

Inductive Bible Study



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1 Easier than you think

Plunge in with the Swedish Method!

Read Matthew 5:43-48 in its context. This is part of Jesus' radical Sermon on the Mount. It is his sixth example to show the real intent of God's laws. (See 5: 21-42 for the five other examples.) His interpretation clashed radically with the traditional interpretations of the rabbis of his day.

Write it down! Find facts - *open* and *hidden* - about each topic below. Open facts are the obvious ones you can see in the text. Hidden facts are those below the surface, or naturally implied.



Something about God (Father, Son, Spirit)

v 43 Jesus' interpretation of OT laws differs from what people have heard. He's daring!

v 44 He commands his disciples to love their enemies, not just their neighbors. He's radical!



Something about man (human nature)



Something not understood



Something enlightening



Something to obey

Small groups Share what you discovered. Begin with your open and hidden facts about God. Help each other stick to the text. Be sure you have time for "Something to obey".

Study methods you used without realizing it



How to read a love letter

THIS YOUNG MAN has just received his first love letter. He may have already read it three or four times, but he is just beginning. To read it as accurately as he would like would require several dictionaries and a good deal of close work with a few experts on etymology and philology.

However, he will do all right without them. He will ponder over the exact shade of meaning of every word, every comma. She has headed the letter "Dear John". What, he asks himself, is the exact significance of those words? Did she refrain from saying "Dearest" because she was bashful? Would "My Dear" have sounded too formal? Perhaps, maybe she would have said "Dear So-and-So" to anybody!

A worried frown will now appear on his face. But it disappears as soon as he really gets to thinking about the first sentence. She certainly wouldn't have written *that* to anybody!

AND SO HE WORKS his way through the letter, one moment perched blissfully on a cloud, the next moment huddled miserably behind an eight-ball. It has started a hundred questions in his mind. He could quote it by heart. In fact, he will -- for weeks to come.

If people read books with anything like the same concentration, we'd be a race of mental giants. But we don't -- and we aren't. And it's sadder that even the greatest book can be read with the same intention and devotion as that of the young man above who is struggling to read his first love letter.

"How to Read a Book" was published only a few years ago, in its 60th thousand. Price \$2.50. SIMON AND SCHUSTER

Yet most of us could read books a lot better than we do. In fact, very few people really know how.

Which is nothing to be ashamed of -- we were never taught how in school. We were taught only how to read words, and reading books is an altogether different thing. Since the 1930's, so many are becoming unwilling to read, and a book has just been published which actually *shows* how to read -- Mortimer J. Adler's fine "How to Read a Book. You have probably heard of it, and probably you've thought that there was no room on the subject in the library.

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Read the article two or more times. *How is reading the Bible like reading a love letter? List the similarities you see.*

1 Approach the Bible as God's love letter to you. So--you would naturally be excited, curious.

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 _____

7 _____

Small groups *Share what you discovered. Which guidelines for studying the Bible seemed to you most challenging?*

Close your time together in prayer for one another. Jot down names of your group members and notes for how to pray for each as you start this adventure of learning to study God's Word--and hear him speaking to you!

Three ways of reading the Bible

Fast - Slow - Slower

1 Overview Reading a passage quickly for big ideas--an overall view of its theme(s). *Try it with Mark 1. Don't linger on details or what you do not understand. Jot down big ideas you see. What seems to tie these big ideas together as a theme?*

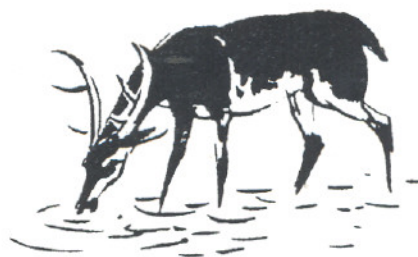


2 Study Reading a text more thoughtfully for details and their implications, and then determining the writer's focus. *Try this with Mark 1:16-20. List the facts--open and hidden. What seems to be the writer's focus?*

Facts and implications _____

Focal event or idea _____

3 Meditation Concentrating on one idea to learn what God is saying to you personally. *Reflect on vs 18, 20. What application(s) does your reflection lead to?*



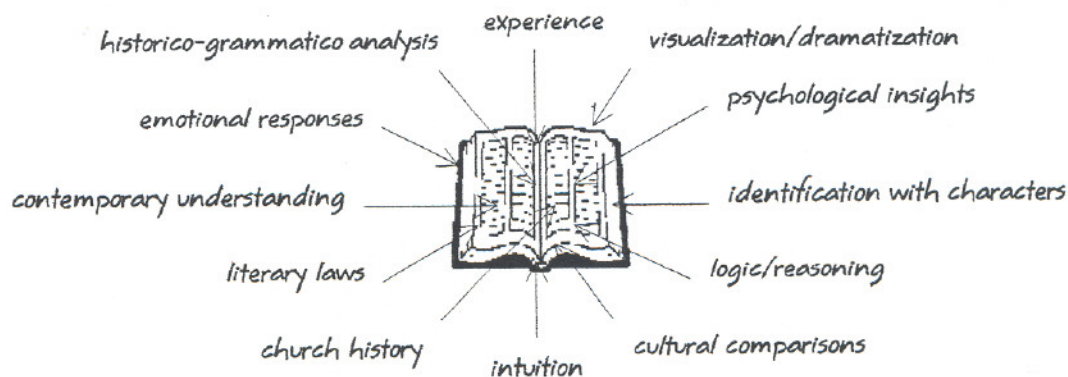
In this course we will concentrate on how to **study** the Bible. But always keep in mind that good Bible study is **preceded by overview** and **followed by meditation**.

2 Keys to Inductive Bible Study

Inductive method or approach?

The inductive method of study is the process of gathering specific facts that can "lead into" a general conclusion. Strictly speaking, in Bible study it is not possible or even desirable to use the inductive method in its rigid rational procedure in order to be "objective". In a more pliable way we prefer to say the inductive *approach* to Bible study rather than *method*. The diagram below shows that as we study the Bible many factors, not just the mind, are validly operating, overlapping, influencing one another.

A strict inductive method of Bible study would use only a rational process. A more flexible inductive approach recognizes many ports of entry into the biblical text. Anything that helps us to observe and think harder about the text is valid—and more natural to learning.



This inductive approach follows three broad steps, but not always in a linear fashion. These steps are 1) **observing** the facts in the text, 2) **interpreting** those facts from the writer's position, and then 3) **applying** his message to our contemporary situation.

The three steps of O - I - A (Dig - Discover - Do)

O **Observe** the facts--open and hidden. *What does the text actually say?* (Acts 17:11)

- Begin with the seven fact-finding questions (7FFQ). **Who (people)? Where (place)? When (time)? What (main action or idea)? How (method/manner)? Why (reason/purpose)? So (result)?**

Answers to *who, where, when* and *so* are usually **open facts** in the text.

Answers to *what, how, and why* are found by digging for **hidden facts** (implications).

- Be curious. Ask more questions about the text. Try different possible answers.
- Visualize the scene. Hear people's voices. Watch their faces and body language.

I Interpret the writer's message. *What did **he** mean by the facts he chose to record? (II Timothy 2:7)*

- Note how he focuses on a central event or idea by his repetitions, comparisons, key words, contrasts, relationships, proportion, progression to a climax.
- Look up technical words in a dictionary. (Word List on pp. 31-35)
- Check biblical maps for geographical locations and their significance. (Map on p. 30)
- Clarify unclear ideas with commentary. (Study Bibles can be very helpful.)
- Tie up these facts and their implications into a meaningful whole - the writer's message.

A Apply the writer's message to life today. *How do we practice the truth learned? (II Timothy 3:16)*

- What is true to life? How are we like the people described? Their problems like ours?
- In what ways can God's solution to their problems also be practical for us?
- What bigger picture of God have you gained to challenge your life? your church?
- Be honest and specific. Generalities quickly evaporate.

Try it! Practice observing, interpreting and applying. Read *Mark 1:40-45*. The context is the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He has become immensely popular because he "taught with authority" and helped all kinds of needy people (1:21-39). Visualize the actions of each person. Try to identify with the afflicted man - and with Jesus. Examine these examples. Then continue the study.

Observation

Find the facts in the text --
both open and hidden facts.

v 40 A man with leprosy came to Jesus. (open) Lepers were repulsive outcasts left to die without family outside the community (gen. knowledge).

On his knees he begged Jesus to make him clean. (open) He knew he didn't deserve Jesus' but tried, anyway. (hidden)

v 41

v 42

v 43

Interpretation

Find the message the writer wanted his readers to see.

He was desperate for help. He knew enough about Jesus to defy the community rules about isolating lepers.

He recognized Jesus' power to heal, but was not sure that Jesus wanted to heal him. He risked being rejected.

Application

Find the relevance of God's message for you/the church.

Most of us know more about Jesus than the man did. We even call him Lord. So we should be bolder and bring our greatest needs to him.

I'm not humble like the man. In fact I often think I'm pretty deserving of God's help. Lord, forgive my arrogance!

Testing your abilities to observe, interpret and apply.

1. Test your powers of observation.

Check the examples below of observing facts in Mark 1:14-20. Then find more facts that Mark records here.

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1) John was put in prison | 8) _____ |
| 2) Jesus began his ministry after John was put in prison | 9) _____ |
| 3) He began his work in Galilee | 10) _____ |
| 4) He proclaimed the good news. | 11) _____ |
| 5) The good news came from God | 12) _____ |
| 6) Mark summarizes it in 4 statements. | 13) _____ |
| 7) The first is: "The time has come." | 14) _____ |
| | 15) _____ |

Small group activity: Going around the circle, members ask a question of one of these facts until all facts are covered. No discussion. Just questions for further understanding. (Try to avoid asking "why?", which is the easiest to ask.)

2. Test your ability to interpret.

Which statement do you think is closest to interpreting Mark's message in 1:14-20?

- Mark's focal point is that Jesus always calls followers at their workplace.
- Mark emphasizes that Jesus will make all of us fishers of men today.
- Mark describes Jesus as a man with authority to inspire men in the fishing business to change their life priorities to follow him.
- Mark teaches that the fishing business is a bad career.
- _____

3. Test how well you can apply biblical principles to life.

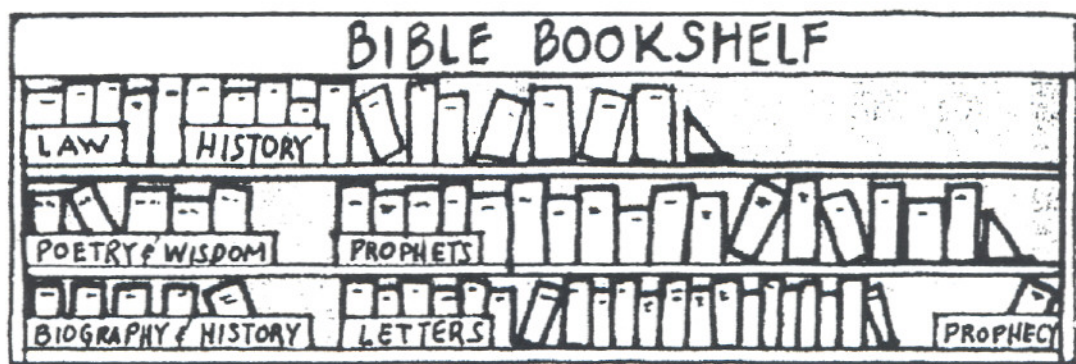
Based on Mark 1:14-20 which of the following are valid applications? Which are probably invalid?

- We should learn the skills of catching real fish before we fish for people.
- We must recognize Jesus' authority before we can truly follow him.
- If Jesus calls us to follow him, we can depend on him to provide all our needs.
- Jesus always called people as partners to follow him. I don't have a partner, so I don't qualify to follow him.
- _____

Four literary forms in the Bible

It will speed your study if you are aware of the literary form that a biblical writer uses. You will know what to look for--and what not to look for. God was very thoughtful in using the four most common literary styles to talk to us in the Bible. (Yes, our God is a talking God!) Different temperaments respond more readily to one type of literature than to others. Learn to appreciate all forms, and learn more!

1. **Narrative** History, stories (Parables are narratives created to teach one major truth.)
2. **Discourse** Direct teaching, prophetic passages, sermons, letters
3. **Poetry** Psalms, proverbs, prophetic passages, songs in *Revelation*
4. **Apocalypse** Revelations, God's disclosures about the future not otherwise known



1. **Narrative/history** *The writer is a story teller.* His aim is to **describe** certain events by which God speaks to his people. He emphasizes people, their actions, reactions, interactions and dialogues. The event moves in *chronological order* to a certain result. *Examples:* First 17 books of the OT and the first five books of the NT.

2. **Discourse/teaching** *The writer/speaker could be a preacher, prophet, or a pastor-teacher.* His aim is to **persuade** his readers/listeners to change their belief and/or behavior. He therefore uses reasons, evidences, general principles, experience, illustrations, history, feelings--any legitimate appeal. His argument moves in *logical order* to a strong conclusion of projected results --promises of blessings if they obey God and warnings of judgment if they do not. *Examples:* prophetic sections in the OT, sermons of Jesus and the apostles, letters in the NT.

3. **Poetry** *The writer may be a dramatist (Job), a worshiper (Psalms), or a philosopher (Ecclesiastes, Proverbs).* His aim is to **testify** to his experience with God and/or his observations about life and human nature. He uses artistic forms like picture language, structured stanzas and parallelism, the unique characteristic of Hebrew poetry. His writings reveal more *reflection, intuition and strongly expressed emotions* than descriptions of historical events or logical arguments. He usually moves in *psychological order* to his conclusion.

4. **Apocalypse** *The writer is a prophet.* This less common style of literature is found in *Ezekiel, Daniel, Jesus' "Olivet Discourse" in Matthew 24-25 and Revelation.* The writer **reveals** God's secret plans for the future and his ultimate triumph over evil. He uses visions, dreams, special terminology, symbols and other vivid imagery. He follows an *eschatological order* towards God's establishment of his visible, eternal kingdom.

Why?	Reason/	(He came to bring the kingdom	
	purpose	God [salvation, wholeness] to	
		people. See 1:15.)	
So?	Results	1) People favorably contrasted Jesus'	
		authority with that of their teachers	
		of the law. 2) They spread the news	
		about Jesus throughout Galilee.	

Try it! Practice the 7FFQ on Mark 1:40-45.

(Omit sections 2, 3 and 4 below until you feel more confident in using O - I - A.)

2. **Observe the writer's emphases.** Clues to his emphases are repetitions, comparisons, contrasts and proportion. Look for these in Mark 1:1-45.

- **Repetitions** – Words, ideas, people, places, activities mentioned two or more times
 desert places – 1:3, 4, 13, 35, 44
 authority – 1:22, 27
- **Comparisons** – things that are similar, or illustrate an abstract idea with something concrete
 catching fish and catching people – 1:16-17
 Jesus as doctor, bridegroom, tailor and wine-maker – 2:17-22
- **Contrasts** – things that are different or opposite from one another
 Places: seashore, synagogue, disciples' home, solitary place
 People Jesus helped: worshipers, man with a demon, fishermen disciples, Simon's mother-in-law, the whole town, a man with leprosy.
- **Proportion** – the amount of space given to a topic in relation to other topics
 Mark mostly describes Jesus' helping people, very little about his teaching.
 After his baptism in the Jordan River in Judea Jesus' activities are all in Galilee (his home province).

3. Observe the writer's progression toward certain results. Watch how accusations against Jesus move to a climax. What are these accusations in 2:1 - 3:6?

1st accusation by teachers of the law, 2:1-12 He has committed blasphemy!

2nd accusation by Pharisaic teachers of the law, 2:13-16 He socializes with (religious) outcasts.

3rd accusation by "some people", 2:18-22 _____

4th accusation by Pharisees, 2:23-28 _____

Climax: Joint decision by Pharisees and Herodians (their pro-Roman political enemies). 3:1-6

4. Observe the writer's general statements and summaries. They introduce or conclude major sections. He's telling us, "I'm moving on to something else in my bigger story."

- In 1:14-15 Mark introduces Jesus' public ministry by giving a **general statement** of his message and his mission--the broad theme of Mark's Gospel. Examine Jesus' four points. What are implications of each point?

1. The time has come. _____

2. The kingdom of God is near. _____

3. Repent. _____

4. Believe the good news. _____

- In 1:39 look at Mark's **summary** of Jesus' Galilean ministry. What does Mark stress about this ministry? _____
-

- In 3:7-12 is a **summary** of Jesus' first year of public ministry. What trends does Mark report?
-
-
-

Keys to valid interpretations

Interpretation is determining what the writer intended to say to his readers.

By his emphases and his arrangement of the facts what message is the writer sending? Actually we begin to interpret soon after we begin to use the 7FFQ, moving from the open to the hidden facts. We also begin to interpret when we look for the writer's emphases and relationships of ideas. Expect overlapping of your observations and interpretations. We interpret 1) specifically and 2) generally.

1. Interpreting specific words, phrases and verses

Let's take two examples from *Mark 1:35*.

Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place. Observe Mark's description of Jesus' three-part action Mark shows us how intentional Jesus was in his need and desire to be with and pray to his Father.

solitary place Outside town; uninhabited area where he would be undisturbed by people and town noise.

2. Interpreting the writer's overall message in a unit of study (paragraph, chapter, book)

What main point was the writer evidently communicating? Always look at the text from his viewpoint. What did *he* mean? What was *his* purpose in showing these facts in a particular way? Follow these guidelines.

- ***Depend*** on the Holy Spirit's enlightenment.

The Counselor...whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:26)

Think on these things, for the Lord will give you understanding. (II Timothy 2:7)

- ***Respect*** the historical/cultural background of the writer and his original readers. For instance, because Mark's first readers were Romans, he begins his Gospel very differently from Matthew and Luke, who record Jesus' birth, and from John, who records Jesus' pre-existence. They all wrote keeping in mind their (original) readers.

Mark was a Palestinian Jew. His Roman readers were an active, practical people. They had no Old Testament background. They were far removed from what had happened in Palestine. But they were interested in the new Christian religion. They were attracted to Jesus as a man of action.

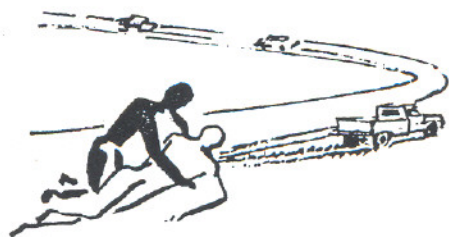
- ***Link*** ideas and actions into a meaningful whole. "Facts are stupid by themselves." (Agassiz, Harvard paleontologist) *E.g., What character trait of Jesus stands out in all the events in Mark 1:14-45? Which facts about Jesus combine to bring out this trait?*

- **Analyze** key words and phrases. They are important clues to the author's message.
Underline special, unusual words you see in the first chapter of Mark. What do they tell you?
- **Honor** the special languages of the Bible--
 - *literal language* in historical books (e.g., the narratives of *Exodus*, *Mark*)
 - *figurative language* in all books (e.g., prophecies, poetry, discourses)
 - *persuasive language* in discourses (e.g., Jesus' discourses, Paul's letters)
 - *artistic language* in poetry (e.g., *Psalms*, songs in *Revelation*)
- **Check** with dictionaries and commentaries for technical terms and historical references.
(See also "Word List for Mark's Gospel" on pp. 31-35.) *List the words in Mark 2 that you might not be able to explain if someone asked. Find out what they mean.*

- **Summarize and harmonize** your conclusions with the clear teachings of the Bible.
Here is an example of interpreting Mark's message in *Chap. 1 - 3:6*.

Jesus began his public ministry in Galilee by calling disciples. They learned by watching him as he helped all kinds of people day and night in Capernaum. This made him famous in the whole province of Galilee. As his popularity grew, so did opposition from the religious and political leaders. (At the end of this first year) they agree to destroy him.

Keys to useful applications



In *Luke 10:25-37* Jesus dialogues with an expert in the law and repeats that it is not enough to know the facts of Scripture and even their right interpretation--as the man did. Twice Jesus challenged him to apply the truth he knew. "You have answered correctly. Do this and you shall live." (*vs 28, 37*)

Application doesn't really take place till you have shut your Bible and done something concrete about what you have learned. But at this third step of the study you consider concrete ways of putting the lesson into practice. The Bible was written for God's people as a body. So, first consider applications to believers as a whole—the church. Then ask yourself, *What's my part in this?*

Here are guidelines to finding useful applications. Try them on *Mark 2:1-12*.

1. *What is true to life in this event? How are we like the people here? How are their needs and problems like ours?*
2. *Whose example should we follow? or avoid?*
3. *What can we praise God for? What should we thank him for?
How should this text magnify our view of God?*
4. *What sins do we/I need to confess? What weaknesses in our group/ my life does this show up and for which we/I need help from God?*
5. *What practical action does this text point us/ me to take?*
6. *In what ways could we/I share with others the truth we/I have learned?*
7. *What is my prayer arising from this study?*

Lord Jesus, _____

The text and what we say about the text

To interpret the Bible fairly we must be able to distinguish between what the text says and means and what people say about the text.

a. textual fact	what the Bible actually says
b. general knowledge	what is known from other sources
c. implication	what is inferred (but not plainly stated) in a fact or set of facts
d. opinion	what is suggested as a possible view
e. visualization	what can be pictured in one's mind
f. interpretation	what the author meant as his message
g. identification	what people can personally relate to
h. application	what is considered relevant and practical for us
i. speculation	what is theorized with little or no factual basis
i. spiritualizing	what is turned from concrete reality to fancy symbolism

Try it! Based on *Mark 4:35-41* (and context) match each statement with a description above.

- c 1 Jesus and his disciples were tired after a day of his teaching the crowds and privately explaining to the disciples.
- d 2 Jesus knew the importance of rest after hard work.
- ___ 3 We should learn from him when to rest from work.
- ___ 4 "Other boats" are worldly things to leave behind as we sail with Jesus on the sea of life.
- ___ 5 Because of the mountains surrounding it, Lake Galilee had sudden violent storms that even experienced fishermen like the disciples could not handle.
- ___ 6 The sun was setting behind them. Dark clouds began to hang over them. Then suddenly strong gusts of wind rocked the boat. Water poured into the boat.
- ___ 7 Jesus slept soundly because he worked harder than the disciples and was more tired.
- ___ 8 Jesus was pretending to sleep. He actually had one eye half open to see when the storm would naturally calm down. Then he got up, stretched out his hand and silenced the storm.
- ___ 9 The pillow (v 8) is God's love on which Jesus rested.
- ___ 10 The disciples may have been angry because it was Jesus' idea to cross the lake.
- ___ 11 I also would have been upset with Jesus at this point.
- ___ 12 It's better to be honest about our anger at God than to pretend we have no such feelings.
- ___ 13 The disciples moved emotionally from fear of the storm to annoyance at Jesus, and then to a new revelation of him and his powers.
- ___ 14 Before this event the disciples had respected Jesus as a teacher with authority, a deliverer from demons and a healer. But they had not yet recognized he was Creator Lord.
- ___ 15 This miracle proved conclusively to the disciples that Jesus was the Son of God.
- ___ 16 We also must learn that no crisis surprises God. He never panics. He wants to calm our fears and control the unexpected crises that arise even in familiar life situations. He cares!

Small groups: What did this exercise help you to do? Which statements especially challenged your thinking? Where did you find overlapping (could be either this or that)?