



# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

A Beginner's look  
at biblical exegesis  
to better under-  
stand God's word

by the  
discipleship team

 **STUDYGROUPS**



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## THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE:

“God wants to bring us into intimacy with Himself. He wants to be a Father to us. In order to have that relationship, however, God has to talk to us. He wants to explain to us who He is and how we can be brought into a close, wonderful relationship with Him. He also wants us to understand the blessings of a life of obedience to His Word and the consequences of disobeying Him. And He wants us to know the truth about life and what is going to happen in the future. The Bible tells us everything we need to know about life. That, my friend, is why you need to study it for yourself.”

- Arthur, Kay. *How to Study Your Bible Workbook*, Page 9.

## WELCOME TO THIS ELECTIVE:

We appreciate that you have decided to be a part of this elective. We are praying for you and hope that you will benefit greatly from your time in here. If you have any questions along the way, please feel free to ask.

## ELECTIVE DESCRIPTION:

This elective is "HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE." Many are afraid of trying to study the Bible because they don't know where to begin or because they find in-depth study as unnecessary. This course will be not only showing you why biblical studies is important but give you the basic tools so you can begin your journey on being a student of the Bible.

## OBJECTIVES:

1. Familiarize yourself with the structure of the Bible: It's parts, genres, and various translations.
2. Understanding the importance of context including background information, the location of the text, and the "upper" story of the text.
3. Learning how to apply the biblical message to your life starting with getting to the AIM of scripture.
4. Knowing what resources are available to you to help you work through this important work.

## ELECTIVE RATING SYSTEM:

This elective follows NLCC's rating system for StudyGroups. This **Elective is rated at a Beginner level**. See definitions below:

**Beginner** - This level are for those who are new to biblical studies. A beginner level StudyGroup will focus more on life application, introduce participants to the most basic elements of our faith, and how the curriculum and their story fits into God's story.

**Moderate** - This middle level StudyGroup may move quicker through material, focus on life application as well as teaching new ideas about God and the Bible, and use historical content to better understand God's word.

**Advanced** - This level are for those who have experience studying the Bible and are wanting to be challenged to enrich their lives with complex theological concepts, investigate the original setting of the book, and have a level of discussion that is equal to the content being presented.

# LESSON 1: THE BIBLE

## WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The Bible is the account of **God's action in the world**, and his purpose with all creation. The writing of the Bible took place **over sixteen centuries** and is the work of over **forty human authors**. It is quite an amazing collection of **66 books** with very **different styles of writing**, all containing the message God desired us to have.

It has been structured in such a way to make it easier to navigate.

The Old Testament	39
_____	5
History	12
Poetry	5
_____	5
Minor Prophets	12
The New Testament	27
Gospel	4
History	1
_____	13
_____	8
Revelation	1

The Old Testament is arranged the way that it is because of tradition. When Jerome translated the Greek Bible into Latin, he gave it the structure that we have today.

The Gospels are believed to be arranged by the date of its publication with Acts as a continuation of the story added on. Paul's letters are arranged by length of book, then by church or individual. The General letters are arranged by author, then by length, and generally Revelation is included but is last because it talks about the end of the world and the hope that is yet to come.

WHAT IS BIBLICAL GENRE?

Definition - A classification of literature used by the author to better deliver ideas, emotions, and intent.

Watch the Bible Project Video on Genre: There are 3 primary Genres; History, Poetry, and Prose. However, these three breakdown into smaller subcategories.

History -

Narrative -

Prophecy -

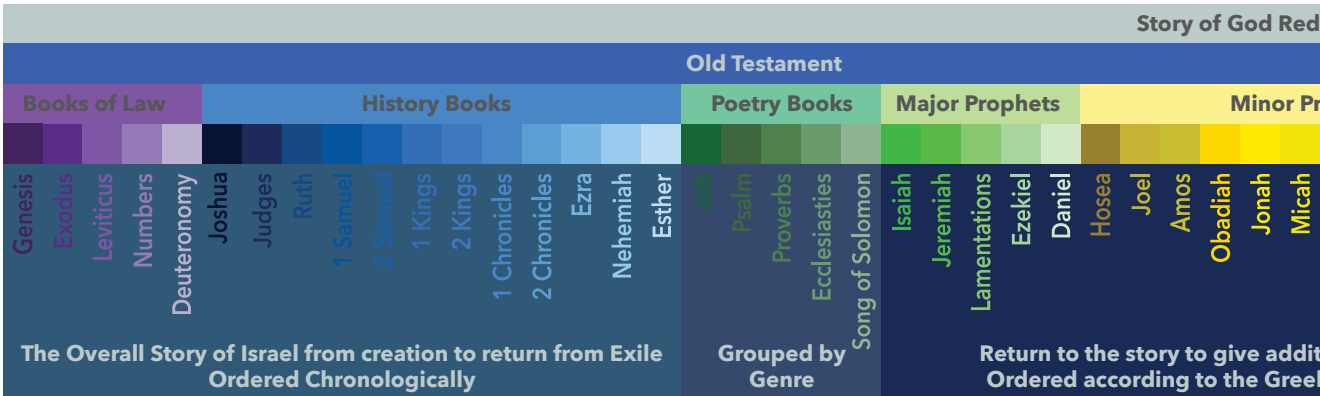
Poetry -

Wisdom -

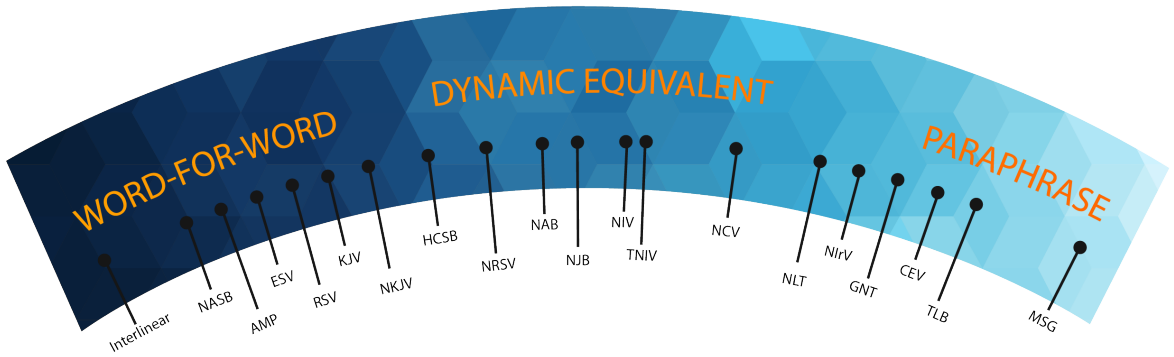
Gospel -

Epistle -

Apocalypse -



# WHAT TRANSLATION IS BEST?



**Word for Word** = exact words as best as can be preserved in the translation's language. These are literal translations.

**Dynamic Equivalent** = preserving the central idea of the original text, but not necessarily the original words.

**Paraphrase** = Someone else's words to describe the idea of the original context.

The Big Four:

- New American Standard Bible - Word for Word
- The English Standard Version - Word for Word
- The New International Version - Dynamic Equivalent
- The New Living Translation - Dynamic Equivalent/Paraphrase

Old Testament	New Testament																															
Prophets						Gospel/History					Epistles of Paul					General Epistles																
Nahum	Habakkuk	Zephaniah	Haggai	Zechariah	Malachi	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John	Acts	Romans	1 Corinthians	2 Corinthians	Galatians	Ephesians	Philippians	Colossians	1 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians	1 Timothy	2 Timothy	Titus	Philemon	Hebrews	James	1 Peter	2 Peter	1 John	2 John	3 John	Jude	Revelation
Chronological insight. Septuagint						Ordered by Date written with Acts last					Letters to Churches by Length					Letters to Individuals by length					Grouped by author, then by length											

A.I.M.

Why are there so many different views, opinions, beliefs about God? Doesn't the Bible just tell us what to believe and think?

Can we simply just read the Bible for what it says and understand the main idea of what a particular book or author was trying to tell us?

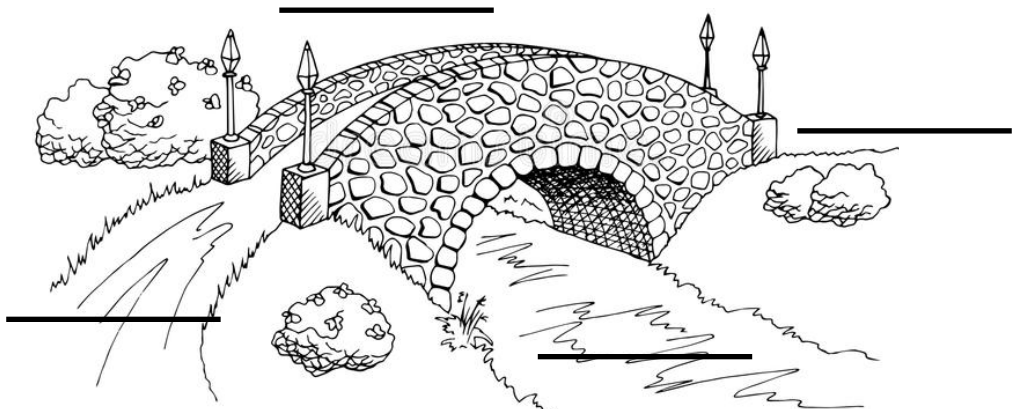
The ultimate goal of all biblical reading/studying/preaching & teaching is to arrive at the A.I.M. of scripture. A.I.M. is an acronym for

A = \_\_\_\_\_

I = \_\_\_\_\_

M = \_\_\_\_\_

Yet this is not always easy, in fact it can be down right impossible at times. Here's a graphic to explain why. Fill in the blanks as we work through it as a class.



How do we overcome the expanse of time and cultural differences in order to understand what Paul, Jeremiah, John, or Moses were trying to say to us?



## LESSON 1 HOMEWORK

Read John 1:1-18 in the NASB, the NIV, and the NLT. You can find these translations on an online source like [biblegateway.org](http://biblegateway.org). Observe the nuances of the translations. Answer these questions:

1. What words seem to be different in the various translations?
2. What words seem to be used in all three translations?
3. What is the Genre of John 1:1-18? It can be more than one!
4. If you have a study Bible, read the introduction section to the Gospel of John. What was important in John's world - his people, his location, his situation - that the Study Bible seems to point out? Nothing specific, just making observations.

What Questions might I have about Lesson 1 that I want to ask for the next session?

## LESSON 2: OBSERVATION

### GETTING TO KNOW THEIR TOWN

Prayer - "John 16:13-15 tells us that the one who guides us into all truth, the One who takes the things of God and reveals them to us, is the Holy Spirit, our resident teacher. So ask God, by his spirit, to lead you into all truth and to open your eyes that you may behold wondrous things out of His Word. Begin with prayer - and continue with an attitude of prayer."

- Arthur, Kay. *How to Study Your Bible Workbook*, Page 17-18.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." - James 1:5

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." - Hebrews 4:12

We should never go into studying God's word lightly. The Word of God has the power to change minds, heal hearts, and cut out sin. Yet, something so powerful handled the wrong way can also harm. We never want to be the people who use God's word to cause pain, hurt or confusion.

Example Prayer:

Lord, thank you for this time you've given me to open your Word and discover who you are. Thank you that you don't leave us in the dark about who you are and what you are doing in the world, but that you have revealed yourself and your will through the Bible. Lord, I need wisdom as I read your Word. You promise in James that we only have to ask for wisdom to receive it. Please give me your wisdom now as I approach your word. Help me to discern the truth of this text. Help me not rely on my own understanding. Thank you God for the clarity, encouragement and hope your Word brings.

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

## CONTEXT

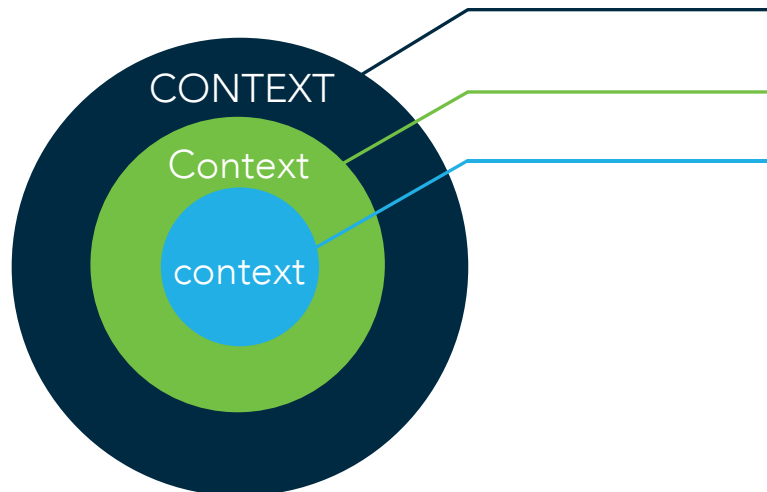
In the world of biblical studies, context is \_\_\_\_\_.

Context defined: "That which surrounds or goes with the text." To be more specific it is the words, phrases, sentences, passages, and sections surrounding a particular word, phrase, or sentence that you are studying. Context is to biblical studies what set, script, and story are to a TV show, play, or film.

Example: Brainstorm all of all the ways you can use the word, "TRUNK". Write them below.

Notice how the meaning of the word changes on the *context* of the sentence it is used. Therefore, the only way to know the intended meaning of the word *trunk* is to examine the way it is used. The environment surrounding the text in which the word appears will show you which of these possible meanings is intended.

Here are three helpful classifications of biblical context:



For practice, let's determine the three set's of context for John 1:6, "There was a man sent from God whose name was John."

## THE OBVIOUS

Think of putting together a puzzle. When you sit down to actually do it, where do you start? The four corners. Why? Because they are obvious. When reading a passage of scripture look for things that are obvious - in other words, things that are easy to see. Here is what to look for:

### Facts:

Place names

Character names

Dates (sometimes in the form of referencing a king's reign)

### Key Words:

Repeated words: "If It's repeated then it's \_\_\_\_\_."

"Therefore" (See Romans)

Connecting Phrases "For this reason . . . So That" (See Ephesians 3)

"And then" or "Next" (Narratives & Visions)

### Other:

Old Testament Quotes (Cross Reference tools)

Numbers

Genealogies

Subtitles

## THE INTERROGATIVE QUESTIONS

Once you have grasped the obvious, it is time to dig a little deeper. Reading with a purpose is accomplished by asking questions of the text. You must interrogate the text as a detective would a witness. You must ask, what are called, the interrogative questions. To get the whole story - all the details - journalists are taught to ask the 5W's and an H (Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How) in their reporting. If you are going to read the Bible with purpose and get all the details to understand the context, Context, and CONTEXT of the passage you must ask . . .

### **Who...**

- wrote it?
- said it?
- are the major characters?
- Are mentioned?
- is speaking?
- is he/she speaking about?

### **What...**

- are the main events?
- are the major ideas?
- are the these people like?
- does he/she talk about the most?
- is the purpose of saying this?

### **When...**

- was it written?
- did this event take place?
- will it happen?
- did he say it?
- did they do it?

### **Where...**

- did this happen?
- was this said?
- will it happen?

### **Why...**

- was there a need for this to be written?
- was so much or so little space devoted to this event or teaching?
- was this mentioned?
- was this reference/allusion mentioned?
- should they do such and such?

### **How...**

- is it done?
- did it happen?
- is this truth illustrated?
- was this acted/carried out?

**Get The Big Picture** - Know where it occurs in the history of the biblical story - Determine it's Genre - The Author - The Audience - The Date it was written

## LESSON 2 HOMEWORK

Read John 1:1-18 in the translation of your choice. Write down the observations you see in the text below under the appropriate marker:

Who are the characters mentioned in these 18 verses?

What key words stand out to you (look for unique, or repeated, or words you don't understand)? Write them down.

When do the events of these verses take place? (there may be multiple time references)

Why was there a need to communicate this information? *Or* Why did the author write this?

How was the author's message accomplished . . . How did these things happen?

Are there any quotes/references/or allusions to the Old Testament? (You may need to use a cross reference resource to know this answer).

Get the Big Picture Details from the introduction in your Study Bible or find the answers online.

Author -

Date it was written -

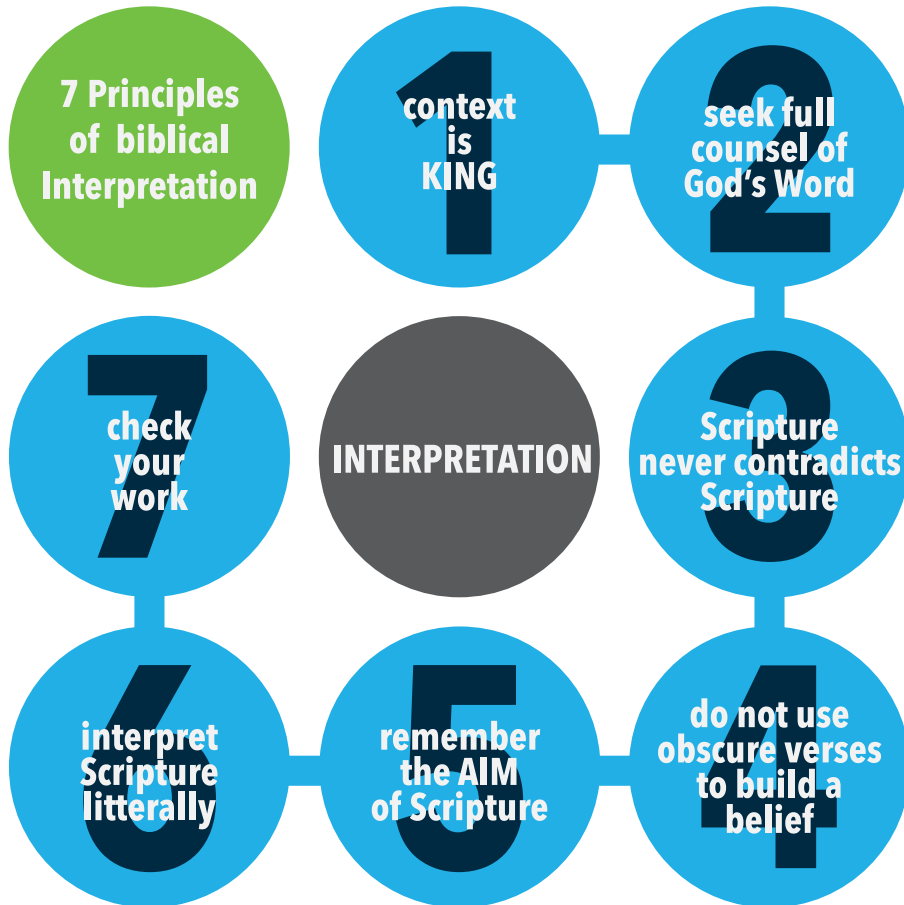
To whom it was written to -

Genre -

# LESSON 3: INTERPRETATION

## CROSSING THE PRINCIPLIZING BRIDGE

Now that you have done the work of observing the text it is time to do a careful analysis. In inductive Bible Study, that's what we call the discipline of interpretation. There are seven guiding principles that will take a lifetime for you to master but you can start working on them now. These principles will help you Interpret the text properly.



"The Old Testament is the New Testament \_\_\_\_\_.  
The New Testament is the Old Testament \_\_\_\_\_."

God reveals Himself in Scripture dynamically and progressively. This is called \_\_\_\_\_.

- The Old Testament is not a complete revelation of God, his will, his plan of salvation, his story. It is in need of being completed
- The New Testament is the key to understanding the Old Testament. It completes the story of God, His People, and his mission to redeem the world.

"The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, **as it was written in Isaiah the prophet: . . .**" (Mark 1:1-2)

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day **according to the Scriptures.**" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

"things which are a mere shadow of **what is to come**; but the substance belongs to Christ." (Colossians 2:17)

"God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, **in these last days has spoken to us in His Son**" (Hebrews 1:1-2)

The Old and New Testament tell one unified, albeit complex, story from the beginning of creation to the renewal of creation. This means when we read the Old Testament we have to keep in mind what is coming down the pike. When we read the New Testament (and this is perhaps even more important) we MUST NOT read it void of its Old Testament roots and meaning.

In most circumstances when a New Testament passage is miss interpreted it is because the reader has failed to grasp how it relates and corresponds to the appropriate Old Testament story/passage/ or principle. Let's now watch "The Story of the Bible" by the Bible Project to understand the overarching story of the Bible.



## WORD STUDY

One of the ways that you can better understand the meaning of a passage is by doing a “word study.”

Essentially, a word study is the exercise of examining how one particular word is used throughout a passage, book, or the entire Bible. Seeing how the word is used elsewhere in the Bible may help you understand it’s usage in the passage you are studying.

Why do a word study?

Although we have so many good translations at our disposal, it is still good to try and get to the original author’s intended meaning for that word. Sometimes translators choose a word that is not always the best fit. Sometimes the words we have in English lack the full meaning of the word. Therefore, you need to go back to the original language to get the full meaning of a word or the full import of a verb.

So how do we do this?

There are many different ways (various levels of in-depth research) for doing a word study. Keep in mind the context, Context, and CONTEXT of the passage. These will be the various places you will want to trace this word through.

Here are things you can do to do a Word Study:

**BEGINNING  
WORD  
D  
L  
WELL  
LOVE**



- [TheBibleProject.com](http://TheBibleProject.com) videos on specific words.
- Cross Reference - see the little letters/numbers in your study Bible, find them in the center column or bottom of page, go to the other places where that word is used.
- See if your Study Bible has any research on it.
- Original Language research. See [biblewebapp.com](http://biblewebapp.com), [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com), Strong’s Concordance, Theological Dictionaries.

## SCRIPTURE INTERPRET SCRIPTURE

The Bible is one revelation without contradiction. Therefore, when studying any particular book of the Bible, ultimately that book must be evaluated in the light of the entire Bible. Because context is king in interpretation practices, both the immediate context of the chapter and book must be considered, as well as the remote context of the whole Bible.

### Cross Reference:

This is the act of looking up related or parallel verses that relate to the verse or verses you are studying. There is a Study Bible called the *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* that is meant specifically for this purpose. It takes a theme and traces that theme through the entire Bible.

Because Scripture will never contradict Scripture, the best interpretation for Scripture is other Scripture.

The first place you can begin is with a concordance. A concordance lists every time a specific word or theme is used in the Bible. The first place to start ALWAYS, is the first time that word is used in the book you are studying, then the first time it is used in the Bible.

### Exercise:

Let's have someone do a word study of "Dwelted" from John 1:14. This word is translated in many different ways and let's see what we find.

Also, let's have someone do a study of the word Love from John 3:16. Determine it's first use in the Gospel of John, and then it's first use in the Bible.



Let's read John 1:6-13, focusing on verses 12-13 and then watch the Theme video for "Image of God"

## PARTS OF SPEECH

Much of the Old Testament is poetry, prophesy, or apocalyptic, which incorporate figurative language and poetic forms of writing. There are many times when reading the Bible where you have to interpret the words figuratively or symbolically.

**Point of clarification:** You read the Bible as the author LITERALLY intended it to be read. You do not always interpret the Bible LITERALLY.

This means if something is meant by the author to be read as historical fact then that is how we ought to read it. However, if the author intended it to be read poetically and symbolically and we interpret those words literally then we are not reading it as the author literally intended.

Metaphor & Allegory -

Simile -

Hyperbole -

Personification -

Irony -

Determine the part of speech for the the word light in John 1:4-9: \_\_\_\_\_

LESSON 3 HOMEWORK

Read John 1:1-18 and do a word study of one of the following words:

Beginning

Word

Light

Glory

## LESSON 4: APPLICATION

### HOW THEIR TOWN RELATES TO OURS

"Bible Study is much more than an intellectual classroom exercise, of course. It is a life-transforming process. Thus, we come to the very critical part of the process - application. Once you know what a passage means, you're responsible to live it."

Arthur, Kay. *How to Study Your Bible Workbook*, Page 123.

Application begins with \_\_\_\_\_, then results in \_\_\_\_\_.

"But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

James 1:22 (also see verses 23-25).

Application answers the questions:

- How does the meaning of this passage relate to me?
- What truths am I to embrace, believe, or order my life by?
- What changes should I make in my belief, in my life?

"All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for **teaching**, for **reproof**, **correction**, the **training in righteousness**; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

2 Timothy 3:16-17

Scripture has everything you need to meet any and all situations of life, so that you "may be adequate, and equipped for every good work." This is why we must study the Bible. To allow God, through his word, to make us adequate and therefore equipped to do every good work.

Do not neglect application, however, good application flows naturally out of correct observation and accurate interpretation of the Word of God. Resist slipping into legalism. Do not let tradition override truth. And finally, application is not your cloak and dagger to badger someone who has a different understanding of scripture than you do. In other words, do not become a Bible thumper!

## WHAT QUESTIONS TO ASK

- A. What does this passage teach?
  - 1. Is it general or specific?
  - 2. Does it apply only to specific people? To a cultural problem of their day? To a certain time in history?
  - 3. Has it been superseded by a broader teaching?
  
- B. Does this section of Scripture expose any error in my beliefs or in my behavior?
  - 1. Are there any commandments that I have not obeyed?
  - 2. Are there any wrong attitudes or motives in your life that the scriptures bring to light?
  - 3. Is there any new truth I need to consider in light of this passage?
  
- C. What is God's instruction to me as his child?
  - 1. Are there any new truths to be believed?
  - 2. Are there any new commandments to be acted upon?
  - 3. Are there any new insights I am to pursue?
  - 4. Are there any promises I am to embrace?

### Avoid the following

- A. Applying cultural standards rather than biblical standards.
- B. Attempting to strengthen a legitimate truth by using a scripture incorrectly.
- C. Applying Scripture out of prejudice from past training or teaching.

TEACH. CORRECT. REPROOF. TRAIN.

Teach: This is what the Word of God says on any particular subject. We might call this Theology. Theology is an umbrella term, meaning there are many facets that fall under this main concept. The Two primary categories are:



Reproof: Exposes areas in your thinking and behavior that do not align with God's Word. Reproof is finding out where you have thought wrongly or where you haven't been doing what God says is right.

Correction: This is perhaps the most difficult part of application because it requires hard actions overcoming addictions, habits, and thoughts that may have persisted since childhood. Here we must rely upon the Holy Spirit Power to get us through the difficult days and in the hard moments so we can align ourselves more to God's will for us.

Train: Although God's Word is profitable and correction, the Bible was also given to you as a handbook for living. As you spend time studying His Word, God equips you through:

- Teachings
- Commands
- Promises
- Exhortations
- Warnings
- The lives of biblical characters
- And accounts of God's dealings with mankind

As you get further into God's word you get to know God and you see how he wants you to live. To live the way God says to live is to live righteously.

## THE MAIN IDEA

When it is all said and done you will want to arrive at the Author's Intended Meaning for the passage. This will help you not only understand the passage, but also apply it's message to the greater story of the Bible, and of course to your's as well.

The main idea is another word for \_\_\_\_\_. This simply means it is the core thought of the section of scripture.

Over the last four weeks, we have been looking at John 1:1-18, which is often considered the *introduction* or *prelude* to the gospel. In it John is beginning to lay the ground word for themes he will develop through the remainder of the book.

What are some of the themes that are introduced in 1:1-18?

Now, let's come together to come up with a main idea - a one sentence description that captures John's thought(s) in these 18 verses.

Main Idea of John 1:1-18:

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Resources:

### **Bible references**

Bible Gateway  
ESV Online  
[biblewebapp.com](http://biblewebapp.com)  
[bible.com](http://bible.com)  
[Biblestudytools.com](http://Biblestudytools.com)  
[biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com)

### **Word Study and Text Analysis**

[biblewebapp.com](http://biblewebapp.com)  
[Greattreasures.org](http://Greattreasures.org)  
[Biblestudytools.com](http://Biblestudytools.com)  
The Bible Project videos at [TheBibleProject.com](http://TheBibleProject.com)

### **StudyBibles**

*The NIV Study Bible* by Zondervan - This is the classical study Bible that has dominated the market since it first came out in the 70s.

*The NLT Life Application Study Bible* - The features of this Bible will focus more on personal application rather than in-depth analysis of cultures and languages.

*The ESV Study Bible* by Crossway - This is a more rigid translation but is still easier to read than the NASB. The ESV SB is one of the most prominent Bibles among pastors, teachers, and scholars. It will provide more of an analysis if you are looking for deeper study.

*The NASB Key Word Study Bible* by AMG Publishing. This is the premier Study Bible for those that want to look deep into the meaning of the words in their original language.

### **Commentaries**

The *For Everyone* series by NT Wright. This is an introductory level Commentary.

*College Press Commentary* series would be great for a little more meat but also staying focused on theological and ethical application.

*The New International Commentary on the NT or OT (NICNT - NICOT)* would provide more detail and in-depth analysis of the text by some of the leading scholars of our day.

### **Systematic Theology books**

*The Faith Once For All* by Jack Cottrell through College Press is a great exposition of the tenants of our faith.

*Visual Theology Study Guide: Seeing and Understanding the Truth about God* by Tim Charlie's and Josh Byers. It is a presentation of theological concepts in info graphic form. This can be helpful for seeing theology on a page.

*Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis is an apologetic and defense of the faith, but it is also a presentation of the basics of faith.

Have you ever wished you knew the Bible better?  
Do you ever feel left out in classes, sermons, or just  
general discussions about the Bible?  
Do you want to be a better disciple of Jesus and  
better your walk with him?

This StudyGroup Elective wants to help you start  
your journey in becoming a biblical scholar. We are  
all theologians, and as Christians we are all stu-  
dents of the Bible. We all have opinions on the  
Bible and it's message. Let us help you become a  
better student by showing you some of the tech-  
niques that preachers and teachers use to better  
understand what the Bible is trying to say.

This elective is for anyone who wants to become a  
better disciple by better getting to know God  
through his revealed word.



 **STUDYGROUPS**