

INDUCTIVE BIBLE STUDY

THE 30x5 WAY

INTRODUCTION TO THE 30x5 BIBLE STUDY

There are many methods for doing inductive study. Howard Hendricks, in his terrific *Living by the Book*, outlines many methods for studying inductively. I have taken as many of these as I could, and culled them together into one process, which I call “30x5 Bible Study.”

BASICS OF BIBLE STUDY

How many of us want to go beyond a “devotional” time with the Lord, to in-depth, mind-challenging, and life-changing Bible Study, but have never done so? We don’t know how! Or we don’t have enough time! Or we get too easily get lost in the weeds, going down rabbit trails that end up nowhere. Are there certain steps you can follow, to help guide you to consistently discover insights from the Scriptures – insights that can change your life? Or if you teach the Bible, is there a way to consistently develop accurate content with meaningful application? After all, you cannot give what you do not have!

Is it possible to accomplish good inductive Bible study that observes the text, interprets the text, and then applies it... and does it efficiently, to produce results... and does it in a reasonable amount of time? I think the answer is YES! The *30x5 Bible Study Method* (that’s 30 minutes a day, for 5 days a week) is designed to help make sure you get into the Word, and make sure the Word gets into you.

There are three basic components of good Bible study. Observation, interpretation, and application. Observing asks, “what does it say?” Interpreting asks, “what does it mean?” Applying discovers “what it means *to me*.” The *30x5 Bible Study Method* is a process to help trigger your observation, provide boundaries for your interpretation, and ensure that your application is biblically based.

I. OBSERVATION – The “30x5” WAY

- A. Pray** I break the **observation** phase of Bible study into **three parts**. The first should be obvious, but it is one I often forget to do. **Pray!** I get so enthusiastic that I often jump in to the Scripture with only my mind, but not my spirit. Remember that the Scriptures are “spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:12, 14, 15). I must always start by asking the Lord to “open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your Law” (Ps 118:18).
- B. Ask Questions** The next thing to do is pepper the paragraph with **questions**, and I don’t even try and answer them right then. To make it simple, I begin each question with the words *who, what, when, where, why, and how*. For example, Timothy 6:18-19 says,
¹⁸*Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,*
¹⁹*storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.*

From those two verses I would ask questions like, “Who are these people, and why is Timothy to target them?” “How does someone become rich in good works?” “What

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does storing up a treasure of a good foundation mean?” “Where is this foundation laid? Heaven or earth? And how does that relate to taking hold of that which is life indeed?” In a half hour’s time I’ll get about two pages of these for one paragraph in the Bible. The greatest benefit from asking questions is that we forced ourselves to *slow down* and interact with what the biblical writer is saying. For some questions, the answers may be obvious, but I ask them anyway. Often one “obvious” question leads to several points below the surface that require further investigation. Be sure and write your questions down, because they will be important when you come to the interpretation phase of Bible study.

C. Apply “Left Handed Observational Facts” Next, I observe through a memory device I call “**Left Handed Observational Facts.**” I use my left hand because it helps me remember the 6 basic things to look for. When you read the Bible, you should look for things that are **EMPHASIZED**. Think of someone poking you in the chest with their first finger. Commands and imperative statements fall into this category. Next I look for things that are **REPEATED**, which I remember by holding up my second finger (two fingers – repeated). By looking for repeated terms, phrases, and ideas, I often discover the author’s main point in the text. After that, look for things that are **RELATED**. The relationships in the text are usually signaled by the simple words: and, but, for, because, therefore, so that, so then, and if-then. These little words hinge sentences together to take you from one thought to the next. It is always good to try and understand the biblical writer’s flow of thought. Remind yourself to look for relationships by holding up your ring finger.

Look for comparative statements, or things that are **ALIKE** (pinky). This is where I notice simile’s, metaphors, or figures of speech, which are often signaled by the words “like,” or “as.” When Jesus said, “I am the door,” he is using a metaphor. It causes us to think of the function of a door, and then know that Jesus provides the entrance to eternal life. Opposite your pinky is your thumb, which reminds you to look for things that contrast, or are **UNALIKE**. The word “but” often signals a contrastive thought, but even if “but” it is not there, a contrast can exist in the logical progression of thought. (This last sentence was a contrastive statement.)

Finally, look for things that are **TRUE TO LIFE**. We often looked at the palm of our hand as children, and played games with our “life line.” Use your palm to remind you to find your “life line” in the Bible. The Scriptures must be applied. Look for yourself in the text. Often we see ourselves in the characters, or we relate emotionally to what is going on. When that happens, then you are responding as the biblical writer intended.

On Monday, for example, you would spend about a half hour on a paragraph of Scripture, perhaps as your devotional time for that day, just asking questions – the ones that begin with the “5W’s & H” (who, what, when, where, why, & how). On Tuesday, spend another half hour digging in with the “Left Hand of Fellowship.” Write down in a notebook the things that are **emphasized, repeated, related, alike, unlike, and true-to-life**. Then, throughout the rest of the week, you would spend time in the

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interpretation phase, with Friday as your day to use the PRACTICE acrostic in *application*, if you have not already done so.

D. LEFT HANDED OBSERVATIONAL FACTS

Now that we have seen an overview of the observation phase, let's look more closely at this thing called "Left Handed Observational Facts." That is where we look for things that are

Emphasized

When you want to emphasize something, how do you do it? You might repeat it several times. You might quote an authority. Your statements will be in the form of a command. You might illustrate it with a story. If you are making a case for something, you might order your thoughts to highlight the most important points. The biblical writers used all these devices. If a word is repeated several times in a paragraph, it may well be the main thought, the emphatic point. If he quotes an OT Scripture, this may signal the "big idea." Jesus will often make his point using a story or parable. Note when this happens, because your interpretation cannot lie far from the author's own emphasis.

Repeated

Obviously you must note words that are repeated. The *Precept*¹ method of color and symbol marking repeated words in your Bible can't be beat. But when you speak, do you always use the same words? When I write, I am careful to use synonyms to spice things up a bit. Look for those as well. When you are trying to get the big idea of a larger section or even a whole book, look for the recurrence of characters. Ever notice how Barnabas enters the storyline in Acts at all the key moments? Or when Saul does something wrong, David always does something right? "These are the generations of..." marks the turning points in Genesis. "Then Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord..." marks the beginning of a new cycle in Judges. Your interpretation of a thorny and confusing passage will depend on how well you observed key words, thoughts, phrases, characters, and events.

Try this for yourself. Go through Ephesians chapter 1 and note all the places Paul says "in Christ," or "in Him." Mark them in your Bible. Make a list of the blessings we have in Christ. Observe the triune Godhead. What functions or perfections do we associate with the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Meditate on these things, and bless Him for them!

Related

About 10 years ago I read an article explaining how to study the Bible inductively. One thing the author said was that I needed to study the grammar of a passage. I groaned inwardly. This was getting more technical and harder all the time! Since that time I have come to appreciate more and more that understanding the grammar of a text is probably the most important and rewarding part of Bible study. It means observing the *relationships* between one thought and another, and following the biblical writer's flow

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of thought as he works his way through sentences, paragraphs, and sections. So when you study the Bible, look for the following *relationships*:

1. From verses to **sentences**: Remember that the biblical writers did not write verses. They wrote *sentences*. Most of the time one verse does not equal one sentence. When you observe, try and get a complete thought. Can you summarize, “what is the point of this sentence?”
2. **Verbs**: It’s a good idea to circle the main verb. Is it past, present, or future? If you use the NASB, read the preface to your Bible. It will tell you all about perfect and imperfect forms of the past *tense*. What about the *voice*? Is it active (the subject does the work), or passive (the work is done to the subject)? Passive voices beg the question, “who is doing the work here?” Often in biblical writing the passive voice implies that God is the one doing the action. Note the *mood* of the verb. Is it a command (imperative mood)? If it reads “should,” “would,” or “might,” it is the subjunctive mood, which often expresses a conditional thought.
3. **Cause & effect relationships**: If the sentence (or verse) starts with “therefore,” “wherefore,” “so then,” “because,” or “for,” there is a link between something that was just said to something that is being said. Too often a chapter will start with “therefore,” and we don’t bother to summarize in our mind what the author just said. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...” (Rom 8:1) In your mind you should say, “There is, on account of... on account of what? What was in the prior verse anyway?”
4. **Conditional relationships**: Most of these are statements of logical conclusion. Often they are in “if/ then” statements. Sometimes the sentence will begin with “since,” which expresses a condition assumed to be true.
5. **Purpose or result**: If you have a “so that,” “in order that,” or “so then,” the relationship between what is being said and the context is expressing “why” something is so. In the Bible, purpose and result are often interrelated, especially when it comes to God, since what God purposes ultimately results!

Why is this important? In inductive Bible study, you take something apart so you can to better appreciate what God, through the biblical writer, is saying. By understanding how the details form links from one thought to another, you can keep things in context. This ultimately will lead to a more accurate interpretation because you have an understanding *how* the biblical author says something. And hopefully, that will help you find out *why* he said it – to change your life! As Dr. Howard Hendricks says, “The more time you spend in observation, the less time you will spend in interpretation, and the more accurate your results.” Unfortunately, the converse is also true.

Alike (Comparisons)

The Bible is full of the most beautiful literature known to man. One reason is that it is so picturesque. So much of it is poetry, which intentionally paints pictures with words.

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But the way we approach the scripture is akin to touring the country by interstate. It's really hard to sight-see at 70 miles per hour! Symbolic language – similes, metaphors, parables, allegory – requires that we s...l...o...w d...o...w...n. Consider. Meditate. Reflect. Think!

Whenever I study the Scriptures, I work in paragraphs of text. I recommend that you do the same. In that paragraph, look for the words “like,” or “as.” They signal a *simile*, which is a literary device that compares one thing to another. In Psalm 1:3, David compares a person who meditates on God's word to a tree planted by a stream of water. To get David's point you must stop and consider, what would a tree planted by water be like? Think about it, and then try it again with verse 4 which compares the wicked to wind-blown chaff.

Metaphors often describe something abstract with something concrete and understandable. Instead of using the terms *like* or *as*, a metaphor will say one thing is another. For example, all of the “I am” statements in John (I am the door, I am the good shepherd, I am the bread...) are metaphors. Jesus was literally none of those things, but when you consider the function of a door, or bread, or light, you get the idea.

Unlike (Contrasts)

Perhaps I am peculiar, but sometimes I understand things better by knowing what things are *not*. A *contrast* will often draw a border around something. On a bright day, an object is sharply outlined by the contrast between shadow and light. The thing is easily defined. I like to think of the word “but” as a hinge that opens and shuts a door to meaning. It limits some things while directing us to others. “Do not be conformed to this world BUT be transformed . . .” focuses us from all the possible things we ought not to be like, to the one thing we must be like: transformed into the image Christ. (Rom 12:1-2) Look for contrasts, they open the door to meaning.

In our own writing and speaking, why do we use comparisons and contrasts? To help get our point across! It was no different for the biblical writers. They used the same type of literary devices. Look for them, and mark them when you study. The point God is trying to get across to **you** may lie right underneath the words “as,” “like,” or “but!”

True to Life

Finally, I want to address an area of observation that is often ignored, yet is essential if you really want to catch the impact of Scripture: we need to look for things that are “true to life.”

When we look for things that are true to life, we allow our God-given imagination to work. Human nature basically has not changed over the centuries. Cultures change, technology changes, information changes, but the things that stir a man's heart, bring a woman to tears, grip us in fear, motivate us to action, or warm us in tenderness toward one another – these things remain constant. When the disciples were with Jesus in the boat as He slept through a gale, they were fearful. They were frustrated with Jesus (“*Do you not care that we perish?*”). I can relate to these emotions, because I have them all

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the time. When we look for things that are true to life, we find things that resonate with our experience.

Howard Hendricks calls this using our “sanctified imagination.” We see ourselves in the situation, and ask, “How would I respond here?” Granted that we don’t all respond to things in the same way, but we all respond in *some* way. Too often we treat the heroes of the faith as flannel graph figures: flat and two-dimensional. But when you engage in the details that help you identify with their emotion, we receive instruction for how we should (or should not) respond.

Sometimes your interpretation will depend upon your understanding of the emotional tone of a passage. When Jesus weeps in John 11, you understand a bit more why Christ came – to defeat death. What would it have been like to nearly sacrifice your only son to God, as Abraham did? Would you have experienced conflict and confusion? Have *you* ever obeyed God even though you didn’t have it all figured out, but followed through anyway? Paul’s tone varies from letter to letter. You sense his frustration and even anger in Galatians, his hurt in 2 Corinthians, his authority in 1 Timothy, and his friendly respect in Philemon. When you observe these things, make note of them. They are facts, in addition to the things emphasized, repeated, related alike, and unlike, upon which you will build your interpretation.

Finally, whenever I am observing a narrative in Scripture (a story), I identify the elements of a story: protagonist, antagonist, characters, setting, plot, climax, and resolution. Doing this often crystallizes the biblical writer’s main point, and helps keep me from being sidetracked by supporting details, or even worse, making one of those supporting details the main idea.

CONCLUSION

This is the process of observation. Train yourself to read the Bible this way. More importantly, develop the discipline of writing all this down! You will be rewarded with some terrific insights, and a higher view of the complexity and beauty of the Bible. Just remember that what you take apart, you have to put back together! That’s why I conclude my observations by trying to say, in just a sentence, what the “big idea” of the paragraph is. For example, when I studied Ephesians 2:1-10, my summary of the paragraph was, “Paul tells the Ephesians that, although they were dead, God made them alive so that they would walk by faith and do good works.”

And that’s a good observation for us to see – and do - as well! Discover the living Lord as He reveals Himself in the Bible, and let your world be changed by what you discover!

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II. INTERPRETATION

When it comes to interpretation, I like to think of applying principles and rules as “tools” that to help me answer questions I asked during the observation phase. Once the questions are answered, then I just added more facts to my data base of observations, and when I have no more questions – well then the text just means what it says! (I wish it were that simple!)

Not every job requires the same tools, and not every question requires the same rules. I like the way Dr. Howard Hendricks explains these rules in his *Living by the Book*. To help us learn them, we have them all starting with the letter, “C.”

1. **CIRCLE A QUESTION!** - Interpretation often starts with a question. In a 30x5 Study, you won't have time to solve every problem, so limit your investigation to a few questions that seem to impact the meaning of the text.
2. **CONTENT** - What do the facts from the Observation phase allow? Your interpretation cannot be contrary to the facts you see in the text.
3. **CONTEXT** - Here there are two primary types of contextual rules:
 - a. Determining the meaning by an understanding how the human author wrote, and the literary genre he used.
 - b. Comparing the text in question with the surrounding text in ever widening circles (the Immediate, Larger, Sectional, Book, and Bible). This is known as the Circles of Meaning.
4. **COMPARISON** - This is called the “Analogy of Faith” where you compare scripture with scripture, especially within the same book. Within in the Bible you look for parallel concepts. You also test your interpretation against your system of theology.
5. **CULTURE & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND** - Understanding the meaning based on a knowledge of the author, audience, date of writing, history and geography, and contemporary issues. Again, the meaning cannot be contrary to these facts, and will often be driven by these facts.
6. **CONSULTANTS (COMMENTARIES)** - This is where you test your interpretation based on a comparison with the “scholars.” You use resources like good commentaries, Bible dictionaries, handbooks, and encyclopedias to supplement your increasing knowledge.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

There are entire courses on the principles of biblical interpretation. Several years ago I discovered a chapter in *THE NAVIGATOR BIBLE STUDIES HANDBOOK*, that summarized these principles so clearly and succinctly that I obtained permission for

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NavPress to reproduce it here. Written by Walt Henrichsen, this originally appeared in *A Layman's Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Nav Press, 1979, out of print).

A. BASIC BELIEFS

The conclusions you draw from your study will reflect your basic beliefs about the Bible. Three fundamental beliefs lead to proper understanding of Scripture.

1. THE BIBLE IS THE LITERAL WORD OF GOD

The apostle Paul stated categorically, "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16, NASB). This statement is foundation to Bible study. Because the Bible is God's inerrant communication to us, it deserves careful study and investigation.

The Bible is literal in the sense that its accounts are records of actual happenings, not a collection of myths and legends. The writers of Scripture, however, do at times use figurative statements, allegories, and symbols.

2. THE BIBLE IS GOD'S MEANS OF REVEALING TRUTH TO HIS PEOPLE

Man alone cannot discover God's plans; God must reveal them. His truth is not revealed in the silent contemplation of your own life or of nature around you, but through the Holy Spirit's illumination of the inspired Word. Jesus taught, "If you hold my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

3. THE BIBLE IS AUTHORITATIVE

The Bible has authority because God is its author and has absolute authority over humans. Every area of every person's life is subject to the Word of God. During His temptation Jesus declared, quoting the Old Testament, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4; see Deuteronomy 8:3).

KEEPING ON TRACK

In order to handle the Word of God properly, it is important to follow certain guidelines of interpretation (*hermeneutics* is the academic word.) Observing these guidelines does not always guarantee correct conclusions, but disregarding them frequently leads to error. Walt Henrichsen wrote a helpful book on this subject: *A Layman's Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Nav Press, 1979, out of print). The rules he suggests are summarized below.

B. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. Work from the assumption that the Bible is authoritative.
2. The Bible interprets itself; Scripture best explains Scripture.
3. Saving faith and the Holy Spirit are necessary for us to understand and properly interpret the Scriptures.

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4. Interpret personal experiences in the light of Scripture and not Scripture in the light of personal experience.
5. Biblical examples are authoritative only when supported by a command. (For example, the book of Acts records that the apostle to replace Judas was chosen by casting lots – i.e., drawing straws. This does not mean the Bible teaches that drawing straws is the only or even the best way of choosing church leaders. *A corollary:* The believer is free to do anything that the Bible does not prohibit.)
6. The primary purpose of the Bible is not to increase our knowledge but to change our lives. *Two corollaries:*
 - A. Some passages are not to be applied in the same way they were applied at the time they were written. (For example, Deuteronomy 22:8 says one should always build a parapet around the roof of his house so that no one will fall off the roof. This was a wise instruction when people used their flat roofs as additional living space.)
 - B. When you apply a passage, it must be in keeping with a correct interpretation.
7. Each Christian has the right and responsibility to investigate and interpret the Word of God for himself. (Of course, humility is in order-everyone from the rankest beginner to the most experienced scholar can be wrong.)
8. Church history is important but not decisive in the interpretation of Scripture. *A corollary:* The Church does not determine what the Bible teaches.; The Bible determines what the Church teaches.
9. The promises of God in the Bible are available to the Holy Spirit for believers of every generation. (One should avoid a demanding, presumptuous attitude when “claiming” promises given to individuals. For instance, just because God promised Sarah a baby does not mean that every woman who “claims” Genesis 18:10 will have a baby.)

C. GRAMMATICAL PRINCIPLES

Scripture has only one meaning and should be taken literally.

1. Interpret words in harmony with their meaning in the times of the author.
2. Interpret a word in relation to its sentence and context.
3. Interpret a passage in harmony with its context.
4. When an inanimate object is used to describe a living being, the statement may be considered figurative. *A corollary:* When life and action are attributed to inanimate objects, the statement may be considered figurative.
5. When an expression is out of character with the thing described, the statement may be considered to be a figurative one.

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6. The principal parts and figures of a parable represent certain realities. Consider only these principal parts and figures when drawing conclusions.
7. Interpret the words of the prophets in their usual, literal, and historical sense, unless the context or manner in which they are fulfilled clearly indicates they have a symbolic meaning. Their fulfillment may be in installments, each fulfillment of prophecy being a pledge of what is to follow.

D. HISTORICAL PRINCIPLES

1. Since Scripture originated in a historical context, it can be understood only in the light of biblical history.
2. Though God's revelation in the Scriptures is progressive, both Old and New Testaments are essential parts of this revelation and form a unit.
3. Historical facts of events become symbols of spiritual truths only if the Scripture so designate them.

E. THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

You must understand the Bible grammatically before you can understand it theologically.

1. A doctrine cannot be considered biblical unless it sums up and includes all that the Scriptures says about it.
2. When two doctrines taught in the Bible appear to be contradictory, accept both as scriptural in the confident belief that they resolve themselves into a higher unity.
3. A teaching merely implied in Scripture may be considered biblical when a comparison of related passages supports the teaching.

If all these rules sound daunting, don't panic. Common sense generally prevails. Probably the most helpful and readable book you could find to help you with sound interpretation is *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart (Zondervan 1981,1993.)

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III. APPLICATION

THE P-R-A-C-T-I-C-E ACROSTIC

Whenever we come in contact with the truth of Scripture, it is important to collect our observations. I'm a list maker, category shuffler, and puzzle solver, and I tend to approach

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the study of Scripture just like that. It helps me to get my brain around the “big idea” of what God is saying. I look at those thorny questions that spring from 2,000 years or more of cultural distance, and take it as a personal challenge to figure it out, based on what the facts allow, based on a comparison with other Scripture passages, and based on my understanding of theology and what I discover in the way of linguistic, archeological, and academic light. When I’ve done all that, I feel pretty good about how I handled the Scripture.

The only thing is, I have not *handed* it to my heart, my mind, and my feet - areas where I need it the most. I have got to put what I have learned into practice. As Dr. Howard Hendricks says, “The Bible was not written to satisfy our curiosity, it was written to transform our life.” I need to apply it, not just learn about it. I need to not only interpret it accurately, but allow the Holy Spirit to use it to change my life. Not change in others, or change tomorrow, or even change for the emotional moment, but real, lasting, determined, and personal change.

That’s a tall order. Where do you start? Howard Hendricks says you start with knowing. Knowing not only what the Bible says, but knowing yourself in your strengths and your weaknesses. It starts with asking and answering for yourself, “where do I need to grow?” He also says it requires a bit of chewing, where you ponder the truth you have learned (that’s called meditation), and allow the Spirit to work on your soul. When that happens, God will help you see yourself from His point of view, and revelation is the basis for change.

I recommend you apply the **P-R-A-C-T-I-C-E** acrostic. This simply means, when you come to the application phase of Bible study, ask yourself if there is a . . .

Promise to claim?

Relationship to build (or bust) in four key relationships (See how it G-O-E-S)

God

Other people (family, friends, enemies, the unsaved)

Enemy (the World, the Flesh, and the Devil)

Self – What do I need?

Attitude to adjust?

Condition to meet?

Trespass to confess?

Imperative (command) to do?

Challenge to face?

Example to follow?

P – PROMISE TO CLAIM

Let’s look at the promises of Scripture. Webster’s Dictionary defines a promise as “a declaration that one will do or refrain from doing something specified; a legally binding declaration that gives the person to whom it is made a right or reason to expect . . . something.” There are some of those legal promises (or covenants) in Scripture, made to specific persons in the Bible: to Noah and thus mankind concerning the flood, to Abraham, Moses, David, and the Nation of Israel. Always remember that the Law of

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Moses has been completely fulfilled in Christ (Matt 5:17), and the believer is released from it (Gal 3:13; Ron 3:28). So if you are looking for blessings for keeping the Law, be careful, you will find yourself under its condemnation as well! (Gal 3:10) Of course, there are benefits from the Covenant promises that we enjoy today, such as being blessed in Abraham's "seed" who was Christ (Gal 3:16). The blessings of the New Covenant, made with Israel and Judah (Jer 31:31), were inaugurated through Christ's blood (Matt 26:28), and the primary New Covenant blessing is God Himself, in the person of the Holy Spirit. Everyone who trusts in Christ by faith has the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9).

In the Bible, there are also specific promises made to individuals like Hannah. God promised her a child (1 Sam 1:16), and Samuel was born. But I would caution you against taking those kinds of promises as examples for you to follow. Even meeting the same conditions is no guarantee that this is a promise you can claim.

One final caution, the Proverbs are things that are generally true. If you align your life with these truths, you will be wise and avoid the natural consequences of sin. Technically however, the Proverbs are not promises. God in His sovereignty may choose a different course for you, despite your application of God's wisdom.

What this means is that you need a solid interpretation, understanding the meaning not only for the original audience, but for yourself as well. Armed with the proper interpretation however, you will find the Bible is full of promises to claim. For example, we are told that if we confess our sins, God is faithful to forgive them (1 Jn 1:9). God's character never changes, and we can count on His character to remain constant. Because of Christ's sacrifice, we can expect God's mercy and grace. We have proof of His love (Jn 15:13). Even in the heart wrenching loss of a loved one, we might hear the believing spouse or child say with confidence, "God is good, all the time." This comes straight from the promise of God: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose (Rom 8:28)." Obviously, the outcome is not always what we want, but we can count on it, God is good. We as Christians, are sustained by God's promises, especially regarding salvation, and the confident expectation of Heaven for those of us who trust in Jesus Christ.

R – RELATIOINSHIP TO BUILD (OR BUST)

The Bible is a book about **relationships**, primarily between God and sinful men and women like you and me. But it also informs us on how to have better relationships with others, and how to avoid getting too close to spiritual enemies, like the world, the flesh, and the devil. The Bible is also a window to our own soul, so it even speaks to our relationship with our self. I remember this by asking, "How G-O-E-S the relationships?" (GOES, for God/Others/Enemies/Self) Just about any chapter in Scripture will tell you something about one of these four relationships.

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GOD – God as He reveals Himself through his Word. He does this first through the Living Word, Jesus Christ (Heb 1:2), who, with the Holy Spirit, communicates things about God that only He Himself would know (1 Cor 2:10-12). And while there is a subjective “knowing” of God in a spiritual sense, we believe that the most objective way to know God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is through the Written Word – the Bible. That is not “second best,” it is the way God designed it! You get to know Jesus Christ through what the Bible says about Him.

OTHERS – It is hard to get along with people sometimes, isn’t it? It has always been that way, and as long as we have a sinful nature, it will continue. But the Bible provides loads of wisdom, that when applied, can smooth things out considerably. Several weeks ago we read the story of Joseph, who ends his saga in Genesis with, “you meant it for evil, God meant it for good.” What an example of faith and forgiveness!

ENEMIES – This is NOT talking about your boss or ornery neighbor! We have three enemies, according to John in his first letter: the world system, our own sinful flesh, and the devil. The Bible explains how to have victory on all three battle fronts. These are relationships to “bust.” As Paul says in Romans 12:2, we are not to be conformed to this world, but rather we are to be transformed. When you read the Bible, look for instructions on how to break the hold of our enemy.

SELF – The Bible is a very personal book. I can tell you for sure, there are no “Bob’s” in the Bible, yet I find myself on almost every page. When you read, allow the Holy Spirit to hold up a mirror to yourself, so that you can see yourself as God sees you. Sometimes the reflection is shocking. Very often, I find it also comforting and reassuring, because God sees me through His very own Son. Learn to see yourself as the object of God’s affection, and look for reminders of the extent of His pursuit of you.

So that is the “R” in PRACTICE. As you read through the Bible, be sure and look for those RELATIONSHIPS – with God, Others, Enemies, and Self. You might even want to start a journal, and record what you discover. Even better however, is when you let the Holy Spirit write them on your heart, and you record them with your hands and feet.

A - ATTITUDE TO ADJUST

An attitude is a mental position, feeling, or emotion toward something or someone. If it is positive, we call say someone is cheerful. Their outlook is optimistic, and we think of them as helpful or a “team player.” But if their attitude is negative, we call them cocky or arrogant, or recognize them as sullen, even rebellious. Once, when I worked for Northrop Grumman, everyone received little gold pins with the word “attitude” on them as a reminder to maintain a “golden attitude.” As you can guess, it actually had the opposite effect, since many saw it as a silly and contrived program. A lot of folks had a bad attitude toward our “golden attitude” pin!

When it comes to the Bible, we are often confronted with characters who maintained both good and bad attitudes. Most of the time their attitude (what they were thinking) is not

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expressly stated in the Scripture. But we can still derive it from what the characters say or do (or don't say or do). For example, what would you say was the attitude of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) toward the work of the Holy Spirit in the early church? How about Barnabas toward Mark (Acts 15:36-37)? Or John the Baptist toward Jesus? (John 3:22-36) In either case, you are left with a challenge to change our way of thinking. Ask yourself, "Do I have that attitude?"

Underlying all attitudes is our understanding of the sovereignty of God, and submission to His will. The attitude of humility displayed by the Lord (Philippians 2:1-11) should cause us to check our own attitude, and imitate His humility and meekness in yielding his right to control men's perception of him (Phil 1:8).

God holds us accountable for every thought (Gen 6:5; Ps 94:11; Rom 2:15). Certainly Jesus could read men's thoughts, and even challenged them when their thoughts were evil (Matt 9:4). He does no less with us today, so when we are confronted with Scriptures that encourage us to "check our attitude," we do well to listen!

C - CONDITION TO MEET

As you read through the Scripture, you are bound to come into contact with contracts, or *covenants*. Covenants often have conditions, and that is especially true with the Law of Moses, which is an agreement between God and Israel. The Law of Moses is in contrast with the Abrahamic Covenant, which was a *unilateral* covenant. The Mosaic Covenant was a two-way agreement "conditioned" upon the behavior of Israel as a nation. They would be blessed if they kept the law, and cursed if they didn't (see Deut 28). Of course, the challenge for Christians living under this age of grace is to interpret conditional statements found in the Bible properly.

Be careful not to make the mistake of placing yourself under the Law. Seeking to earn God's blessing by keeping Mosaic laws is a *bad idea!* God blesses us through Jesus Christ (Eph 1:3). I have known Christians who gave up ham and cheese sandwiches (Lev 11:7); who won't wear blends of clothing (Deut 22:11), or any number of things believing that somehow God wants that in addition to their faith in Christ. Jesus completely satisfies God's requirement for holiness in mankind. We must stand on *that!*

So what kinds of conditions ought we to meet? Here's a great place to start: Look for ones that remind us of the blessings we have in Christ, and the fruit of the Spirit that is ours, available by trusting in Him. Are you downcast? If you hope in God, He will lift you up (Ps 42:5). Are you anxious? Pray (Phil 4:6). Here's a tough one. Do you want to grow as a Christian? Then let the daily trials of life have their perfecting and polishing effect (James 1:2-3). Isn't it interesting, when all is said and done, that our primary condition is *faith!* That's enough of a condition to meet, all by itself!

T - TRESPASS TO CONFESS

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I like to wear button down collar shirts. I don't know why, but I just don't like seeing little wings sticking out of my neck. Sometimes in the middle of the day I'll look in a mirror, and see my collar unbuttoned. In typical male fashion, I blame everyone else. "Don't I have any friends?! Why didn't someone TELL me those things were sticking out?!!!" The Bible is a mirror, and through it God reflects to us the image of our soul, so we can see for ourselves that all is not well within. "Forgive us our trespasses," we have learned in the Lord's Prayer. Let's look at what is behind this idea of sin, or "trespass" which we have to confess.

There are at five Greek terms to express the concept of sin in the New Testament, plus parallel concepts captured by Hebrew terms in the Old Testament. You have probably heard someone say that sin means "missing the mark," which is the basic meaning of *hamartia*. When it comes to your standing before God, have you done everything you ought to have done? Have you been everything you might have been? Have you given Him the worship He is due? How about the negatives: Have you refrained from doing, thinking, and being what God prohibits. Start with the 10 Commandments, and the answer must be "No, you haven't." Nor have I, nor has anyone else. We have all "missed the mark" of what God expects of us.

The second word pictures the idea of stepping across a line: *parabasis*. God set the standard: Don't eat the fruit. Adam and Eve took the fruit, and ate of it (Gen 3:6). We are all guilty of deliberately stepping over the line. But what about when you don't mean to, but you still end up on the wrong side of God? That's *paraptoma*, a slipping into sin. The devil tempts, deceives, and lures us, and we are unexpectedly caught. You turn the channel on the TV, and there is a Victoria Secret commercial. You flip through the Sunday Morning newspaper, and you are confronted with full color ads of men and women in their underwear. Try going to 7-11 for a Slurpee. Within reach are the smokes, drinks, porn and gambling. It's one-stop-sin-shopping!

The Greek word for law is *nomia*. The opposite is *a-nomia*, which means "lawlessness." Being tempted at the 7-11, and even glancing unexpectedly at the cover of the dirty magazine cover is *paraptoma*. If you buy it, you are being deliberate and have committed *anomia*. David looked over the wall and saw Bathsheba (*paraptoma*). He committed adultery and it became *anomia*. Finally repenting a year later, David wrote, "Against You, You only, have I sinned/ And done what is evil in Your sight (Ps 51:4)."

Finally, there is the word we find in the Lord's Prayer, *opheilema*, which means "debt." It is the idea of failure to pay what is due. Have you given God the worship due Him? *Opheilema* Have you obeyed Him completely? *Opheilema* Have you been true to yourself, and used to the fullest the gifts God has given you? *Opheilema* Are there others with whom you have missed the mark, stepped over the line, stupidly caused hurt, or were just plain mean? *Opheilema* "All have sinned..." Paul reminds us. (Rom 3:23)

You can hardly read a page of Scripture without finding the ugly part of your nature staring back at you. The devil would have you live under condemnation. Don't go there. Go God's way: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins,

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and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) Our sin is great, but Christ’s payment is ever greater. Stand in that, never in your condemnation.

I - IMPERATIVE TO DO

When we put into practice what we read, it is often in response to a direct command from Scripture. In the P-R-A-C-T-I-C-E acrostic we use the letter “I” to remind us to look for “Imperatives (or commands) to do.”

Paul often peppers the second half of his letters with commands, encouraging his readers to get with it in their walk with Christ. I have been studying Philippians lately, and Chapter 4 is full of imperative statements. “Stand firm in the Lord” (v. 1), and “rejoice in the Lord always” (v. 4) are two such commands. I have been worrying a bit lately, and verse 6 really got to me: “Be anxious for *nothing*.” I look at that and say, “OK, how?!” As is often the case, God’s Spirit gives us the “how-to” along with the command. Verses 5-6 tell me that I need to take my worries to God in prayer and cast them on Him. The problem is, I keep taking them back. So Paul gives a second line of defense in verse 8: discipline my mind to deliberately think about “whatever is honorable... right... pure... lovely... of good repute... excellent...and praiseworthy: dwell on these things...”

Of course, the commands are straightforward. I understand perfectly what I am *supposed* to do. It is the doing that is hard. Maybe that’s because I gain ground, expecting to give it right back up. But when you read the previous chapter, especially verses 3:12-16, it seems Paul could not bear the thought of that. He kept pressing on, not looking back at either the good or the bad. His philosophy was to “keep living by the same standard to which we have attained” (v. 16). Once he had attained a level of maturity (by God’s grace), it was unthinkable for him to give it up. He strived to hold on to it. I especially like his thoughts in Chapter 1: “I am confident... that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (1:6). That’s progressive Christianity. A few verses later Paul prays that their “love may abound still more and more...to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ” (v. 9-10). I’ll never forget a few years ago reading this and being struck by the obvious: Paul expected us to grow! He actually had an expectation that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, people would *change*. Paul believed that for the Philippians. Do I believe it for myself? Paul seems to think I ought to!

How about you? When it comes to the Lord’s commands, are you seeing progress? If not, follow Paul’s example. Figure out where you are and tenaciously hold on. Don’t give up that ground. Sink your grapple in deep, and, by the power of God’s Spirit, keep climbing upward. “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you.” (Phil 4:9)

C - CHALLENGE TO FACE

We are now at the second “C,” and if you are like me, you will ask yourself, “does this stand for ‘Condition to Meet,’ or ‘Challenge to Face?’” Since we already looked at meeting conditions as part of application, it must be the latter.

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Challenges in the Scripture take the form of the high bar in the Christian life. A famous challenge is found in Joshua 24:15. “... **Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.**” You can almost see Joshua, taking his foot and scribing a line in the sand, saying in so many words, “all who will follow, cross the line.” Seeing Simon Peter and Andrew his brother, Jesus gave them the greatest challenge of their life, “**Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.**” (Matt 4:19) I have often wondered, would I have taken the challenge, on the spot, like that? Paul gives us all a personal challenge in Romans 12:1. “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice**, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.” Paul was **not ashamed of the gospel of Christ** (Rom 1:16). The implication? I should not be ashamed of it either. The ultimate challenge, reminded by Peter: “**Be Holy, as I am holy**” (1 Pet 1:16).

There is an aspect of “challenge to face” that is somewhat subjective. Someone might ask, “Couldn’t this also be an ‘imperative to do?’ Why not a ‘condition to meet?’ Perhaps an ‘attitude to adjust,’ or ‘relationship to build?’” The answer is “yes, it could be any of those things. But what is it, *to you?*” When it comes to the application phase of Bible study, the Bible must be personalized: “How does this apply to you?” The old adage goes, there is one correct interpretation for any given passage of Scripture (the inspired author meant for it to say *one* thing), and many applications. That is, the one meaning of the passage may be worked out in all kinds of personal ways. This is why personal Bible study is an art as well as a science. Bible study is an exercise in *slowing down*. We speed through so much of what we do. Looking for these types of things in our Bible reading and study forces us to think, meditate, categorize, and compare our conclusions with our own experience. Most of all, it helps us see these as challenges, not for the Israelites, or Peter, Andrew, the Roman church, or those guys way back then. They are challenges for us to face today.

E - EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW

Examples, both good and bad, are set by the heroes of faith we find in Scripture. As you progress through the Bible, you may read of David, his faithfulness to the Lord, his humility and repentance, and how he served God wholeheartedly. Later, you might read about Solomon and the kings that followed him. Throughout Scripture, you discover examples to follow, as well as ones to shun. Go back after your reading, find a verse that struck you as a good example, and mark it in your Bible. I love the story in 1 Kings 3:5-15, where God invites Solomon to ask for whatever he wished. Solomon, rather than asking for wealth, health, or power, asks for wisdom – a discerning heart to rule God’s people. (1 Kg 3:9) How we should follow Solomon’s example! Today in your ABF’s make it a point to set aside for now requests of health or favorable circumstances, and instead ask for the wisdom to build, by our behavior and relationships, Christ’s kingdom and His church.

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Read through the New Testament, and you will see the example of those who followed Christ in the gospels and Acts, and of course the example of our Lord Himself. Turn to the epistles, and you see how what we believe is to be put into practice. There we follow examples in our thinking as well as behavior as we understand the mind of Paul, Peter, James, Jude, the author of Hebrews, and John. Paul is very bold. Twice he tells the Corinthians to “follow him.” (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1) He tells the Philippians to “join in following my example” (Phil 3:17). He says the same thing to the Thessalonians 3 times (1 Th 1:6; 2:14; 2 Th 3:7) Is your walk with the Lord the kind where you would say to someone else, “Do it the way I do it”? Perhaps we need to follow Paul’s example, not only in his righteous attitudes and instructions, but also his incarnational approach to ministry, where the message and the man were one and the same.

NOT A HEARER, BUT A DOER!

The P-R-A-C-T-I-C-E acrostic provides a great checkup to keep us thinking about how what we read and study applies to our life. The worst thing we can do is to read, study, interpret, and understand... and then stop there. As Howard Hendricks says, “The Bible was not given for information, but transformation; not so that you can *know* but so that you can *grow!*” Perhaps the best way to sum up this section on applying the Scriptures comes from the Bible itself: “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. *Do what it says.*” (James 1:22)

CONCLUSION

If you could see my Bible study notes from years ago, it was literally stream of consciousness observations, listed numerically on a legal pad. By God’s grace the class did not stone me for the way I must have been assassinating the Scripture. Add to that my personal anxiety, knowing that, although I had given my best, it still lacked thoroughness of research.

Along the way, having spent some time in Seminary and acquainting myself with Dr. Hendricks’ methods, I learned from him and others what I wish someone had taught me 25 years ago – a *process* of Bible study. Today I am much more confident in the results as being truer to the author’s intended meaning, and more consistent in offering applications that are harmonious with the biblical text.

This booklet was prepared for you and for those you may teach and disciple, so that you will not lament, as I did for so many years, lack of training in Bible study method. I pray that, as you put these principles into practice, you discover life change, first for yourself, and then those God has put in your care for discipleship.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever. (Isa 40:8)

Precept Upon Precept, by Kay Arthur. Precept Ministries International offers curriculum based inductive Bible study.