is simple. But it is not to be ignored, nor done carelessly. It affects *everything* else that *follows* it.

A key element in observing a text well is to read the Bible text several times *before* you begin your study. This will help you see the truth in its own context.

2. INTERPRETATION

The 2nd step is the process of **studying to understand the meaning** of the details (words and phrases) of what is observed in the scripture text. There are valuable guidelines for doing this step, but it must be preceded by accurate and careful observation. Interpretation is often much simpler *when observation is done well*.

3. APPLICATION

The 3rd and final step is putting the understanding gained (in step two) into **practical life action**. This step makes it possible for the truth to become real and useful in daily life. In a sense, it is like a translation of the truth *from words into action*.

Two important questions help take our study from theory and concept into practical action— *What will I do? How will I do it?*

Keep in mind—

- IBS makes it possible to move from **knowledge** to **understanding** to **practicing** the truth.
- It is *not* a **mechanical** method, but a *process* that needs to be **guided by the Holy Spirit**.

Step 1 — Observation

“What does the text say?”

- What is actually written down as *words and phrases* within the Scriptures?
- What has God spoken through those who wrote it?

Here are some simple, useful ways you can do this step of observation well.

- The most simple and valuable way to begin is *reading and rereading* the text
- As you read, make note of important words and phrases
- Have a notebook handy to write down important details you discover
- Ask key questions as you read and study through the Scripture text
- Be able to retell the story and put the truth of the text In Your Own Words (IYOW)

DEVELOPING OBSERVATION SKILLS

Observation involves *examining the words and phrases* of the text

- *Observation is the first and most important step in the study process*
- *Everything else rests upon how well it is done*

4 Key Questions to ask as you read the text

“WHO?” This question refers to **People**.

- ***Who are the people involved in the story (written text)?*** Not only the names of people, but their *identity*.

“WHAT?” This question refers to **Events and Actions**.

- ***What happens in the story?*** *What are the events taking place? What activities are going on? What are the people doing?*

“WHERE?” This question refers to **Location or Places**.

- ***Where are the places mentioned in the story (text)?*** *Where do events take place? What types of land or locations are mentioned in the text?*

“WHEN?” This question refers to **Time**.

- ***When did this story take place?*** *What is said giving any idea of time or historical time period? When does the story start? ...end?*

These 4 Key Questions are inter-related and work together in telling the story, and help you discover relationships between each of the details...

- **People** are *involved* in **events and actions** that *occur* at certain **times**
- **Events** *take place* at certain **times**, in certain **places**, usually involving **people**

4 IMPORTANT ELEMENTS TO OBSERVE WHEN STUDYING NARRATIVES (STORIES)

[Narratives include the books of the Pentateuch, Historical books and the Gospels]

1. **People**— Those involved or mentioned by name or description within the story (text)
2. **Events and Actions**— Whatever *happens* or *takes place* within the story— including conversations, meals and other common events or actions
3. **Places**— Including geographical and physical locations/descriptions
4. **Time**— Any mention of chronological time, dates, timing or sequence (progression) of events or actions within the text

ANOTHER KEY QUESTION IS “*How?*”

This refers to the *Way* things (events and actions) happen or take place
How* is closely related to the question “*what?*”** (events and actions), **but *also* to the other questions— *Who, Where, and When

- *How* did the events happen? In what *way* did things happen?
- *How* did the actions take place? In *what way* are people doing things?
- *How* do the events and actions *affect* the people directly or indirectly?
- *How* do things *change* with circumstances, relationships, or within history (time), and where things take place?

“*How?*” is an important investigative question that goes deeper into observing the text than the first 4 Key Questions

- *How* are the four basic elements of a narrative inter-related?
- *How* are they connected?
- *In what way* is each of these elements affected or influenced by the other?

“*How?*” is a transition question between the first four basic Observation questions and the primary question of the 2nd step of IBS— Interpretation— “*Why?*”

1. **How**— *describes the process of the story*— *how* it takes place.
2. **How**— *explains the inter-relationship of the four important elements* of a story or narrative (people, events and actions, places, and time).
3. **How**— is the *glue of the context*.
 - a) *When* you see *how* the **four elements are inter-related and affected** by each other
 - b) *Then* you can **understand the context** and **go on to answer** the question “*Why?*”

Step 2 — Interpretation

“How can I understand what I have observed?”

This is the **focus** of the **2nd step of IBS**. You are looking for spiritual insight and understanding. There are 5 Basic Rules for helping interpret the Scripture. Again, this is *not* to be a mechanical or scientific process, but a study guided by the Holy Spirit.

DEVELOPING INTERPRETATION SKILLS

Interpretation is *understanding the meaning* of the details discovered by observing a scripture text— *gaining insight*

Carefully examine your observations with the following three things in mind:

1. **Study with a fresh attitude**—as if you’ve never read or studied the text before.
2. **Set aside previous ideas, teachings and biases**—regardless of what you or others might think a text means.
3. **Study using the 5 Basic Rules of Interpretation called hermeneutics.** Hermeneutics are basic principles of interpretation—applied with both *art and skill*—to understand the meaning of a Bible text. IBS is one form of applied hermeneutics.

“Why?” is often answered by simple observation

- *Rereading the text, understanding the context, and accurate observation will do more to improve your interpretation skills than anything else*
- *Accurate observation reveals why something takes place, is said, or doesn’t happen.*
- When you answer the question “Why?” correctly, you get an accurate explanation (interpretation) of the meaning and purpose of what you observed.

Answering the question “why” requires discernment

Discernment sees beyond the surface of the details [see 1 Corinthians 2:10-14]

Here are 3 things needed for discernment:

1. Be guided by the Holy Spirit— look at John 14:26; 1 John 2:27
2. Use the 5 Basic Rules of Interpretation (hermeneutics)
3. Use your own thinking and sound judgment

Examples: *(See the following stories for illustrations of discerning the truth)*

- Matthew 16:5-12— Jesus’ disciples gain insight (discernment)
- Luke 7:36-50— Jesus, a Pharisee, and a sinful woman
- Luke 20:1-8— Jesus, Jewish leaders, and questions
- Luke 20:19-26— questions about taxes to trap Jesus
- Luke 24:13-35— opened eyes and burning hearts

So, HOW DO YOU DO THIS? *This is where the IBS study process deepens*

- This is a personal, interactive process of studying God's written Living Word. So, pray and ask the Holy Spirit for His guidance!
- IBS is *applied* hermeneutics, also called exegesis. Exegesis is the critical (analytical) explanation or interpretation of a scripture text. Here are five rules to guide you.

5 BASIC RULES OF HERMENEUTICS

1. STUDY THE SCRIPTURE WITHIN ITS CONTEXT

- a. The surrounding words, their setting and reference within the Bible
- b. Study the *immediate* and *whole context* of a scripture text. This helps clarify and confirm the truth in the text.
- c. Study the *full context*— geography, manners and customs of that historical time.

2. LOOK FOR THE PLAIN AND SIMPLE MEANING

- a. Understand how words are expressed as the *writer* intended
- b. Read and understand the Bible the same way you read other literature.
- c. Look for the plain and simple meaning in the text, *first*.
- d. Look for words that express more than their simple definitions.

3. LET SCRIPTURE INTERPRET SCRIPTURE

- a. The Spirit of Truth (the Holy Spirit) Reveals the Word of Truth
- b. The Scriptures are God's written Word revealed and inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16).
- c. The immediate and whole context is an important priority.

4. NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES HELP INTERPRET THE OLD TESTAMENT

- a. Doctrine and theology revealed in the NT is a replacement and fulfillment of what God revealed in the OT
- b. Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets (the Old Covenant Scriptures and established the New Covenant (Matthew 5:17).
- c. The New Testament (Covenant) fulfills of the Old Covenant.

5. WHAT IS OBVIOUS AND CLEAR (EXPLICIT) IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT COULD BE TRUE (IMPLICIT)

- a. Don't go too far with your interpretation!
- b. Whatever is *clearly stated* and expressed is most important.
- c. What *could or might* be intended is less important.
- d. So, what is clearly stated is *always* more important than what could be meant.

Step 3 — Application

“How should I respond?”

This is the primary question you need to answer for the truth to become real and active in your daily life. **2 important questions** need to be answered to make application more specific.

The 1st question is— *What will I do?* — “What practical action can I take?”

- What is a useful way to apply the truth in your daily life?
- Ask yourself what specific things you can do *or* what you ought not to do.
- Ask similar questions regarding promises and other exhortations.
- Make abstract truth become *concrete reality*. Put theological truth into *practice*.

The 2nd question is— *How will I do it?*

- How will you actually do (or *not* do) these things?
- Also, consider *when* you will start putting these truths into action in your life.
- The *goal* of application is to apply the truth in both a *practical and personal way*.
- Applications need to be *specific, personal and practical*

DEVELOPING APPLICATION SKILLS

The Bible is clear about a person’s responsibility to obey the truth once it is known and understood.

- The following texts remind us that a person is *not* to be just a hearer, but a *doer* of the Word— John 13:17, 14:15; 1 John 2:4-6; Matt 7:24; James 1:22-25

1. How would the original hearers and readers apply this same truth?

a. Application needs to be seen within *the original context first*

2. **Once** you see how it would apply within its *original* context...

3. **Then** you can begin to apply it within present day life— just follow these basic guidelines:

a. Your personal study should be worked into your own life *first*

- i. Look for a *key verse or word* that anchors the application to the text
- ii. An application needs to be simple and practical and personal
- iii. Applications should be the natural overflow from your inductive study of a text

Observation — 1st Step of IBS

5 Key Questions / 4 Elements

1. **Who** is involved and included?
 - People—individuals, groups, nations, etc. (notice pronouns!)
2. **What's** happening?
 - Events and Actions
3. **Where** is it happening?
 - Places and Locations
4. **When** is it happening?
 - Time—time of day, chronological, sequential, historical, etc.
5. **How** is it all connected and happening?
 - Ways things take place / happen—descriptions, emotions, processes, customs and manners, relationship of each element to one another, etc.

Inductive study draws conclusions—from what is discovered in Scripture within its own context and the Bible as a whole.

Text (details) → **Ideas** (insight) → **Truth!**

- Premises or ideas about truth ought to be from a thorough reading and studying of the Scripture text
- Carefully and accurately observe what is written in Scripture before drawing any conclusions about the truth within it
- Inductive study enables you to learn *all* doctrinal topics and subjects within their context in the Bible.

Interpretation — 2nd Step of IBS

5 Basic Rules

1. **Context**—The immediate and whole textual context, and cultural and historical elements of context
2. **The Plain and Simple Meaning**—Are words expressed in literal or figurative language?
3. **Scripture Interprets Scripture**—Consider the context and harmony of the Bible as a whole
4. **NT Helps Interpret OT**—Old Covenant Law fulfilled in New Covenant by Jesus
5. **Obvious takes Priority over Implied**—What is clearly and plainly intended and expressed is more important than what could be meant

Studying and Journaling

As you read and study, make notes in your Bible and keep some note paper handy. This will be a reference for more detailed study and journaling.

Put yourself within the context of whatever you're reading—so you “see and hear” it from the writer's point of view.

If it's Genesis, imagine things at the beginning of time. If it's the Psalms, picture King David strumming away as he pours his heart out. In the Gospels, put yourself in the place of the disciples with Jesus.

Application — 3rd Step of IBS

Putting Truth into Practical Action

▪ **Answer these 2 Important Questions**

1. **What will you do?**
 - Translate your understanding of the Scripture text into useful life-action
2. **How will you do it?**
 - What are specific ways or in what manner will the truth become useful and practical in your life?

Remember—thinking is not doing and verbs are action words.

- Turn abstract truth into concrete reality
- Put theological truth into practice
- Be specific, personal, and practical

Simple Outlining of the Scripture Text

1. Break the Scripture text into Segments
2. Group the Segments into Sections
3. Discover the Theme of the book

Simple Outlining helps with seeing the big picture and how specific details fit into the larger picture of a Section of Scripture.

Work segment by segment and verse by verse based on your outline.

Work observation by observation within each verse for more detailed study and journaling.