

# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

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# O bjective of the Class

The Bible is God's word to man. God has graciously revealed Himself in the words of the Bible. He has also revealed who we are, what He has done for us and what He expects of us. Sometimes, however, we read the Bible without really comprehending what is being said. How do we study? How do we move from merely reading through the words to seeing the meaning to our own lives? In this class, we will be examining several principles and aids that will help us.

**Each week** we will have an assignment. Doing the assignments is very important. The goal of the class is for you to learn how to study yourself.

**Please bring** a pen or pencil, this note book and your Bible to each class.

*Be diligent to present  
yourself approved to God,  
a worker who does not  
need to be ashamed,  
rightly dividing the word  
of truth.  
2 Timothy 2:15*



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# How to Study the Bible Lesson 1



## INTRODUCTION An Overview



**Objective:** In this lesson we will define our method of Bible Study and overview the general principles we will be using.

### I. Definition of our method.

- A. There are a variety of valid ways we can approach Bible Study. We can study it from a historical, biographical, topical or other perspective.
- B. In these lessons we will be using a modified version of the **inductive method**.
  1. The **inductive** method first observes, then concludes. It moves from the specific to the general. The **deductive** method begins with a general principle or conclusion and then sees if that principle is true in practice. It moves from the general to the specific.
    - a. Stated another way, "Induction is the logic of discovery, while deduction is the logic of proof." Charles Eberhardt
  2. Our emphasis will be on the inductive method.
    - a. It means starting with an open mind, a clean slate and an objective look at the Scriptures *before* drawing conclusions.

### II. We will look at three main areas.

- A. **OBSERVATION** - We must discover what the passage says.
  1. Before we can move to the application of a passage, we must first understand what was being said.
  2. We will examine what type of literature a Bible book contains: historical narrative, biographical/autobiographical, poetic, prophetic, letters, law giving/teaching.
  3. We will examine a book in the Bible as a whole and try to see the general outline used by the Holy Spirit to convey His message.

4. We will examine the structure of the text: repetition, progression, climax, contrast, radiation, contrast and interchange.
5. We will talk about marking our Bibles in a way that will help us to organize the message in our minds.

**B. *INTERPRETATION*** - What does the passage mean?

1. This is not always completely separate from the *OBSERVING* step.
2. We will examine the main rule - context, context, context.
3. We will look for key words, themes, purpose statements to let the Author lead us to the meaning He intends.
4. We will examine figurative language: simile, metaphor, exaggeration, metonymy, synecdoche, personification, irony, parable, allegory and type/antitype.
5. We will examine basic helps such as cross references, concordances, Bible dictionaries, topical Bibles and commentaries.

**C. *APPLICATION*** - What does the passage mean to me?

1. We will examine the need to pray for the guidance of God.
2. We will examine how God seeks to change our lives.
  - a. By statements, commands, principles which set forth His will.
  - b. By approved examples which reflect His will.
  - c. By necessarily inferring His will in the text.
3. We will examine the difference between general and specific authority as well as the importance of respecting the silence of the Scriptures.
4. We will examine questions that will help us apply the truths of God to our lives.
  - a. How would the original readers have applied this passage?
  - b. What belief does God want me to accept or reject?
  - c. What attitude does God want me to take on or avoid?
  - d. What action does God want me to do or not do?
  - e. What promise of God can I claim?

### III. Please read the following story and do the assignment at the end.

The following is a story of a student's crisis under scientist and teacher, Professor J. Louis Agassiz. It was retyped and slightly edited for length from INDEPENDENT BIBLE STUDY pp.173-178. It originally appeared in Every Saturday, XVI (Apr. 4,1874), 369-370, under the title "In the Laboratory with Agassiz, By a former pupil."

It was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the laboratory of Professor Agassiz, and told him I had enrolled my name in the scientific school as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the mode in which I afterward proposed to use the knowledge I might acquire, and finally, whether I wished to study any special branch. To the latter I replied that while I wished to be well grounded in all departments of zoology, I purposed to devote myself specially to insects.

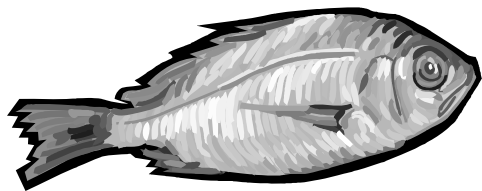
"When do you wish to begin?" he asked.

"Now," I replied.

This seemed to please him, and with an energetic "Very well," he reached from a shelf a huge jar of specimens in yellow alcohol.

"Take this fish," said he, "and look at it; we call it a Haemulon; by and by I will ask what you have seen."

With that he left me, . . . I was conscious of a passing feeling of disappointment, for gazing at a fish did not commend itself to an ardent entomologist.



In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish, and started in search of the professor, who had, however, left the museum; and when I returned, after lingering over some of the odd animals stored in the upper apartment, my specimen was dry all over. I dashed the fluid over the fish as if to resuscitate it from a fainting-fit, and looked with anxiety for a return of the normal, sloppy appearance. This little excitement over, nothing was to be done but return to a steadfast gaze at my mute companion. Half an hour passed, an hour, another hour; the fish began to look loathsome. I turned it over and around; looked it in the face - ghastly; from behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three quarters' view - just as ghastly. I was in despair; at an early hour I concluded that lunch was necessary; so, with infinite relief, the fish was carefully replaced in the jar, and for an hour I was free.

On my return, I learned that Professor Agassiz had been at the museum, but had gone and would not return for several hours. My fellow students were too busy to be disturbed by continued conversation. Slowly I drew forth that hideous fish, and with a feeling of desperation again looked at it. I might not use

a magnifying glass; instruments of all kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish; it seemed a most limited field. I pushed my finger down its throat to feel how sharp its teeth were. I began to count the scales in the different rows until I was convinced that that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me - I would draw the fish; and now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature. Just then the professor returned.

“That is right,” said he; “a pencil is one of the best of eyes. I am glad to notice, too, that you keep your specimen wet and your bottle corked.”

With these encouraging words he added, -

“Well, what is it like?”

He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the structure of parts whose names were still unknown to me: the fringed gill - arches and movable operculum; the pores of the head, fleshy lips, and lidless eyes; the lateral line, the spinous fin, and forked tail; the compressed and arched body. When I had finished, he waited as if expecting more, and then, with an air of disappointment, -

“You have not looked very carefully; why,” he continued, more earnestly, “you haven’t seen one of the most conspicuous features of the animal, which is as plainly before your eyes as the fish itself; look again, look again!” and he left me to my misery.

I was piqued; I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish! But now I set myself to my task with a will, and discovered one new thing after another, until I saw how just the professor’s criticism had been. The afternoon passed quickly, and when towards its close, the professor inquired, -

“Do you see it yet?”

“No,” I replied, “I am certain I do not, but I see how little I saw before.”

“That is next best,” said he earnestly, “but I won’t hear you now; put away your fish and go home; perhaps you will be ready with a better answer in the morning. I will examine you before you look at the fish.”

This was disconcerting; not only must I think of my fish all night, studying, without the object before me, what this unknown but most visible feature might be; but also, without reviewing my new discoveries, I must give an exact account of them the next day. I had a bad memory; so I walked home by Charles River in a distracted state, with my two perplexities.

The cordial greeting from the professor the next morning was reassuring; here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw.

“Do you perhaps mean,” I asked, “that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs?”

His thoroughly pleased, “Of course, of course!” repaid the wakeful hours of the previous night. After he had discoursed most happily and enthusiastically - as he always did - upon the importance of

this point, I ventured to ask what I should do next.

“Oh, look at your fish!” he said, and left me again to my own devices. In a little more than an hour he returned and heard my new catalogue.

“That is good, that is good!” he repeated, “but that is not all; go on.” And so, for three long days, he placed that fish before my eyes, forbidding me to look at anything else, or to use any artificial aid.

“Look, look, look,” was the repeated injunction.

This was the best entomological lesson I ever had - a lesson whose influence has extended to the details of every subsequent study; a legacy the professor has left to me, as he has left it to many others, of inestimable value, which we could not buy, with which we cannot part. . . . and to this day, if I attempt a fish, I can draw nothing but Haemulons.

The fourth day, a second fish of the same group was placed beside the first, and I was bidden to point out the resemblances and differences between the two; another and another followed, until the entire family lay before me, and a whole legion of jars covered the table and surrounding shelves; . . . The whole group of Haemulons was thus brought in review; and, whither engaged upon the dissection of the internal organs, the preparation and examination of the bony framework, or the description of the various parts, Agassiz’s training in the method of observing facts and their orderly arrangement was ever accompanied by the urgent exhortation not to be content with them.

“Facts are stupid things,” he would say, “until brought into connection with some general law.”

At the end of eight months, it was almost with reluctance that I left these friends and turned to insects; but what I had gained by this outside experience has been of greater value than years of later investigation in my favorite groups.

**In the space below, write down what we can learn about Bible study from this story.** (This will serve to overview many of the principles we want to learn in this class.)

**In class assignment:** Read through Eph.2:1-10 - what do you see?