

# Build Your Own Bible Study

Adapted from *Tools for Mentoring Bible Module* by Joy Schroeder

## Use the Study Questions Personally

The “Study Questions List” below can assist you as you study the Bible. The list includes **observation**, **interpretation**, and **application** types of questions. When you study Scripture, you drill down deeper into a smaller portion. Generally, use several **observation** questions, a couple of **interpretation** questions, and choose one **application**. **Observe** as much in the passage as your time and interest allow. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you. Do something to apply what you read so that the Bible transforms your life.



## Use the Study Questions in a Bible Discussion

You can use the “Study Questions List” below to create Bible discussions for a small group, as well. First, study the short passage yourself as described above, letting the Holy Spirit speak to you personally. Next, answer two questions: (1) What is the **main point or idea** of the passage? (2) What do you want your group members to **do** to act on the main point—a specific action to apply the truth? Then, aiming the discussion toward the main point, choose a few **observation** questions, a couple of **interpretation** questions, and one **application** question from the list that addresses question (2)—what you want members to do.

For example, use questions from the “Study Questions List” below for a discussion of Romans 8:35-39. Some **observation** questions adapted from the list below might be: What is the main point of this passage? What situations are listed that cannot separate you from God’s love? An **interpretation** question might be: What issue in your situation does this address? An **application** question might be: What does God promise in this passage? How specifically will you apply the promise today—how will it change your thinking?

## Study Questions List

**Observe:** What does it say? (Hendricks 124-125)

- Who is the God-inspired author? The author’s audience? Any other people in the passage?
- Observe the setting: Where are they? When is it taking place? Who is around? What action occurs?
- What type of literature is this?
  - Narrative, epistle (letter), parable, poetry, prophecy, or exposition (teaching or explanation)?
- Notice the context of the passage within the surrounding paragraphs and the book.

- What is the main point of the passage (within its context)?
- Note any of the following:
  - o Repeated words or phrases (Psalm 136; Matthew 5:21-48)
  - o Questions and answers (Malachi; Mark 11:27-12:44)
  - o Lists (Romans 8:35-39; 2 Peter 1:5-7)
  - o Cause and effect relationships (Romans 1:18-32; 8:18-30)
  - o If/then relationships or statements (Romans 12:6-8; Matthew 6:14-15)
  - o Things that are compared (similar—“like” or “as”) (Psalm 1:3-4; Hebrews 5:1-10)
  - o Things that are contrasted (different—“but” or “yet”) (Psalm 73; Galatians 5:19-23)
  - o Figurative language (hyperbole, metaphor, simile, etc.)

**Interpret:** What does it mean? What principle does it teach? (See “General Guidelines for Interpreting Scripture” below.)

- You can take most passages at face value. The plain meaning is usually the intended meaning.
- To discover what it meant to “them, then:”
  - o What did it mean to the people to whom it was originally written?
  - o What was the author’s purpose or reason for what he wrote? (Why did he write this?)
  - o What circumstances were present at the time—cultural, historical, or in the church?
- To discover what it means to “us, now:”
  - o What is the timeless principle or truth?
  - o What issue in your situation or your culture does this principle address?
  - o What is the significance of... (a certain statement)?
  - o What is the meaning of... ?
  - o What are the implications of... ?

**Apply:** What will you do about it? Choose one. The acrostic spells SPACE PET. (Warren 39-40)

- Is there a...
  - o Sin to confess. Do you need to make amends?
  - o Psalm or prayer to pray. Is there a Psalm or a prayer that you can make your own?
  - o Attitude or action to change. What is your next step toward the change?
  - o Command to obey. What is your next step to obey?
  - o Example to follow. What did the person do right that you should imitate?
  - o Promise to claim. Have you met the conditions?
  - o Error to avoid. What error did the person make that you should avoid?
  - o Truth to believe. What insight did you gain about life or God Himself?

## For Example: A Bible Discussion from James 1:22-25

In the Bible discussion of James 1:22-25, notice how the observation, interpretation, and application questions are simply adapted from the “Study Questions List.”

Read James 1:22-25.

To what is the Bible compared? (Observe a **comparison**.)

In what way can you use the Bible like a mirror for yourself? (Interpret what it means.)

If you don't change to align your actions with what the Bible says, what happens to you? (verse 22)  
(Observe an **if/then relationship**.)

In verse 25, what words describe what to do with the Bible? What will result? (Observe another **if/then relationship**.)

What is one thing the Bible teaches that you are putting into practice now? What is one thing you are not obeying? What will you do to change and when? (Apply a **command to obey**.)

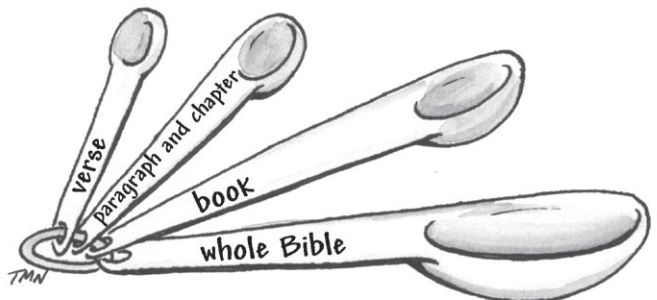
## General Guidelines for Interpreting Scripture

### Plain meaning:

Usually, the simple, obvious, plain meaning is the intended one. Take passages at face value whenever possible. Read the words in their normal sense. “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense” (Hendricks 265).

### Context:

- Let Scripture interpret Scripture. Consider the verse in the context of the surrounding verses (unit of thought or paragraph), in the context of the chapter, and in the context of the whole book.
- Fit the passage or verse into what the Bible as a whole says about the subject. Read other passages that refer to the same subject to get a more complete understanding. Fit the passage into the relevant theme(s) in the Bible.
- Consider the cultural and historical context. When the passage refers to a subject within the culture or history of the original hearers (e.g. food sacrificed to idols), use TTT (Shadrach 252).
  - o First, consider “Then meaning,” what it meant to them at the time.



- o Next, find the “Timeless principle” that applies to us now.
- o Finally, act on “Today’s application” of the principle. Use your common sense.
- Consider any special guidelines for understanding the particular type of literature you’re reading: historical narrative, epistle (letter), parable, poetry, prophecy, or exposition (teaching or explanation).

### **What God is like:**

Consider verses in light of what the Bible reveals about God’s character—what He is like. In Exodus 34:6-7, God reveals Himself to Moses using these words:

*“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty [unrepentant] unpunished.”*

### **Promises:**

Many promises are conditional on your response to God’s conditions. Fulfill the conditions attached to these promises, and you can trust God to fulfill them. Check to see that you are in the same circumstance as the person receiving the promise in the Bible. If not, look for the principle implied by the promise and apply that.

A conditional promise: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9*

An unconditional promise: Jesus said, *“...And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* Matthew 28:20

### **Difficult passages to understand:**

If the passage taken at face value and in context doesn’t seem to make sense, is unclear, seems to contradict other clear passages, or seems inconsistent with God’s self-described character, consider one or more of the following:

- Interpret unclear passages in light of clear ones, not the other way around (Gibbs 107).
- Interpret an isolated passage in light of multiple passages on the subject (Gibbs 107).
- Confirm implicit teaching (indicated but not stated) with explicit teaching (clearly stated) elsewhere in the Bible (Gibbs 107).
- Use “TTT” (explained earlier).
- Use the special guidelines for its type of literature.
- In a small number of cases, the full meaning eludes us for one of two reasons:
  - o We lack information, as in some situations the New Testament epistles (letters) address.
  - o We cannot know for sure, as in which end-times prophecies have been fulfilled.
- Remember, what God wants us to know for sure He has communicated to us clearly.

## Sources

Gibbs, Carl B. *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*. Springfield, MO: Global University, 2004.

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Warren, Rick. *Bible Study Methods*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006.